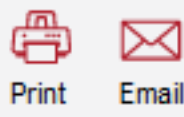
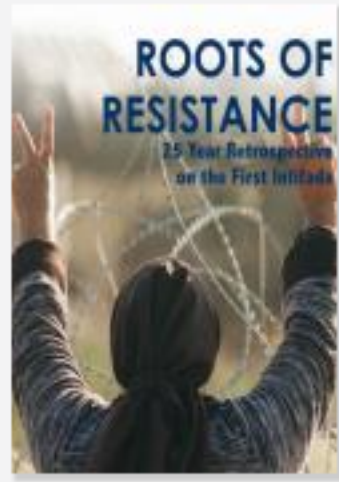


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ROOTS OF RESISTANCE: WE ALL HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO TURN RESISTANCE INTO LIBERATION



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The first Intifada (actually the second if we include the Palestinian Revolt of 1936-39, both derided as "riots" and "disturbances" in Israeli historiography) stands alongside other historical acts of popular resistance to oppression, occupation or colonial rule. Some succeeded in overthrowing that rule: the Arab Spring comes immediately to mind, as do the strikes in Gdansk led by the Polish Solidarity movement; the Russian Revolution; the Viet Minh and Viet Cong in their prolonged struggles against the French and Americans; the many anti-colonial movements in Africa; peasants movements in Mexico, China, Algeria, India and Cuba; the sustained campaigns of the ANC in South Africa, the Taliban of Afghanistan and many more – all of which should give us hope when confronted by those who ridicule people power. Others did not succeed – the Tiananmen Square protests, the Tamils of Sri Lanka, the Tibetans, the Native Americans or Black nationalists of the US – but their grievances, though suppressed, continue to fester, waiting for the next round. Still others, hundreds of others, large and small, are ongoing, still unable to achieve their aims yet too strong to be suppressed and normalized, Palestinian resistance prominent among them.

Powerful state oppressors invariably cast resistance movements as violent, irrational, terroristic, lacking any legitimacy whatsoever. They often succeed, at least for a time. Ultimately they are undone by the blatantly oppressive measures they must take to control or quash the uprising. The modicum of sympathy for the "terrorists" thus released allows at least the critical among us to articulate the legitimacy of their cause. Over time the moral and legal legitimacy of the oppressor recedes until a tipping point is reached, after which the regime becomes vulnerable, its sustainability thrown into doubt, its hold loosening despite its overwhelming power and ever more draconian policies.

Granted, this has been a prolonged process in the case of Israel and the Palestinians. The ability of the oppressor regime, Israel, to muster international support, is considerable. Recalling the persecution of the Jews and, ultimately, the Holocaust, conceals Israel's power as well as the injustice, illegality and wanton brutality of its treatment of the Palestinians. It also enables Israel to cast itself as the victim, although this is wearing thin. Other factors are at play as well. Jews are seen as white people, one of "us," with all the implications and privileges that entails. Leon Uris' book *Exodus*, translated into more than 50 languages and perhaps the most effective piece of PR ever produced, etched into the public consciousness the image of heroic, handsome, freedom-loving but tough Jews (Paul Newman played Ari Ben Canaan in the Otto Preminger film, music by Henry Mancini and sung by Andy Williams) overcoming the traumas of the Holocaust to bravely defend themselves against nameless "gangs" of swarthy, blood-thirsty Arabs. Even today Israel belongs to the European soccer and basketball leagues, and participates in the awful but popular Eurovision contest. (Americans, be glad you don't know what that is.) Writ larger, Israel, partly by dint of its military prowess, has become part-and-parcel of the Global North, located solidly on the "civilized" side of the Clash of Civilizations, a leader in the campaign to pacify those resisting global capitalism.

Israel still has the ability, though a diminished one, to mobilize influential if patchy sectors of the international community: Christian Zionists, the guilt-ridden, pro-American peoples of Eastern Europe and Germany, parliamentarians and members of Congress, key government officials and, not least, powerful defense contractors – not to forget, tragically, the organized Jewish community. But we should notice contrary trends as well. One hundred and thirty countries, more than 70% of the member states of the UN, voted to recognize a Palestinian state, isolating the nine who voted against: the United States, Israel, Canada, the Czech Republic (the only European country to vote no) and five Pacific atolls. Already in 2003 a Gallup Poll of Europeans found that 59% saw Israel's main threat to peace, followed by Iran, Iraq and...the US. Even in the US views seem to be changing: witness the three voice votes in the Democratic Convention that failed to produce a majority recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

The significance of the first Intifada, in my mind, is that it initiated this process of revelation and table-turning. The success of Israel in portraying itself as an innocent victim rather than an oppressing power has run its course. No longer can it demonize the Palestinians and deny them their national right to self-determination and still muster international support. This was no mere PR campaign, of course. Thousands of Palestinians paid with their lives or their health or their property. Though the Intifada was mounted by an unarmed population, more than 1300 Palestinians died and tens of thousands were injured, including almost 30,000 children who required medical treatment for beatings endured during the first two years of the intifada, a third of them under the age of ten. Some 120,000 people were arrested at a time when Israel's security services were perfecting methods of torture that fit the Supreme Court's guidelines of "moderate physical pressure." 1500 homes were demolished. The UN General Assembly characterized Israel's actions as "war crimes and an affront to humanity," charging it with "annexation, deportation, expulsion, destruction, collective punishment, administrative detention, torture, illegal exploitation, curtailing of free press, killing and wounding of defenseless demonstrators, breaking of bones and limbs of thousands of civilians, use of toxic gas and arming of Israeli settlers with the purpose to perpetrate and commit acts of violence against Palestinians."

With their very lives the Palestinians who rose up in the first Intifada broke Israel's monopoly over how the public viewed them and their struggle. They gave us the infrastructure – the exposure after years in which Israel tried to pacify and normalize its Occupation, the moral and political case, the ability to demand Israeli accountability under international law, indeed, the inspiration – upon which our current struggle is based. It was one of the most significant popular uprisings of the neo-colonial era. For its significance goes far beyond Palestine itself. The Palestinian struggle is a microcosm of larger but similar struggles on the global stage, the world as a Global Palestine, if you will. It is a bellwether of how well we are doing. Palestinian success in freeing themselves from the domination of a Global North country provides a measure of the degree to which collective and individual human rights, backed by international humanitarian law, actually affect political reality. By the same token, Israel's ability to mobilize support for its policies of occupation, deny Palestinians their human rights, openly defy international law with the connivance of the American and European governments and employ with impunity the harshest military measures reveals how far we have to go.

The first Intifada, significant as it was, could not have ended Israel's Occupation by itself. Just as the Palestinians represent the billions of others struggling for their own basic rights, for sustenance and for a place in this world, culturally and individually (including the poor, the immigrants, the marginalized and the dissident within the Global North itself), so too do they need the support of the strong publics in that very Global North that it exploiting and marginalizing them. And herein lies our challenge. The first Intifada could reveal the injustice, anger and unwillingness of the oppressed to live under oppression, it could provide direction to those who fighting the Occupation and substance to their political and legal arguments, but only governments can actually end the Occupation and, guided by the people, achieve a just peace. We the people are in a bad marriage. Unelected, possessing limited power and no official mandate, we can neither negotiate nor sign treaties. We need governments to do that. But governments, it seems, will never do the right thing of their own accord; they engage in conflict management, not conflict resolution. The people, civil society, play a crucial role in forcing governments to act. Whether from the ground up as in the first Intifada, in creating global instability as in the Muslim world's refusal to normalize relations with the US until the Occupation ends or in our own campaigns such as BDS, public advocacy and turning to international law, civil society can make the Occupation unsustainable. To hasten its end by forcing governments to act (and if they won't, like the US and Israel, then finding governments that will by-pass them, as in the UN vote) – that is our role.

We must pick up our end if the first Intifada will in fact represent the beginning of a process of liberation or will become simply a brave but futile act. That means, in my view, formulating the most effective strategies for translating the people power of the Intifada into government policy and, ultimately, to compel the Israelis to end the Occupation and enter into a just peace, whatever form that may take. The Palestinians cannot overthrow the Occupation on their own, the Israeli Jewish public has been neutralized and simply doesn't care, and our own governments would rather manage the conflict for another century rather than end it.

The good news is that we, all of us, Palestinians, progressive Israelis and you (who we call "internationals"), have made the Palestinian issue one of the two or three central issues across the globe. Literally hundreds of organizations actively pursue Palestinian rights, supported by trade unions, political and human rights groups, churches, intellectuals, students and vast sectors of the public. Even as I write this the World Social Forum on Palestine has just concluded in Porto Alegre, Brazil – some 3500 activists from throughout the world, convened in part by Via Campesina, the international peasant movement. But we have to build on our successes. We have to ask: beyond BDS and the different to campaigns we have initiated over the years, how do we continue to mobilize new sectors of society, change public opinion and, in the end, influence governments' policies. Since governments follow where the people lead, our task is to join with the Palestinians in parleying the opportunity they gave us in the first Intifada into effective actions.

A lot is at stake here. If the Occupation wins – and don't doubt for a moment that Israel believes it has already beaten the Palestinians – it is not only the Palestinians who have lost, but all of us. If oppression prevails and on the southern border of Europe, in the Holy Land visited by millions of pilgrims and tourists each year, human rights and international law are trampled at will in Palestine, a chilling message is sent to oppressed peoples living in places far less transparent than Israel/Palestine – and to us as well. If the Occupation prevails due mainly to American complicity, how hollow will that render any talk of the Global North about democracy and freedom. And if, irony of ironies, Jews become the new Afrikaners, the insistence of Israeli leaders that they represent the entire Jewish people meaning that Jews anywhere who do not distance themselves from Israeli policies are in fact complicit, the enlightened leaders of the American Jewish community at the head, the lessons of oppression the Elie Wiesels among us press upon the world will be considered self-serving at best.

The people who rose up in the first Intifada began the task of liberation; it is our responsibility to join with our Palestinian colleagues to formulate the most effective strategies possible to turn their resistance into genuine liberation.

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