

US Media Want to Keep Palestine “Boring”

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Glenn Greenwald and Murtaza Hussain offer an intriguing insight into how behind the scenes the US media seek to prevent us from engaging with the debate about Israel and Palestine. Their article concerns [an email exchange](#) between Hooman Bakhtiar, a Voice of America producer, and Josh Block, one of Israel’s many spin-doctors in the US.

Bakhtiar’s programme had booked Rula Jebreal, a journalist of Palestinian origin, born in Israel, who is known for her forthright and independent views. In fact, in 2014 she was so forthright that – irony of ironies! – she managed to get her contract with MSNBC cancelled for [criticising on-air](#) the channel’s failure to include Palestinian voices in its Israel-Palestine coverage.

The framework for the discussion between Bakhtiar and Block is the unusual decision to allow Jebreal airtime on VoA. Block is clearly surprised and appalled by the decision, and dedicates a lot of energy to belittling her, calling “crazy” and an “anti-Semite”, and suggesting she’s a non-entity. These are clearly code-words for something else: the double whammy that she is both glamorous and an articulate critic of Israel.

In fact, she is the kind of advocate for Palestinian rights who rarely gets a platform in the US media. Bakhtiar is worried about the booking, fearful that if allowed to speak unchallenged (as Israeli spokespeople so often are) she may come across to viewers as sympathetic and persuasive. As he puts it: “I cannot have this lady Rula all by herself.” He therefore pleads with Block to help find a strong Israeli spokesperson to counter Jebreal.

Instead, Block suggests dropping Jebreal and booking a pliant Palestinian official, Ghaith al-Omari, who has worked in Washington think-tanks funded by Israel supporters and lobby groups like AIPAC. At that point, Bakhtiar admits that the reason Jebreal has been asked on is because of her looks.

When Palestinians are criticised for not making a stronger case in the media, one should bear all this in mind. As the email exchange makes clear, Jebreal’s booking is the exception that proves the rule.

Most of the time the Palestinian case is not given a voice at all. On the few occasions it is, both Israel and the US media actually prefer that it is articulated by besuited Palestinian officials, usually with a poor grasp of English and dire presentation skills. If the US media cannot ignore the Palestinian case, they want to bore us to death with it.

Using the sexist criterion of “looks” that Bakhtiar employs, and which clearly apply in many other areas of US news, sports and weather coverage, Jebreal ought to be a household

name – all over the US media every time Israel-Palestine is in the news. But she precisely is not. Which ought to tell us quite how much the debate on Israel-Palestine is being rigged according to a script that has been drafted not just in Washington but in Tel Aviv too.

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