

Introduction: Nonviolent Resistance in the Second Intifada

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In the summer of 2008, Hafez, a nonviolent activist and resident of the southern West Bank village of At-Tuwani, was meeting with other members of the Nonviolent Committee of the South Hebron Hills to discuss plans for an upcoming demonstration in response to increasing land confiscation by the nearby Israeli Ma'on settlement and its outposts. Hafez had been beaten and arrested two years earlier for coordinating a nonviolent action in the village, but the experience only reaffirmed his commitment to popular struggle. Indeed, the residents of the South Hebron Hills area continue to engage in regular acts of nonviolent resistance, supported by other Palestinians, as well as international solidarity groups like the Christian Peacemaker Team (CPT), and Israeli organizations like Rabbis for Human Rights (RHR).

At the same time, in summer 2008, farmers in the village of Nahalin, near Bethlehem, were working with local engineers to implement a new waste-water management system that would allow for treated water, rather than high quality drinking water, to be used for irrigation. The project aimed not only to improve water security and crop output, but also to challenge Israeli land confiscation policies and enable farmers to stay on their properties.

Also in August 2008, in the Mediterranean Sea, the first Free Gaza boat was approaching the coast of the Gaza Strip, with international activists bringing a cargo of food and health supplies to the besieged territory. In addition to providing direct humanitarian materials, the action aimed to bring attention to the blockade of Gaza, and it

was subsequently followed by other missions. Meanwhile, within Israel, the Israeli human rights organization Gisha was bringing a case to the Israeli Supreme Court regarding the restrictions on fuel restrictions to Gaza that were hindering the operation of hospitals, water treatment plants, and public transportation.

Nonviolent initiatives such as those mentioned above were not limited to the summer of 2008, but rather were taking place throughout the second intifada, and are only increasing in what might now be considered the post-second-intifada years. However, since the start of the second intifada in 2000, these popular tactics were largely overshadowed by militant actions such as suicide bombings and rocket attacks. While studies on armed resistance are undoubtedly useful, it is imperative for theorists and practitioners alike to better understand the use of nonviolent resistance as a form of activism, and explore the potential of civil-based action as an alternative framework for popular struggle in Palestine.

In particular, it is important to examine the meanings of nonviolence for different actors, the rationale of using unarmed tactics, and the relative effectiveness of various nonviolent strategies. Indeed, as the examples above indicate, nonviolence takes many shapes, and actions that may be considered “nonviolent resistance” by some activists may not be considered either “nonviolent” and/or “resistance” by others. Broadening our conceptualization of nonviolence in this way presents opportunities and challenges for practitioners and scholars alike. On the one hand, expanding our notion of nonviolence may open up more spaces for activism and allow for more widespread participation that address different grievances in creative ways. On the other hand, extending the concept of nonviolence can also be controversial in grouping very distinct methods under one

umbrella, resulting in movement fragmentation as different activists and organizations seek to distinguish themselves from others.

In examining these issues, the contributors to this volume explore the following questions: How do individuals, organizations, and networks in Palestine participate in nonviolent resistance? How do solidarity organizations in Israel, the Middle East, and Western countries engage with Palestinian grassroots movements? How do local and international perceptions of “nonviolence” influence the dynamics of resistance movements? What alternative approaches to resistance exist beyond armed actions on the one hand and surface-level “peace-building” on the other? How do power dynamics among and between different groups affect understandings and applications of nonviolence? Scholars and activists in this volume draw on field research and direct experiences to examine the role of civil resistance in popular struggle in Palestine during and after the second intifada, focusing on how these struggles are interpreted, perceived, and acted upon by local and global actors.

Our aim is not to place normative value on some forms of resistance over others, but rather to bring attention to the breadth and complexity of nonviolence, which is often seen as a sort of “black box” of resistance. Thus, we are not focusing primarily on comparisons between “violent” and “nonviolent” methods, but rather aiming to unpack the concept of nonviolence to shed more light on the nuances and controversies entailed in that concept, in both theory and practice. Though concentrating on the Israeli-Palestinian context, we anticipate that these discussions will extend to conflict areas beyond Israel-Palestine as well, and we hope that this volume will encourage further studies into the complexities of nonviolence. From a critical theory perspective, we also

hope that the volume will prompt more research into who defines nonviolence and “legitimate resistance” in different contexts, and how that influences the ways in which nonviolent resistance is manifest.

As the examples at the start of the chapter indicate, we recognize the need to expand the mainstream Western notion of nonviolence beyond traditional conceptions of direct action. In the case of Palestine-Israel in particular, familiar methods such as strikes, sit-ins, and demonstrations are not always feasible or effective, requiring different types of efforts from different actors. However, we broaden our definition of nonviolence with caution, suggesting that increasing the sphere of nonviolent methods demands being more attentive to the complexities that exist within the theory and practice of nonviolence. We return to this discussion in the concluding chapter of the volume. In this introductory chapter, we briefly discuss the concepts of nonviolence and resistance, inventory the types of popular resistance occurring in the West Bank during the second intifada, and provide an overview of the contributions included in the volume.

Nonviolent Resistance

Although the term “nonviolence” has many meanings, the idea of strategic nonviolence, or nonviolent action, forms the foundation of the kinds of popular resistance discussed in this book. According to Gene Sharp, strategic nonviolence is based on the idea that “the exercise of power depends on the consent of the ruled who, by withdrawing that consent, can control and even destroy the power of their opponent.”¹ From this viewpoint, it is believed that “governments depend on people, that power is pluralistic, and that political power is fragile because it depends on many groups for reinforcement

of its power sources.”² Thus, people can transform situations of oppression by withdrawing their consent through refusal of cooperation, withholding of help, and disobedience and defiance.³

Direct action refers to strategic nonviolent tactics that deliberately challenge the authority of the oppressor. Direct action is usually the most visible form of popular resistance and is the approach typically associated with civil resistance. Nonviolent direct actions can include acts of omission, when people refuse to perform acts that they are required to do by practice, custom, or law; acts of commission, when people perform acts that they are not usually expected or allowed to perform; or combinations of the two. Both acts of omission and acts of commission can be categorized in the areas of protest and persuasion, noncooperation, and intervention.⁴

Acts of protest and persuasion include public actions such as mass demonstrations, marches, and vigils; formal statements such as petitions, declarations, and public statements; symbolic acts such as displaying flags, colors, and symbols; and communicative acts such as hanging banners and posters, distributing newspapers and leaflets, and holding meetings and teach-ins. While often used strategically throughout nonviolent movements, acts of protest and persuasion usually emerge early in a struggle, and can function as tools for mobilization and consciousness-raising.

Protest and persuasion techniques have several objectives. First, actions of this nature seek to provide a signal to oppressive forces that the participants seriously object to certain policies or acts. Moreover, these actions serve to show the wider oppressed population that the opposition movement is challenging the oppressor, thus encouraging others to critically analyze their situation and, ultimately, work for change. Finally,

persuasive actions can raise consciousness about the situation outside of the region, thus calling attention to the situation and increasing international solidarity. In these ways, protest and persuasion tactics serve as challenges to the oppressor on the one hand, and as appeals for local participation and external support on the other hand.⁵ In the case of Palestine, regular Friday marches and demonstrations in protest of construction of the separation barrier illustrate this form of nonviolence, publicly voicing opposition to the barrier while also attracting local and international support.

Often considered the most powerful category of nonviolent tactics,⁶ noncooperation includes acts of social, political, and economic noncooperation. Social noncooperation includes acts such as shunning and ostracism, suspension or boycott of social events, and disobeying social norms, thus marginalizing the oppressive community. Acts of economic noncooperation, including boycotts, strikes, and nonpayment of taxes, aim to impair the means available to a government to provide goods and services to its supporters, thus decreasing supporter loyalty. In addition, reducing government means can ultimately hinder its ability to carry out oppressive policies. While nearly all nonviolent acts are political to a degree, acts of political noncooperation refer specifically to actions that aim to reject the authority of the occupying power, such as withdrawal of political support, boycott of government bodies, and refusal to recognize government institutions.

The objective of noncooperation is to make it difficult for the government to function by withdrawing the people's consent to the occupying power. While impairing the oppressor, noncooperation can also increase solidarity within the community and strengthen civil society.⁷ In the case of Palestine, acts of noncooperation such as strikes

and internal boycotts did take place during the second intifada, however, because of the effective separation of the Israeli and Palestinian populations, these actions often went unnoticed in Israel. Despite this lack of coverage, there were still numerous incidents of noncooperation, including many daily interactions between Palestinians and Israeli soldiers at checkpoints.

Intervention refers to acts of civil disobedience, such as sit-ins, pray-ins, defiance of blockades, land seizure, and use of alternative social, economic, transportation, and communication systems.⁸ Interventionist tactics aim to disrupt established practices and policies with the aim of creating new relationships, institutions, and patterns of behavior.⁹ Because they are more confrontational, interventionist acts often put activists at greater risk for repressive responses, including detention, arrest, personal injury, and even death. However, because they are provocative, interventionist actions are sometimes more effective than other tactics in forcing attention on the issue.

Even when the oppressive power responds to interventionist tactics with violence, such harsh responses can bring about change by initiating political jiu-jitsu. According to Helvey, political jiu-jitsu occurs when “negative reactions to the opponents’ violent repression against nonviolent resisters is turned to operate politically against the opponents, weakening their power position and strengthening that of the nonviolent resisters.”¹⁰ In this way, harsh responses by an occupying power to activist tactics can convince other bodies, such as international organizations, institutions, and states, to put pressure on the regime or lend support to the movement. For example, the May 2010 Israeli raid on the Mavi Marmara, which resulted in the deaths of nine activists, also

brought international attention to the situation in Gaza, as well as the efforts of the Free Gaza movement and the global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction (BDS) campaign.

Acts of protest and persuasion (such as marches, demonstrations, and protests), noncooperation (such as boycotts and strikes), and direct intervention (including civil disobedience) characterize some of the most visible nonviolent tactics in Palestine and elsewhere. This book focuses primarily on mobilization related to these direct actions, but also explores indirect actions, including civil society initiatives and everyday acts of resistance, which characterized the broader sphere of nonviolence in Palestine in the second intifada.

Nonviolent Resistance in the Second Intifada

Despite the apparent dominance of violent resistance during the second intifada,¹¹ nonviolent resistance did, and continues to, take place throughout Palestine in various forms. First, direct action campaigns, consisting of acts of protest and persuasion, boycotts, and civil disobedience, have emerged in numerous villages, usually led by local popular committees.¹² While these campaigns typically have transpired in response to the construction of the separation barrier, which cuts off many rural communities from the land and/or water sources on which they depend for their livelihoods, the village campaigns have come to constitute a nexus of resistance to the occupation itself. For example, the village of Bil'in, located 12 kilometers west of Ramallah, has been holding weekly demonstrations against the wall and the occupation since January 2005, and has served as a gathering place for activists, as well as a model for other village campaigns.

The majority of village-based direct action campaigns have been coordinated by local popular committees.¹³ Popular committees are grassroots in the truest sense of the word, consisting of individual volunteers from local communities with natural ties to the land and closeness to the people. This proximity, in terms of geography and lived experiences, gives popular committees a degree of legitimacy and respect that may be difficult for non-community members to attain. The committees are not formal, therefore giving them considerable flexibility and freedom to communicate and associate with various groups and stakeholders. The membership of popular committees varies, but often includes village elders, farmers, activists, students, and local political leaders. The diverse composition of the popular committees allows community members to collaborate on various objectives and actions in such ways that overcome political divisions that often plague other levels of Palestinian society.

Village popular committees undertake a variety of duties. For the sake of this discussion, it is important to note the popular committees' role in coordinating direct actions in terms of protest, noncooperation, and intervention. Regarding protest, popular committees are the primary organizers of sustained campaigns usually consisting of weekly demonstrations following the Friday prayer. Villages throughout the West Bank have mobilized to organize and sustain these weekly marches, usually near the construction sites of the separation wall. In terms of intervention, popular committees have organized episodes of civil disobedience, again focused on the separation wall, by mobilizing villagers to physically block the destruction of olive groves and other agriculture, or by blocking the bulldozers and other equipment used for the wall construction. Finally, regarding noncooperation, popular committees have been

instrumental in organizing boycotts of Israeli products, particularly those manufactured in settlements. Each popular committee also performs other tasks in accordance with local grievances and needs, with several committees even pursuing legal cases in Israeli courts on behalf of the villagers. Many popular committees also handle the villages' communications with Israeli authorities and sometimes settlers, maintain records and maps of land closures and seizures, act as spokespersons with the media, offer support to other villages, and coordinate actions, conferences, and events with other committees.

Many local campaigns are directly or indirectly supported by civil society organizations, including national campaigns to halt the construction of the separation barrier, like the Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign (also known as Stop the Wall). This coalition of Palestinian NGOs and popular committees coordinates efforts on local, national, and international levels to resist the separation wall and the occupation by supporting grassroots resistance, helping local communities initiate legal cases, encouraging NGO participation and national mobilization, facilitating research and documentation, and encouraging international outreach and solidarity, especially in the form of BDS campaigns. The campaign also includes a youth initiative, in which members offer courses at university campuses on the effects of the wall, the history of Palestinian struggle, and the importance of popular resistance strategies.

Some NGOs are involved in similar activities, and also work to organize trainings, conferences, and workshops to disseminate nonviolent strategies. For example, Holy Land Trust in Bethlehem has supported local village campaigns, provided nonviolence trainings to communities, and organized training of trainers (TOT) workshops to further disseminate nonviolent strategies. The organization also

coordinates alternative tourism and encounter programs to increase international awareness of the occupation.

Similarly, other civil society groups have used the persuasion technique to amplify Palestinian voices through various mediums to raise awareness about the occupation in general and the nonviolent struggle in particular, both regionally and internationally. For example, alternative news agencies like the Palestinian News Network (PNN), the International Middle East Media Center (IMEMC), and the Al-Ma'an News Agency represent grassroots efforts to ensure that reports of both Palestinian grievances and actions are documented and disseminated. Participatory arts and media projects like Picture Balata and Voices Beyond Walls likewise seek to amplify Palestinian narratives through creative media as a form of activism.

Finally, countless Palestinians have participated in everyday acts of resistance, specifically remaining on their land in spite of encroaching settlements and construction of the separation barrier. As one farmer in the Jordan Valley explained, "My weapon of defense is that I won't leave this place."¹⁴ Other individuals and communities reflected the same notion of *sumoud*, or steadfastness, a concept often used in the region to refer to Palestinians' resilience and perseverance despite the occupation.

Clearly, unarmed resistance has not been absent during the second intifada. On the contrary, activists and non-activists alike have engaged in various actions that incorporate a variety of tactics, actors, and approaches to nonviolence. In this volume, we start with the premise that nonviolent resistance has been, and continues to be, a highly utilized form of struggle in Palestine-Israel.¹⁵ We are not so much asking *if* nonviolent resistance is occurring, but rather *how* it is occurring, *who* is participating, and

why it may or may not be effective in different contexts. We thus seek to dig deeper into the complexities and nuances that shape nonviolent resistance in theory and practice in the region rather than apply prescriptive lenses.

Overview

In this volume, the authors challenge conventional thinking on nonviolence in Israel/Palestine by examining a wide range of perceptions, actors, and tactics involved in nonviolent activism in the second intifada, and how these changes are influencing popular resistance in Palestine-Israel.

The book begins by exploring how different interpretations of nonviolence can both restrict and expand opportunities for mobilization and resistance. In “Discursive Domestication in Post-Oslo Palestine,” Ava Leone argues that development assistance in post-Oslo Palestine intentionally led many NGOs to become divorced from grassroots activism in favor of western-influenced “nonviolent” projects focused on building institutions. Through a critical analysis of documents produced by prominent American organizations working in post-Oslo Palestine, Leone reveals a discursive process of domestication—a conscious effort to delimit Palestinians’ ability to imagine and employ alternative resistance strategies.

Timothy Seidel takes a slightly different approach by advocating for expanding concepts of nonviolence beyond traditional definitions of direct action. In “Development as Peacebuilding and Resistance: Alternative Narratives of Nonviolence in Palestine-Israel,” Seidel explores the everyday resistance practiced by Palestinian communities struggling to exist despite pressures to leave their homes due to economic, social, or

political forces related to the Israeli occupation. Seidel shows how sustainable development initiatives, when locally initiated or undertaken in partnership with Palestinian communities, go beyond humanitarian and peacebuilding objectives to function as acts of resistance.

In “Partners for Peace: Cooperative Popular Resistance and Peacebuilding in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” Robert Sauders likewise aims to broaden common perceptions of Palestinian resistance, which have tended to focus on violent expressions of secular nationalism or Islamist networks, by introducing the concept of cooperative nonviolent resistance networks. Using the group Combatants for Peace (CFP) as a case study, Sauders demonstrates how nonviolent social movements can cut across ethnic, religious and national identities, allowing for new interactions between diverse actors. Sauders suggests that these interactions embody a form of resistance that looks beyond short-term objectives to challenge more entrenched constructions of power.

Sarah Scruggs further builds on the theme of cooperative efforts for resistance by diverse actions by examining the role of international solidarity groups (ISGs). In “Understandings of Nonviolence and Violence: Joint Palestinian and International Nonviolent Resistance,” she highlights that both within ISGs and between ISGs and Palestinians there are differing perceptions of nonviolence and violence and these perceptual differences lead to varying conclusions on what methods are permissible within a nonviolent movement. She also advocates for expanding Sharp’s repertoire of nonviolent tactics to address the realities of “oppressive structures” in the Israeli-Palestinian context.

Mohammed Abu-Nimer likewise offers insights on the need for new actors and tactics by discussing the role of religious leadership in the conflict. Abu-Nimer first notes that while religion is often assumed to be a force for violent incitement, it can in fact play a positive role in working towards peacebuilding in the region. Furthermore, he emphasizes that, to be effective, religious peacebuilding efforts must extend beyond interfaith dialogue to directly confront issues of rights and justice.

Jesse Benjamin brings attention to the efforts of yet another group of actors whom are often overlooked in discussions of nonviolent resistance in the region. In “Unarmed Resistance in Bedouin Communities,” he examines the challenges facing the Arab Bedouin living in the Negev who have Israeli citizenship but lack the rights and privileges of Jewish Israeli citizens. Many live in villages unrecognized by the state and must struggle to remain in their homes, which are under constant threat of demolition. This chapter challenges frequent dichotomous assumptions of the conflict by exploring nonviolent resistance in the context of Arab/Palestinian citizens of Israel and their efforts for equality and socioeconomic justice.

In “International Law and the Case of Operation Cast Lead: ‘Lawfare’ and the Struggle for Justice,” Maia Carter Hallward examines the efforts of activists in both Israel and Palestine to use international legal frameworks as tools for activism and nonviolent resistance in response to Operation Cast Lead. Specifically, Hallward examines how Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations use international law differently in their advocacy, with Palestinian human rights organizations using law to resist the occupation, and Israeli human rights organizations using law to encourage government

accountability. Hallward's chapter reflects the expansion of nonviolent tactics to include methods such as legal activism, or "lawfare," in challenging occupation policies.

The expansion of tactics is further discussed by Hazem Jamjoum in "The Global Campaign for Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel." In this chapter, Jamjoum discusses how the BDS campaign has been especially effective at garnering international participation and solidarity, putting external economic and political pressure on Israel. In this chapter, he discusses the trajectory of the movement both inside and outside Palestine, its relationship to the Palestinian liberation movement, and the challenges that the movement faces.

New tactics of civil disobedience are further discussed in "The Free Gaza Movement," based on an interview with Huwaida Arraf and Adam Shapiro, both leaders with the movement. In this chapter, they discuss the planning and actions of the Free Gaza movement, which sought to break the siege on Gaza by sailing boats carrying humanitarian supplies and medical equipment from Cyprus to the coast of the Gaza Strip. The chapter chronicles how the movement used international law and human rights frameworks to challenge the Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip, and how Israeli responses to the movement have influenced international solidarity and activism.

Nonviolent resistance is not a new phenomenon in Palestine-Israel, but changing perceptions, actors, and tactics are constantly reshaping the way it is interpreted and employed. In this volume, we aim to provide further insight into the complexities of nonviolence in theory and practice by drawing on the direct observations of activists, scholars, and practitioners in the field. We hope that this volume initiates and inspires

further work and research into the role of nonviolence in justice and peacebuilding in Israel-Palestine.

¹ Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973), 4.

² Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 8.

³ Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 64.

⁴ Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 68-69.

⁵ Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 68-69.

⁶ Robert Helvey, *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: Thinking about the Fundamentals* (Boston: Albert Einstein Institution, 2004).

⁷ Helvey, *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict*.

⁸ Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*.

⁹ Helvey, *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict*.

¹⁰ Helvey, *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict*, 150.

¹¹ In this volume, the second intifada refers to the period of intensified resistance from approximately September 2000--2008.

¹² Many village-based campaigns have been supported by international groups like the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), the Palestinian Solidarity Project (PSP), and the Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), as well as by Israeli groups like Anarchists Against the Wall, Ta'ayush, and Peace Now. The efforts of these groups are worthy of additional discussion, but are beyond the scope of this article. For more on international interventions, see Nancy Stohlman and Laurieann Aladin, *Live from Palestine* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2003).

¹³ Popular committees emerged in the first intifada to organize local resistance in accordance with strategies developed by the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU), an organized underground movement that coordinated nonviolent actions for all of Palestine, through the use of weekly or biweekly fliers and communiqués. The role of the popular committees and the UNLU diminished significantly with the PLO centralization of actions in the latter half of the first intifada, and essentially remained dormant during the 1990s and the first three years of the second intifada. However, in 2003, popular committees started to re-emerge in several villages to coordinate local resistance activities, and have continued to serve as models for other villages initiating their own committees.

¹⁴ Interview with author, 2008.

¹⁵ See Julie M. Norman, *The Second Palestinian Intifada: Civil Resistance* (Routledge 2010); Maia Carter Hallward, *Struggling for a Just Peace: Israeli and Palestinian Activism in the Second Intifada* (University of Florida Press, 2011); Mary Elizabeth King, *A Quiet Revolution* (Nation Books, 2007).