

Editorial: Antisemitism, Anti-Palestinianism, & the Diversity Die

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Typically, the job of a journal editor is not what people would consider to be exciting. We get to read some really interesting material, we get to stoke occasional fires by inserting our opinions unchecked, and we spend lots of hours in a world that exists only in email. Sometimes, it's like our job is to run outside and hit the hornet's nest with a stick, then run back inside and watch through the window. Occasionally, however, that gets reversed. It's as if something hits the Journal with a stick, then watches to see what happens. I've been the beneficiary of two such events, in the form of emails, over the course of the past month. I'd like to share them with you here.

Example One (directly quoted):

I have been a supporter of the JSWVE for a number of years and have been pleased that due, to the efforts of the past and current editor, efforts have been made to recognize that social work in other countries does not necessarily fit the model familiar to colleagues in the USA. At this time, however, I have decided to withdraw from the journal for reasons that I explain below.

The journal speaks to ethics and values in social work, and I have become disappointed that the overriding ethical issue facing us during the last two years does not seem to have attracted submissions or editorial comment. I am

aware that a paper focused on challenges facing Jewish Identity has been submitted yet the fact that both my country, the UK, and the USA are complicit in the genocide in Gaza and illegal and violent expansion of settlements in the West Bank seems not to be of interest. There are also associated domestic impacts in the UK, USA and some European countries that are now undermining and restricting the civil rights of their citizens to express support for Palestinian people.

Example Two (directly quoted):

Hello,

I just wanted to let you know that I quit an MSW program because your field is insanely antisemitic.

I can't believe that you goys are now crucifying Jews for the sins of Christian colonialism and white supremacy.

SHAME!

Sincerely,

A Jew

PS—

*Muslims — Palestinians — were our **Master** and persecuted us with the Dhimmi system until dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1920.*

— The majority of Muslim countries still practice a form of Dhimmi apartheid and deny Jews rights and citizenship.

You are standing with our former Masters and teaching Soviet/Islamist anti-Zionist propaganda as truth. You got conned.

You people will always believe anything about Jews as long as it's stupid and mean and ahistorical and lets you morally preen about how righteous you are for scapegoating Jews.

As you can see, it's exciting times at the *Journal*.

But what's a poor editor to do? Well, to start with, I asked both authors to submit their thoughts as editorials, forum articles, or letters to the editor. One did just that. It is included in this edition of the *Journal*. The other author has also responded that they will consider submitting something more formal. If that

comes to fruition, I will afford it the same gravitas that I have afforded the other submission.

Social work practitioners, scholars, and educators (henceforth in this paper simply called “social workers”) should be bold enough to reflect upon and address issues of discrimination within our ranks. Our discipline, irrespective of where it is practiced, is rooted in the notion that all people deserve a fair shake. The Statement of Ethical Principles (The Statement) of the International Federation of Social Workers specifically mentions “social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2018).”

In this editorial, I hope that I can respond thoughtfully to the concerns raised by the two authors, contextualize their accusations within the broader historical and professional landscape, and promote a constructive dialogue that advances both understanding and meaningful action. Further, I hope that this can serve as a catalyst for other authors, of a variety of opinions and from myriad places, to also offer contributions to the discussion. Maybe I can stir the hornet’s nest.

The Allegations

The emails at the heart of this response allege that there are factions of social workers who discriminate *for* or discriminate *against* Jewish people and the state of Israel. I could also have said that the emails assert that some social workers discriminate *for* or discriminate *against* Palestinian people and the Palestinian state. These concerns, articulated in two very different communication styles, reference both overt and subtle manifestations of bias, including exclusionary practices, micro-aggressions, and institutional silences around both Jewish and Palestinian experiences. The authors – who represent two different opinions – both argue that unfair treatment, either inclusionary or exclusionary, is a leading factor in the creation of unsafe living environments for specific populations. I would add that discrimination of any kind by social workers also undermines the core values of the professional practice of social work, which is inherently a values-driven profession.

To fully grasp the gravity of these claims, it is essential to understand them within their historical contexts. Antisemitism and anti-Palestinianism have long and troubling histories, ranging from explicit acts of violence and discrimination to insidious, systemic marginalization. These injustices have varied from inter-

personal acts all the way to governmental policies and military actions. Within professional settings, antisemitism and anti-Palestinianism can manifest as exclusion, lack of representation, and failure to acknowledge the unique challenges faced by individuals from either tradition. The social work profession, with its mandate to combat all forms of injustice, must confront these realities directly. However, to situate the conversation fully and fairly, we must also acknowledge the lived experiences of Palestinians and Jews and the oppression that they have faced historically and continue to face today.

Social Work Values and Ethics

As articulated in The Statement, the discipline of social work is built upon the principles of:

1. Recognition of the Inherent Dignity of Humanity
2. Promoting Human Rights
3. Promoting Social Justice
4. Promoting the Right to Self-Determination
5. Promoting the Right to Participation
6. Respect for Confidentiality and Privacy
7. Treating People as Whole Persons
8. Ethical Use of Technology and Social Media
9. Professional Integrity (IFSW, 2018)

Oppressive and discriminatory practice in any form would be against the full manifestation of any one of these principles. How can hostile actions against Jewish people be seen as recognizing their human dignity? How can exiling Palestinian families from the only place that they have ever lived be seen as promoting their right to self-determination? How can spewing slander and hatred on social media be seen as within the scope of professional integrity? When children are starved, maimed, orphaned, or killed, does it really matter whether they were born to parents who are Palestinian, Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, or otherwise? Does it matter if they are Russian, Ukrainian, Cuban, or Congolese?

The commitment to anti-oppressive practice is not merely aspirational in our discipline, it is a fundamental element of it. Social workers are called upon to challenge discrimination wherever it occurs and against whomever it occurs. In fact, this is the very task to which we committed ourselves when we decided to

become social workers! Our field exists because we are the people who have committed ourselves, both personally and professionally, to creating welcoming and affirming spaces, practices, and policies. To support anti-Palestinianism or anti-semitism is to chip away at the foundation of the professional practice of social work and our very reason for existence.

A Call for Submissions

The *Journal* is international. The IFSW has provided us with a beautiful and powerful platform upon which we can build knowledge, debate positions, and explore intricate, nuanced aspects of this complicated subject and many others. As we together face this thorny issue, the *Journal* recognizes the importance of serving as a forum for thoughtful, informed, and diverse perspectives. To that end, the IFSW and I invite social work researchers, educators, and practitioners to submit articles exploring any and all facets of this topic. Contributions are welcome from those who have experienced or witnessed discrimination firsthand, as well as from individuals who wish to offer critical analysis, propose solutions, or share narratives that challenge prevailing assumptions.

We are committed to publishing works that present a range of viewpoints. The current issue includes articles that tackle some of our industry's current divisive concepts head-on. There are articles relating to transgender care, anti-semitism, and the potential for racial (and other) bias in social work licensing examinations in North America. Each of these topics can be incendiary, but these are the kinds of topics that should be explored and challenged in a publication like ours.

As the editor-in-chief of the *Journal*, I would like to have enough high-quality articles to support a special issue on the Israeli/Palestinian topic, so I'm asking for your submissions. Submissions may address the presence (or absence) of anti-semitism and/or anti-Palestinianism in social work, discuss the interplay between these discriminations and other forms of oppression, critique current practices, or explore pathways toward greater inclusion and justice. By fostering a robust and respectful exchange of ideas, we aim to enrich our collective understanding and to strengthen the profession's commitment to its foundational values. As I was preparing this editorial, I was reminded by one of our colleagues at the *Journal* that an alternative perspective to much of the current discussion would be an approach that is *both pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli*. This does, indeed,

seem to be true to the heart of inclusivity and mutual respect, core elements of the social work view of the world.

The concerns articulated in the recent emails that I received serve as a vital reminder of the ongoing work required to uphold the values of social work. Oppression of anyone anywhere demands both recognition and action. In his letter from Birmingham Jail, Dr. Martin Luther King said that “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere (King Jr., M.L., 1963),” reminding us that complicity is tacet support. By engaging thoughtfully with these issues, reaffirming the ethical foundations of the profession, and fostering respectful dialogue, social workers can advance a culture of inclusion, equity, and accountability and simultaneously challenge oppressive systems, tyrants, and regimes.

The *Journal* and I invite all members of the social work community – practitioners, educators, students, and leaders – to participate in ongoing scholarship around anti-Palestinianism and antisemitism and any other expressions of bias, inequity, and marginalization. The *Journal* stands open to articles representing all sides of this issue, in the hope that rigorous debate and reflection will yield deeper understanding and progress.

The profession's strength lies in the capacity of its practitioners for self-reflection, collective action, and unwavering commitment to justice. Let us move forward together, honoring the dignity and worth of every person, and ensuring that social work remains a force for positive change in all of our societies.

A Parable

When I was in my MSW program, I took a course called Social Work Practice with Groups that particularly resonated with me. That's somewhat ironic, because I actually don't do much group work and don't think that I'm particularly good at it. Nonetheless, at the end of that course, I felt compelled to write a parable of sorts to give to my professor that described my thoughts about some of the topics that we had covered in the semester. Over the many years since then, I've used that brief composition as a teaching tool for social work students, medical students, medical residents, psychology students, pharmacy students, and law students. I've revised it a few times. I offer my current version as my parting shot for this editorial.

The Diversity Die

Imagine a six-sided die. One side reads, “I am an individual with my

own needs and my own history, and I deserve to be treated as such,” while the opposite side reads, “I want to be treated just the same as anyone else and given the same rights and responsibilities.”

Another side reads, “I recognize that each person is unique and has the right to expect to be understood in his or her own individual way,” while the side opposite that reads, “I understand that I am expected to treat everyone the same, showing no favor or partiality to any person or group.”

The final pair of sides read, “We as peers understand that we as a group deserve recognition of our group culture, values, and ideals, all of which are fundamental to our group identity,” which is opposed with, “We as a group understand that there may be members of other groups whose group cultures, values, and ideals conflict with ours, but who still have that same right to their own group identity.”

In the professional practice of social work, in all of its varieties of expression, our job is to cast this die so that it lands with all six sides facing up.

References

- International Federation of Social Workers. (2018). *Global social work statement of ethical principles*. <https://www.ifsw.org/global-social-work-statement-of-ethical-principles>
- King Jr., M. L. (1963). *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*.