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Palestine solidarity

Ending Zionism is a feminist issue

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As Israel's assault on the besieged Palestinian population in Gaza approaches its third week, we continue to hear about the "disproportionate number" of women and children victims. This expression begs the question: what is a proportionate number of women and children killed in a genocide?

As Jadaliyya's Maya Mikdashi asks in her op-ed titled "Can Palestinian men be victims?", if a significant majority of the killed were adult men, would Israel's crimes be lesser?

A different analysis of gendered violence is necessary: one that recognizes that no "proportions" are acceptable because all deaths should be mourned, while providing the tools for a differential understanding of the manifestations of violence.

Rape calls

The feminist network INCITE! Women and Trans People of Color Against Violence has always understood that state violence is both racialized and gendered.

Zionism is a prime example of that; it is a racist ideology grounded in the privileging of one ethno-religious group over all others.

When a state views a population "as its dispossessed, disenfranchised and occupied indigenous population" as a "demographic threat," that view is fundamentally both racist and gendered.

Racist population control relies specifically on violence against women. So it is not surprising that Mordechai Kedar, an Israeli military intelligence officer turned academic, would matter-of-factly suggest this week that "raping the wives and mothers of Palestinian combatants" would deter attacks by Hamas militants.

Similarly, Israeli lawmaker Ayelet Shaked did not attempt to present the murder of Palestinian children and their mothers as unfortunate, disproportionate "collateral damage" "she openly called for it by asserting that Palestinian women must be killed too, because they give birth to "little snakes."

This comment reflects an Israeli infrastructure designed to sustain high rates of miscarriages by blocking basic resources such as water and medical supplies, forcing women in labor to wait at military checkpoints on their way to a hospital, and generally creating inhumane and unlivable conditions for Palestinians.

This latest murderous attack on Palestinians in the Gaza Strip has not only taken the lives of hundreds of Palestinians, but it has also increased miscarriages, pre-term labor and stillbirths.

Ethiopian-Israeli women, most of them Jewish, have also been subject to mandatory contraceptive injections without their consent.

Ending Zionism is a feminist and a reproductive justice issue.

Liberating women?

Of course, gendered violence as a tool for settler-colonialism is not a new strategy; settler-colonialism, patriarchy and official hypocrisy usually go hand in hand.

Nineteenth-century France claimed to be liberating Algerian women even as it torched entire villages and towns. The proverbial colonial white man would have us believe that he was acting on the selfless impulse to save brown women from brown men, even as the colonial power he served impoverished entire countries.

Algerian women were certainly no better off as result of French colonialism; in fact, their circumstances deteriorated significantly.

The George W. Bush administration gave itself a pat on the back for supposedly liberating women in Afghanistan from the Taliban. Yet we see throughout history, and not just in Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Algeria or Palestine, that wars have never liberated women and gender nonconforming people of color.

New brand of hypocrisy

Today, Israel has developed a new brand of this hypocrisy, as it claims that it is more civilized than the Palestinian people because it is supposedly a more "gay-friendly" country. This is pinkwashing, Israel's attempt to distract from its ongoing human rights violations by pointing to its supposedly better gay rights record.

But that record, once again, is racist.

Any Jewish citizen of Israel can and must serve in the Israeli occupation forces, but these are the murderous forces engaging in the genocide of the Palestinian people.

Does it make for a more moral army if some of its killer soldiers are openly gay? Stop to think of who the purveyor of the greater violence is. Who is denying Palestinian women, children, gays, lesbians, trans people and straight men their most basic rights — freedom of movement, safety, shelter, food, a home, life? One has to acknowledge that the guilty party is "civilized" Israel, not Palestinian heteropatriarchy.

War — militarism — is a hyper-masculinist activity that glorifies and rewards all violence, including gendered violence, and a soldier trained in violence cannot put that violence aside when he or she gets home.

All of Israeli society is trained in violence. And violence is not a pair of combat boots one can leave at the door; violence becomes second nature (unless it was first nature, in which case it is further aggravated) and the entire community that engages in warfare is a more violent community — not just at the war front.

Joint struggle

This is what we are witnessing today, as we have observed it again and again every time Israel escalates its assault on the Palestinian people.

As for Palestinians, there are no battlefronts, no "war zones." All of historic Palestine is the battlefront as mobs of Israelis take to the streets in violent rampages.

This realization has always been at the very core of INCITE's analysis. We understand that in situations of settler-colonialism, indigenous women, trans people and gender non-conforming people bear the brunt of a nexus of racism and sexism. We are engaging in a joint struggle, from India to the Arab world to South West Asia, to Africa and the Americas, for the dignity and full sovereignty of indigenous people.

This is why INCITE! endorsed, in 2010, the Palestinian call for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel and remains committed to the grassroots struggle against state-sponsored violence against the entire Palestinian people.

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