



Fresno WILPF

Womxn's International League
for Peace & Freedom



Behind the Mask: What, *or who*, is propping up the Empire?

I've recently returned from a trip to the occupied West Bank, Palestine, which is where I took this photo of an American IOF (Israel Occupation Forces) soldier wearing a Trump mask while responding to an event outside the Palestinian village of Tuwani, which you may recognize from the documentary *No Other Land*. That's right, I said American: over 12,000 American citizens serve in Israel's military.

Further, around this time last year US Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee revealed to an Israeli news station that the number of American citizens living in illegal Israeli settlements within what are supposed to be Palestinian territories is around 700,000. For perspective, this is comparable to the populations of Nashville, Denver, and Seattle; Palestine is roughly the size of Delaware.

Since October 7, 2023, America has sent over \$22,000,000,000 of military assistance to Israel. How many school lunches could that have covered? What about healthcare? Infrastructure? Why are we sending all that money to another continent to people we don't even know? Instead of going towards programs here at home, our tax dollars are directly funding an apartheid occupation and the military operations that sustain it.

It's undeniable that Israel and America are deeply intertwined. So how did we get here? I don't think the real question is about government policy; it's about the collective sustaining it. When we the people fail to question the moral cost of this partnership-turned-empire, we become complicit in the system that prioritizes geopolitical leverage and wealth for a select few over basic human rights.

Palestine is not the only place in the world where we are seeing the effects of our collective complicity; www.genocidewatch.com keeps a running list of active and emerging crises. Across the globe, almost all of the locations on the list has the same common denominator: valuable natural resources. The pattern is clear: when access to resources clashes with human rights, our silence is the fuel that perpetuates this violence.

There is one demographic that is especially crucial in this code of silence: white women. Why are so many of us silent when faced with the oppression of others, particularly people of color? And for those of us that do speak out, why work so hard to cultivate an image that is progressive, feminist, radical, only to retreat at the first sign of discomfort?

In her book *The Trouble with White Women*, Kyla Schuller tells us that "solidarity and social change manifest through the daily practice of fundamentally redistributing power and resources, not through the balms of awareness and attention." If true solidarity requires redistribution, why does it feel like women and communities of color are the ones actually shouldering the fight for equity, while white women-

Republican and Democrat alike- inadvertently become obstacles rather than fighting alongside them as accomplices?

Ladies, we've got a lot of work to do. One thing that was abundantly clear to me while I was in Palestine is that we are out of time. For Palestinians living there, it's no longer a question of if they will be killed by the Israeli occupation, but when. So many places around the world are at a similar tipping point: Congo, Sudan, Myanmar, Ukraine, Syria, the list goes on.



While the state of the world may not be our fault, our silence is a failure of responsibility. Too often we rely on the men in our lives to lead the moral charge, while we leave our own platforms empty and idle. We are capable of incredible influence in world politics; we simply need to step into that space.

We also need to do our homework. No one of us will reach a point of all-knowing where we can sit back and say "well, I'm set! I've learned all I need to learn." This mindset contradicts our very nature- we are made to be constantly growing, developing, evolving- but it's also a direct route toward the genuine activist to complicit passivist pipeline. The moment you close yourself off to new and changing ideas and realities, you effectively cross over to the "other side," becoming a part of the very system you once worked to dismantle.

In both the 2016 and 2020 elections, effectively half of all white women in the US voted for Trump. That statistic alone should be enough for us to want to rally among ourselves to understand why. How did so many of us vote not just for the Republican party which is outwardly dedicated to dismantling our rights such as abortion access and voting protections, but for Trump, a child rapist who has shown us time and time again that he has no respect for women. What's that old saying? Fool me once, shame on you, but fool me twice...

Back in April, I was a guest on KFCF's *Stir It Up*, hosted by Fresno WILPF's Jean Hays. We discussed my time in the West Bank, and Jean asked me a vital question: Was I in danger? The answer is yes. Illegal Israeli settlers are armed and unpredictable. There are also uniformed settlers, settler civilians who dress in military gear and carry weapons, but aren't

officially part of the military. Settler security patrols, also armed. And of course, Israeli police and IOF, very armed. All of these share a hatred toward Palestinians, and they view anyone who aligns with the Palestinian cause as an enemy.

It was also during my time in Palestine that America began launching strikes against Iran at the behest of Israel. The sky above the West Bank is now a wartime air travel corridor, and when Israel's Iron Dome (largely funded by, you guessed it, America) intercepts a missile, it generally falls somewhere in the West Bank. So yes, I was very much in danger. But let's unpack my privilege in that.

I chose to travel to Palestine. I was well informed, vetted, and trained by the International Solidarity Movement (ISM). I dictated when I went, for how long I stayed, and I was free to leave at any time. For months, I processed and weighed these risks with my wife, my therapist, and my support system. While there, I was free to move around from city to city as I pleased, and at checkpoints I was ushered through the VIP lines. When I reached the end of my planned time, I came home. I was able to witness the danger for a finite time without being consumed by it.

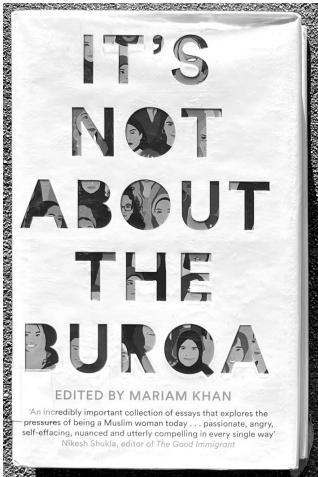
This stands in stark contrast to the experience of Palestinians living there. For them, a trip to visit relatives in another village can take an entire day due to the vast network of checkpoints, gates, and blockades that is constantly being expanded. They face constant violence from illegal settlers, who often shoot and kill them with impunity. Their homes and villages are burned, animals and cars are stolen, and they're often arrested with no clear reason why. While in prison, they're subjected to sexual, physical, and psychological violence. Just this March, Israel passed a law making death by hanging the default sentence for Palestinians. Even if they did want to leave Palestine, it's very difficult, and they will never be able to return to their homeland.

Palestinians have no choice but to endure this, each and every day, as their only reality. This is a fundamental difference between those with privilege and those without: privileged people choose when to feel discomfort while oppressed people live in it. Further, the reason they're oppressed in the first place is to provide comfort for the privileged. We must familiarize ourselves with discomfort as a necessary step to dismantle the systems that create it. Only by confronting this reality can we hope to make real impact.

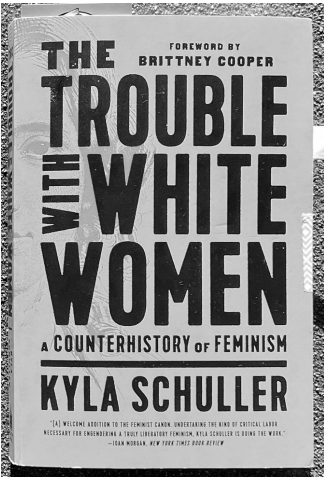
To my fellow white women reading this: this is not a call out. It is a call in. I'm not asking you to carry the world's burden alone or to perform some sort of perfect activism. I'm asking you to join us. Step out of your comfort zones and into the difficult but necessary work of dismantling the harmful systems of the world. Use your voices, your votes, your dollars, your privilege to amplify the voices of those who are being silenced. Let's not speak for them, but stand beside them. We all hold power within ourselves; we need the power of this demographic in the fight for international freedom.

In solidarity,
Cam

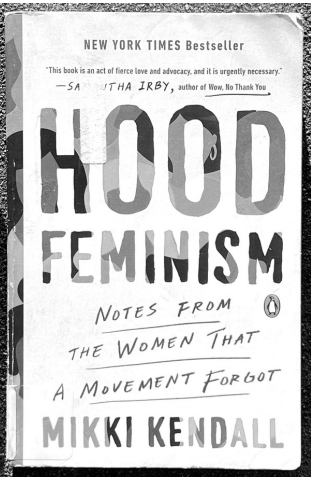
Did this article make you uncomfortable? Curious? Unsure of what to do next? Here are some recommended reads, no matter where you are in your journey. Great for book clubs!



It's Not About the Burqa
Mariam Khan



The Trouble with White Women
Kyla Schuller



Hood Feminism
Mikki Kendall

Women in Black protest:
Wed, Jun 3 @ 11:30am-1pm
2500 Tulare St
For more info contact Sue:
skern@netptc.net
559-349-3777

WILPF Monthly Business
Zoom Meeting: Open to all!
Thurs, Jun 11 @ 6:30pm
For Zoom link email
lenivreeves@gmail.com

Stir It Up on KFCF:
Wed, Jun 24 @ 3pm
Tune in to 88.1 FM as Jean
Hays highlights people and
events important to our
WILPF community.

FREE Music Lessons!
Guitar, baritone ukulele, &
voice lessons in Mexican
Traditional, Nuevo Canto,
Latin American Folklore,
American Folklore,
Contemporary, Rock, & Pop
Every Friday @ 5pm
Fresno Center for Nonviolence
1584 N Van Ness Ave
559-485-8558

