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# Liberatory violence is never “unprovoked”

written by James Dugan

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*In today's world no one is innocent, no one a neutral. A man is either with the oppressed or he is with the oppressors. He who takes no interest in politics gives*

*his blessing to the prevailing order, that of the ruling classes and exploiting forces.” —George Habash*

*“Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come as a result of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding” —Frantz Fanon*

With Israel in particular, it is immediately apparent how willfully ignorant Americans are to the level of sheer violence that it takes to uphold a settler society. Every day that Israel exists as an apartheid State is a violent event for Palestinians. Further, every missile that strikes Gaza and every raid on a refugee camp in the West Bank is propped up by financial support from the United States. The focus of condemnation should therefore be Israel and the United States for creating the material conditions that have necessitated a liberation movement.

The purported concern about violence rings empty when it is devoid of any reference to Israel’s history as a settler colonial project; without any reference to the Nakba of 1948 or the 11-day bombardment of Gaza in 2021 which resulted in hundreds of lost lives and thousands of destroyed residences. Throughout the onslaught, hospitals and news agencies were deliberately targeted by the air strikes—which of course utilized U.S.-made warplanes and bombs. The conditions of colonialism and apartheid ensure that even the most ordinary day is subjected to violence in less blatant forms (*e.g.* the violence like hunger and poverty that Kwame Ture described as being “so institutionalized that it becomes a part of our way of life” and is accepted as normal). But 2021 was also preceded and followed by other explicitly jarring events, such as the senseless shootings during the Great March of Return in 2018-2019 (over 8,000 hit with live ammunition, over 30,000 injured) and the settler rampage of Huwara earlier this year (leaving hundreds of homes and vehicles torched).

All of this illustrates that, as put by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, “Settler colonialism, as an institution or system, requires violence or the threat of violence to attain its goals.” Israel’s colonization of Palestine is the embodiment of violence—and any notion that violence is “committed equally by the colonized and the colonizer [ ] blurs the nature of the historical processes.” Dunbar-Ortiz’s point has been reiterated by many voices committed to self-determination, decolonization, and universal freedom. Paulo Freire, the great Brazilian educator instructed that “with the establishment of a relationship of oppression, violence has already begun. Never in history has violence been initiated by the oppressed.” Walter Rodney, the radical Guyanese intellectual, put it similarly, “Violence aimed at the recovery of human dignity and at equality cannot be judged by the same yardstick as violence aimed at maintenance of discrimination and oppression.”

With this framework in mind, to call the recent militancy “unprovoked” is to ignore the systemic nature of oppression in Palestine. To those that opt not to ignore it, the response was inevitable for the same reasons that Angela Davis called certain tactics taken during the black liberation struggle inevitable: “Because of the violence that exists on the surface everywhere, you have to expect that there are going to be such explosions. You have to expect things like that as reactions.” An acknowledgment of how violence permeates *prior to the reaction* is crucial.

And it should be clear that what we expect and what we desire are not always one and the same. Malcolm X, an early advocate of Palestinian liberation articulated this point well: “I don’t believe in violence that’s why I want to stop it. And you can’t stop it with love. So, we only mean vigorous action in self-defense and that vigorous action we feel we’re justified in initiating by any means necessary.” When Palestine resists its oppression, it acts in self-defense; it aims at “the recovery of human dignity.” For anyone whose crucial guiding moral and political directive is self-determination and freedom, it is clear which side of the struggle we stand on.

To a Free Palestine in our lifetimes.

*“Nobody in the world, nobody in history, has ever gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of the people who were oppressing them.” —Assata Shakur*

*“The way the oppressor tries to stop the oppressed from using violence as a means to attain liberation is to raise ethical or moral questions about violence. . . . [V]iolence in any society is neither moral nor is it ethical. It is neither right nor is it wrong. It is just simply a question of who has the power to legalize violence.”*

*-Kwame Ture*

[Source](#)

