

Evaluate the effectiveness of Palestinian armed resistance versus non-violent resistance in terms of achieving the goal of self-determination.

Introduction

In their struggle for self-determination, broadly defined as the right of a people to determine their own governance (McDonald, 2001), the Palestinians have employed both armed and non-violent resistance methods. This essay argues for the effectiveness and potential of non-violent resistance as a more inclusive and adaptable approach to the pursuit of self-determination. The evaluation begins with a historical investigation of armed resistance, focusing on its reasons and significance in restoring dignity and preserving memory, drawing on the works of notable theorists such as Fanon, Sartre, and Said. It then problematises the gendered nature of armed resistance, arguing that its masculine-centric approach often sidelines women, limiting their participation and thereby undermining the overall cause. A comparative analysis of the two Intifadas follows, highlighting the disparity in women's participation and advocating non-violent resistance's inclusivity. The final section of this essay envisions the future of Palestinian resistance in the context of our shrinking world. It evaluates the transformative power of social media and digital platforms in enhancing nonviolent resistance, as demonstrated by campaigns such as #StopPrawerPlan and Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions. The evaluation concludes with an argument that, in an era of heightened globalisation and digital communication, non-violent resistance holds the

potential to supersede violent resistance and should be favoured due to its inclusivity. In dissecting the varied effectiveness of Palestinian armed and non-violent resistance, this paper aims to deepen our understanding of the intricate dynamics in the Israel-Palestine conflict. This evaluation sheds light on the diverse strategies and roles of Palestinian actors, offering a nuanced perspective on their quest for self-determination. Understanding this context is crucial for comprehending the complexities of this enduring conflict.

The Case for Armed Resistance

A Battle Within: Restoring Self-Respect for Liberation

In the struggle for self-determination, the potential of armed or violent resistance (to be used interchangeably in this paper) is typically anchored in its power to liberate colonised individuals from the systemic violence perpetrated by their oppressors. Violence, according to figures such as Fanon and Sartre, can be a liberating force for those subjected to the widespread, insidious violence of colonisation. It has the ability to dispel feelings of inadequacy, hopelessness, and apathy, boosting fearlessness and restoring a sense of self (Fanon, 1961). This empowerment can help the oppressed overcome an internal struggle for self-determination—a battle for dignity and self-respect. Through violence, individuals can emancipate themselves from feelings of inferiority (Fanon, 1961; Sartre, 2000), equipping them to confront the larger, external conflict with their oppressor. This perspective posits that violence grants the marginalised the means and will to enact substantive change through the pursuit of other forms of resistance (Nakhleh, 1971).

The concept discussed above finds practical manifestation in the Palestinian context, where cycles of violent and non-violent resistance have taken place. Armed resistance has

frequently occurred in the context of heightened sentiments of powerlessness and shame. The Israeli occupation has markedly undermined the arenas that allow Palestinians to express, assert, and preserve their masculine dignity and self-respect through independent actions (Holt, 2003). As a result, periods marked by humiliation, helplessness, and the inability to protect oneself and one's family have fuelled frustration, compelling Palestinians to resort to various forms of armed resistance, such as suicide bombings (Holt, 2003). These acts can be perceived as "weapons of the weak," designed to offset the power imbalance and reclaim a sense of self-worth (Pape, 2008). Between 1987 and 1993, as their sense of dignity was restored, many Palestinians engaged in nonviolent resistance to the occupation (Holt, 2003). This shift was fuelled by a revitalised sense of pride, which previous acts of violence had rekindled—a topic discussed further in the following sections (Allen, 2002). This case exemplifies how armed resistance has been used as a self-liberation mechanism, allowing for the restoration of dignity, and thus contributing to the pursuit of Palestinian self-determination.

[An External Battle: Restoring Collective Identity for Liberation](#)

It is worth noting that the capacity of armed resistance in self-liberation can materialise in various forms (Fanon, 1961). What is perhaps the most visible type of liberation achieved through violence in the Palestinian context is aligned with Said's (1986) portrayal of the conflict as a war aimed at eradicating the Palestinian national identity. The primary external or visible battle undertaken by Palestinians as a people in fighting their war for self-determination has been the fight for the recognition of their enduring presence and, in tandem, the restoration of their collective historical reality. Undermining the Palestinian pursuit of self-determination, the Zionist movement's rewriting of Palestine's history effectively erased the collective memory and identity crucial for self-governance (Said,

2000). Self-determination is, after all, the right of a people to determine various aspects of their governance, meaning that the elimination of a group's memory and status as a people can be viewed as detrimental to their cause. The utilisation of armed or violent resistance played a vital role in preserving collective memory and ensuring that the issue of Palestinian self-determination remains a prominent topic in contemporary discussions within the field of International Relations. The following subsection will illustrate this further.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the international community no longer recognised the Palestinian Arabs as a prominent political entity but instead referred to them as Palestine refugees (Nakhleh, 1971). The erasure of Palestinians' identity as a people during that time not only contributed to their humiliation and desire for self-liberation but, in my perspective, had a more significant impact on their struggle for self-determination by eradicating their collective memory. Armed resistance can be seen to have restored Palestinians' history, recovering their status as a people with the right to self-determination in the early 70s. The 1972 Munich Olympics incident, where the Palestinian group Black September held the Israeli national team hostage, provides a striking example of how violence was used to restore the Palestinian identity (Galily et al., 2015). This event, which was broadcasted globally to an estimated 800 million viewers, strategically leveraged the communication infrastructure set up for the Olympics to disseminate their message to a large, international audience, many of whom were being introduced to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for the first time (Galily et al., 2015). The group saw their act of armed resistance as 'painting the name of Palestine on a mountain visible from the four corners of the earth', suggesting that violence was a means of capturing international attention (Galily et al., 2015, p. 1000). This perception was not misguided, as the aftermath of the Olympics

marked a turning point where the Palestinians and their quest for self-determination could no longer be overlooked. Echoing this sentiment, Said (2000) has argued that the rise of groups like the PLO and Black September in the 1970s, who resorted to violent means of resistance, ignited a renewed interest in Palestine across both political and non-political literature, fuelled by a rekindled sense of historical identity. This further illustrates the effectiveness of armed violence in aiding the Palestinian struggle for self-determination through the restoration of their history and collective identity.

[The Third Battle? Addressing Concerns.](#)

Before delving into the primary drawbacks of using armed resistance for self-determination, it is important to tackle potential criticisms regarding the views presented earlier, notably the use of Black September's act in 1972, widely regarded as a terrorist act, as an example. While it is worth noting that definitions and categorisations of terrorism can be subjective, the focus here is not on this debate but rather on acknowledging that, even if classified as a terrorist act, it was indeed a form of resistance initiated by a weaker party to counteract a power imbalance. Moreover, many criticisms of armed resistance often hinge on the battle for public opinion. Critics argue that armed resistance can harm the Palestinian cause by reinforcing the Israeli narrative that frames Palestinian resistance as terrorism (Mason and Falk, 2016; Khalidi, 2013). Proponents of nonviolent resistance underscore its potential to shape public opinion favourably, citing non-violent acts during the first intifada as pivotal in changing global perceptions of the conflict (Mason and Falk, 2016), thereby challenging the standard narrative of Israel as the "David" against the Arab "Goliath" (Rigby, 2010).

While critics may argue otherwise, I maintain that the success of the first intifada in reshaping public opinion was significantly influenced by prior acts of violent resistance,

which spotlighted the Palestinian struggle on a global scale. In essence, non-violent resistance operates like theatre, requiring an engaged audience (Mason and Falk, 2016); violence, in turn, can stimulate that engagement. Armed resistance played a vital role in transforming the narrative from an Arab-Israeli conflict to a distinctly Palestinian-Israeli one, thus aiding Palestinians in reclaiming their identity and collective memory. This reframing distinguished Palestinians from the broader 'Arab Goliath', improving their visibility on the international stage. Although this shift in perception may not have been initially positive, in this case, negative perceptions were better than obscurity. Subsequent non-violent resistance efforts reinforced and supplemented this reframing and garnered public empathy. Notably, the Palestinian struggle manifests a recurring cycle of alternating between violent and non-violent tactics, seemingly corresponding with phases of dignity restoration and memory reclamation (Holt, 2003). This is not to negate the simultaneous occurrence of both strategies but to accentuate the dominant approach during a given period. As shown above, armed resistance has effectively served to thrust the Palestinian cause into the limelight of international discourse. The next segment of my argument pivots to explain why primarily relying on armed resistance should be a calculated and sporadic choice, focusing less on swaying public opinion and more on addressing the internal dynamics integral to the Palestinian pursuit of self-determination.

A New Case for Non-Violent Resistance

Beyond Man's Self-respect

Fanon's (1961) narrative of armed resistance and the subsequent self-recreation revolves primarily around the "native" man recreating "himself", leaving women conspicuously

absent from the discourse. The discussion of women in the context of self-determination consistently emerges in reference to a man's loss of his family (Sartre, 2000), thereby denying women an active role in anti-colonial resistance. This masculine-centric perspective on anti-colonial resistance is far from exclusive to Fanon, with many historical self-determination struggles adopting a "nation first, women later" strategy (Massad, 1995, p. 469). Despite the assumption of equality among groups in the principle of self-determination, it overlooks the reality that women, constituting a substantial portion of the population in many countries, often face limited or negligible participation in the decision-making process (McDonald, 2001). In the case of Palestine, the masculine character of Palestinian nationalism has historically undervalued and underutilised non-masculine contributions to the fight for self-determination (Holt, 2003), explaining why violence has often been utilised to restore feelings of masculinity in times of despair. I aim to defend the effectiveness of non-violent resistance by highlighting its inclusionary force.

[A New Internal Battle: Fighting for Equality](#)

My argument does not begin with Palestine but with a statement made by a representative of the Patriotic Women's Association in Turkey regarding the Kurdish struggle for self-determination: "The process of our people's liberation determines the process of our women" (Akan, 1992, p. 22). This perspective highlights the intrinsic link between the collective emancipation of a people and the advancement of women's rights. It implies that the attainment of freedom and progress for the Palestinian people is incomplete without the active participation and empowerment of Palestinian women, suggesting that their exclusion from armed resistance undermines the overall cause. For this reason, I argue that resistance should involve the crossing of boundaries between the public and private spheres, giving

women an opportunity to engage actively and enabling the native woman to achieve liberation through the restoration of her self-respect.

Here we might call into question whether armed resistance is truly gendered or if the above view of armed resistance disproportionately freeing men and women from their inferiority complex merely reinforces stereotypes of women as passive. In Palestine, the increase in female suicide bombers challenges such stereotypes of women being inherently more inclined toward peace, for example (Hasso, 2005). To be clear, I am not suggesting that women cannot nor have not engaged in forms of armed resistance, merely that they have disproportionately done so, as it is generally discouraged (Holt, 2003). The unequal level of participation is not rooted in intrinsic or inherent qualities but rather stems from the process of militarisation and war becoming associated with masculine norms and behaviours (Schock, 2015). The following subsection provides empirical evidence to showcase how armed resistance has historically excluded women in the Palestinian context.

The Intifadas: A Comparative Analysis

While both intifadas involved a combination of armed and non-violent resistance, the first intifada is widely recognised as a predominantly nonviolent movement, whereas the second intifada, known as the Al-Aqsa intifada, was markedly different, leaving little space for non-violent strategies (Shock, 2015; Mason and Falk, 2016; Mall Dibiasi, 2015). In parallel with the discrepancy in the levels of armed resistance between the two intifadas, there was also a notable disparity in the extent of women's participation. During the first intifada, with the detention of many Palestinian men, women and youth played pivotal roles in the largely nonviolent Intifada, with the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) categorising 97% of the activities associated with it as nonviolent (Mason and Falk, 2016; Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011).

Through their unprecedented level of participation, Palestinian women were allowed to participate and publicly recognise the inseparable link between their national liberation struggle and their fight for gender equality (Sharoni, 2016). Unlike the grassroots nature of the first uprising, the Al-Aqsa Intifada became more akin to a guerrilla war (Mall Dibiasi, 2015). With increased militarisation, Israeli military repression, and risks tied to armed struggle, fewer Palestinian women held leadership positions during this period (Sharoni, 2016). Additionally, women's involvement at the grassroots level was limited as organised resistance primarily excluded widespread community participation (Sharoni, 2016; Mall Dibiasi, 2015). This supports my earlier claim that nonviolent resistance is more effective than armed resistance in promoting inclusivity, making it more effective in achieving the Palestinian people's goal of self-determination- not just the Palestinian man's.

Future Resistance in a Shrinking World

This evaluation has outlined four major battlegrounds in the Palestinians' ongoing pursuit of self-determination. While armed resistance has effectively restored dignity and preserved memory, non-violent resistance has been vital in shaping public opinion and advancing women's liberation. Nonetheless, I argue that despite the past necessity of violence, non-violence now holds the potential to supersede it, given its adaptability and inclusivity. It is, however, important to emphasise that both forms of armed and non-violent resistance serve distinct purposes, and there are situations where the use of armed resistance may be deemed necessary.

#StopPrawerPlan

As broadcast television and communication technologies progressed, Said (2000) pondered the implications of a shrinking world for the Palestinian struggle. As Sayigh (1997) notes, the

survival of the Palestinian resistance has hinged on their ability to adjust their tactics at critical moments. I argue that in our era of heightened globalisation, where social media has shrunk the world further than broadcast television did, traditional forms of resistance have the scope to transform further, unlocking the more significant potential for evolved forms of non-violent resistance. The evolution of non-violence has already begun to make its mark in Palestine. Upon the introduction of the Praver Plan, set to displace approximately 40,000 Bedouins from Naqab, young Palestinians turned to digital platforms and Twitter hashtags like #StopPraverPlan and #AngerStrike to raise international awareness about the policy without resorting to violence (Dwonch, 2019). On the internal level, Palestinians across diverse regions, including Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, coordinated independent demonstrations within their localities (Dwonch, 2019). Merely two weeks later, the Israeli Government retracted the Praver Plan bill (Dwonch, 2019), showcasing the potent political influence of social media networks in galvanising a unified Palestinian non-violent movement amid a fragmented societal landscape. This act of non-violent resistance also importantly saw a rise in women's participation, illustrating the potential non-violence has in aiding in several of the battles for self-determination simultaneously due to its inclusivity (Dwonch, 2019; Wortham, 2020).

BDS

The shrinking of the world has not only provided platforms for women's activism but also bolstered non-violent movements like BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions). Launched by a broad coalition, including women-led groups, BDS has transformed the dynamics of resistance against the Israeli occupation (Sharoni, 2016). Now increasingly able to utilise social media to organise and rally support, as the women-led #MeToo and #BLM movements

have done in recent years (Wortham, 2020), BDS offers inclusive spaces for effective non-violent resistance, which can now reach wider audiences overcoming the primary obstacle it had faced in the past (McMahon, 2014). For instance, groups like the women and nonbinary-driven Palestinian Queers for BDS (PQBDS) utilise online platforms to reach global audiences and mobilise solidarity, calling out instances of Israeli pinkwashing to redirect attention to the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian struggle for self-determination (Sharoni, 2016). This digital strategy has resulted in over 100 women and LGBTQIA+ groups (their target audience) supporting the movement's boycotts (BDS, 2022). Social media can significantly enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of non-violent Palestinian resistance, particularly for movements like BDS, which rely on reaching global audiences, suggesting that non-violence is the way forward.

Conclusion

This essay underscores the potential of non-violent resistance in the Palestinian struggle for self-determination, emphasising its inclusivity and adaptability, especially in our digitised era. While armed resistance has historical significance, its masculinised nature often sidelines significant societal groups, primarily women, reinforcing gender inequalities. Non-violent resistance, however, fosters greater participation, addressing the intersectional challenges of national liberation, gender equality, and social justice. The advent of social media has amplified the reach of such movements as BDS, mobilising international solidarity. While violent resistance may remain necessary in specific contexts, the future of Palestinian self-determination likely hinges on increasingly leveraging non-violent strategies, particularly those harnessing digital technologies' power. Ultimately, the most effective

resistance will unite and mobilise diverse individuals and groups towards a common goal, demonstrating flexibility and adaptability amidst changing circumstances.

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