NO STATE SOLUTION

ON SOCIAL WAR, ISRAEL, AND THE ALIBI OF THE STATE

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I decided to write this essay at marches, feeling dissatisfied as always with the feeling of frustration with protest/spectacle politics, and despairing at the slogans that get chanted (especially with weird apprehensions of antisemitism). I wanted us all to be chanting "No State Solution." And then I thought I would write what I meant by that. I knew it was not an original slogan or thought, that as always, as an anarchist, I am writing in the mix of many thinkers, and I aim to contribute perspectives from my particular location that I have developed in collaboration with many comrades dead and alive, known and unknown. There is a new book by Daniel Boyarin with this title I have yet to read, and a zine by a comrade, Rozele, written during an earlier anti-war moment that just made its way to me. I believe I am offering a slightly different angle here, less concretely historical, maybe less specifically Jewish (though I am Jewish), and more about the state logics, the desire fueling these geopolitical events, and the dead end feeling of resistance and anti-war movements.

The fact that another front in the Palestinian struggle would come into such sharp focus right now can tell us something about the impasse of our ideas of political solutions. I am not writing to the anarchists, I suppose, who might already think this way, but rather in response to the configurations I'm seeing in the dominant forms of protest that lead to confusing results.

My central claim is that Israel is the apotheosis of the nation state, the nation state as settler state, as ethnostate. There

are so many places to point to understanding this trajectory historically, ideologically, and even libidinally: one salient feature is that Israel is marked through a continued imposition of European/white ways of life and (post)-industrial capitalist standards of living as the ultimate goal of human development, and these lifestyles as a right that the State ensures. This ideological claim erases cultural differences, either by making it impossible to live differently, absorbing cultural differences as native to the settler, or nostalgically lost and yearned for at times, and presenting other cultural desires as primitive or barbaric. The operating structures of Orientalism and Islamophobia make it easy to dismiss the Palestinians as violent, using an ages old image of the Arab and the Muslim as misogynistic, tribal, retrograde. The operating structures of the State therefore make it easy to accept Israel as legitimate, necessary, inevitable. They also make the State form the inevitable aspiration for Palestinians, whether in a shared secular "democratic" state of "equal rights" with Jews, or in another ethnostate next door to Israel.

It's curious, in a way, to claim that the apotheosis of the nation-state era is a Jewish state, since the nation state formed alongside a violent history of antisemitism and fraught assimilation by diasporic Jews. But this can be explained in part by the concomitant desire of the Zionists and antisemites to remove the Jews from Europe, thereby helping to enable the illusory possibility of equating a race, a people, with a State. It is also part of a post-WWII restructuring of geopolitics and Western identity, in the founding of Israel, that brought Jews more wholly into the auspices of white civilized normalcy (though many Jews are still recalcitrant to this incorporation).

Instead of focus on this particular history of this configuration, I want to look at the unconscious logics that go unreflected,

even amongst anti-authoritarian leftists and anarchists (and clearly by authoritarians, liberals, and progressives). These moments of crisis often show us how much liberal ideology still stains our thinking. The obstacle in the way of most people in thinking these problems through is ingrained ideas of identity filtered through nationality, ethnicity, race. And the way we attach those things to the state, to a homeland that would need to be exclusive. Each people has a land. A friend said, this could all have easily been avoided, if Israel didn't go full throttle in response to the Gazan incursion, the Al-Aqsa flood. But in our conversation, we admitted that Bibi (or Israel, the state) does not want that. It wants death, it wants vengeance. And even if this retaliation didn't occur, the structure of Israel creates the inevitable death world, a rocket from Hamas, a bombardment, a ceasefire, there's are all structures of war. I am interested in thinking more about the State as social war.

The idea I grew up with was that the Jews needed a state in order to be safe from the possibility of another Shoah. Safety comes with a state. The State operates through the invocation of providing security for its people, securing its borders, creating safe streets, even sometimes a safety net, the illusion that our lives won't fall through the cracks into utter degradation, even if they are also being put on the chopping block in a myriad of other ways. Of course, we don't live this way. Since 9/11, thinkers have continuously brought up the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt's "state of exception" to discuss the way state's govern through invoking safety to grab more totalizing power. This concept works well with Max Weber's oft-cited definition of the State as a monopoly of legitimate force. Everything the State does that isn't violence is a kind of window dressing. And yet that structure also encompasses our lives, the way we make meaning in ourselves. It's hard to square what Eric Stanley calls an

"atmosphere of violence," that our presumed safety is actually not the inverse of violence, but rather the outcome of a structure of generalized death.

But the weak affect that expresses itself in a Jewish state as necessary for Jewish safety as a result of the Shoah also dialectically creates a sense of strength. The Jews are no longer a weak people, subjected only to the whims of ruling powers who will commit atrocities. The Jewish state allows us therefore to express the bloodlust that any state power unleashes, particularly as it is backed by the trauma of the Shoah. In Netanyahu's desire not simply for retaliation, but for an excuse for genocide, I see Jewish glee in projected strength: wielding state power at last, in revenge for centuries, millennia, of being at the mercy of bloodthirsty sovereigns. In the Zionist arguments--even those "progressives" slipping ever rightward from this moment--I hear simply bloodlust, a desire to make enemies pay, to make up for the weakness of living in fear of the real threat antisemitic violence. The State as an abstract force gets some of its power from standing in to voice this desire as a collective need.

Israel is the apotheosis of the nation state, a project of social organization and power that has culminated alongside and in tandem with capitalism as an organization of labor, production, and consumption. The nation as an understanding of the organization of sovereignty has relied on the figuration of a people, unified through citizenship, a permutation of belonging to the land that actually flips that relationship of living within the land to a property relationship of ownership. The idea of the nation that fuels the State isn't that dissimilar from how many leftists imagine the engine of a proletarian revolution: a mass of people sharing a common aim and a common identity.of ownership. The idea of the nation that fuels the State isn't that dissimilar from how many

leftists imagine the engine of a proletarian revolution: a mass of people sharing a common aim and a common identity.

As the state form worked itself out around the globe through the process of colonization, the settler state was another fundamental step in developing its structure. Since the equation of a State with a unified homogenous group of people was always an illusion that wiped out the microdifferences among communities, not to mention whole cultural differences of groups that were suddenly included within one imagined polity, the settler state was a development that worked towards forging that unity through the purging of others living in the claimed land, whose borders the nation would need to shore up and protect. As Indigenous thinkers insist, settler colonialism is a structure, not a moment in time: this structure projects a "native" settler population over the erasure, genocide, forced assimilation, of Indigenous groups. In that regard, we can frame the 75 years of Israeli settler occupation over against the 500 plus years of settlement on Turtle Island, and think about how recently the military struggle ceased as part of daily life here.

Ultimately the settler state is expressing the internal desire of the more general nation state formation to forge an ethnically unified people, an ethnostate. Colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade helped solidify a racial hierarchy across the globe, which equated peoples with blood and formed a notion of identity that is inborn and that could be expressed through a homogenous national culture. This notion of identity is also inherently hierarchical, our biology, our birth determines our location in relation to power, through race, gender, and class, all conceived of as relatively static with important exceptions that give us the illusion of the possibility of border crossing. Importantly, this idea of national culture was also a dominant form in decolonial movements in the postwar period, an articulation of liberation

through the grammar of the hegemonic form of (national) self-determination. Arguably one of the reasons decolonization has failed is that it expressed itself through racialized national identities, which has led to genocidal wars of ruling classes against other groups of people, who are envisioned as a threat to their survival.

Structurally the State functions through a monopoly of legitimate violence, negotiated through the projection of external enemies and the introjection of internal enemies. These enemies are typically racialized, seen as another type, another group with innate differences. In the US, we have seen this work through the internal threat of Indigenous cultures, of enslaved Africans and later freed Black Americans as internal threats, overpoliced and overincarcerated, abandoned to premature death, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes it, and migrants, who function liminally as both external and internal, as the wind blows. The external threat has been communism, Islamic terrorism, drug cartels, and so on. These all serve as reasons to militarize: the borders, the police, the treatment of civilians. The public is whipped into a fury of insecurity that invokes the need for ever more present safety measures (think 9/11). We cede our protection to the State, which continuously polices the national borders and the boundaries of our national identity.

Contrary to what we might expect given the history of Enlightenment secularism in the founding of the modern state, the nation state and its identity fixtures are ultimately expressed as a divine mission, such that the apotheosis of the nation state is a religious-ethno-settler state, i.e. Israel. We think of the nation state as a development of the rational Enlightenment, when religious backing for sovereignty was taken away from the divinely inspired royal and given to the people, who ceded their individual wanton rights to form a social contract for the greater good. But in the mission of

colonialism, we still see the State as a religiously inspired activity: ultimately what we see in Israel articulating a chosen people in a chosen land. (This conclusion also explains the rise in power of an Evangelical Christian right in the US that has overlapping aims with Zionism.) However, this thinking has been a motor of colonialism since the beginning, with Europeans naming themselves the inheritors of the birthright of domination of the land, extraction of resources, and the slaughter of infidels. In the funny twist of logic that is projection, this Christian mission is able, through a long tradition of Islamophobia, to produce an external/internal threat threat of backwards religiosity in the Muslim, particularly the fundamentalist Muslim, who is so shackled to a retrograde religion that they don't embrace the modern wonders of industrialized capitalism. Never mind that the lineage of thinking that led to the Enlightenment can be traced to cosmopolitan areas where Muslim, Jewish, and Christian philosophers read each other's work.

If we want to boil down the problem of the nation state, like capitalism it comes down to an imposed scarcity. Where capitalism titrates abundant resources such that only a few at the top get everything they need, and everyone else must vie and compete for scraps, national identity imagines that every group of people must form a nation that would be tied to land, and yet there is only so much land to go around. Therefore, the land as a resource is a locus of conflict.

One of the major confusions for Western thinking when we hear the slogan "Land Back" from Indigenous liberatory movements—or the chant, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free"—is this relationship to land. We only relate to land as property, either deeded and rightfully owned through law, or divinely gifted and tied through blood to a people excluding all others. The land back claim of Indigenous decolonial movements, however, isn't the

genocidal call that pearl-clutching settlers think it is. When discussing Palestinian liberation with Zionist Jews, I am told they want to genocide the Jews and wipe them off of Israel. We know within Turtle Island/United States, that the majority of Indigenous groups here calling for land back aren't articulating a reversed settler genocidal urge, but rather a new relationship of living to the land, one that imbricates our species with other living things. The settler propaganda claims that all people have a land they are indigenous to, that they can then claim, like their birthright. The vocabulary of national identity runs so deep that many decolonial liberatory movements could only conceive of their freedom in that language. Our race thinking is so deeply embedded as an extension of our logic of property, we can't imagine a world where different people live in relation to land outside of ownership, extraction, and biological hierarchies.

When it comes to Israel, there are added reasons to promote its existence that make it often hard to have real discussions about the violence it promotes. But I want to move beyond the argument that the Shoah/Holocaust is invoked as an excuse for Israel to perpetrate violence and genocide on the Palestinians, beyond the Israeli settler logic that their safety must be secured with disproportionate force against any would-be resistance, that all Jews in the world owe their safety to Israel. I think there is a deeper alibi at play in the grievance politics of Israel and its relation to the Holocaust, an alibi that the state itself permits.

We are told that the Arabs, Hamas, the Palestinians want all Jews dead. Gaza or Hamas is an existential threat for Israel and hence the Jews. But this is a displacement of the European antisemitic death wish that seemingly culminated in the final solution, but actually found its end in the creation of the Jewish state. The current conflict is a co-production of two fundamental forces of Western civilization—antisemitism and Islamophobia. Israel washes the blood off Europe's

hand with an Arab antisemitism. You only need to look at Germany's ham-fisted (treyf), violent, and disgusting response to any anti-Zionist voices, but especially those of Jews.

Immediately after the October 7 attacks, and ongoing up to now, we can hear a response from the pro-Israel side of a total bloodlust unleashed by the provocation of the Palestinian/Hamas incursion across the border. This bloodlust is clearly evident in Jewish Israelis, but also for people in the US, in a way that feels resonant with the post-9/11 reaction: a thrill of killing—elsewhere. For Jews, I think this thrill has sources in the desire for vengeance from the history of genocidal violence we bear in ourselves. Israel completed a fantasy of the strong Jew who could no longer be slaughtered in their home. But it also necessitated a Jew who was willing to slaughter others in their homes. That's no accident.

Overall, this lust for killing the State formation unleashes is not inherent to the Jews, or any people.

The structure of the State itself, as a libidinal force, unleashes this bloodlust. If not on our very doorsteps, then elsewhere in the world (this is the US relation to the many dead in our name). The anti-zionist Jews in the diaspora can very well claim that the genocidal violence Israel commits is not in our name, and yet we are all implicated here.

In the end, I don't think there is any real political solution to the problem of Israel in Palestine. People will demand you make some suggestion within political possibility, whether it's one or two states, a way within the racial state formation to share the land. But all of these visions leave the structural possibility or inevitability of violence intact, which is ultimately the State, and our concepts of national/ethnic identity. Identity in itself.

When I say there is no real political solution, I mean that the only solution is a no state solution. My anarchist perspective is anti-political, just as it is against economics. (We can go deeper in terms of anti-social or social, but I'll reserve that for another time). A no state solution ultimately I suppose is no solution at all, since it's not on the table in the halls of power. What would it take for Israel to give up statehood? For Palestinians not to desire statehood? For the US to give up its own statehood? All of these things are connected. Whenever societies declare themselves outside of the State, they are then in some way at war with all states (think Rojava, think Chiapas).

But I wonder whether we can imagine that the Jews and Palestinians now inhabiting the land called Palestine or Israel could just dissolve the bonds of state and live peacefully after the last 75 years of violent imposition of state boundaries and structures seems ridiculous.

I have come to the conclusion that in most attempts to have real discussions about issues like this we speak—just as the politicians and military plot—as if we are already dead. There is an element like moving chess pieces on a chess board. Or the procrustean bed, we have to cut limbs off to fit the desired shape. But I think, even more deeply, we can't envision a future of life, only death worlds, a fait accompli, because we can't think outside the State. The decision to bombard Gaza after Hamas broke through the wall and attacked Israelis—that was a decision of death, but not from the grief of dying. It was a decision that everyone must die, Palestinians and Jews, though it was made under the guise that Jewish lives would be saved this way. Clearly no one that holds power in any state values the lives lost in the quest to retain state power.

So then, is it just an endless cycle of violence? A repetitive blood bath?

My feelings of despair have not only been limited to frustration with marching in circles demanding politicians who think of us as another lower species stop a war they aren't actually in direct control of (how many times do we do this? Forever?). The despair also comes from the thought that, should the state formation simply fall away, the inveterate bloodlust would likely still exist. Maybe not as a the bloodlust unleashed by the State, but perhaps a version of Fanon's cleansing decolonial violence. Each action Israel takes, just like each action the US takes, digs deeper into generations who feel need for vengeance. And the thought of reparations can't even, in my mind, begin to cover this.

And yet, on the ground, the experience is different, more layered, more complex than any of this allows. When we talk about abstract forces in this way, it is helpful to see how we, as little pinpoints, embody these lines of power beyond ourselves. But if you zoom too far out, you miss the way people actually live—by people I mean those without the guns backed by the State, or who write the laws those guns enforce. We live in more complex, intertwined ways, and we typically treat people like people, not types or identities, except on social media.

I write to remind us always that we aren't actually the PEOPLE, we aren't the NATION, we aren't even a COMMUNITY, except in the things we do. How do we staunch the endless bloodletting of the State? We have to be wrong. We have to act like we aren't already dead. We have to open the possibility of not knowing how things will turn out, because if we know, then there we are, somewhere in the queue of killed by the forces of State and Capital, whether directly or abandoned. We relate to a land that is not already claimed, and yet is always already inhabited—not the empty utopian dream of settlement. Our lives are not actually saturated by State thinking, we aren't little flags in our interactions.

Both Israel and the US, all of the rising tide of fascist state formations globally, are feeding off our unhappiness with the way things are. If that unhappiness can become grievance and resentment, then we can take on the identities needed to act out endless wars and their reactive protests. Our only chance is instead taking this unhappiness towards social war, void of political solutions, to focus on the ways we currently live outside and against the State, even while its logic tries to saturate us.

When I was writing this, I sat on the subway next to a kid who told her father, only half listening while on his phone, "You've only visited a place if you've cried in that place." The kid explained that you need to feel all the emotions possible in a place to really have been there, with crying as the one that seals the deal. The father made noises of vague interest, but I thought there was real kid wisdom there. We might all be walking ghosts on the land that the State has claimed, but the grief and despair we feel here marks our relationship to the complex ways that we mix with each other outside the death world. Our grief and despair, if we feel them, might open us to live amonst the land, to start to know it as we start to find each other in resistance to the State.

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