

The Power of Indigenous and Palestinian Women against Colonial Forces

Jilliane A. Fermin

WMST 1195: Women of the South

Professor Itrath Syed

April 14, 2025

1589 Words

It is bizarre how, nowadays, people critique colonialism and say it was bad, but majority of those same people are ignoring it as we are witnessing it and its heinous processes in real time. In Turtle Island, or the continent of North America, Indigenous people are still being treated as outsiders to the land that is rightfully their home. Even if Orange Shirt Day and Red Dress Day have been annually celebrated in Canada for the past few years, the government still does not prioritize Indigenous people. This is proven by how most Indigenous people living in reserves do not have access to clean water, secure shelter, and guaranteed ownership of their belongings. Not to mention, the trauma that residential schools brought are still being experienced through intergenerational trauma. The Palestinian people are currently going through the same thing. They have been displaced out of their homes by the Israeli occupation, and they are currently going through a genocide. Because Canada is part of the Global North while Israel is an ally of them, they have both conducted actions to “switch cities off,” making Turtle Island and Palestine “uninhabitable” for Indigenous people and Palestinians (Pratt et al., 2025, p. 237). Furthermore, their acts unravel the power and importance of women because, unfortunately, they specifically focus on how to erase women from their locations. Because of colonial control by countries and allies of the Global North, Indigenous people and Palestinian people have experienced and are currently experiencing apartheid and a genocide, but their continuous resistance against colonial control to get their land back shows their power.

The apartheid orchestrated by colonial forces have caused the Indigenous people and the Palestinian people, specifically women, to lose what is rightfully theirs, revealing how these colonial forces benefit from keeping them segregated. Separation has been a useful tool for oppressive forces to colonize the land they want. With the equality between men, women, and two-spirit Indigenous people, colonial forces find it harder for their systems to take over Indigenous peoples’ systems. Consequently (like most oppressive regimes), to achieve a

successful apartheid, women's power must be weakened. As Anderson (2016) said, "Indigenous systems that allocated power to some were incompatible with the kind of colonial control power dynamics that would be necessary to maintain colonial power" (p. 34). In simpler terms, colonial systems thrive in patriarchal power. In Canada, segregation is seen through the Gradual Enfranchisement Act and Indian Act, where the Canadian government prioritized men by making women lose their Indigenous status if they marry non-Indigenous people (Anderson, 2016, p. 45). They use it as a tool of separation. By erasing women from their communities and their leader roles, the patriarchy can take over. Colonial forces can easily find a way to insert their systems through the huge gaps they made to detangle the connection between Indigenous people. Similarly, the oppressive forces of Israel have displaced almost all Palestinians from Palestine, making them seek refuge in different countries. However, the Israeli occupation does not only separate Palestinians physically, but they also separate them from influential spaces such as feminist conversations. As Jabiri (2024) pointed out, in "decolonial feminist works, Palestine is erased, particularly in the chapter on refugee women, where its absence is glaring" (p. 228). By leaving out the experiences of Palestinian women out of decolonial and feminist conversations, it gives the Israeli occupation the benefit to get away with their actions toward Palestine. Their voices being silenced closes past and current global conversations about the deteriorating effects of the occupation. In short, colonial and patriarchal forces benefit from the segregation of Indigenous and Palestinian people – especially women – because it gives them the space to insert themselves in locations to which they are not invited.

In addition to the apartheid, Indigenous people and the Palestinian people have experienced and are currently experiencing a genocide, which shows how women and children are threatening to the colonial forces. In Canada, residential schools were built to execute an ethnic cleansing and genocide. A prominent example of this is how European

Christianity saw menstruation as a “sin, contamination, and inferiority,” opposite to a lot of Indigenous groups’ beliefs (Anderson, 2016, p. 52). By building the residential schools, they have erased the ceremonies practiced when women are entering puberty or going through menstruation (2024, p. 52). They have also used these schools to make Indigenous youth hate themselves – both as women and as Indigenous people – because their identities are either erased or projected as abnormal. Colonial forces conducted the past and present genocide of Indigenous people systematically through residential schools. Unfortunately, Palestinians are currently going through similar experiences. Through the horrific bombings and blockade of resources, Israel commits reproicide (Pratt et al., 2025, p. 232). The actions of the Israeli occupation have forced Palestinian women to suffer from malnutrition during pregnancy and give birth without sanitary care (p. 236). Israel commits genocide by preventing the growth of the Palestinian population. Through the Canadian government and Israel’s actions, the oppressive forces view women and children as threats. This can be correlated with the women and youth in Egypt. Despite being two different social categories, they successfully came together to fight against and end the Mubarak regime (Ali and Macharia, 2013, p. 361). The movement and its huge impact made possible by women and youth in Egypt (even though they do not look progressive now) is a clear example of how severely threatening they are to oppressive and colonial forces. Therefore, The Canadian government and Israel occupation target women not only because they are the ones who can give birth to future generations but also because they – and their children – have the power to organize and successfully perform as leaders, threatening their colonial systems’ vulnerability.

Aside from their threatening presence, Indigenous and Palestinian women's continuous resistance to get their land back through feminist and social movements reveal that the Global North and their allies have less power than the world makes them seem to be. Since colonialism, people around the world see white people, or people from the Global

North in general, as godly figures. An example of this is when Hillary Clinton talked about body politics “at the government forum at the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995” (Arat-Koc, 2002, p. 56). Because she talked about the dangerous effects of Global South’s practices on women’s bodies, others probably thought that Clinton mentioned them with the intention to “save” and “help” women of the Global South. Actions like Clinton’s makes it harder for the world to see the Global North as evil because they are acting as “helpers,” even though Clinton’s words are actually problematic for it victimizes women of the Global South. This is why Indigenous and Palestinian feminist conversations and movements are important because it dismantles the superiority of the Global North. Because colonial powers are the ones currently controlling Turtle Island and Palestine, it filters the fact that Indigenous and Palestinian people – especially women – can run their home in their own way, not in the colonial forces’ way. An example of this is how Zapatistas organize when farming. Because they are able to use their own lands for farming, they can produce healthy and nutritious food for “local consumption” (Klein, 2015, p. 152), showing that the Zapatistas are more than capable of being in charge. Additionally, the fact that they can perform such tasks (aside from their movements) while being under colonial control speaks volumes of their capabilities. The example of the Zapatistas shows how Indigenous and Palestinian people are more powerful than colonial forces, especially if they can freely use their own land. Furthermore, the decolonizing aim of Indigenous feminists’ movements reflects the strength of Indigenous people. As Lindberg (2004) said, “[Indigenous women] cannot participate in a context-free movement... Context includes history and the history of women in Canada is not shared by Indigenous women” (p. 349). The constant confrontation of a colonized construction of feminist movements by Indigenous women puts Indigenous people to the forefront; it also brings marginalized groups with them because they are confronting a system that has been so harmful towards others, further proving Indigenous

people's impact and strength. Similarly, Palestinian people show their strength and power through the construction of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. The movement running from 2005 (Vilkomerson and Wise, 2024, p. 8) up until today shows how cruel and evil the Israel occupation is on one hand and the range and strength of Palestinians on the other. Therefore, through their feminist and decolonizing movements, Indigenous and Palestinian people are resilient and will be more resilient if they have sovereignty over their own land.

In conclusion, women are grave threats to colonial and oppressive forces in Turtle Island and Palestine, which is why colonial forces orchestrate heinous acts to diminish them, but their movements keep proving their perseverance and strength. To be in solidarity with the Indigenous and Palestinian people is to listen to their voices and constantly follow their movements. We should never act as “a voice for the voiceless” (Koopman, 2008, p. 295) because Indigenous people and Palestinians have their own voices; we should be helping them from the perception of equality. As we witness the active colonization, apartheid, and genocide, our job by standing in solidarity with Indigenous people and Palestinians – aside from listening to them and actively decolonizing frameworks – is to call out the embarrassing silence and inaction and to demand accountability from the Global North. We must work together to give Indigenous people and Palestinians their land back.

References

- Ali, F. A., & Macharia, H. M. (2013). Women, youth, and the Egyptian Arab spring. *Peace Review*, 25(3), 359–366. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2013.816557>
 - Anderson, K. (2016). The dismantling of gender equity. In *A recognition of being: Reconstructing Native womanhood* (2nd ed., pp. 33–55). Women’s Press.
 - Arat-Koc, S. (2002). Imperial wars or benevolent interventions? Reflections on ‘global feminism’ post September 11. *Atlantis: A Women’s Studies Journal*, 26(1), 7–20.
 - Klein, H. (2015). Women who give birth to worlds. In *Compañeras: Zapatista women’s stories* (pp. 135–169). Seven Stories Press.
 - Koopman, S. (2008). Imperialism within: Can the master’s tools bring down empire? *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 7(2). <http://www.acme-journal.org/vol7/SKo.pdf>
 - Lindberg, T. (2004). Not my sister: What feminists can learn about sisterhood from Indigenous women. *Canadian Journal of Women & the Law*, 16(2), 342–352.
 - Pratt, N., Jabiri, A., Ajour, A., Shoman, H., Aldossari, M., & Ababneh, S. (2025). Why Palestine is a feminist issue: A reckoning with Western feminism in a time of genocide. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 27(1), 226–250.
 - Vilkomerson, R., & Wise, A. (2024). Introduction. In *Solidarity is the political version of love: Lessons from Jewish anti-Zionist organizing* (pp. 1–29). Haymarket Books.
- Sources and related content