

Armed Struggle or Civil Disobedience?

The Occupied Territory 1967-1987



By Issam Nassar

The common history of the Palestinian struggle against the occupation, to the extent that there is one, takes the diaspora as its starting point, with the rise of the *fedayeen* movements in the 1960s. Little attention was ever given to the emergence and development of the movement inside the occupied territory, except as an extension of the leadership outside. This short essay is a preliminary attempt to fill in the gap by granting Palestinians “inside” a certain agency that they have previously been denied in the general discourse. Based solely on my recollection of events that I witnessed and have reflected upon, this article makes no claim to be comprehensive or founded on archival or documentary research.

Following the occupation of what was left of Palestine in 1967, a resistance movement immediately emerged. However, the core of the movement was based outside the newly occupied territory, particularly in the refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, where a number of paramilitary organizations already existed.

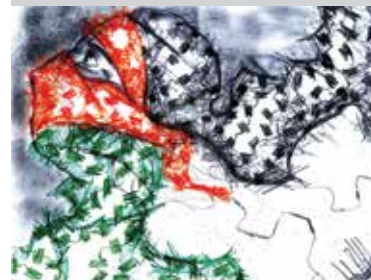
The Gaza Strip, which was governed by Egypt, had a number of active Palestinian movements with Palestinian forces known as the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA), under the auspices of the Egyptian army, actively recruiting young Palestinians. The PLA was the military branch of the newly established (in 1964) Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). At the same time, the organization known as the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) was present and encouraged by the regime of President Gamal Abdel Nasser, to recruit freely as its vision was not significantly

different from that of the regime itself. In addition, a Palestinian Communist Party was also active in the Strip, although its work was largely underground at the time. In the immediate aftermath of the occupation, the existence of these groups made it easier to organize against the occupation. Shortly after the war, the ANM dissolved itself, and a Palestinian branch of the movement was established under the name of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and many of the members of the ANM joined the newly established PFLP.

In the West Bank, on the other hand, no political parties were allowed to function, though a few had supporters and members who resorted to underground work. Unlike the Egyptian rule in Gaza, Jordan annexed the West Bank and extended citizenship to its residents. Jordanian law did not allow the freedom to organize within political organizations – perhaps with the exception of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement, whose activities were restricted to the realm of religious preaching. Underground organizations in Jordan and the West Bank at the time included the Ba’ath Party, the ANM, and the Jordanian Communist Party. Unlike in the Gaza Strip, military activities outside of the legitimate army of the state did not exist.

The difference in the conditions between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip during the period before the occupation had significant ramifications on the struggle in the two areas after the June 1967 war. Where the overcrowded Gaza Strip with the largest refugee population was

The history of the Palestinian struggle seems, to a large extent, to have marginalized the pre-Intifada contributions of the West Bank and Gaza. It is time to rethink that “official narrative” by bringing the two regions into the picture.



more prepared for armed resistance, the subdued West Bank, with its strong connections to Jordan, was prepared for peaceful protests and acts of civil disobedience. Still, after a few years of armed struggle in Gaza, the Israeli authorities managed to crush the movement. Israel opened up its market to the Gazan labor force, a fact that tremendously helped the largely poor inhabitants of the Strip and, at the same time, helped Israeli to pacify the population.

The situation in the West Bank was different in some ways. Despite the imposition of an oppressive system of Israeli military rule that crushed

Palestine would like to acknowledge:



Diego Maradona

Considered to be one of the top football players in history, Maradona was also the former captain of the Argentinian national team. He openly stated, “I’m the biggest fan of the Palestinian cause,” and “I support this nation’s cause since I grew up on struggle and standing against injustice.”

Palestine would like to acknowledge:



Gabriel Garcia Marquez

One of the most important Latin American writers, the Colombian novelist Marquez won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1982. That same year he published an article denouncing Israeli crimes against the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples, stating that “Begin and Sharon deserve the Nobel Prize for killing.” He remained close to the Palestinian cause until his death in 2014.

any form of organization (be it civil or political) in the West Bank, Israel extended its civil law over occupied Jerusalem, a fact that gave Palestinians in the city the opportunity to organize and build national institutions, using the existing Israeli legal system that had a certain margin of freedoms otherwise denied in the rest of the territory. This is not to suggest that Palestinian activity in Jerusalem was unimpeded, but simply to recognize that the margin for organizing was a little easier in the city. By the early 1980s, Jerusalem had a number of active institutions and centers, such as the Arab Thought Forum and the Arab Studies Society, among others, whose main focus was the condition of the Palestinians under occupation. A number of Palestinian newspapers also appeared in Jerusalem during that period, including *Al-Fajer*, *Al-Shaab*, and *Al-Tali'aa*. Whereas the first two were connected with the PLO and largest faction, Fatah, the last one was the mouthpiece of the Palestinian communist organization – the autonomous West Bank branch of the Jordanian Communist Party at the time. Similarly, a few Jerusalem-based publishing houses emerged and reprinted books from the Arab world, particularly from Lebanon where the PLO and its organizations were based, which were not allowed to enter the occupied territory at the time. The newspapers and the reprinted books had a major impact on fortifying a Palestinian national consciousness in the occupied territory.

Similarly, the emergence of colleges and universities in the West Bank had a significant impact on the political movement, with Birzeit College upgrading to a full-fledged university that attracted students from the entire country, and the establishment of Bethlehem University and Al-Najah in Nablus – all in the mid-1970s – political action was taking hold among students in ways that had not been seen before. The universities became centers for

independent political thinking, and Palestinian political groups, such as Fatah, the Popular Front, the communist organization, and the Democratic Front actively mobilized students. For the first time since the *Nakba*, Palestinians from the various parts of Palestine were meeting, organizing together, and building networks that connected the political movements across Palestine.

In 1976, the PLO gave its blessing to its supporters to participate in the municipal elections that Israel allowed to take place. Supporters of the various

became the main center of Palestinian activism. Israel sprang into action and started to clamp down on the movement inside Palestine. The elected mayors were dismissed from their positions and replaced by Israeli officers or appointed mayors with no ties to the PLO. The universities were shut down for long periods of time, and campaigns of arrest and expulsion of Palestinian activists skyrocketed. Israel's policies of repression, coupled with intensifying settlement activities in the West Bank and Gaza, and exploitive

the footwork of the activists in the Occupied Territory during the first two decades of the occupation. The West Bank and the Gaza Strip became, for the first time in the history of the Palestinian struggle, the center of the movement rather than its periphery. Did such a change have anything to do with the decision of the outside leadership to move into Palestine via the so-called Oslo Peace Accords? This is a matter perhaps for studies that have not yet been undertaken. It goes without saying, of course, that the



A scene from the first Intifada. Photo by Peter Stepan.

Palestinian factions won the elections in most cities and towns, and the new mayors emerged as community leaders who were active in the civil struggle against the occupation.

By the early 1980s, a political leadership and an active popular movement were already in place in the occupied territory, a fact that Israel did not take lightly. With the exit of the PLO's military forces from Lebanon in 1982 and the dispersal of its cadres throughout the Arab world, the occupied territory

work conditions for the Palestinian workers inside Israel intensified political activism. In December 1987, an Israeli driver ran over and killed a number of Gaza workers. The protest movement that emerged quickly developed into what became known as the Intifada, which lasted for a few years.

It is possible to make the claim that the groundwork of the future mass mobilization that would be seen after the eruption of the Intifada in 1987 would not have been possible without

intent of this essay is not to belittle the role played by the movement outside, nor to disregard the heavy price paid by the Palestinians in the refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and elsewhere. It is, rather, a simple attempt to draw attention to the missing pieces of the puzzle in the Palestinian story.

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TESTIMONIES

TAYSEER ABU EISHEH, Merchant, 54 Years Old, Hebron

Occupation is the siege imposed on us that isolates us from our land, our property, and our families. My house is located inside a settlement called Ramat Yishai in Tel Rumeideh in the city of Hebron. It is surrounded on all sides by the settlement, a military camp, and two military checkpoints. I also have a store that is five minutes from my house, located near Shuhada Street. Every morning I have to cross four checkpoints to reach my store. Occupation has affected me economically and morally, and deprived my wife and children of the right to visit me at home. No one may reach the place where I live, not even physicians, and ambulances need special coordination with the occupying authorities. I feel like a prisoner sentenced to life imprisonment.

AMER HLEIHEL, Actor-Director and Art Director at Al-Midan Theater, 37 Years Old, Haifa

Occupation for me means that I was not raised under the chestnut tree planted by my great grandfather in the deserted village of Qadita, and that I haven't been able to sneak a taste of the fruit of the carob tree behind our neighbor's house in the village. Occupation means I can't take the bus from Safad to Gaza to watch a movie or buy sweets or new clothes. I now live in Haifa, and whenever I pass one of the deserted and locked-up Palestinian homes in Wadi Salib, I remember that I am a refugee in my own country. I am engaged in an unending battle with the occupation and I am hopeful of an occupation-less future. I hope that one day I will have breakfast in Haifa, take lunch in Beirut, and enjoy dinner in Damascus.

DALAL ABU AMNEH, Palestinian Artist and Neuroscientist, 33 Years Old, Nazareth

Occupation is the shackles that restrict my cultural, social, artistic, and spatial freedom. It is the type of restriction that forced me to live in isolation from the larger Palestinian and Arab society. It is a restriction that pushes me and my children toward surrender and toward forgetfulness and historical belonging. We Palestinians who live in the 1948 territory are constantly struggling to determine where we belong and identify our national identity. I am sincerely worried that the Palestinian people living inside the 1948 territory will lose their cultural and social identity – something that unfortunately can be seen happening – in spite of the fact that for 69 years we have been able to preserve our history and Arab Palestinian identity. We are struggling with time and I do not wish to see the future generations from the 1948 territory distance themselves from their original identity or lose faith in their right to liberation and to one day return to their homeland.

JAMAL ABU SHA'BAN, Member of the Association for the Defense of the Rights of Displaced People (ADRID), 43 Years Old, Acre

Occupation has taken away my home from me and displaced my family into the diaspora and refugee camps. Occupation has deprived me of the right to exercise my freedom and beliefs. It is the force that has obliterated a whole nation and destroyed its cultural, religious, and historical heritage. If there were no occupation, I would live in peace and our nation would be the richest and most beautiful Mediterranean country. My life would be stable and I would have a position in the government. I would also be able to visit my family and friends in the West Bank and Gaza unimpeded by checkpoints or oppression. In light of the current regional conditions and the

dominance of the right-wing extremists all over the world, and in light of the existence of an occupying power that rejects all peaceful solutions and settlement, I see a bleak and bloody future. I expect more human rights violations, more oppression and displacement, and more suffering for the Palestinian people.

AISHA HUSSEIN ARISHI, 77 Years Old, Palestinian Refugee in Sweden

I am a Palestinian refugee from a small village called Faram in the Galilee. My family was expelled in 1948, and I can still remember our home vividly, the fig trees and the olive trees. After the Nakba we went to Baalbek Refugee Camp in Lebanon, where we lived until we migrated to Sweden in 1990. My husband was martyred in an explosion in Beirut in the 1970s, and later I was obliged to work, harvesting crops and providing for my family that consisted of 13 boys and girls. We lived in the refugee camp in very dire circumstances. I also lost 15 members of my family in the Sabra and Shatila massacre. I feel alienated and since I was severed from my family and friends I have not been able to smile or laugh wholeheartedly.

MAHMOUD ALA'DIN, retired Palestinian Ambassador, 73 Years Old, Palestinian refugee in Germany

I was born in Jaffa but my family comes originally from Bethlehem. We moved from Bethlehem and settled in Ramallah, and in 1965 I left Ramallah to study at university in Germany. In the same year I joined Fateh. I could not return home because of the occupation. If it were not for the occupation I would return to my homeland and work for my people and contribute to building our nation. But I was denied the right to return home and see my family and friends. I will certainly return home when the occupation comes to an end. I miss my homeland and my hometown Jaffa. As time passes my yearning and nostalgia grow and likewise

the anger in my heart continues to grow. In the blink of an eye I have lost my history! I lived for so many years and I always thought to myself, "When will the occupation end so that I can return home?"

AHMAD AMRO, Unemployed and Currently Studying French – A Palestinian Refugee Born in Yarmouk Refugee Camp who Fled to France after the Destruction of the Camp, 41 Years Old

Occupation means the death of hundreds of Palestinians who could not return to their homeland and who drowned in the Mediterranean while fleeing the destruction of their camps. Occupation is the permanent question we are asked by others: Why did you come to our land? Occupation is the only thing that can obliterate my name and the way I define myself while everybody insists on calling me a "refugee."

BASSAM AL-AZA, Merchant – Palestinian Refugee in Al-Baqa' Refugee Camp in Jordan, 55 Years Old

Occupation means losing all of your homeland: land, trees, stones, and everything. Occupation was the thing that made us homeless and turned us into refugees. It took away our rights, and I found myself living in a refugee camp unable to return home. My family was displaced and made homeless twice: Before the Nakba of 1948 my family used to live in Hebron and owned large areas of land, but after the Nakba we were displaced and became homeless and forced to move to Aqabat Jaber in Jericho, and in 1967 my family was expelled to refugee camps in Jordan where we settled in Al-Baqa' Refugee Camp. We uphold our right of return and we will never give it up. We are waiting for the end of occupation so that we can return home and live in freedom and dignity.