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A PRACTICAL APPRAISAL OF PALESTINIAN VIOLENCE

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Jews about Israel, which further consigned Palestine to a place of foreignness and unfamiliarity (the conditions for genocide in the first place). Boardrooms enacted swift discipline. University presidents made clear that Palestinian students and employees were prohibited from speaking.

The real conflict doesn't exist between civility and terrorism; it exists between Palestinian fortitude and Western anxiety.

I remember those days in the refugee camp with fondness. Its scenery is forever imprinted in my brain: the weathered buildings more askance as they grew taller; the noise of children in every alcove and stairwell; the scent of hot oil, thyme, and untreated water; the alleyways scarcely wider than a set of shoulders.

The camp was precarious. Even in times of joy it was tense. That's the nature of any ghetto or shanty. At any moment it can be overrun by violence. A refugee camp is filled with surplus for whom important people spare no concern. The Israelis could come, or the Lebanese military, or the U.S. Marines. There could be a siege. There could be an internecine war. There could be a food shortage. There could be untreatable disease. Possibility itself was a source of constant stress.

But just down the coast was Palestine.

What would it take to get there? People spent surprisingly little time on this question, probably because everyone already knew the answer.

"Whatever is necessary to return."

online brand: total abandonment of an encaged population to genocide.

Knowing that the approval or even the comprehension of the professional classes will never be forthcoming is one reason why violence is essential to national liberation. Palestinians have determined to proceed without their Western custodians. Decolonization is a grueling project, generally beyond the acumen of those weaned in comfort.

The professional classes are stuck in bourgeois abstractions (from which they derive so many rewards) or profess a material politics they don't in reality support. They demand a bloodless liberation, but only without the colonizer's blood, even as the native bleeds out in full view of the world. They demand a revolt without consequence, a caucus of pristine victims politely asking to stay alive. They have taught Fanon but ignored his observation that decolonization "cannot be accomplished by the wave of a magic wand, a natural cataclysm, or a gentleman's agreement."

These erstwhile liberals don't need to consult Palestinians to see how wrong they are. Zionists have been explaining for decades that Israel must be defeated by force.

V. Palestine Tells All

Palestine is the canary *and* the coal mine. It forces self-professed radicals to admit that they are furtively liberal. (Ideology: the coal mine. Liberalism: its noxious gasses.) It gives lie to the Western lionization of free speech as a means to assert civilizational superiority. (Free speech: the coal mine. Racial supremacism: its noxious gasses.) It reveals which governments around the world are serious about human rights. (Governments: the coal mine. Human rights: its noxious gasses.)

Whenever Palestinian resistance threatens to gum up imperialism, cities throughout the democratic West readily enact fascist policies, shutting down protests, firing or arresting dissenters, doing away with civil liberties, and demanding obedience. In the immediate aftermath of the Palestinian operation, media outlets across the spectrum deployed a vocabulary that would facilitate Israeli genocide. The little bits of sympathetic coverage took the form of Jews talking to other

I. Terror and Jubilation

When I was a graduate student many years ago, I got to spend time in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon. Life in the camp was challenging, but community bonds were strong despite the adversity. Internal tensions existed, but return to Palestine served as a unifying principle.

It was an active era of Palestinian resistance—what Western journalists and intellectuals lazily refer to as "Palestinian violence." A major tactic at the time was the suicide bomb. Sometimes the attacker would go after a military installation. At other times, he (or she) targeted public spaces. Western pundits and intellectuals, along with a fair number of their counterparts in the Arab World, declared the tactic a byproduct of atavistic evil and collected the usual plaudits in return. To even suggest the possibility of sociological factors was a monstrous breach of professional standards. According to the orthodoxy, Palestinian behavior was rash and unreasoned.

As in many neighborhoods around the region, television sets in the camp often streamed a news channel, if only as background noise. Whenever the presenter reported on a new operation, cheers emerged from the crowded flats throughout the camp. The reaction didn't bother me—they were living in squalid conditions, after all, and their cause was undeniably just—but I didn't fully understand it, either. I simply registered the cheering as a notable memory.

At the time, I had a vague but definite sense that the jubilation wasn't an expression of bloodlust. That kind of interpretation seemed to me simplistic and ungenerous. I had experienced too much warmth and hospitality to ascribe any evil to my hosts. Besides, I knew why the people surrounding me were refugees. I knew the history of massacres spread over two countries. I knew the stories of torment and humiliation, of yearning and exile, of loss and agony. Bromides wouldn't do.

In time, I came to understand that the jubilation was largely an expression of hope. And a simple hope, at that: the deeply human desire to return home. Every operation against the colonizer represented a possibility of return. The Palestinians weren't looking at the situation through an abstract or idealistic lens. They were

consummately practical.

Nobody wanted to live in a refugee camp anymore.

Earlier this month, the Palestinian resistance in Gaza launched a remarkable offensive, unprecedented in its scope and design. Hundreds of rockets bypassed Israel's ballyhooed Iron Dome and landed everywhere from Ashqelon to Tel Aviv. Simultaneously, Hamas operatives stole into southern Israel and captured various civilians and IOF personnel. Fighters infiltrated Zionist settlements, leaving behind dozens of casualties. One of the operations targeted a music festival near the Gaza Strip. For the first time in decades, Palestinians controlled land inside the so-called Green Line between Israel and the Occupied Territories.

The resistance called on its allies in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Iran to join the operation, setting up the possibility of a regional war. The world's attention was again focused on Palestine.

Israel's response was exceptionally brutal, surpassing the horror of its protracted assaults on Gaza in 2009 and 2014.

The music festival would become the main rationale for that brutality. Western media falsely reported that Palestinians were dismembering babies and practicing widespread rape, falsehoods repeated by the president of the United States.

The IOF indiscriminately targeted civilians, cut gas and electricity, locked down the West Bank, engineered mass displacement, eviscerated rescue workers, shut off internet, bombed hospitals, and refused to allow aid from Egypt. In a colonial project that has spent over a century committing atrocities, the so-called war on Hamas was one of its ugliest episodes.

In corporate media of the anglophone world, siding with Palestinians, even haltingly, wasn't an option. Quashing pro-Palestine sentiment has always been the norm in these environs, but the suppression in this

counts. First, it suggests a kind of equivalence that papers over economic and technological disparities between Israeli and Palestinian societies. And second, Israel isn't on the offensive against a political party; it is waging war on the entire Palestinian populace.

Israel's goal isn't merely to defeat Hamas. It wants to eradicate Palestine altogether. When Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant declared that Israel would treat Palestinians like animals, he was conveying, in clear and direct language, a compulsion to genocide.

By calling Palestinians animals, Gallant, along with many of his colleagues, may think he is describing Palestinian inhumanity, but in fact he is presupposing and thus justifying their violence. Zionists, after all, introduced the concept of race to which Palestinians have been acclimated (through suffering and exclusion). Zionists set up and maintained the dichotomy between human and animal. As a result, Zionists invented a Palestinian subject they could never subsequently control. They had no choice. The settler is nothing without the animalistic native. In the final balance, Gallant was subconsciously endorsing suicide.

IV. The Professional Left Accedes

One can discern the seriousness of an insurgency in the Global South or in the ghettos and reservations of North America by the type of reaction it inspires among the progressive intelligentsia. If the insurgency promises to inflict real damage on the oppressor, then members of that intelligentsia will rush to condemn it on moral grounds.

It happened in the United States with the usual politicians and public intellectuals: Bernie Sanders, Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, Naomi Klein, Jamelle Bouie, and on through the Rolodex. Slightly more surprising was Judith Butler's insipid reflection on the unwillingness of Palestinians to make liberation more comfortable for their oppressor.

Many of us have always known that shitting on Palestine is a rite of passage for aspirants to political office or cable news studios. We therefore understand that for the wannabe influencer both Israeli and Palestinian death isn't actually a moral concern; it is a professional opportunity. Here we see the pitiful upshot of "resistance" as an

scene: a bunch of Southern preppies with enormous entitlement visiting aggression on a scapegoat for their racial animus. The worker fought valiantly but was badly outnumbered. Soon, though, dozens of bystanders came to his defense, by land and water. They walloped the white offenders in a chaotic scene captured by multiple camera angles. Their resistance was intense. One white woman was whacked on the head with a folding chair. One of the white men ended up in the river.

On social media (and beyond), there was great celebration by Black users. They quickly made memes of the violence and handed out nicknames to participants in the brawl. This mass of users was, in a word, jubilant.

The jubilation lasted more than a week.

It conveyed a distinct message: “we are no longer defenseless.”

For Palestinians, resistance delivers a similar message: we will not sit passively in these concentration camps and get starved and bombed into oblivion. They are moved by the desperation of survival, for if their colonizer gets to decide then they will disappear from the earth. Their supposedly irrational violence is the very definition of self-defense.

The violence isn’t purely psychological. It has material purposes, as well. The idea is that the settlers can never be comfortable, for it is in comfort that the settlers feel as if they have accomplished their objectives. The land is theirs. The natives did indeed forget. History has finally ended.

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And so no small number of Palestinians were jubilant when they saw Israeli settlers boarding airplanes to somewhere else.

III. Compulsion to Genocide

Commentators in the West have taken to describing the current situation as the “Israel-Hamas war.” The term is inaccurate on two

case was harsher than usual. Politicians on both sides of the aisle rushed to condemn Palestinian terrorism. Corporations performed their usual gestures of anguish and concern. And in a type of pandering that came across more as cruel than vapid, a long list of celebrities pledged support for Israel.

Had this embargo on sympathy for Palestinians not existed, then more Americans might have learned useful context and considered some of the meaningful questions arising from Palestinian resistance.

Useful context begins with the nature of the Israeli state, an avatar of belligerence and inequality. Beyond its role as a force of extraction in the global nexus of U.S. imperialism, Israel was founded by conquest which has yet to be rectified. That conquest included mass displacement of Palestinian Arabs, theft of land, murder of entire villages, appropriation of resources, and destruction of the natural environment.

Given this context, the notion of “self-defense,” the Zionist’s discursive go-to, becomes more complicated. How can an occupying power be in a position of subjection or helplessness? Only in unusual circumstances does the historical oppressor get to claim self-defense. This isn’t one of those circumstances: Israel’s hostility as an occupying power is entirely routine. Checkpoints are aggressive. Border crossings are aggressive. Military patrols are aggressive. Embargoes are aggressive. Home demolition is aggressive. Settlement construction is aggressive. Extraction of land and water is aggressive. One cannot invoke self-defense as a counterpoint to nonstop aggression.

In short, there is no such thing as Israeli self-defense. It is a categorical impossibility.

Then again, maybe the problem with Americans isn’t ignorance or lack of information. Maybe they know damn well that Israel kills in great numbers and are glad of it. Maybe they’re acclimated to the spectacle of colonial violence. Maybe they see it as a benefit to humanity. Maybe they perceive in bloodshed the world as it ought to be. Maybe they know all they need to know about Israel, which is that it acts as a mirror for their own fantasies of heroism and probity.

II. Why the Violence

Israel's trance community had gathered in the desert near the settlement of Re'im a few miles from the Gaza Strip. They were there to enjoy a psychedelic festival of techno-electronica music, Nova, one stop among an itinerant lifestyle of sensuality and peaceful vibes.

Nova. The name evokes stargazing, wanderlust, possibility. It is mysterious and fascinating, a portal to a different world, one that promises escape from the drudgeries of this deteriorating planet. Just out of the ravers' view were two million people of the Gaza Strip, consigned to the drudgery of sanctions, immobility, and military occupation. They too dreamed of another world. But that world didn't exist in the cosmos. It is already here, on this earth, in the homeland from which they were expelled.

These dreams of different worlds were in unavoidable conflict. Each world required the disappearance of the other. The Israeli ravers thought they had already achieved their goal and had only the heavens to contemplate. But the people in Gaza haven't consented to that destiny.

This contrast calls to mind Frantz Fanon's observation that "the colonial context is characterized by the dichotomy it inflicts on the world." If nothing else, the operation from Gaza was profoundly Fanonian—or perhaps we can say that Fanon accurately described the inevitable logic of Indigenous resistance.

There is plenty of temptation to wag fingers in the aftermath of the operation, but surely that task is not the domain of academics and activists in the metropole. Nor should it be the priority of diaspora Palestinians (among whom I include myself). In our environs, filled with their own kind of hostility, the priority should be to defend Palestinians against the torment to which they have been subjected by the entire industrialized world. Among politicians, artists, celebrities, and intellectuals, Palestinians have no shortage of critics happy to cosign Zionist genocide. Those critics don't need or desire our validation, anyway. Abandoning our brethren in order to appease the Zionist establishment will deliver no accolades. In the end, the aspirant to respectability is left only with the shame of conciliation.

Palestinians are perfectly capable of formulating strategy and thinking through complex problems without the guidance of outsiders; they certainly don't need half-baked moralism from dorks and social climbers in the West. The Palestinian story isn't esoteric or inaccessible. In fact, one can discover the rationale for Palestinian violence anywhere in the great mass of revolutionary writing from Amílcar Cabral to Bassel al-Araj. That intellectuals who have made lucrative careers with tough-sounding buzzwords were so eager to condemn an actual instance of Indigenous resistance is a damning (and in my mind permanent) indictment of Western academe.

It didn't take long, in any case, for many of the early reports of Palestinian savagery to prove false or exaggerated. Israeli babies weren't beheaded and the mass rape event turned out to be complete nonsense. At least two Israeli captives gave interviews stating that they were treated humanely. Israeli police and military personnel hid among civilians and were responsible for some of the casualties attributed to Palestinians. Nevertheless, the story of Palestinian depravity continued to circulate as Israel killed innocents by the thousand and turned significant portions of the Gaza Strip into rubble.

Israel's response thus illuminated the rationale for the Palestinians' operation. Everyone expected maliciousness. That expectation didn't arise from thin air. The operation wasn't some random expression of hatred. It was a tactical counterpoint to the colonizer's systematic malice.

The Palestinians, like all colonized people, have to measure a hunger for dignity against the agony of retribution. They cannot sit passively while the oppressor inflicts continuous misery and they refuse to accept an ethno-religious narrative in which they exist only to be vanquished. What, then, is left for them to do? They must fight. The fight might be ugly in accordance to the situation imposed by the occupying power. It might challenge observers' perception of victimhood. Sometimes it might even transgress the boundaries of what Western intellectuals consider proper civil etiquette.

The psychic characteristics of the fight provide the dignity unavailable in the colonizer's fantasy world. Thus it is a cause for jubilation. A few months ago, a group of unruly white revelers jumped a Black dock worker on the Montgomery (Alabama) waterfront. It was a familiar