

In a stinging rebuke to the New York Times, poetry editor Anne Boyer resigns over Gaza genocide

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The events in Gaza and the horror they are evoking worldwide are feeding and strengthening a deep-going radicalization and shaking up various social forces and institutions.

In one of the latest developments, Anne Boyer, poetry editor of the *New York Times Magazine*, which publishes a poem a week, announced her resignation on Wednesday in opposition to the genocide in Gaza. Although not directly stated, this was unquestionably meant as a scathing criticism of the *New York Times* and *New York Times Magazine* editorial policy. As one commentator noted, the statement “takes direct aim at the language used by her (now former) employer in its coverage of the war on Gaza.”

Boyer’s outraged letter deserves to be quoted in full.

“I have resigned as poetry editor of *The New York Times Magazine*,” Boyer began.

“The Israeli state’s U.S-backed war against the people of Gaza,” she continued, “is not a war for anyone. There is no safety in it or from it, not for Israel, not for the United States or Europe, and especially not for the many Jewish people slandered by those who claim falsely to fight in their names. Its only profit is the deadly profit of oil interests and weapon manufacturers.

“The world,” she wrote, “the future, our hearts—everything grows smaller and harder from this war. It is not only a war of missiles and land invasions. It is an ongoing war against the people of Palestine, people who have resisted through decades of occupation, forced dislocation, deprivation, surveillance, siege, imprisonment, and torture.

“Because our status quo is self-expression, sometimes the most effective mode of protest for artists is to refuse.

“I can’t write about poetry amidst the ‘reasonable’ tones of those who aim to acclimatize us to this

unreasonable suffering. No more ghoulish euphemisms. No more verbally sanitized hellscapes. No more warmongering lies.

“If this resignation leaves a hole in the news the size of poetry, then that is the true shape of the present. — Anne Boyer”

Boyer is a poet and essayist, the author of 10 books, and the winner of the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for general non-fiction. Her resignation and letter have struck a blow against the pretensions of the *New York Times*—which has supported the slaughter in Gaza in its editorial policy and reporting—to be evenhanded and “objective,” instead of what it is, an organ of CIA-Pentagon-White House propaganda that invariably sides with oppressor against the oppressed, essentially pro-imperialist yellow journalism.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted on the resignation—almost certainly coerced—of another *New York Times* writer, Jazmine Hughes, earlier this month for signing a writers’ petition calling for a ceasefire in Gaza:

“The *Times* is itself complicit in this world-historic crime. The protest letter [signed by Hughes] cited an October 14 op-ed by the paper’s Editorial Board entitled ‘Israel Can Defend Itself and Uphold Its Values’ which, while weakly calling upon the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to attempt to ‘minimize’ civilian casualties, declared that the Israeli regime deserved the unequivocal support of the United States and its allies in prosecuting its war against the people of Gaza.

“At the same time,” the WSWWS pointed out, “the *Times* systematically downplays the war atrocities of the Israeli military. While it cannot avoid reporting on the massive scale of death and suffering being inflicted on Gaza, it employs a crude sleight of hand in its coverage.”

Boyer’s phrases, “sanitized hellscapes” and

“warmongering lies” are precise and excoriating. They rip the veil off the official lying and chloroforming of public opinion by the *Times*, the country’s flagship liberal publication.

Boyer’s resignation and the phrases with which she justified it indicate how deep-seated the opposition to the genocide in Gaza is in the global population, how much thought is being given to it amidst the shock of mass killing and official lying. Even within the citadel of journalistic dissembling and hypocrisy, the old order is starting to crack up.

Boyer’s last act as poetry editor for the *Times Magazine* was to publish a poem in the November 5 issue titled [...] by the Palestinian-American poet, Fady Joudah, “written in the past few weeks,” about which she commented, “The weight of the unsaid and the unspeakable, the lost and the left out, hangs over the poem’s head. Perhaps it is Palestine. What is missing defies proportion. It could be as vast as history, as small as a child’s breath.”

The poem may also be about America, or Britain or Germany, where the weight of the “unsaid and unspeakable” hangs over the nation’s head and “defies proportion.” And, indeed, in a way that is “as vast as history and as small as” the last breaths of Gaza’s children.

Fury over the Israeli mass murder also set the tone for the 2023 National Book Award ceremonies. At the final award, as author Justin Torres was on stage to receive the fiction award for his novel, *Blackouts*, he was joined by the other nominees on the podium. Short story award nominee Aaliyah Bilal read out a statement that said:

“On behalf of the finalists, we oppose the ongoing bombardment of Gaza and call for a humanitarian ceasefire to address the urgent humanitarian needs of Palestinian civilians, particularly children. We oppose antisemitism and anti-Palestinian sentiment and Islamophobia equally, accepting the human dignity of all parties, knowing that further bloodshed does nothing to secure lasting peace in the region.”

The fact that this statement was delivered at a gala affair featuring billionaire Oprah Winfrey and the usual and expected obeisance to race and gender politics makes it all the more significant. Other speakers raised the issue of Gaza, including poet Heid E. Erdrich, the Native American writer and sister of Louise Erdrich, who noted from the podium, “human suffering in Gaza is at the forefront of our thoughts.”

In the days before the awards ceremony as rumor

circulated that nominees would make a statement in defense of the Palestinians, one sponsor, Zibby Media, withdrew from sponsorship, claiming that plans were afoot for a “hate-filled” antisemitic presentation by the nominees. Zibby Owens, the owner of Zibby Media, said in a blog post that she could not be in “an environment that values ‘not censoring’ authors more than preventing ... a prejudiced, activist environment.”

“Clearly,” she wrote, “the NBF admittedly knew about the authors’ plan and had decided to do nothing about it, including communicating it to guests and sponsors or getting involved with the authors or publicists.” In the current climate, it is entirely possible that much of the staff of the National Book Foundation and even its directors were sympathetic to or at least tolerant of the anti-war sentiments of the nominees.

The Book of the Month Club also declined to attend the event.

Earlier this month, over 2,000 writers, in an open letter to *Poetry* magazine, the leading poetry publication in the US, and its publisher, the Poetry Foundation, protested the indefinite shelving of a book review of Sam Sax’s poetry collection *PIG*. Both Sax and the reviewer, Joshua Gutterman Tranen, are anti-Zionist Jews. Tranen was told by the Poetry Foundation that, in his words, it “did not want to be seen as choosing a side in political events, and that there was no plan to publish the review ‘for a while.’ I decided to pull the review.”

Tranen told the editors in an email: “As a Jewish ex-Zionist who lived in the settlements, and whose old friends are actively fighting and killing in Gaza as we speak, I’m tired of being told how and what I’m allowed to feel and say about Israel/Palestine.”

The open letter to *Poetry* asserted: “The Foundation has picked a side. To claim that the review was held in order to protect the critic from potential backlash is infantilizing and cowardly; silence does not protect anyone. As artists, we accept the risks that come from taking a stand.” The letter urged fellow poets to “to boycott the Foundation and its press until such time as they have demonstrated they are on the side of humanity.”



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