

SCTIW Review

Journal of the Society for Contemporary Thought and the Islamicate World

ISSN: 2374-9288

September 6, 2016

Marwan Darweish and Andrew Rigby, *Popular Protest in Palestine: The History and Uncertain Future of Unarmed Resistance*, Pluto Press, 2015, 226 pp., \$28.00 US (pbk), ISBN 9780745335094.

Popular Protest in Palestine presents a rich body of fieldwork that Marwan Darweish and Andrew Rigby collected between 2011 and 2013. The book, however, is not restricted to the contemporary era—since the 1980s, both authors have followed the trajectory of unarmed Palestinian resistance and the role it has played toward ending the Israeli occupation. In addition, they make use of historical documents, Darweish's lived experience of displacement, and oral histories to examine the historical roots and continuities of Palestinian resistance across a large span of space and time. In my view, the book constitutes a significant contribution to a burgeoning field of study, which attempts to understand the diverse aspects and incredibly wide range of longstanding Palestinian forms of popular unarmed resistance.

I believe that there remains prevalent in both academia and in public discourse in North America, a false belief that if Palestinians would resort to unarmed struggle, then the American populace would support the Palestinian struggle towards self-determination. To this baseless notion, this book offers a resounding rebuke. Palestinians have been engaging in unarmed resistance for over 100 years, most of which goes unnoticed and unmarked in American and Canadian discourses. The authors' comprehensive study of the subject is therefore much needed and is of interest to anyone who wants to understand the struggle of the Palestinians in particular and the complexities of civil resistance in general.

Building on their long established personal and professional relationships and contacts, Darweish and Rigby conducted over a hundred interviews with Palestinian, Israeli, and international activists across Palestine and Israel. Their main goal in the book is to gain a better understanding of why it is that activists today, as compared to the 1980s and early 1990s, are no longer optimistic about the effectiveness of unarmed civil resistance. The authors draw from the growing literature on civil resistance and nonviolent action to explain the reasons behind this trajectory of losing hope.

Darweish and Rigby work with a range of concepts and analytical insights from this literature. I will forgo their discussion on the conditions that are necessary for the emergence and sustenance of collective popular resistance and the conditions necessary for that resistance to take a non-violent form (8-10). More interesting and critical, I think, are the four underlying assumptions of their work and the different types of non-violent action they outline. Succinctly put, the four assumptions claim that oppressive and repressive regimes

cannot exercise their power without a certain amount of obedience from large segments of the population; civil resistance can hence gain leverage over the superior power of such regimes by turning these segments against the regime; the most effective strategy is to locate and expand cleavages between/within the different groups that make up the regime, creating internal conflicts and thus raising the costs of maintaining its oppressive order; furthermore, civil resistance can create a “chain of nonviolence” where intermediaries and groups outside the regime can exert pressure on it, forcing the regime to change or causing its collapse (6-7). The key point here is that civil resistance works because it can exert either direct or indirect pressure (or both) on a regime without resorting to physical force, since such confrontations always favor the regime.

This brings up a second set of concepts, which concern the authors’ employment of five types of nonviolent action, each serving a specific strategic purpose. Generally speaking, “Symbolic” and “Polemical” actions challenge the occupier’s symbolic universe, while “Offensive,” “Defensive,” and “Constructive” actions target the occupier’s violent structures and orders (7-8). In tracing popular Palestinian resistance from the period of Ottoman rule in the late 1880s to the present, the authors illustrate how this resistance has run the gamut of all these types of nonviolent actions. A few examples can provide an idea of what each type of action entails.

Symbolic and polemical resistance often involves boycott actions and the utilization of various media outlets. These actions date back to the early parts of the twentieth century. For example, in response to the 1917 Balfour declaration, various items appeared in the Palestinian press urging the population to resist the establishment of a Jewish state on the land of Palestine, and in 1920, a conference was held in Haifa to reject and oppose the Balfour Declaration [polemical resistance]. When Balfour visited Jerusalem in 1925, “he was met by black flags and a complete boycott of the occasion by the Palestinians” [symbolic resistance] (16). Jumping forward to Palestinian resistance against the Separation Wall in contemporary times, we find activists in Bil’in who campaign through various new media outlets to create awareness and develop local and international alliances in their struggle against land confiscation [polemical resistance] (89). The boycott campaigns against Israeli products have also been a staple of Palestinian resistance, and they have occurred in small-scale campaigns [symbolic violence] long before they became centralized, developed, and advanced through the now internationally known Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions Movement (BDS) (83-84).

The most common examples of offensive resistance involve activities such as strikes and demonstrations. The Revolt of 1936-39 is the most famous example in Palestinian history (21-26), but other cases abound, most evident in the mass strikes of the First Intifada (61) and the large scale, media savvy, demonstrations of the Second Intifada (76-79). Defensive resistance seeks to preserve the ability of the occupied people to survive, a recent example of which involves “the practice of activists [often internationals or Israeli activists] accompanying Palestinians as they go about their daily lives so that...they can deter assaults by settlers and the Israeli occupation forces” (84).

Constructive resistance creates alternative institutions that embody the free and unoccupied world the resistance is striving to create. One of the more outstanding examples of constructive resistance is found in the village of Battir, which has been threatened with complete destruction since the 1940s but still survives today. In 1949, as a result of the Israel-Jordan bilateral armistice agreement, Battir fell within the “no-man’s-land” strip, and was therefore subject to evacuation and destruction. Under the leadership of Hasan Mustafa, a prominent leader in the village, the villagers lobbied the Jordanians and convinced them

that their village ought to be moved inside the Jordanian line. But until the Jordanians could secure this in an agreement, the villagers had to fend off Israeli attempts to destroy the village. Most of Battir's inhabitants, at the outbreak of the 1948 War, had fled to a neighboring village in fear of an Israeli attack. Mustafa knew fully well that if the Israeli government had decreed Battir an empty village, it would destroy it. So in addressing this danger, "Mustafa organised young men to go and light lamps in the village houses at night, put out washing lines, make as much noise as possible, and generally...give the impression that the village was fully inhabited" (30). These simple acts of resistance held off Israel long enough for the agreement to be reached and Battir was spared destruction.

The challenges of isolation and separation, however, began to take their toll on the village, and so under Mustafa's leadership, they responded by lobbying the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA) to help them build roads and create various community programs to improve irrigation, education and vocational training (31). Most recently in 2005, large tracts of land in Battir came under threat of confiscation for the purposes of constructing the Separation Wall. Again, the community lobbied the Israel Nature and Parks Authority and the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to protect those lands, leading to a ruling in 2013 by the Israeli High Court in their favor. In 2014, UNESCO recognized Battir as a World Heritage Site, which will make it more difficult for Israel to annex their territory in the future (33). In short, Battir's story illustrates the continuity of Palestinian resistance over time and the ways in which, under certain circumstances, it can be successful. Certainly, it is difficult to pinpoint precisely these circumstances and even more difficult to replicate them on a large scale. For Darweish and Rigby, among those complex circumstances, the outstanding leadership of Mustafa in securing the village's existence stands out. And this leads me to my main question for the authors, which revolves around the notion of leadership.

In evaluating the prospects of a mass movement of popular resistance, the authors place emphasis on the necessity for a strong, committed, moral, and ethical leadership. This is certainly understandable, and is often highlighted in writing on decolonial struggles, most famously in Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*¹ and in Rashid Khalidi's *Palestinian Identity*² for the case of Palestine in particular. The argument goes, that in order for the popular/mass/civil resistance (whether armed or unarmed) to succeed, a strong leadership is necessary to direct the people's actions towards the high ideals of human freedom and national liberation. Without such leadership the movement will recede and fade out of its own natural volition at best, or devolve into a brutal power-seeking movement at worst. Darweish and Rigby do not sway from this viewpoint and they work within its boundaries.

However, this is perhaps a time in the history of decolonial resistance that activists and ordinary people no longer have faith in the very notion of "leadership" itself. This was a common theme during the Arab Uprisings, and I would argue, it is a theme that has been present in Palestine throughout its history and is perhaps the most prevalent theme in Palestinian grassroots resistance today. This can indeed be seen in two cases examined in *Popular Protest in Palestine*. First, the authors discuss the Gaza Youth Break Out (GYBO) movement as an example of how Palestinian activists, despite all hardships and failures, can still rise up and produce a defiant discourse and stance, such as that seen in GYBO's powerful manifesto (173-175). But the authors do not deeply explore how GYBO's

¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

² Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

manifesto begins with an unequivocal rejection of all traditional leadership, and in the process challenges the very idea that a leadership, as an organizing force, is necessary. Yes, it is important to emphasize that GYBO's activities petered out due to the Palestinian population's exhaustion (175), but it is also critical to examine how their activities, in their decentralized form, constituted an attempt to rethink politics and leadership itself. This is even more evident in the BDS movement.

The authors present an excellent set of similarities and differences between the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa and Palestine (163-168). I do not necessarily disagree with their specific points, most notably their observation that the fundamental difference between the two contexts is the unwavering support of successive US governments for Israel. However, the last judgment they pronounce on the BDS movement in Palestine is in haste: they claim that BDS in particular and Palestinian popular movements in general, lack an "organic leadership"—a leadership born of, by, and for the people "within or outside the occupied territories with the will or capacity to coordinate any sustained movement of popular protest comparable to that which brought about change in South Africa" (168). The main issue I have is that it is only in hindsight, in knowing that a movement was successful (relatively speaking of course), that the movement then seems to have a coherence and unity throughout its story of resistance. Such a viewpoint, however, does not often prevail during the processes of resistance themselves. In South Africa, there were many internal political divisions, differences over tactics and strategies, divergences over the question of violence, and seemingly insurmountable local and global obstacles. It is only in hindsight that we now view those moments of absolute uncertainty as having this coherent and united organic leadership.

I am not arguing here that Palestinian resistance will succeed in the exact same way that South African resistance did, but my main point is that scholars should avoid equating the uncertainty of Palestinian resistance today with a "lacking" of some element or another, in this case an organic leadership. I think that one of the more important aspects of Palestinian resistance today is its challenge to the very notion of leadership, which makes me hesitant to get behind the idea that the main task ahead for Palestinians is to forge a coherent and unified leadership that gives clear directives to the masses. This idea constituted the mantle of decolonial struggles in the second half of the twentieth century. And many activists today have reached the conclusion that this idea has serious limitations in that it centralizes power within a specific leadership group, which then refuses to share that power in the aftermath of those struggles. The challenge to leadership cannot be brushed aside as naïve, inconsequential, or as somehow lacking direction, but must itself be analyzed if we are to better understand Palestinian resistance today and its future prospects. Indeed, it seems to me that the continuous failures of successive traditional forms of leadership have contributed to the loss of hope that Darweish and Rigby want to explain. I would be very interested to see how the authors would address and investigate the question of leadership in Palestinian activism today. I think this would add an important dimension to an already impressive, rich, and insightful body of work that they have put forth in this book.

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Citation Information

Ayyash, Mark Muhannad, Review of *Popular Protest in Palestine: The History and Uncertain Future of Unarmed Resistance*, *SCTIW Review*, September 6, 2016.
<http://sctiw.org/sctiwreviewarchives/archives/1202>.

ISSN: 2374-9288