Imagine a Country

October 15, 2023

Bedouins in a camp in South Hebron
Hills. Palestine 2011.

Let's imagine the following story. A country is occupied, its people systemically oppressed. The policies of the occupying state encourage the installation of new permanent colonizers — settlers. The struggle for emancipation by this oppressed people receives insufficient support from progressive forces outside the country, and is marginalized and ignored by the world's leading states. Then reactionary forces take up the cause of national liberation and recruit from the population that suffers daily injustice. Their methods increasingly involve terrorist acts. The colonizers' government brutally represses the movement and the resistance is increasingly radicalized, giving rise to an ultra-right-wing, ultra-reactionary organization.

At some point, the international balance of power begins to shift: emerging ultra-reactionary imperialist forces gain in power, bourgeois democracies find themselves increasingly weakened, discredited and losing their position of absolute hegemony, not least due to their internal political crises. Emerging imperialisms provide support for the reactionary organization claiming to represent national emancipation movement, which has become the bearer of the ideology of hatred.

At some point, under the impetus of external actors and under the weight of internal oppression that was only growing year by year, the organization intensifies acts of violence against the civilian population of the oppressing nation: hostage-taking, rape, murder. In Ukraine's history, we've already had a story that strongly resembles this scenario. It was when the Ukrainian Insurgent Army under the leadership of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), our very own Hamas, massacred entire villages of Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia in 1943.[1]

I'm deliberately giving a simplified and generalized description, because I'm trying to see the

structures that make it possible not to exoticize Palestine, but to make it potentially comparable to other situations of colonial oppression and legitimate resistance carried out nonetheless by ultra-right-wing, ultra-reactionary organizations. This is not to say that Hamas and the OUN are the same thing, but I do think the comparison has a place and helps us to understand the systemic dynamics underlying conflicts of this kind.

Today, to remain silent about apartheid and systemic violence against Palestinians and to side with Netanyahu's regime, which wants to wipe out 2 million people in Gaza, is unacceptable. To say that Hamas' murder of civilians is somehow justifiable, or to pretend that Hamas currently represents the Palestinian people's struggle for freedom, is equally unacceptable. Hamas and Netanyahu are not only two reactionary forces, they both openly declare that the civilian population of the adversary is a legitimate military target.

In this situation, the only reasonable thing would be to support what's left of the Palestinian emancipation movement, which is able to fight without falling into ultra-reactionary delirium. And also to support those Israelis who actively oppose their ultra-right colonialist regime and support the Palestinians' right to self-determination. But where are they after more than half a century of endless horror? They still exist, but the fact that they are so weak is also our fault. We haven't done enough to support them and make them strong in the face of the reactionary forces. We have betrayed them, thinking that expressing solidarity is the same thing as concretely helping the resistance of the oppressed. No, it's not.

And if we carry on like this, if our political activism today is limited to posting flags on social networks or writing endless comments on Facebook – we're going to have a second Palestine with its Hamas, except that it will be in the middle of Europe and taking hostage the population of over 40 million. Yes, that's very likely what will happen if we betray the Ukrainians and allow their country to be partitioned in the name of "peace". What's worse is that this is exactly the kind of scenario some left-wing activists would have preferred. If Ukraine had been occupied and subjugated, it would be so much more comfortable to express solidarity with the Ukrainians. And yes, I've heard this reasoning with my own ears.

Unlike Hamas, the fascist Azov isn't in power (yet) and isn't slaughtering whole families of Russian civilians that have moved to the occupied Ukrainian cities. Ukraine is still defending the democratic project and there are still many forces fighting against the occupier, but defending the project of a secular, open, anti-authoritarian, socially conscious and just Ukraine. But it seems that for some on the left, this is not enough to get them to support the struggle of a people who accept American weapons. On the other hand, supporting those who take up arms from the Iranians has never been a problem for much of the "western left."

I'm shocked by the reaction of many left-wing organizations. People are celebrating what's happening in Israel/Palestine as if it were "an opening" to something good, to the liberation and emancipation of the oppressed. For me, what's happening is a failure of humanity and especially of all those who identify with the forces of the left. What's happening today is an acknowledgement of the powerlessness of all progressive forces, who have not done enough to support the cause of the oppressed. Not in Palestine, not in Iran, not in Syria, not anywhere else. Waving Palestinian flags was cool for the good conscience of anti-mainstream activists, but it wasn't enough. The real Palestinians were still alone in the face of the horror of occupation.

We need to realize this and acknowledge our failure as soon as possible. We need to stop fooling ourselves and finally start thinking seriously about what we can do *concretely* today to oppose the fascism that's spreading like a virus, and to *really* help those fighting for their emancipation before they fall into the cycle of despair and insurmountable hatred.

[1] The OUN is a Ukrainian far-right movement founded in 1929 and responsible for numerous massacres against Poles and Jews during the Second World War. Stepan Bandera headed one of its factions – the OUN(b).