Palestinian Youth: The Next Stage of Resistance

written by Tariq Kenney-Shawa | July 6, 2019

In the face of faltering confidence in the prospects of a two-state solution, Palestinians find themselves once again in a state of limbo, bound by a peace process that has not only failed to award them independence, but has only deepened their suffering and heightened the conflict's intractability. Time and time again, it has been argued that due to the interlocked physical reality, mutual population penetrations, shared natural resources, rights of refugees, the inherently unjust nature of separation, and the deep spiritual and historical ties to the land shared by Palestinians and Israelis alike, sustainable peace can only be achieved through integration. Even if a two-state solution were to be established, Palestinian independence would exist in name only. Whether it be based on a secular democratic structure, a binational framework, or a creative parallel state apparatus, the only path to genuine, lasting peace between Palestinians and Israelis clearly lies in extensive levels of cooperation, a reality of coexistence, and the extensive process of establishing mutual recognition.

Today, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has assumed a new position amidst a rapidly changing Middle East and a tumultuous shift in the division of world power; eclipsed by the proliferation of high-intensity armed conflicts throughout the region. From the ongoing Syrian civil war, which has commanded the attention of international policymakers and aid organizations, to the rising tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which have come to shape key regional alliances and conflict zones, the Palestinian question has largely fallen by the wayside. This convoluted reality has contributed to a crippling impasse that disproportionately impacts Palestinians as their suffering continues, isolated from international and regional focus.

Across the board, conflict-resolution discourse has ignored perhaps the most vital component of a future solution: Palestinian youth. In Palestine and across the Middle East, young people constitute a much larger portion of the population than their counterparts in the West; however, despite their demographic weight, their needs have largely gone unnoticed and their opinions often violently suppressed. The consequences of their marginalization were made clear with the outbreak of the Arab Spring, as thousands of youth across the region found a voice following decades of suppression. In Palestine, emerging from the ashes of the Oslo process, the youth demographic represents a fresh path toward resolution and an opportunity to lead the necessary shifts in conflict discourse. Hence it is vital that future attempts at resolution consider the needs of young Palestinians in order to provide the equality of voice that is necessary in achieving a just, inclusive settlement.

The goal of this article is to examine how the next generation of Palestinians might avoid succumbing to a future of perennial suffering in silence under the status quo, and how instead it might regain attention and reframe the conflict discourse. Thus, we must ask: Would the quest for

equal rights be better served through a civil rights-based approach with the aim of achieving an integrative solution to the conflict?

At this impasse, in the words of Menachem Klein, "the ball is in the Palestinians' court," as they face Israel's complex, oppressive machine in addition to international apathy. Palestinians face the arduous tasks of regaining global attention to their efforts to balance the asymmetrical relationship on which the conflict has been based for decades and reframing the conflict parameters. This calls for a paradigmatic shift from political agendas that dictate separation to a rendering of Palestinians and Israelis as internal, rather than external, to each other. By removing the aura of separation and the façade of two separate nation-states, the conflict can be framed truthfully as one between a settler-colonial movement and the indigenous population. In this frame, self-determination rather than statehood represents the main concern of Palestinians since "self-determination belongs not to national groups as national groups, but to the legitimate residents of any region whose status is unsettled."[1] With this in mind, young Palestinians must first address their own fragmentation in a battle against Israeli divide-and-conquer tactics, reevaluate the roles of their own political institutions, and lay the groundwork for a prolonged civil-rights campaign that will cement the one-state reality, abandoning separation for good.

The Role of the Palestinian Authority

Perhaps the most imperative issue for evaluation is the role of the political bodies that currently serve to represent the Palestinian struggle for self-determination. Emerging as a product of the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian Authority (PA) was founded to serve as a semi-autonomous government structure with the goal of facilitating the eventual establishment of an independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders. Palestinians have since viewed the PA as the primary vehicle for aspirations of statehood and sovereignty and the central focal point for institution-building. However, the Palestinian leadership has come under growing criticism regarding issues ranging from internal corruption and inefficiency to their failure to lessen the burdens of occupation, let alone achieve actual independence. A recent poll by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research found that a majority of Palestinians actually view the PA as a burden, over 64 percent want President Mahmoud Abbas to resign, and a vast margin have lost faith in the administration's ability to continue the peace process and establish an independent state.[2] Some have even abandoned their calls for independence for fear of the substandard political reality that the PA would establish if statehood were to be achieved. While it is abundantly clear that the PA has failed in its central objective of achieving independence, it can be argued that the inherent nature of this form of Palestinian leadership is counterproductive to an integrative solution to the conflict.

The first and most obvious point of criticism lies in the accusations of institutional weakness and corruption that have plagued the PA since its inception. The PA is almost entirely dependent on aid from external sources, ranging from the U.S. government to sympathetic Arab governments and influencers. Between 2001 and 2008, the level of donor aid to the PA increased by 500 percent, reaching a staggering 58 percent of the GDP, a level of dependence that continues to rise.[3] While much of the economic growth in the Palestinian territories can be attributed to increases in donor aid, a 2012 World Bank report found that the growth is not sustainable due to its heavy dependence on continued flows of indefinite external funds.[4] The fracturing of the Palestinian economy at the hands of the Israeli occupation has effectively morphed the Palestinian existence into a humanitarian problem, laying responsibility for sustaining the Palestinian population in the hands of the PA and the international community. The incessant dependence on aid has instilled in Palestinians a sense that they are intruders on their own land, living in submission and dependence, and has "engineer[ed] them into perpetual beggars."[5] As a result, the international community's commitment

to relief and charity, rather than assisting in the quest to achieve Palestinian self-determination, has simply allowed the perpetuation and consolidation of the status quo.

Silence and cooperation in regard to the ongoing occupation has been the main condition for continued funding and the central reason the PA is permitted to continue with limited autonomy. Palestinian tax revenue is actually controlled by Israel, which has repeatedly withheld funding from the PA in retaliation for acts of Palestinian resistance that range from violence to attempts to further the case for independence in the United Nations. In March 2015, Israel withheld over $130 million in monthly tax and customs revenue to punish the PA for its attempts to join the International Criminal Court, a move that would raise pressure on Israel regarding potential war crimes.[6] With mounting debt, the PA has found itself increasingly unable to pay employee salaries, further increasing its dependence on donor support and exacting a devastating effect on the economy. Due to this high dependence on donor aid and Israeli economic cooperation, Palestinians are further silenced for fear of losing the sustenance they require.

More significant than the institutional and financial weaknesses of the PA is the fact that the governing body fails to adequately represent the entirety of the Palestinian population and actually enhances the occupation, rather than providing an effective channel for resistance. Since its establishment, the PA has failed at representing a majority of the Palestinian population due to its push for an independent state within the West Bank and Gaza Strip, focusing almost exclusively on programs catered toward Palestinians of the occupied territories. To further compound this, the right of return for millions of Palestinian refugees has been put on hold in today's negotiations to the point that Palestinian officials have themselves admitted that refugees may never be included in a final deal. Additionally, the PA does not represent the Palestinian citizens of Israel, as they have come to form their own political organizations independently. In effect, not only does the PA fail to represent a majority of the Palestinian population, it furthers the fragmentation of the Palestinian movement and political identity.

Most importantly, the PA has come to serve two central roles that allow for the continuation of the Israeli occupation and the overarching conflict paradigm. First, the PA relieves the occupier from the bulk of the costly and routine responsibilities of conducting a protracted military occupation, while serving as a façade of independent government. It assumes roles ranging from providing goods and services to those living under occupation to establishing an internal security network that cooperates with the Israeli military to prevent resistance from the occupied population. The PA security forces have even been known to forcibly stifle protests against the Israeli occupation and have been accused of carrying out torture and infringing on free speech. A report issued by the Ramallah-based Coalition for Accountability and Integrity found that the security sector received over $1.078 billion of the overall $3.86 billion Palestinian budget, a portion of the budget that was larger than the health and education sectors combined.[7] As a result, the professionalized PA security forces have been dubbed "subcontractors" that allow Israel to maintain the occupation while avoiding direct contact that damages its image abroad. In other words, the "dirty work" is carried out by the PA themselves, further perpetuating Israel's disengagement initiative and allowing Israel to selectively extricate itself from the equation, yet maintain overarching control over the entirety of the territories.

Second, the PA effectively shields Israel from the non-Jewish demographic threat, keeping the ever-growing Palestinian population on the "other side" of the divide. By building semi-autonomous political infrastructure and pursuing policies aimed at achieving independent statehood, the PA gave Israel an alternative to outright ethnic cleansing in their attempts to maintain a Jewish majority within Israel proper while simultaneously and gradually expanding Israel's territory.

In effect, any Palestinian government bent on independence inherently opposes and obstructs the

formalization of the one-state reality. This puts the final touch on Israel's disengagement strategy, all while directing Palestinian resistance efforts to the goal of independence and furthering Israel's conflict narrative that blurs the internal, asymmetrical relationship that actually defines Israeli-Palestinian relations.

The PA has come to represent an unproductive conduit of Palestinian energy, as anger is channeled through petty internal disputes and accusations of corruption that merely contribute to the continued disintegration of potential Palestinian political clout. Popular frustration has not been effectively translated into mobilization against the Israeli occupation, but rather toward ongoing disputes like the divide between Fatah and Hamas. While resistance was once expressed through grassroots-led actions like the First Intifada, Palestinians now depend on the weak PA and its futile negotiation attempts in hopes of achieving the central goals of self-determination and an end to the occupation. In truth, the PA has come to truly embody aspirations for statehood, thus epitomizing a path doomed for continued failure.

The Future of Palestinian Nonviolent Resistance

With this in mind, it is clear that the only way to shift the conflict discourse away from the failed two-state paradigm and toward an integrative movement for self-determination is by dissolving the PA, forcing Israel to reassume full occupation responsibilities over the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Since the dissolution of the PA would represent a tactical component of the strategic shift, Palestinians will have to refrain from establishing institutions or interim autonomous governance in order to force Israel to face two options. The first would be Israel's consolidation of the one-state reality, which would subsequently pave the way for a protracted Palestinian civil rights movement. The second would be Israel's termination of the occupation entirely, which, according to precedent, seems highly unlikely. Of course, this would necessitate an agreement with Hamas and all Palestinian political factions in order to ensure that they do not attempt to take advantage of the potential vacuum to expand their powers. Palestinian political representatives will have to focus their leadership efforts on mobilizing the masses through a grassroots campaign for nonviolence. The absence of the PA—and in essence any autonomous government—would effectively render the Palestinian-Israeli relationship increasingly reminiscent of apartheid South Africa, a vital comparison in the process of reframing the conflict paradigm as one between a settler-colonial power and the indigenous population, and a potentially strategic move that the Israeli leadership has been openly wary of.

Although it is important to recognize the disparities between the two situations, in particular the fact that the South African state depended on black South Africans for cheap labor and then denied them the right to vote, the prospects of the Palestinian population falling under direct control of the Israeli government drastically alters the situation. Will the now-leaderless Palestinians then be able to vote freely in Israeli elections? Or will Israel deny them that right, among others, in an effort to maintain Israel's status as a Jewish state, effectively delegitimizing Israel's widely touted claims of being the "only democracy in the Middle East." With this in mind, the South African experience presents not only an encouraging example of what was once a seemingly impossible reconciliation process, but a model of potentially productive tactics that may be implemented in a strategic push for an integrative solution to the conflict. The civil rights struggle against apartheid in South Africa gained worldwide attention, exposing the injustices of the apartheid regime and gaining vast international support, which proved vital in buttressing the internal civil rights movement that triggered the ultimate fall of the apartheid regime.

For decades, in line with the overarching fear of a demographic imbalance, Israeli leaders have repeatedly noted the threat that a Palestinian civil rights movement within an integrative state framework would be to the future of the Jewish state. In 2004, Ehud Olmert, then deputy prime

minister of Israel, commented that “more and more Palestinians are uninterested in a negotiated, two-state solution, because they want to change the essence of the conflict from an Algerian paradigm to a South African one. … That is, of course, a much cleaner struggle, a much more popular struggle—and ultimately a much more powerful one. For us, it would mean the end of a Jewish state.”[8] Thus the Palestinian demographic advantage is clear, not necessarily as a means of strictly pursuing an integrative solution, but as a vital bargaining chip for civil rights. Faced with a formalization of its status as a clearly undemocratic state, Israel will have to either permanently give up its expansionist ideals by granting Palestinian independence or abandon its status as a democratic state. Choosing the latter would mean enduring a protracted civil rights movement that would likely end in either a secular democracy or a binational state. If Israel’s nondemocratic nature is successfully exposed to the world, the international pro-Israel lobby will find it increasingly difficult to defend Israel’s moral position.

It was, after all, the clarity of the cause that made South Africa’s anti-apartheid movement so attractive to the world community. The clear, inbuilt framework for injustice and the obvious asymmetrical relationship between the indigenous oppressed and settler-colonial oppressor differentiates the South African anti-apartheid movement from the current Palestinian struggle for self-determination and justice. Despite facing similar discriminatory policies both in the occupied territories and Israel, Palestinians’ struggle has historically been more fragmented, complex, and defined by a false narrative of separation. Thus, the Palestinian movement must strive to address its own fragmentation, reestablish a united Palestinian front, and embark on a nonviolent civil rights movement aimed at exposing the one-state reality and Israel’s settler-colonial status. At this point, the only viable means of shifting discourse would involve a combination of internal pressure through mass, organized nonviolent movement with a campaign to muster international support. The new Palestinian struggle must be for rights, self-determination, and justice in an integrative solution.

Creating this unified framework would require substantial effort to organize and mobilize the Palestinian population, which for the past decades has remained locked in a simultaneous mélange of all three stages of Pallo Jordan’s resistance theory.[9] Many support military resistance in hopes of expelling what they see as a settler population, some back the direct negotiation process, while others have accepted the one-state reality and hope to join Palestinian-Israelis in the call for civil rights and integration. Clearly, only one of these positions recognizes both the permanence of Israeli Jews and the failure of the separation discourse. Establishing a shared understanding of the need for integration and the one-state reality that already exists must represent the first “order of business” in the push for a shift in discourse. In order to remedy their fragmentation, Palestinians must identify a universal platform based on a discourse that focuses on the pre-1948 Palestinian experience and that underscores the indigenous-settler-colonial relationship. This process must be constructed around an inclusive vision of Palestinian identity, not only uniting Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but including the Palestinian refugee and diaspora population in dialog.

Historically excluded from the peace process, the Palestinian refugee population must play a central role in the discourse shift, as their reality serves as a living embodiment of the Palestinian suffering that began even before 1948 and the Palestinian indigenous identity that must be reclaimed. However, it is paramount to first dispel the “abstract, utopian discourse of return”[10] that frames the right of return within a false narrative of what Palestine once was and can be. For example, an independent Palestinian state will not be capable of absorbing an influx of refugees, and it is equally unrealistic to expect Israelis to accept any number of refugees into their midst, regardless of the integrative solution envisioned. Yet, Palestinian refugees must be accorded rights to a spectrum of remedial options that include the right to return, restitution, and resettlement, as noted in multiple United Nations resolutions and international laws and norms.[11] Most important however, is the restoration of functioning representation to the refugee community. In other words, their demands

must be placed equally alongside those of Palestinians within Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories as part and parcel of the unified platform for resistance.

Accordingly, Palestinians must prepare for a protracted process of what Omar Barghouti terms "ethical de-colonization" or "de-Zionization," involving simultaneous dialectic processes of both reflection and praxis, anchored in international law and focused on the ultimate goal of social and political inclusion.[12] This involves engaging in a process of breaking down the deeply entrenched oppressor-oppressed dichotomy, a practice similar to that which occurred and continues to transpire in South Africa. Here, Palestinians should highlight the importance of recognizing the difference in rights of self-determination between the settler-colonial power and the indigenous Palestinians and ask the question: Are Jewish Israelis entitled to self-determination in historic Palestine as a separate, exclusive community at the expense of the rights of the Palestinians? Recognizing the exclusive, detached settler-colonial rights to self-determination inherently undermines that of the indigenous population. Based on UN General Assembly Resolution 3236, the Palestinian right to self-determination was elevated to the recognized status of an *inalienable* right, differentiating it from the *acquired* rights of the settler-colonial population.[13] Thus, the exercising of settler-colonial self-determination that actively excludes the indigenous population is not only illegal under international norms and law, but immoral, as it directly denies Palestinians their basic rights. This is not to deny the rights to self-determination of Jewish Israelis anywhere, but rather to begin a discourse that is aimed at dismantling their privileged settler-colonial status.

However, by taking this approach, Palestinians walk a very fine line, as these arguments have understandably been interpreted by Jewish Israelis, as they were by white South Africans, with existential fear. In truth, one of the central factors that contributed to ending apartheid in South Africa was the African National Congress's presentation of an integrative plan of inclusion, rather than violent exclusion.[14] Against the backdrop of calls for equality, white South Africans had expressed fears of being "driven into the sea"; these mirror the qualms of many Israeli Jews. Ultimately, Palestinians must incorporate a genuine understanding of the driving factors behind the existential fears that many Israeli Jews endure, not merely for the sake of morality, but for the chance for mutual engagement between moderates of both sides. Thus, much of the potential for success of the next stage in the Palestinian struggle will be dependent on emulating the call for inclusionary reforms that genuinely make Israeli Jews "full partners in building and developing a new shared society, free from all colonial subjugation and discrimination, … the most magnanimous offer any oppressed indigenous population can present to its oppressors."[15]

Therefore, the path to sustainable peace and internal Palestinian self-determination must be based on three central tenets that clearly mirror those of recent rights-based initiatives like the Boycott, Divestments, and Sanctions (BDS) movement: ending the occupation, ensuring equality through an integrative solution, and recognizing the centrality of the refugee right of return. Reference may also be made to the core principles put forth in the Future Vision documents that were penned by a group of Palestinian-Israeli politicians and intellectuals led by Shawki Khatib, head of the Supreme Follow-up Committee of the Palestinians in Israel and of the National Committee of the Heads of Arab Local Councils. This vision outlined three basic principles including the fundamental rights of Palestinians in Israel, equality before the law, and self-determination and autonomy, calling for a dismantling of Jewish preference and a binational state with equal rights.[16] This platform must be built upon achieving Palestinian unity, the interdependence of individual and collective rights, and the technical and moral need for integration. However, as was the case in South Africa, this can never be achieved through continued appeasement or begging alone.

The use of armed force as a means of attaining their political goals has not only proven ineffective historically for Palestinians, but "pits Palestinians against Israelis in an arena where [Israel] is

strongest and the Palestinians are weakest."[17] More importantly, the use of violence often serves to equate both parties, rather than forwarding a narrative of the oppressed resisting their oppressor and giving the Palestinians the distinct moral high ground.[18] With their demographic advantage, Palestinians must utilize the only means of resistance that has historically proven effective: nonviolent civil disobedience. Through the utilization of an official mass-based civil rights movement inspired by both the South African struggle against apartheid and the First Intifada, Palestinians can work to pressure Israel through direct nonviolent disruptive actions while simultaneously regaining interest and vital support from the international community.

The Role of the International Community

With Israel's firmly rooted military, economic, and diplomatic superiority, the Palestinians cannot exert sufficient pressure alone, even with an effective mass civil rights movement. This underscores the vital role that the international community and Israelis play as a balancing force in any future stage of the Palestinian struggle. Without foreign intervention through diplomatic pressure, sanctions, and general divestment, the Palestinians simply have little sway. This is the central reason that Prime Minister Netanyahu has been so adamantly against engaging in indirect negotiation processes that include the mediation or support of international actors like the United Nations that aren't unquestioned protectors of Israeli interest. Instead, Israeli leaders insist on direct negotiations with their Palestinian counterparts, representing the most effective way of taking full advantage of the asymmetrical balance of power and ensuring that any agreement follows Israel's guidelines.

As a response to Israel's apprehension of international mediation, the Palestinian rights movement must be tailored to attract and entice an international audience and build support on current initiatives, like the BDS movement, that are already gaining ground across the globe. Without the PA, the BDS movement will benefit from more visible materialization of the settler-colonial-indigenous dynamic, making the call for blanket boycotts on Israel more applicable. Thus strengthened, the BDS movement will provide the international "wing" of the internally led nonviolent civil rights movement, tasked with raising international pressure on Israel.

The gradual worldwide shift in support for the Palestinians represents an opportune moment to engage in a widespread shift in official discourse. According to a recent study by the Pew Research Center, liberal Democrats in the United States have adopted increasingly pro-Palestinian stances and, more importantly, millennials have become increasingly sympathetic to the Palestinian cause.[19] The U.S. presidential election of 2016 displayed this shift, as Bernie Sanders was able to compete for the Democratic Party nomination despite overtly criticizing Israeli policy and citing the suffering of Palestinians. According to Joel Kovel, "The struggles of the Palestinians themselves to achieve the status of an actual people in the world's eye have finally borne fruit. And this, combined with the continual demythologizing of Zionist claims, has finally created the condition for the awakening of a collective conscience on their behalf."[20] This presents a unique opportunity for Palestinian youth to exhibit their political activism through the growing channels of expression that have become increasingly available through social media and the spread of easy access to direct information. However, with the Trump administration's clear, unbridled support of Israel and its expansionist intentions, Palestinians must work to situate their struggle as a fundamental component of the liberal opposition campaign in the United States.

If Palestinians can maintain a platform of nonviolence and visibly endure the brutality they inevitably face, the international community will find it increasingly difficult to maintain support for an openly violent, undemocratic Israel.

The Youth Role

At this point we are confronted with perhaps the most challenging question: Can Palestinians coalesce, form a united front, and then sustain a committed nonviolent movement in the face of continued occupation and violent oppression? To answer this, we can point to the ever-persistent determination of Palestinian youth, who, despite the crippling hardship they face, prove their ability to mobilize and productively channel their political energy on a daily basis. In truth, an uprooting of the status quo in favor of a renewed civil rights-based movement provides the most opportunity for Palestinian youth, who have emerged out of the failure of the peace process ambitious and restless, yet voiceless and disenfranchised. Today, well over 30 percent of the Palestinian population is between the ages of 15 and 29, signifying a sizable portion of the population that has not benefited from adequate political input, much like their counterparts across the Arab region. A recent Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research study found that Palestinian youth between the ages of 18 and 22 are least supportive of the two-state solution and are most intrigued by one-state proposals, especially when faced with a realistic description of what an independent Palestinian state would look like.[21] In reality, in the age of globalization, the disintegration of political borders, and exposure to the internet Palestinian youth are less interested in their predecessors' goals of achieving an independent state and are more focused on gaining individual rights regardless of the political backdrop.

Through their frustration and desperation, an increasing number of young Palestinians have retreated from political involvement and have instead turned to individual struggles. Additionally, a growing number have come to view armed violence as the only means of achieving their political goals.[22] This has been most obvious with the recent trend of lone-wolf knife attacks that have been predominantly carried out by young Palestinian teens. These recent outbursts of violence by young Palestinians not only represent attacks on their occupiers, but more importantly symbolize assaults on the status quo. In other words, they show that young Palestinians have already begun abandoning what they see as a failed path and are attempting to take matters into their own hands. With no other alternative or conduit for their political input, their potential energy is lost to desperation.

However, dwarfing these sporadic outbursts of violence and proving the potential for sustained nonviolence have been the ongoing protest movements pioneered by young Palestinians. For more than a year, Palestinian youth have positioned themselves at the forefront of the ongoing Great March of Return, staging regular nonviolent protests along the Gaza border and bearing the brunt of a violent Israeli response that has led to the death of more than 200 unarmed demonstrators, including journalists and children as young as 14.[23] Although Hamas continues its attempts to hijack the movement, tainting the demonstrations with efforts to stage unsuccessful breaches of the border, young Palestinians persist. They continue to confront live sniper fire in an effort that, despite their persistence, will likely change little on the ground.

Another recent example of the ubiquitous determination of Palestinian youth was the recent set of protests in Jerusalem, sparked in response to Israeli occupation measures that included the closure of the Al-Aqsa compound. With little international support, and in the face of an extremely violent response from Israeli forces, the determination and persistence of young Palestinians forced Israeli concessions in what was, at the very least, a symbolic victory. Equally important was the fact that both Hamas and the PA played little to no role in mobilization, but rather grassroots efforts proved most effective.

Perhaps the most applicable source of inspiration that can be harnessed by today's youth is the First Intifada, a hallmark of Palestinian nonviolent resistance and a vital model to build on. The First Intifada, which began in 1987 and led to the start of the Oslo peace process, arguably represented the most effective means of pressuring Israel both internally and externally, a proof of the ability of

young Palestinians to mobilize without a central leadership, and a successful way of drastically shifting the conflict discourse. As anger boiled over, Palestinians took to the streets in huge numbers, without a central leadership or iconic figureheads. They engaged in nonviolent demonstrations, blocked roads, staged sit-ins and strikes, and vociferously and openly expressed their Palestinian identity with Palestinian flags and an overwhelming sense of unity. In fact, the Israel Defense Forces itself actually classified 97 percent of intifada activities as nonviolent.[24] As the uprisings continued, they were met with devastating violence from Israeli forces, including beatings (notably, the publicized order by then-Defense Minister Yizhak Rabin to break the arms and legs of protesters), live ammunition, house demolitions, curfews, imprisonment, and torture.[25] The violent response resulted in the death of more than 1,370 Palestinian civilians, with tens of thousands severely injured or imprisoned.[26]

The nonviolent protests and the violent Israeli response thrust the realities of Palestinian suffering and anger into focus for Israelis, causing many to begin to question their own government and its occupation, and even began to gain the attention of the international community, swayed by images of children confronting tanks and heavily armed soldiers.[27] These acts successfully displayed the "vast discrepancy in power between the Palestinian people and Israel's war machine" and led to a reversal of the narrative that Israel represented the "David" in the fight against the Arab and Palestinian "Goliath."[28] One of the primary indicators of the uprising's international political impact was the United States' refraining from its customary veto of UN Security Council resolutions criticizing Israel.[29] At home, Israeli criticism of their own government's disproportionate use of force contributed to the rise of the labor movement's pro-peace platform and sparked an increase in Palestinian-Israeli solidarity groups. Ultimately, the intifada represented the central factor in actually bringing both parties to the negotiating table, as it ensured that the Palestinian problem could not be ignored.

The intifada also showed the ability of Palestinians to mobilize without a central leadership at the helm and to shift the conflict discourse. The swell of largely unorganized popular action emerged as a grassroots movement and displayed the potential power of Palestinians despite their territorial fragmentation. With the Palestinian leadership in exile in Tunisia at the time, Palestinians proved that they don't necessarily need a "Gandhi figure" to lead their struggle against Israeli occupation.

By glancing back to the First Intifada as an example of the potential of a mass civil rights-based movement, Palestinian youth can build on the already vast array of nonviolent modes of resistance that they already employ, ranging from peaceful sit-ins to heightened support of the international BDS campaigns. However, as their actions expand, young Palestinians must be prepared to bear the brunt of an Israeli reaction that may be even more intense than previously experienced. With Palestinians calling for equal rights in an integrative solution, the Israeli government will seek to justify a violent crackdown by arguing that the nation's Jewishness and ultimately its survival depend on it. Palestinians will be forced to withstand substantial pressure and maintain their dedication to nonviolence in hopes of simultaneously pressuring Israelis as well as gaining sympathy; over 62 percent of Israelis perceived Palestinian resistance during the First Intifada as violent, despite evidence to the contrary.[30] This will represent an increasingly difficult feat with the rise of the far-right within Israel and the extensive impact of the disengagement policies. However, if Palestinians can maintain a generally nonviolent stance and absorb the blows of the Israeli reaction, Israel will find it increasingly difficult to defend its self-perceived victim status.

If sufficient effort is dedicated to shifting discourse, mobilizing Palestinian youth, effectively channeling their political energy, and even training them in methods of nonviolent protest, young Palestinians will find themselves in a unique position of influence as they constitute the most vital component of a mass Palestinian civil rights movement. Instead of fighting for leaders and a political

process that has repeatedly failed them, a strategic shift will present an opportunity for grassroots organization and an effective, nonviolent channel for their pent-up energy. Palestinian youth have come to realize that their struggle is not for illusive borders and imbalanced political agreements, but rather for liberation from Jewish primacy in Zionism's ultimate vision of Israel. They will fight for their own civil rights, dignity, and the chance to develop their lives past the limits in which they are contained under occupation and political stagnation. In truth, Palestinian youth are not unfamiliar with assuming the center stage in leading widespread nonviolent resistance against Israeli occupation, and they repeatedly demonstrate their mobilizing prowess. Young Palestinians represent a budding amalgam of frustration and hope, effectively representing the only viable weapon against Israel's crushing political machine.

Conclusion

The downfall of the two-state solution did not merely emerge with the fragmenting effect of Israel's "facts on the ground," the political gridlock that prevents their removal, and their crippling impact on the viability of a future Palestinian state. Rather, the two-state proposals and the overarching theme of separation have been based on an inherently unjust conflict discourse that ignores the central causes of the conflict and disregards vast swathes of the Palestinian population, ensuring that a "solution" that is based upon these principles will be doomed before its implementation.

By following this one-sided approach to solving the conflict, the current peace process ignores the core roots of Palestinian identity and suffering, simply reconfiguring or repackaging the continuous Israeli domination of almost every aspect of Palestinian existence. More importantly, the continuation of the current two-state approach displays the acceptance of Zionism's unwarranted settler-colonial territorial claim over that of the area's indigenous inhabitants, making the Palestinian right to self-determination subordinate to the recognition of Israel's right to maintaining an exclusively Jewish state. In truth, it is the Palestinian people that have adjusted their outlooks to suit the trajectory of the Zionist project and have lost their claim to sovereignty, self-determination, and collective dignity by settling for separation.

Neither Palestinians nor Israelis will forgo their claims to historic Palestine, and it is just as unlikely that either party will accept the division of what they both see as their rightful homeland. Due to this mutual, unremitting hold, along with the physical reality that exists as a result, a just solution can only be reached through some form of integration that recognizes equal individual rights while simultaneously acknowledging the underlying and undeniable nationalist identities that are so deeply rooted in both peoples. With alternatives largely undeveloped due to their absence from the official discourse, Palestinians must lead the shift in strategic approach in order to reevaluate the meaning of their struggle.

The Palestinians, resilient as they have been for decades, must recognize that statehood no longer represents a vehicle capable of achieving their aspirations of self-determination and equal rights, which means that the reality of Israel's unjust settler-colonial sovereignty can only be combated by turning the conflict inward. To do so, Palestinians must look to the First Intifada and the South African struggle against apartheid as not only examples of more effective ways of exerting both internal and external pressure on the settler-colonial power in question, but vital ways of reframing and coming to terms with their own reality in order to confront the inevitable upcoming stage of resistance.

In John Kerry's words, "If the choice is one state, Israel can either be Jewish or democratic, it cannot be both."31 Israel will be forced to choose either granting equal rights to Palestinians through instituting a one-state secular democracy and creating a binational state, or accepting Palestinian independence with the recognition of the territorial and population integration that will have to

accompany it. This proposal is not meant to serve as a definitive "solution" to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but represents what may be the only means for Palestinians to regain interest in their cause, reframe the conflict parameters, and embark on a path toward rights, regardless of the specific political state structure. In essence, this merely lays forth the next stage of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and equal human rights, which will be a protracted civil rights movement with the aim of ensuring that the status quo is not sustainable for Israel in the long run.

However, Israel's most comprehensive success and the factor that continues to serve as a shield against struggles for justice has been their ability to deeply fragment not only the physical existence of Palestinians, but more importantly, their very identity. In truth, the fate of the next stage of the Palestinian struggle for rights and dignity will be dependent on their ability to unite, transcend their physical and political divisions, and rebuild their shared sense of identity. But after undergoing such a thorough, systematic process of fragmentation through occupation and expulsion, the question is whether a unified Palestinian platform can even be identified and maintained in the face of inevitably severe Israeli repression. Will Palestinians prove capable of overcoming the countless physical and political boundaries that have been constructed at their every turn? Will the oppressed become oppressors themselves? Or will they be forced to fade into silent suffering in the shadow of history, as have so many as the world complacently accepts another casualty of settler-colonialism's unchallenged brutality?

Notes

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