

Solidarity through sovereignty -
connecting our collective liberation

Flag drop in Magandini/Brisbane

Indigenous sovereignty here & in Palestine

Indigenous sovereignty is a felt, embodied belonging to the land and community that holds deep and varied meanings for Indigenous people. There is a **stark difference between Indigenous sovereignty and the type of sovereignty claimed by nation states like Australia & Israel**. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collective 'Still Here' speaks about Indigenous sovereignty as knowing, caring and being Country **"we embody this land and its stories, we are country and country is us"**. This is the Indigenous connection to land we refer to in the saying "sovereignty never ceded".

'Still Here' contrasts state sovereignty as "a sovereignty built on monarchs, violence & dominion over land & people. This kind of power controls, destroys & colonises in a relentless pursuit of progress." Indigenous sovereignty is resisting "Western ways of governing that exclude & dominate." When a settler colony like Australia is formed, settlers claim ownership of land through 'state sovereignty'. **Colonial state sovereignty requires violence to establish and maintain itself**. We see this in the violent, ongoing colonisation on this continent that dominates Indigenous land & communities through extractive industries, mass incarceration, child theft & other forms of systemic oppression.

Colonialism & Palestinian Indigeneity

In its simplest political form, Indigeneity means a particular relationship to settler-colonialism. **Indigenous people are those that pre-exist the arrival of colonists that seek to eliminate & dominate the existing population**. Both Blackfullas & Palestinians predate the arrival of settlers who systematically discriminate against them in order to create a nation state built to benefit an exclusive group, such as a 'white Australia' or 'Jewish Israel'. **Indigenous sovereignty, inherent in Blackfullas & Palestinians, challenges the legitimacy of the nation states of Australia & Israel**.

Like the rest of the Mediterranean & SWANA (South West Asia North Africa) region, **Palestinians have always been people with diverse ethnic connections & multiple faiths, including Judaism**. Like Christians & Muslims, Jews have a historical & religious connection to the land of Palestine.

Zionist colonialism sought exclusive control of land for Jews, specifically European Jews. Early Zionist settlers boasted of their European superiority over savage Palestinians & even non-European Jews, claiming a right to rule the land of Palestine based on interpretations of scripture. Contemporary Zionism has added another element to the claim, arguing that Jews have a singular place of origin in Palestine & are Indigenous to the land. Many Zionists recharacterize settler-colonialism as European Jews 'coming home' to ancestral lands after being (largely) absent for 2000 years.

While the contexts vary across the world, settlers claiming Indigeneity to justify their presence & subjugation of others is not unusual. It is common to hear Australian settlers claim to be Indigenous or 'from here' to justify their rights to land or contest Blackfulla sovereignty. **This claim aims to deny settler colonialism & its inherent racial violence**. It is important to remember that Indigeneity fundamentally refers to the population that pre-exists the arrival of settlers. Both Blackfullas & Palestinians pre-exist & endure settler-states on their lands. **It is these two groups that settler states (Australia & Israel) seek to kill, oppress & remove from the land in order to maintain power**. Blackfulla & Palestinian Indigenous sovereignty will always challenge the legitimacy of settler-colonial states.

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Zionism & the colonisation of Palestine

Zionism: a settler-colonial movement

Zionism is a **modern political idea that led to the creation of the state of Israel in 1948**. Zionism was founded by European Jews in the 19th century, a time when the nation state was increasingly viewed as the strongest way to create order & political power. It was also an era of increasing anti-semitism in Europe. **Zionism sought to create a nation-state exclusively for Jewish people.**

The original Zionists were clear that the formation of Israel required colonial violence. Russian Zionist leader, Vladimir Jabotinsky described Zionism as a “**colonisation adventure**”, writing that, “**every Indigenous people will resist alien settlers as long as they see any hope of ridding themselves of the danger of foreign settlement**. That is what the Arabs in Palestine are doing, & what they will persist in doing as long as there remains a solitary spark of hope that they will be able to prevent the transformation of ‘Palestine’ into the ‘Land of Israel’.”

Moral justification for the creation of Israel & the elimination & subjugation of Palestinians relies on one of the **same fictions that enabled the creation of Australia – terra nullius/land belonging to no one**. **Zionists claimed Israel as ‘a land without a people for a people without a land’**, denying Palestinian existence & Indigeneity as well as justifying the colonial & racial violence required to establish Israel.

Zionism as white supremacy

Colonisers claimed this continent as ‘terra nullius’ & Palestine as ‘a land without a people’ despite knowing & interacting with Indigenous people. **In both cases, the claim is not that Indigenous people did not exist altogether, but that (despite clear contrary evidence) they are considered so backward, racially inferior & politically disorganised that their lives did not have value.** Zionists considered several places for colonial settlement, including parts of Argentina, Uganda/Kenya & one **proposal to turn millions of hectares in the Kimberley, Western Australia, into the new Jewish homeland.**

After the Holocaust & World War Two, Zionist settlement in Palestine served several purposes for Western powers. The creation of a Jewish state appealed to Western antisemitism by settling Jews outside the West. Israel also provided a European ally in a strategic, resource-rich part of the world. Zionist founder, Theodor Herzl described the benefits of choosing Palestine as the site of a Jewish state as “**a portion of the rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism.**” Like all settler-colonial states, **the creation of the state of Israel required murder, displacement (ethnic cleansing) & genocide of the existing population.** The racialised dehumanisation of Indigenous Palestinians justified Zionist violence in a similar way that white supremacy has justified colonisation on this continent & across the world.

Zionists continue to justify genocide of Palestinians with white supremacist narratives that Palestinians are primitive, “**drunk cockroaches**” (Eitan, former Israeli chief of staff) & “**human animals**” (Gallant, Israeli defence minister). In this language we recognise the **same racist, colonial stereotypes about Indigenous people used to justify the violence of the Australian state & colonies around the world.**

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Israel as a settler- colonial state

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Nations founded & maintained with violence

Settler-colonial states like Australia are defined by the process of eliminating (through murder and/or displacement) the Indigenous population in order to claim the land so people from elsewhere can occupy it. Like Australia, Israel was founded on this idea, as the first Prime Minister of Israel stated “we must expel the Arabs & take their place”. Both Australia & Israel were founded through colonial violence. Across this continent, settlers massacred & enslaved Indigenous people, rounding them up into missions in order to take their land. In Queensland, a specific police force was founded to ‘disperse’ Indigenous people through mass murder & dispossession. This force was “the single biggest killer of Aboriginal people in colonial Queensland”. Founding Zionists like Jabotinsky were clear that the foundation of Israel would be dependent on violence against Indigenous Palestinians “without an armed force which will render physically impossible any attempt to destroy or prevent this colonisation, colonisation is impossible...it stands & falls by the question of an armed force.”

This founding violence culminated in 1948 with what Palestinians call the Nakba (catastrophe). The Nakba was a mass ethnic-cleansing that used massacres, systemic rape & other terror-tactics to destroy 420 Palestinian villages & expel 780,000 Palestinians from the land. As a result, Israel pushed Palestinians that remained within what is now claimed as Israel into enclaves, & forced many others into designated ‘Palestinian Territories’ under Israeli control. Other Palestinians were forced to leave as refugees. Zionists used this violence to gain control of the land & found the state of Israel. Palestinians commemorate Nakba Day as an annual day of mourning, while Zionists celebrate the foundation of Israel. This holds a stark similarity to Australia’s national celebration on January 26, also a day of mourning & resistance for Blackfullas.

Ongoing Nakba: oppression & apartheid

As Blackfullas on this continent know well, colonisation is not confined to the frontier wars of the past. Colonisation is a present, every day force embedded in government systems, practices & societal norms that oppress Blackfullas & deny them control of their land & lives.

Today, this oppression takes many forms, including mass incarceration, child theft, the denial of healthcare & many other essential services. Until 1988 (when it was fully dismantled), Blackfullas in Queensland were subject to legislated racial controls & segregation called The Protection Act. These laws controlled where Aboriginal people could live, if they could marry, if they could keep their children (all Aboriginal children were legally wards of the state, so could be removed from their families at any time), & where they must work (though their wages were taken by the government). Queensland’s Protection Act was an inspiration for South African apartheid & its echoes are clear in Israel’s laws. Israel’s apartheid is characterised by having two legal systems: one that privileges Israelis & another that oppresses Palestinians.

Whether they are Palestinians living in ‘Israel’, the West Bank or Gaza, no Palestinian has the same legal rights as an Israeli. This system is physically marked by the apartheid wall that divides the West Bank, cutting through Palestinian cities & villages, separating communities, families, people & their lands. Controlling the everyday lives of Palestinians is only possible because they are surrounded by Israel’s military, which occupies the West Bank & holds Gaza under siege, where they control who & what (like food & water) enters. Palestinians are also given markers of inferior status: different identity cards, a segregated road system (Palestinian cars have different registration plates that can only use certain roads) & require permission for movement granted by Israel.

This apartheid extends to Palestinians in the diaspora who have no rights to return to the land where they or their ancestors were born. In contrast, Israel gives any Jewish person around the world the right to settle there. Israeli officials have been clear that their laws are designed for the benefit of Jewish Israelis only, with Prime Minister Netanyahu describing Israel as “the national state, not of all its citizens, but only of the Jewish people.” This apartheid is designed to make Palestinians everyday lives so oppressed & precarious that they become unliveable. This ultimately serves Israel’s colonial goal to remove Palestinians from the land in order to occupy more & more of it.

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Colonial destruction of land & water

Colonisation has destroyed natural ecosystems across the globe. This is a **key settler strategy to separate Indigenous people from the land they care for**, in favour of exploiting its resources. There are countless local examples of this: draining of rivers like the Murray-Darling-Barkaa for unsustainable farming, destroying sacred sites like Juukan Gorge for mining & the extinction of one hundred plants & animal species since European colonisation. 75 years since its creation, **Israel has devastated the environment, ecosystems as well as native flora & fauna in order to claim the land, hide its violence & make life unliveable for Palestinians**. Claiming the land as 'European' not only meant killing & displacing Indigenous Palestinians, but also Indigenous plants & animals.

Living for thousands of years, the olive tree is the centre of Palestinian social, cultural & economic life, Abu Ali writes **"with the olive tree we live, & without it we don't live"**. Since 1967, **Israel has destroyed over 800,000 olive trees, along with other Indigenous plants essential for Palestinian food, trade & culture**. Among these are the tens of thousands of olive trees & habitat Israel burnt or uprooted to clear land to build the Apartheid wall. **The Israeli Army & settlers routinely burn & uproot olive trees to prevent Palestinians from farming & trading** as well as attempting to sever their connection with the land.

In the place of Indigenous plants, **Israel has planted vast forests of non-native pine trees that have devastated local communities & ecosystems**. European pine was chosen in an attempt to 'Europeanise' the Palestinian landscape. Pine also grows quickly, which led to Israel mass-planting over the ruins of many of the 400 Palestinian villages Israel ethnically cleansed in 1948. **By growing invasive pine forests over the ruins of villages & declaring them national parks, Israel is both erasing its violence & preventing Palestinians from returning to their homes**.

European pines are so acidic that they kill smaller native plants & the native animals that rely on them for food. **By mass planting these fire-prone trees in their non-native climate, Israel has caused some of the largest wildfires in its history**.

Water as a tool of colonial control

Denying Indigenous people water is a key feature of settler-colonial states worldwide. On this continent, poisoning waterholes was a key strategy to kill Indigenous people & take the land. Today, Australian governments deny safe drinking water to over 500 remote Indigenous communities. Water sources these communities relied on for millennia are often contaminated by nearby mining, fracking & unsustainable farming. Israel also uses water as a form of colonial control. During the Nakba, Israel had a strategy of poisoning Palestinian water wells to cause sickness, death & force Palestinians away from their villages. **Today, Israelis pouring concrete into wells, springs & other water sources used by Palestinians is commonplace**. To claim & control the land, **Israel has drained native wetlands & diverted key waterways**, destroying habitat for local animals & plants, drying the seas & rivers until they are unrecognisable. **Controlling all major waterways allows Israel to systematically deprive Palestinian people & land of water**. This inequality is stark in the West Bank & Gaza, where Israel distributes more than 4 times as much water to Israeli settlers than to Palestinians in the West Bank. Israel also controls water access in Gaza, where 97% of water is undrinkable & slowly poisoning Palestinians (figure prior to the current genocide).

Killing land & people with waste & warfare

Colonialism makes Indigenous people & their land sick with toxic waste & warfare. Indigenous people in 'Australia' are consistently fighting toxic dumping of materials like asbestos & nuclear waste on their Country. The Maralinga Tjarutja people, animals & land still suffer the radioactive effects of the atomic bombs Britain dropped on their Country for 'testing' during the Cold War. **Israel uses toxic waste to systematically damage the health of Palestinians & their land by: Concentrating hazardous industries near Palestinian villages, transporting Israel's toxic waste to the West Bank for 'processing' by Palestinians and dumping sewerage from Israeli settlements on Palestinian farms, killing crops & soil. Israel's toxic munitions like depleted uranium & white phosphorus have not only killed & injured Palestinians, but irreparably poisoned air, land & water for generations to come.**

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