Once again, the streets of the West Bank are on fire. There is talk of a Third Intifada. In the mainstream media, and among certain politicians, there is “fear” of a third intifada, because an intifada—literally, a shaking off—even when it fails to bring about a change in the status quo, questions it loud enough for everyone to be forced to pay attention. Everyday violence against the people of Palestine otherwise goes unreported. And so, only when thousands of Palestinians put a halt to their daily activities under occupation, to rise up against the oppressions they negotiate regularly, do we get to hear about “unrest” in the West Bank...

Just as predictably, and rightfully so, the alternative media points out that there is only talk of “unrest” when Israelis are attacked, whereas the situation in the West Bank has not be “restful” for Palestinians in decades, since the illegal occupation of these Palestinian territories in 1967. And yet that occupation entails, on a daily basis, a violence that is well documented, and which nonetheless fails to register as “unrest” in the westernized, colonial mind. It is “violence as usual,” so the Israeli military raids into Palestinian neighborhoods, the home demolitions, the checkpoints, the tear-gassing of school children, the collective punishment, the expansion of illegal settlements, the administrative detention of thousands of innocent civilians, do not make the news.

That is in the West Bank. The ongoing chokehold on Gaza—a sustained siege so vicious and intentionally evil it is tantamount to slow genocide—is viewed as a necessary “security” measure for Israel, again, with little regard for its impact on the besieged refugees. Indeed, as Palestinian legislator Hanan Ashrawi observed: “We are the only people on earth asked to guarantee the security of our occupier, while Israel is the only country that calls for defense from its victims.”

Within Israel “proper,” there are over 50 laws that discriminate against Palestinians, and that system of apartheid translates into a population riddled with unemployment, poverty, and the consequences thereof. And as Israel continues to deny the Palestinian refugees their Right of Return, it is violating a basic, inalienable, universally-recognized human right for Diaspora Palestinians, all over the globe. None of this is “renewed violence;” it is violence that has been sustained since 1948.

And as always happens at times like these, questions abound, about the specific incident that sparked this particular round of “fierce clashes,” how long this specific episode of protests will last, or whether this time, the US will condemn Israel’s “excessive violence,” (a condemnation never to be followed by consequences) or merely criticize, yet again, “Palestinian violence,” a violence never recognized as rightful resistance against an ever-more openly vicious, racist, and violent occupier.

But the questions we need to be asking are: what is the vision that motivates these protests, beyond an improvement in the daily life of the protesters? What is the platform that vision is established upon? What comes next, after the protesters achieve these immediate goals? Because we must believe that these protests will end, with a change in the system. Israel is an apartheid state, and apartheid cannot last. Some might say “we cannot rearrange the furniture while the house is burning.” But the house has been burning for decades, and what is going on—an uprising against structural violence, and a soul-deep yearning for freedom and self-determination— is not new. And when it finally comes to be, when we finally have freedom and self-determination, it will not be a minute to soon. Whether this “unrest,” these “fierce clashes,” this “renewed violence” are the prelude to a Third Intifada or not, our mandate is to plan for the future.

And as we plan for the future, we need to be wary of partial solutions. Once we put out the fire, every unresolved issue is a potential spark that will reignite it. So let us keep out eyes on the prize. We are not only seeking an end to the occupation, and a lifting of the siege. What we aspire to is the creation of the first nation born in the 21st century that is truly founded on the basis of democracy, not demography.

As we fight to overthrow Zionism, we need to understand Zionism as a form of racism, and as one of many global manifestations of settler-colonialism. Zionism—the privileging of one perceived ethnic group over another - is by necessity, by definition, a form of institutionalized structural violence. Because there can be no such thing as a “Jewish democracy:” a “demographic” state, whatever the
chosen demography, is always-already racist, undemocratic, violent.

We are fighting racism, and racism does not exist without sexism, without homophobia, without classism, without ableism, without violence. This is something we need to understand and center in our struggles. History shows again and again that partial solutions, solutions that prioritize certain oppressions over others, are not solutions. They cement, upon achieving a first success, the hierarchy of oppression they had neglected to address during the struggle. Gender is a universal example. As we look at struggles throughout history, we cannot help but notice the irony of the assumption that “first we solve the national problem, then we tackle the women’s agenda.” Yet women are an intrinsic part of the nation.

The USA is another example of the corrosiveness of prioritizing some over others, as this is the country that declared itself the “Land of the Free” even as it engaged in that most horrific “peculiar institution,” the enslavement of fellow humans. And so we need to understand that everyone who wants to be part of that liberated nation must be included from the very conception of that nation, and not as an afterthought. We need to understand that we are not only fighting racism, we are fighting institutionalized, structural violence against various communities, and we must not duplicate such a system. The New Palestine will hopefully have learned from its history, as well as the histories of all countries founded on injustice and institutionalized priorities. First things first may sound convenient; but it is ultimately counter-productive, unless that “first thing,” that “first success,” is freedom for the most disenfranchised. Partial solutions are otherwise part of the problem.

As we rise up against a system that privileges some over others, as we understand that privileging one group always-already means oppressing another, let us work on genuine equality. Whether this is a third intifada or not, what must rise out of the ashes of an unjust system is self-determination for all. Palestinians have become a model of “sumoud,” persistence under the harshest of circumstances. We can and should also become a model of freedom and justice for all, post colonialism, post apartheid, and post Zionism. It’s a huge challenge, and it’s not too soon to start tackling it.

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Article-Summary: As Palestinians fight to overthrow Zionism, they need to understand Zionism as a form of racism, and as one of many global manifestations of settler-colonialism. Ending the occupation alone is not enough. Palestinians must aspire to create the first nation born in the 21st century that is truly
founded on democracy, not demography.

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