

Australian media studies teacher denounces Gaza genocide and escalating attacks on democratic rights

Richard Phillips
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The following interview is with an Australian media studies teacher and former photojournalist who wants to remain anonymous because he fears being victimised by pro-Zionist elements at the tertiary institution where he works. He will be referred to as Vincent.

Richard Phillips: Thanks for speaking with us today. There's a lot to discuss. Can you begin by commenting on the current situation in Gaza?

Vincent: Like lots of rational, reasonable people around the world, I'm appalled by what has been going on in Gaza—hour by hour, day by day—over the past three months. What's happening in Gaza is ethnic cleansing and ticks all the boxes defining genocide.

There's a groundswell of protests happening globally, which is gaining momentum, but I'm outraged that the politicians, the statesmen, the captains of industry, the people who have the power to stop this violence are refusing to do so. Their endorsement of the horrendous violence being unleashed against the Palestinians is shocking and at times for me hard to even process. It's horrendous.

RP: Israel's agenda, which is fully backed by the US government and its allies, is for destruction of Gaza and the removal of all its Palestinian residents.

Vincent: That's right. The US is fully invested in this agenda, economically and geopolitically. It's supported by [Rishi] Sunak in the UK and others, with Australia, as usual, being the little lapdog. It's unconscionable.

The IDF [Israel Defense Forces] and the Zionists claim they're going after Hamas to defend Israel but when you look at the Palestinian death toll and the massive destruction being unleashed this has nothing to do with defence. Tens of thousands of innocent men, women and children are being killed, far in excess of

the number of Israelis Hamas is alleged to have killed on October 7.

It's disproportionate, grotesque and ultimately futile, because you can't kill an ideological movement with bombs and bullets. The IDF might win the military battle against Hamas, but it won't win this struggle and is sowing seeds for future conflicts.

RP: And this is just a glimpse of what Washington's "rules-based order" looks like.

Vincent: It shows what the US is prepared to do to maintain its dominant position even if that means thousands of innocent Palestinians suffering the most horrific deaths or being maimed, and everything around them destroyed. The US is incredibly invested in selling arms to the Israelis and, as we all know, a lot of money is made in war, so there's a capitalist agenda as well.

RP: Journalists are being deliberately targeted by the IDF. The Committee to Protect Journalists estimates that at least 69 journalists, the majority Palestinians, have been killed in Gaza in the past three months. According to Al Jazeera, over 50 media premises or offices have been completely or partially destroyed by Israeli attacks in Gaza. Could you comment on this?

Vincent: All sorts of horrible things happen in war. Journalists get killed in crossfire, of course, but the death rate of journalists in Gaza now is alarming and probably the highest number killed in such a short time frame.

These are not crossfire deaths but orchestrated events and singular in their intent. They're aimed at stopping the real story of Gaza being told. This contravenes everything related to the so-called rules of war. The targeting of journalists, like doctors, nurses, and other

medical workers, is a war crime.

The IDF has a long history of targeting and intimidating journalists. I've spoken to journalists who have worked in the West Bank and have been threatened, arrested and roughed up by IDF soldiers. The soldiers knew everything about them. They knew their faces and had read all the stories they had written about their assignments in Israel and the West Bank.

RP: What do you think about mainstream media coverage of Gaza?

Vincent: Most of it is pro-Israel and pro-IDF and shockingly so. The coverage has little to do with providing honest and accurate information. It doesn't matter whether it is "opinion journalism," "tabloid journalism" or "quality journalism," there's no objectivity or balance, even from so-called internationally reliable publications. It's all about presenting Israel as the victim and its "right to defend itself," even as the IDF is killing tens of thousands of Palestinians.

The Palestinian case is not being presented in an objective, clear and cogent way. Much of this is because of direct editorial interference and connected to capitalism and money. Media organisations are concerned about advertisers pulling their ads and losing profits. Australians love to say that they live in a democracy but if the media is being censored and journalists told what they can or cannot write or being blacklisted from reporting on Gaza because they signed an open letter supporting the Palestinians then it's not a democracy. Freedom of speech is one of the basic pillars of a democratic society.

RP: And now artists, actors, writers and other creative workers are being threatened with dismissal or have their contracts torn up for speaking out against the horrors going on in Gaza.

Vincent: Yes, that's right. We seem to be rapidly approaching a society where you're no longer allowed to have a public opinion about any political event and express it artistically. Like journalists, artists inwardly reflect on and are influenced by the external world, including wars and catastrophes such as Gaza.

Art since the beginning of time has a long and rich history of political storytelling.

To declare that art must not be political means its transformation into visual wallpaper, into a meaningless decoration. It's absurd and reminds me of

the McCarthy era witch hunting in the US or the thought police in 1984, George Orwell's novel.

What does it say about the degenerated state of the civilised world when people are branded as antisemites or peddlers of hate speech for just voicing their empathy for the tens of thousands of innocent people being killed and maimed in Gaza. Not being able to enter into a conversation about society's searing and most fractured and destructive events like Gaza without fear of retribution is regressive and counterintuitive to conflict resolution.

If you subtract the basic human right to be able to express and debate things about society or your country or the world at large, then you're not living in a democracy but a fascist state. What about Goya and his *Disasters of War* or Picasso and his *Guernica*? Should their work be banned?

RP: Finally, what do you think of the analysis being provided by the *World Socialist Web Site*?

Vincent: It's very good. It's direct, thorough, fact checked and historically based—a reminder to the world of what real journalism looks like. Millions of people are shocked by what they see going on day after day in Gaza, but they need to understand the whole brutal history of the oppression and dispossession of Palestinian people under the Ottoman and British empires and then, after World War Two, the Israelis.



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