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Thoughts on a joint but unequal Palestinian-Israeli struggle

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Thoughts on a joint but unequal Palestinian-Israeli struggle

Israeli activists have joined Palestinians in demonstrations throughout the West Bank for a decade, in what some have come to bill a 'joint struggle.' But the apparent disparity between the daily realities of Israelis and Palestinians beckons the question: What is the role of Israelis in the Palestinian struggle for liberation?

<http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L400xH266/Resistance-Tamimi-press-50cbc.jpg>

Activists from Anarchists Against the Wall in West Bank. Sign reads "resistance" in Arabic and Hebrew (Photo: Tamimi Press)

Since 2003, a growing number of Israeli activists, primarily affiliated with Anarchists Against the Wall, have been joining the Palestinian popular struggle against the separation wall and settlements. Israelis accompany Palestinians in weekly demonstrations throughout the West Bank in villages like Bi'lin, Nil'in, Nabi Saleh, Beit Ummar and al-Ma'asara.

Recently, I have become aware of an internal debate in the circles I am a part of and privy to in Ramallah, Nabi Saleh and in the virtual circles of Twitter, Facebook and the blogosphere. This debate has spilled into activist circles I frequent and aroused an array of responses, most of them quite emotional. Some people, Palestinian and others, have begun calling into question the participation of Israeli activists in Palestinian demonstrations against the wall and even challenge the efficacy of a joint Palestinian-Israeli struggle in general.

An accusation I have heard is that, as Israeli Jews, we enjoy privileges denied to Palestinians and that, moreover, unaware of these privileges, we show up at various demonstrations in the West Bank demanding to be treated as equal partners in the struggle. One person dismissed offhand Israeli activists' often harrowing experiences of arrest, injury or harassment by the state's security apparatus because we cannot understand what it's like to live under military rule, fearing daily for oneself and loved ones.

As a result, I'd like to attempt to address some arguments I have heard from certain activists in recent conversations and blog entries, about the role of Israeli activists in the popular Palestinian struggle. I am speaking only for myself and do not represent any other activists.

Yes, we are painfully aware of our colonial privileges as Israeli Jews. We articulate that every time we get into our cars, driving back to Tel Aviv from Nabi Saleh or Bil'in, leaving our Palestinian friends behind to deal with repercussions, including night raids and brutal arrests. We recognize the dire implications these joint actions carry for Palestinians.

We do not wish to be treated as "equals" or to lead the struggle. On the contrary: we do not make demands, and we are not attempting to lead or be decision-makers in this process. At most, we see ourselves as allies, junior partners in a joint struggle. "Joint" does not mean equal partnership, but it does indicate our deepest commitment to and

solidarity with the ongoing Palestinian struggle for liberation from the shackles of colonialism and apartheid. The fight to end racial oppression must entail a joint struggle that brings together people of different ethnicities and creeds, including those who enjoy colonial privileges, to demand an end to a racist regime.

I take issue with what feels like a dismissal of incidents of injury of Israeli or international activists. We also suffocate from tear gas, get hit by rubber bullets and stink from skunk water. Several of us have, over the years, sustained life-threatening injuries, lost an eye or wound up in a coma for weeks. Was this suffering meaningless?

The mere existence of Israeli solidarity activists, or our presence in West Bank demonstrations, should not be taken for granted. For someone who was born into the occupation and indoctrinated to be a proud colonizer, idolize the military and partake in the ongoing erasure of Palestinian history, the road to dissent is far from clear. And those of us who have turned our backs on the state and its racist ideology are often shunned by our family and friends, and constantly threatened by Zionist activists and state agencies. The life of an anti-Zionist activist in Israel is a lonely one; I sometimes find myself envious of the *tsumud* (Arabic for “steadfastness”) I see in the West Bank.

But what I find most disturbing about the argument that we should not attend West Bank demonstrations is the assumption that, after the liberation of Palestine and the end of occupation and Zionism, Jews will just leave, “willingly or not,” as one activist boldly told me. It saddens me, not just because at the heart of a joint struggle should lie a vision for a just postcolonial society, but because it speaks to the lack of understanding by some that Israeli Jews are rooted here, have a profound sense of belonging and attachment to their place of birth, and that another wave of mass displacement will never be a just solution. This realization is vital, if not only for the shifting dynamics of the current struggle, but more significantly – for the imagined future of Palestine and the shape its society takes. I’m afraid if we maintain the separation the current regime desires, between Israeli Jews and Palestinians, post-liberation Palestine might become a dystopia of inter-ethnic, interfaith discord and mutual suspicion that will descend into further conflict.

Post-scriptum :

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<http://972mag.com/thoughts-on-a-joint-yet-unequal-palestinian-israeli-liberation-struggle/49242/>

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