

A day in my life – thoughts on non-violent Jewish resistance

I take the Egged bus to my university. The only bus line which connects my city and Tel-Aviv. Egged runs bus lines in settlements in the West Bank and is thereby profiting from the military occupation of Palestinian territories. When I hand the bus driver the 10 shekel fee to Tel-Aviv I think of the ways in which I am forced to cooperate with this occupation even in such a tiny and daily transaction.

I enter the halls of the Humanities Faculty in which an artifact that was uncovered in the Gaza strip after '67 is displayed. The expeditions in which such artifacts as this one were excavated honor a university benefiting from what its archeologists have stolen. Shouldn't these be in a free Palestinian university?

I walk up the steps and pass by the "Middle Eastern and African Studies" department, whose chair, considered all knowledgeable about "our neighbors," still counsels the Israeli military intelligence as an ex-officer. I once made the mistake of going to one of his lectures in which he informed us gravely that there was no Palestinian nation when the Zionists came here. Was there a Jewish nation when the Zionists came here? I left before I could ask.

I continue to the Sourasky library where students still discover challenging writings on Jewish identity and politics or are moved reading accounts of Holocaust survivors reminding them of people, similar to you and I, who have been forgotten even by those who assume to follow them. The same library where they will find Palestinian novels and learn of other kinds of destruction and expulsion or enter, hesitantly, Arabic spaces and cultures, worlds so close to where they have been born though they are forced to remain distant from them in the name of their "security." I look at the books wondering all the while if my university purchased them or other research materials through its connections with or donations from the members of the Tel-Aviv University Business–Academic Club. One such member of the 2009 Club is EDS (Electronic Data Systems) Israel. I think of Palestinian workers who have to undergo fingerprint recognition and are

controlled by this company's biometric "inventions" or stopped at a checkpoint to be looked down on by an Israeli reserve soldier who was yesterday sitting beside me in class and tomorrow will ask for my notes. Should I give them to this soldier? Knowing he will find the little comments on the margins written in haste in moments of inspiration when learning about colonialism and orientalism? Yes, we have such classes as well. Tel-Aviv University is home to many critical thinkers and writers who are increasingly being censored.

I walk past the faculty members' club, aware that this beautiful house once belonged to a family, Abu Kheel. There was once a Palestinian village here, north of Yaffa city. Contrary to the myth of the barren land to which a people without a home came, Yaffa was once a vibrant place and indeed still is but one has to know where to look. Yet the people who live here are constantly being harassed by the Tel Aviv-Yaffo Municipality officials causing them to move inwards to Ramle and Lyd, so that richer and whiter people may renovate the Palestinian local houses, raise the prices and gentrify the area. This usually happens following the so-called "illegal extensions" that growing families add to their houses which are subsequently demolished even though permits for building in Yaffa are scarce unless you are Jewish or well-off. We are all witnesses to the creation and re-creation of (internal) refugees.

Indeed the occupation is always and constantly here and not, as some would like to think, over and beyond the by now meaningless Green Line. The Separation Wall and the unyielding siege on Gaza have made it all the more and painfully clear that the occupation has come to define the existence of all who live here but my Jewish hands are covered with its blood. **How to resist when everything I touch is stained?**

I first must recognize where I am a participant, even if involuntary profiteer, as I sit on the green lawns of my campus grounds and know that in the Middle East someone could have put this water to better use and then ask myself – who does this water belong to in the first place? As I go to work and receive payment from a company which has offices in a settlement where it was cheaper to set them up and where Palestinian workers no

doubt are being exploited, unprotected by the laws of minimum wage which our government bestows only upon the privileged citizens. As I decide where to go for holiday and am told by my friends how nice and inexpensive it is now to rent a place for the weekend on the Golan Heights. As I drink freshly squeezed orange juice, exported to the world without mention of where the fruit comes from – occupied land. As I drive on apartheid roads built on more stolen land because it will shorten the way and I am in a hurry to a meeting in Jerusalem.

And once I realize that even as I try to resist the occupation has engulfed everything, I understand that I am faced with a choice. Should I use my privileges as a Jewish citizen of Israel? As a Jewish anti-apartheid and a peace activist in this country, I can say and do certain things -necessary things - which would place me in danger, in prison, in the graveyard if I were Palestinian. Yet, I worry - if I do this for long, will I discover that the methods are stronger than the aims? Will I not actually deepen the divide between myself and fellow Palestinians based on the very privileges I still enjoy? I may try to ignore or disregard or justify my use of them but do they not grow in the faces of those I work with? Unlike international activists I cannot be IN solidarity with Palestinians for I myself am the perpetrator of the crimes committed against them.

Or am I?

I too was born into and am a product of a Zionist-separationist system and so I too am part of the struggle. Indeed it is also MY struggle, to be liberated from the horrifying task of oppressing others and so I should not wait to be asked to join. Yet when I join, how do I do so not from an imposing position? How do I shed away that which I have that others do not, that which they are deprived of so that I may continue to prosper on their backs? **As a Jewish person living here should I “give up” and speak out against the quotidian “normalities” which help fuel the occupation by my very collaboration and tacit cooperation?** Sometimes I cannot because it would mean practically ceasing to live/function. Other times I am trapped as the occupation has entered even the most private and intimate of spaces, as when my beloved brother came home in his uniform and my mother asked me to help her wash it and hang it out to dry. Nonetheless, I simply CANNOT divest from the occupation as long as I help to maintain it and as long as I

benefit from the power it has given me individually as well as collectively, even as I am critical of it. By attempting to do this I contribute to breaking away with static binaries which have placed me on a certain side of the walls the Israeli government builds even when I oppose the building of these walls. By exposing and refusing to go along with the binary and aggressive “normalities” that allow the occupation to continue I can take part in the struggle in a political, non-violent form of Jewish resistance.

Yet as I reach the conclusion of these thoughts I find I have fallen trap into the very dichotomies which I claim separate us from each other by imposing an oppressive order of different yet connected occupations. Dichotomies that coerce us into being only Jewish as opposed to Palestinian, or Palestinian of '48 as opposed to Palestinian of '67 and these as opposed to Refugees and then Jerusalemite as opposed to West Banker as opposed to Gazan etc. It is not “simply” the occupation which we must resist but rather a whole regime of divisions set in place treating the people of one land differently based on their ethnicity or race. I end with the understanding that I am looking to re-define my place here. Although I take responsibility for my role in maintaining oppression, I am more than “the occupier” and even more than someone resisting being one. As a person struggling for justice and for the end of (the) occupation(s) I too can hope for liberation by re-thinking and re-imagining myself and my place here. I join the struggle then, also because of the personal silencing I experience on account of my beliefs and because of the shared pain born out of friendships with people I hold dear who pay heavy prices for their actions and stands; although not considered “the chosen people” they are my people nonetheless.

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