

Distinguished professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara:

Israel was founded on ethnic cleansing, violence, and terrorism



By Ali Amiri
Social critic

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

William I. Robinson, a distinguished professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, is not only a scholar whose research encompasses globalization, transnationalism, political sociology, and development and social change, but also an activist, who endeavors to link his academic work with global movements striving for social justice, popular empowerment, participatory democracy, and people-centered development.

In the following in-depth interview, Professor Robinson details the influential Israel lobby within American universities, political institutions, and corporations. He then provides a profound historical analysis of how Zionists have shaped and controlled the narrative surrounding the Palestine-Israel conflict. Furthermore, he sheds light on the rise of fascism in Israel as a political tool for their overt apartheid and explores the racial nationalism inherent in Zionism and the fabricated mythology Zionists use to justify their occupation of Palestine. The interview concludes on a hopeful note, as Professor Robinson expresses his belief that as long as the Palestinians continue to breathe on their land, they are resisting the Zionists, their oppression, and their apartheid.

IRAN DAILY: As I understand, this particular book, 'We Will Not Be Silenced', attempts to document, frame, and contextualize the silencing of pro-Palestinian voices, as well as the voices of critics of Israel, by an entity referred to throughout the book as the Israel lobby. Is that correct?

ROBINSON: That is correct, but it's a little more expansive than that. It has been going on for a very long time, obviously, since 1948. But this has intensified in the past 20 to 30 years, as gradually, the legitimacy of the Zionist project and the Jewish state has been challenged. The censorship and repression of anyone who criticizes Israel has been intensifying. And right now, we're seeing a wave of censorship, a wave of repression on university campuses, public institutions, the government, the media, across the board; a wave of censorship and repression against anyone now criticizing not only Israel but also, of course, the genocide taking place in Gaza.

So, this hit me, in particular, in 2009. You may remember Operation Cast Lead, which was an earlier attack on and siege of Gaza. It was nothing compared

to what's going on now, and I publicly spoke against that on my campus. The University of California was infiltrated by this Israel lobby that we refer to — I want to get back to the Israel lobby in just a minute. They went after me and tried to get me fired from the university. That is when I became involved in Palestinian solidarity and, more broadly, in this fight against censorship and repression by the Israel lobby in the United States.

But this has been going on since before 2009, before that book, and it has intensified since then, and now it has reached levels never before seen. What I want to say about the Israel lobby is that it does exist in the United States and is a strong pressure group, which involves a lot of financial blackmail, purchasing of candidates in the political system, financing of the election of those senators or Congress members or local elected officials who are going to defend Israel politically and diplomatically, the US support for Israel, and the suppression of any solidarity with Palestine. It is an extremely strong lobby, but here is the point: it's not just in

the United States. It is what we could call the US branch of the larger global Zionist project that suppresses any critique of the project and any solidarity with Palestine. It's not restricted to the United States and Europe at all. It's worldwide.

For instance, the presidents of the universities of Pennsylvania and Harvard were both forced to resign. Not because they support Palestinian freedom, but because they did not crack down hard enough on Palestinian solidarity activities on their respective campuses.

Those solidarity activities were carried out especially by two organizations: one is Students for Justice in Palestine, and the other is Jewish Voices for Peace. These are anti-Zionist Jews in the United States. The younger Jewish population in the United States is increasingly turning to anti-Zionism. They're increasingly saying "not in our name," and they are protesting. They're leading this mass wave of protest and solidarity with Palestine that's taking place across the United States right now. And that, in turn, means that the Zionist lobby and all of their political representatives in the US po-

litical system and economy need to intensify their crackdown, their repression, and their censorship. So, everything laid out in that book is now multiplied a thousand times over amid this genocide.

For instance, you cannot get a job on university campuses if you have previously participated in Palestine Solidarity. The Zionist network and the Israel lobby will block you from getting a job, and if you are a professor, you won't get tenure. Their influence comes from donating a lot of money to universities and to other organizations and, as I've mentioned, political campaigns. More and more, corporations are firing their employees who speak out in favor of Palestine or simply against the genocide.

If you were familiar with the term Hasbara, then you would know that it's literally a branch of the Israeli Ministry of Defense, it's public, and it's the whole of Israel's political diplomatic apparatus around the world. It's systematic propaganda and systematic targeting of any of Israel's critics around the world, and this is how it works.

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Courage immortalized in words

'We Will Not Be Silenced: The Academic Repression of Israel's Critics', edited by William I. Robinson and Maryam S. Griffin, contains thirteen testimonials from figures like Richard Falk and former US congresswoman Cynthia McKinney, as well as professors, postgraduates, and activist alumni of American universities, who were targeted by the Israel lobby for speaking out against Israeli apartheid and violations of Palestinian human rights. The struggle of these individuals to defend their academic freedom has garnered widespread public and international attention.



◀ Palestinian civilians and medics run to safety as Israel shells a UN school in Beit Lahia, northern Gaza Strip, with what is suspected to be white phosphorous bombs on January 17, 2009.
● MOHAMMED ABED/
AFP