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On Palestine Student Solidarity Encampments

Cindy Milstein

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It's likely foolhardy to generalize about the life going on inside the encampments and occupations popping up—rhizomatic “liberated zones,” or what a couple decades ago or so would have been called “temporary autonomous zones.” For they won't last. But like new spring buds unfolding into flowers, turning what seemed a barren landscape into a lush terrain, it's their ephemerality that offers promise.

A muscle memory awakens.

One can almost feel those muscles coming back alive, achy at first, but growing stronger, and once exercised, hard to forget.

What's peculiar about this season of self-generated and self-organized spaces, though—and here comes the potential overgeneralization—is that there's little, to almost no, memory of similar moments before. Not the specificity per se of why people (re)take over squares and plazas, forests and farmlands, buildings and sacred stolen lands, time and time again, and engage in autonomous and collective self-determination and self-governance (as well as the self-discipline of community

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self-defense). But rather, that encampments and occupations are a fairly common part of our tool kits toward freedom.

The current and/or recently evicted (by cops) autonomous zones seem largely filled with folks who are fresh to being rebellious—and often relative newbies. They are learning by doing, which if one has many a muscle memory of past encampments, feels [fill in the blank].

Where have the threads gone that tie multigenerations of resistance together? How can we exercise more savvy, resilient, and effective reclaimings—aka, win more, both to stop genocides and fascism, but also truly carve out free lives worth living on our own terms—if we aren't passing along rad history?

One young student occupier at one camp reading a zine called me over. “Did you bring these free zines?” they asked. “Yes,” I replied. “This one is blowing my mind! There've been other encampments in the past!”

Yet there they were—even without that knowledge, exercising beautiful resistance, drawing on ancestral muscle memories reawakened “simply” by inhabiting a liberatory life, however brief, made in solidarity and in common with others.

Until we are all free.