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## Why is Israel Shooting at Unarmed Protesters?

*For Israel, the Problem Isn't How We Resist, But That We Resist at All*

On March 30th, 2018, more than 30,000 Palestinians protested in Gaza. Israel's soldiers shot and killed Palestinian teen Abdul Fattah Abdul Nabi. Abdul Nabi was running away from the border fence between Gaza and Israel to help another Palestinian teen who was also also running away from the fence (soldiers had shot round after round at this teen while he was crawling on the ground). That day, soldiers also shot 27-year-old Palestinian farmer Amr Samour as he harvested parsley. He was shot with a tank shell because he "looked suspicious." A week later, protesters marched in large numbers again. Since the Great March of Return protests began, Israel's soldiers have killed 31 Palestinians and injured more than 2, 700, including five Palestinian journalists. Palestinian journalist Yasser Murtaja, who wore a vest clearly identifying him as press, was shot April 6th and died as a result of his injuries early April 7th.

Why would Israel's soldiers be instructed to shoot to kill teens running away from the fence, Palestinian journalists, farmers, and unarmed protesters? Surely one of the most militarized states in west Asia is not scared of a march? In fact they are. Colonial governments are at their weakest when they use naked violence against indigenous people. When the colonizers are in control, they can maintain the pretense of a "democratic state" (though they are anything but). Right now, Israel fears what all colonial projects fear– any questions regarding its legitimacy, and the mass protests in Gaza forefront that Israel is not a legitimate state, but rather a colonial one built on the genocide (massacres, forced expulsion, theft of land) of indigenous Palestinian inhabitants. Colonial sights were set on

Palestine in the late 1800's in Western Europe through the lens of zionism, a white supremacist ideology (read the words of its architects—Herzl, and later Jabotinsky). In 1948, 78% of Palestinian land was violently colonized to create what is called the state of Israel. In 1967, the remaining 22 % (the West Bank and Gaza) was invaded and occupied. The people of Gaza are the refugees from historic Palestinian land that was colonized in 1948 and again in 1967. Some residents of Gaza have been made refugees by Israel several times over. Land theft has continued in the West Bank, Naqab desert, other parts of what is now called Israel, and occupied Al Quds (Jerusalem) to this day. Plans are currently underway to demolish the entire Palestinian Bedouin village of Umm al-Hiran between April 15th and the 29th, and plans for a new town (built exclusively for Jewish settlers) are already in place. Israel plans to build 1,600 new settlement units northeast of Al Quds. Just this week, armed settlers forced Palestinian farmers to leave their land in Al Khader (south of Beit Lahem (Bethlehem)). The list goes on and on. The Nakba is now. What's left of Palestine for Palestinians is only about 4% of historic Palestine that's supposedly under Palestinian control. And even in this 4%, Palestinians have no sovereignty. They are subject to military raids, arrest of political leaders, no control of air space, no control of mineral or water rights and checkpoints that strictly control movement of Palestinians into and out of this 4% area which is already broken into small ghettos. And the internally displaced Palestinians who live in Apartheid conditions in what is now called Israel are treated similarly.

The Gaza Strip has been under an Israeli land, naval, and air starvation blockade for 11 years. This prevents food, medicine, and reconstruction materials from entering Gaza. Gaza has also been militarily invaded by Israel three times in the past 12 years alone— in 2006, 2012, and 2014. During the 2014 invasion, over 2,200 Palestinians in Gaza were killed, more than 11,000 were injured and more than 500,000 people were displaced. 11,000 homes were destroyed in Gaza through bombing by Israel's forces. Today, 96 per cent of Gaza's water supply is unsafe to drink. Residents get power for about three hours a day. 80 percent of the population lives in poverty. Unemployment rates are over 40% (the highest in the world), and the rate of food insecurity is about 50 percent. The health system is close to collapse. 40% of children have anemia and malnutrition.

Why has the siege of Gaza been so brutal and at the same time, mostly invisible to the West (except when the most egregious aspects of it force itself into Western consciousness)? Because black and brown lives don't matter much to the governments of the US and Europe, as long as those black and brown people die quietly. Palestinians

become visible when we die or are shot in large numbers because ignoring a massacre offends Western sensibilities of itself as “just” and even then, reports in Western media of our deaths and injuries, in the passive voice, abound. Palestinian protesters “die in clashes” rather than a rogue illegitimate state military murdering them in direct contravention of international law. Alternatively, we are seen in the press, when we defend ourselves, as “militants” (something Western governments, and especially colonial settler state governments abhor). Robert F. Williams, a leader in the Black liberation movement, said that the “militant is a ‘militant’ because he defends himself, his family, his home, and his dignity. He does not introduce violence into a racist social system—the violence is already there, and has always been there. It is precisely this unchallenged violence that allows a racist social system to perpetuate itself.”

Though Israel’s government would like you to believe that it is the Palestinian resistance that is the problem, consider this: Palestinian resistance has historically included non-cooperation, protests, work strikes, boycotts, hunger strikes, and armed resistance to the military and to settlers. In the Naqab desert, Palestinian Bedouin have protested non-violently against the theft of their land for decades, and continue to be violently cleared from it by Israel, almost invisibly to the rest of the world. In the US and Europe there are efforts to make it illegal to even talk about the illegitimacy of Israel as a state and there are also efforts to legally punish those who engage in the boycott, divestment, and sanction campaign. The oppressor’s response to all legitimate forms of resistance at any level, from free speech, to a stone throwing child to mass protest to boycotts to armed struggle has always been the same—calculated, brutal, and merciless by design. There is nothing Israel won’t do to stop any kind of Palestinian resistance. The Iron Fist Policy is a perfect example. This was an officially sanctioned policy that included breaking the bones of Palestinian children’s hands for throwing stones during the First Intifada. For Israel the problem isn’t how we resist, but that we resist at all.

Netanyahu’s reactionary government is nothing new to Palestinians. And this is also not simply a problem of a reactionary government over a more progressive population. Israelis vote in high numbers during their elections. The violent, repressive, illegal, and most importantly, racist policies of the government of Netanyahu has mass support in Israel— not unusual for colonial states who have an interest in keeping the “natives” in check. The recent state violence against Palestinians witnessed by the world is what colonial governments do and what the majority of their settler population supports.

The fact that Palestinians have the attention of the international community is certainly a step in the right direction, but let's not make the mistake of thinking that the protest movement alone will solve the problems of colonialism in historic Palestine. Assata Shakur once said, "Nobody in the world, nobody in history, has ever gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of people who oppress them." And anyone who has a working knowledge of anti-colonial history that is more than Hollywood's Ben Kingsley version of Ghandi knows this. Like all indigenous people who have resisted colonialism historically, there will be a need for all kinds of resistance working in parallel. As for the current March of Return, we know from past experience that when black and brown people are murdered by the state, the attention span of Western audiences is short. The media coverage given to the plight of our people will end eventually, and Israel will be back to the business of expanding its colonial project in Jerusalem, the Naqab, and the rest of historic Palestine. We will still need the armed Palestinian resistance to make expanding settlements distasteful for settlers. No one wants to live in a war zone if they don't have to, and settlers don't have to. They have a choice. The armed resistance is one of the few forms of resistance that has slowed down the settlement project— the real violence that is slowly and methodically killing our people.

And Israel isn't just a problem for Palestinians. Israel has colonized Palestine, but has also been involved in oppressing other people of color worldwide. Israel's government, "security" establishment, and tech sector has a long history of propping up repressive regimes in Central and South America, developing highly repressive policies and forms of technology, and training US police.

What can conscientious people here in the West do who are watching what is happening in Gaza? Embrace your humanity. The colonial project in historic Palestine, like all colonial projects— on this continent and elsewhere— is a dead end. There is no humanity in it. You cannot make it "more just" while it still exists. For Palestinians and all indigenous people to have justice, they must have their land back. All Palestinians know this and so does Israel, which is why they try to keep that discussion off the table by shooting unarmed protesters, journalists and farmers.

The illegitimacy of Israel as a state and the legally guaranteed right of Palestinian refugees to return to their ancestral homes is the central issue Israel does not want you to see. For those who say the facts on the ground make decolonization in Palestine impossible, remember the French once thought the same about Algeria. Charles de Gaulle said "Algeria will always be French," and during a period when the French settler project was

arguably at its strongest in Algeria, the courage and steadfastness of the Algerian people and their many forms of resistance (including a popularly supported armed resistance) achieved the liberation of Algeria from the grip of French colonialism. De Gaulle's "always" ended in 1962.

Ultimately, the people of Palestine will liberate themselves, but those in the international community who are horrified by recent events in Gaza, can still do their part. If you reject white supremacy and you care about black and brown lives, then you must also reject the legitimacy of Israel, as a colonial settler state. Support boycott, divestment, and sanctions against Israel. Stop the 3 billion dollars a year that the US government gives to Israel (soon to be 3.8 billion). Support the right of Palestinian people to reclaim all their land. Support the right of Palestinian refugees to, at long last, return home, and in the words of Malcolm X, support the right of Palestinian people to resist "by any means necessary."

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