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Genocide and the Politics of False Equivalencies



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

The condemnation of the killing of civilians and children cannot be addressed through the lens of false equivalency, suggesting all sides are equally guilty in this war. What Hamas did on October 7th, however horrendous, is not equivalent to the suffering and terror imposed by the Israeli state on Palestinians both historically and in light of the current escalating scale of what amounts to massive, unthinkable, and unconscionable violence. The relentless killing of children by Israeli Defense Forces and its elimination of the most basic needs of the Palestinian people in Gaza is far from an abstraction or a sound bite that can be buried in the language of equivalence, or for that matter, the cravenly appeal to balance. The International Court of Justice reinforced South Africa's claim, however tempered, that Israel is waging genocide and must "take all measures within its power" to uphold its obligations under Article II of the Genocide Convention. The U.S. Campaign

for Palestinian Rights stated rightly that “One thing has been made clear on the world stage: There is vastly documented evidence that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians.”

While the International Court of Justice judgment should be welcomed, it is hard to imagine why there isn't an immediate call for a cease-fire and a full-fledged acknowledgment of Israel's committed war crimes and acts of genocide. Netanyahu's war only has one endpoint the complete destruction of the Palestinian people along with the land they still possess. The long legacy of Israel's colonialism and politics of disposability and extermination/elimination cannot be hidden behind the false claims of defense and sovereignty; this is a project of massive cruelty and dispossession boldly proclaimed endlessly by Netanyahu and his right-wing criminogenic associates. Their dark impulses and mobilizing passions of murderous violence are no longer hidden. The death machine rolls on with a smirk, boast and a sickening smile, boldly announced by Netanyahu and his far-right associates. In the war's wake, the bodies of the dead—mostly women, children, and civilians add up—over 26,000 thus far. Jeffrey St. Clair movingly captures the merging of the crimes against the people of Gaza and the pathological openness, if not pleasure, of the Israeli state in affirming its criminal rampage. He writes:

In contrast to other historical atrocities, the crimes against the people of Gaza—mass murder, manufactured famine, dispossession, looting of property, demolition of cultural and religious heritage, and forced expulsion—have all been committed in the open, the genocidal plans have been written about in newspaper columns and freely expounded on talk shows. You won't have to excavate through secret archives, the evidence of these grotesque crimes is there for all to see. What they've said and what they've done is on the record. There can be no hiding from it. And those who've armed, funded, abetted, and justified these genocidal measures should be condemned for their complicity.^[1]

The suffering of children in Gaza is visceral and way out of proportion to Hamas's crimes and this war of revenge is conducted in a way that echoes crimes of a totalitarian past, with its colonial legacy of dispossession and elimination. Blood flows everyday in Gaza, and it comes largely from the bodies of the most vulnerable: women and children. This was made particularly clear in a post provided by Dr. Seema Lilani's description, describing the first three hours working at Aqsa Hospital in central Gaza.

She writes:

“In my first three hours working at al-Aqsa hospital, I treated a one-year-old boy with a bloody diaper, and his right arm and right leg had been blown off. There was no leg below

the diaper. He was bleeding into his chest. I treated him on the ground because there were no stretchers and no beds available, and when the orthopedic surgeon came to wrap his stumps up to stop the bleeding, I would've imagined in the US this would've been a straightforward case that went immediately to the OR because of the severity, but instead, the impossible choices inflicted on the doctors of Gaza have made it such that he wasn't 'the emergency of the day,' there was a waiting list and the OR was already full with other more pressing cases; and so I ask myself, what's more pressing than a one-year-old without an arm, a leg and who is bleeding in his chest and choking on his blood. And that will tell you a little about the scale of devastation that the people of Gaza are suffering.”^[ii]

This is just one example of the horror the Israeli state is inflicting on Palestinians as part of its right-wing war of revenge. This is a horror magnified thousands of times. The smell of needless destruction, death, and untold misery in this case is only matched by the cowardly collapse of conscience, especially among the U.S. and other nations who refuse to call for a cease-fire and are supplying Israel with military weapons. Surely, a den inhabited by barbarians and cowardice. The war on Gaza and the Palestinian people makes clear what the death of humanity looks like through the lens of militarization, extermination, colonialism, and war.

Notes.

^[i] Jeffrey St. Clair, “Genocide on the Installment Plan,” *CP+* (December 30, 2023). Online:

^[ii] Cited in Jeffrey St. Clair, “A War with No Future,” *CP+* (January 20, 2023). Online:

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