

Anarchists Against the Wall and Palestinian Activism

Introductions (5 minutes)

Speakers and attendants share:

- Names / pronouns
- Experience with / interest in the topic of this workshop

Why This Workshop (2 minutes)

-We are going to be talking about Anarchists Against the Wall, Palestinian activism, and the relationships between groups like AATW and Palestinian popular committees.

-We believe the AATW-Palestinian alliance to be an interesting example of joint-struggle across barriers of privilege, language, and culture. We believe North American activists can learn from the challenges and successes of AATW-Palestinian organizing.

Israeli Social Context (5 minutes)

(Abie)

- History of Jewish settlement of historic Palestine
- Demographic issues in Palestine / Israel
- Overview of Israeli political landscape
- Note parallels with North America?

What is the Wall? (10 minutes)

(Abie)

- History
- Israeli justifications
- What factors influence its path (land, water, settlements, etc.)
- What are the consequences for Palestinians?

Anarchists Against the Wall: History, Values, and Practices (3 minutes)

AATW coalesced in 2003, one year after the construction of the Wall began.

AATW formed during a 4-month-long protest camp in Mas'ha, a West Bank village losing land due to construction.

During this time, an Israeli activist was shot in both legs with live ammunition by the

IDF. The resulting media attention extended to the loose anarchist group, which remained un-named. The name "Anarchists Against the Wall" stuck.

Anarchists Against the Wall Values and Practices (10 minutes)

AATW have no formal platform: identify strongly as a "direct action group."

AATW affiliates are, however, united by certain tendencies:

- A broad critique of Zionism (as rather than opposing only the Occupation)
- A critique of the paternalism and ineffectiveness of the Israeli peace camp
- A belief that Israeli activists have a special responsibility to accept Palestinian self-determination

Organizational Challenges

The "lack of demand for theoretical and tactical unity" has enabled AATW affiliates to use a diversity of tactics. However, this can also lead to disagreements and public misconceptions.

AATW work to avoid informal hierarchies. Roles shift, skills and resources are shared. However, it is sometimes impossible for Israeli activists to share Palestinian contacts.

While AATW is roughly gender balanced, feminists have critiqued AATW's organizing style as traditionally "masculine."

AATW struggles with post-traumatic stress and burnout. Sometimes Israeli activists feel it is illegitimate to complain about their distress.

Anarchists Against the Wall in Action (10 minutes)

(Mark)

- Attending protests and actions on the West Bank
- Taking leadership from Palestinian popular committees
- Describe types of protests and actions
- "Rules of engagement": how they change when Israelis and internationals are present
- Military repression and violence against activists (testing "less lethal" weapons)
- Other AATW activities (rebuilding homes, supporting immigrants within Israel, etc.)

Legal Issues (5 minutes)

(Abie)

- Legal repercussions for Israelis vs. Palestinians?
- # of arrests / indictments?
- Legal debt (\$40 K as of February 2009)
- Other issues?

Subverting Israeli Privilege: Possibilities and Dilemmas (5 minutes)

AATW claim that one of their goals is to "redirect the racist privilege [they] enjoy under Israel's discriminatory policies.

The military's reluctance to fire live ammunition into a crowd where Israelis are present is a significant example of Israel's discriminatory policies.

The legal repercussions for Israeli activists are much less severe.

Other privileges enjoyed by Israeli activists include:

- the ability to travel more freely, even within the West Bank
- greater access to the Israeli media
- an easier time negotiating with soldiers due to prejudice and language

This may "increase the influence Israelis have on decisions about the struggle."

AATW attempts to address this concern by:

- taking leadership from Palestinian activists and increase or decrease the level of confrontation at protests accordingly.
- only attending protests when *invited* to by Popular Committee members

The privilege and visibility enjoyed by Israeli activists threatens to overshadow the work of Palestinians.

Palestinians are concerned about the "normalization" of interactions between Palestinians and Israelis.

International and Israeli initiatives have focused on building friendships between individual Israelis and Palestinians without seeking to address the power imbalance.

Palestinians critique "coexistence" initiatives, which treats the conflict as a product of cultural misunderstanding.

AATW members believe their personal relationships with Palestinians have helped them to unlearn prejudice- but more importantly, these relationships "form the basis for joint struggle."

In the words of a Bi'lin Popular Committee member: "After we end the Occupation together, there will be plenty of time for tea."

AATW members try to improve relationships with Palestinians by:

- learning Arabic (difficult, only classical Arabic is typically taught in Israel)
- avoiding bringing "unwanted cultural influences" to protests- dress, etc.
- knowing Popular Committee members, checking during demonstrations
- talking over tea with Palestinian activists before and after demonstrations

AATW constitute the main contact between Israeli and Palestinian activists, and were among the first Israelis to join Palestinians in protests on the West Bank. AATW is influential within the Israeli movement, despite its marginal political position.

Anarchist Support for the Palestinian Movement: Challenges (5 minutes)

Culturally and politically, some anarchists have a hard time engaging with the Palestinian movement. While it is difficult to generalize, some contrasting trends exist within the Israeli and Palestinian activist communities.

AATW

- typically secular
- influenced by punk and other subcultures
- support for queer liberation, animal liberation
- most oppose nationalism and the state

Palestinian Peace Activists

- mostly Muslim (varying levels of observance)
- gender segregation, gender roles extend to activist sphere
- many want a Palestinian state (or an Islamic state, or a single multicultural state)

Anarchists disagree about whether liberation from a colonial state must always come before the rejection of all states. Some believe a Palestinian State would be a pragmatic, medium-term solution to the worst conditions facing Palestinians today.

Uri Gordon notes that Palestinians are already living under a state:

"A Palestinian state would almost certainly be less brutal than the occupying Israeli one." (Gordon)

"It does nobody any good to effectively say to the Palestinians, 'sorry, we'll let you remain non-citizens of a brutal Occupation until after we're done abolishing capitalism [and the state].'" (Gordon)

There is a consensus that ending the Occupation must be a priority, and it is up to Palestinians to direct the struggle.

One queer Israeli anarchist, Yossi Bartal, sees working in solidarity with Palestinians as complimentary to working for feminist and queer liberation:

The "Occupation" (which Bartal defines as a broad set of conditions facing all inhabitants of Palestine / Israel) increases nationalism and militarism in both Israeli and Palestinian societies, which further marginalizes voices for social change.

Bartal's personal relationships with Palestinians have helped her to unlearn the "clash of civilizations" propaganda that casts Palestinians as socially regressive.

The fact that the oppressed sector is not the perfect revolutionary subject (if there is such a thing) does not in any way diminish my obligation to stand alongside it against the state- my state- which is curtailing its basic rights." (Bartal)

Palestinian Activism (10 minutes)

(Mark)

- More on the popular committees
- Tactics
- Key actions, challenges, and successes

(Videos)

Q & A / Discussion (10 minutes)