

## Palestinian Youth And Civilian Resistance

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### Abstract

The main aim of the current study is to explore civilian resistance as perceived by Palestinian youth. Index of a 19-item scale used to measure responses that was developed by the researchers, was administered to three hundred and eighty youths (196 males and 184 females) in the West Bank during the 2017 stratifiedly selected sample. The findings demonstrate that youth reported moderate attitudes (M 3.19 SD 0.35) towards civilian resistance as a Palestinian strategy to shake off the Israeli occupation. The study observed that almost all of the Palestinian youth surveyed (63.8%) had a moderate perception of civilian resistance. Current statistics revealed that gender, place of residence, and community affiliation were significant predictors for the perception of civilian resistance. Implications of the findings and directions for future empirical research were discussed.

**Keywords:** Civilian resistance, Palestine, youth, culture, occupation, Intifada.

### Introduction

Since 1917, the Palestinian people have used various forms of struggle against the British colonization as well as the Zionist movement since their first attempt to control Palestine and turn it into a national homeland for the Jews. In the beginning, the Palestinians adopted the option of armed struggle, but in 1936, they developed their means and staged a popular strike, holding national conferences, submitting petitions, organizing strikes, and negotiating with the Mandate authorities.

Since the beginning of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Palestinian people have always been fighting and resisting the Israelis. This resistance evolved over sixty years of struggle and in each stage utilized different techniques and methods till another mode of Palestinian resistance would emerge in 2005 called "civilian resistance" (Banat, 2010, 2015A).

In the years 2000-2005 and at the end of the Al-Aqsa Intifada (uprising), a new option had begun in the Palestinian arena, which is the option of popular resistance, after the Palestinian people suffered great losses as a result of adopting the option of armed struggle. Through this

form of struggle, they tried to make use of two important options: the first is the experience of Gandhi in India against the British occupation; the second is the experience of the African National Congress in South Africa against the Apartheid Regime.

## **Background**

Historically, civil resistance has played a powerful role in national liberation struggles in human history. The modern form of civilian resistance was popularized and proven to be effective by the Indian leader, Gandhi, in his efforts to gain independence from the British between the years 1917-47; as well as by the campaigns against apartheid in South Africa, especially before 1961, and during the period of 1983-94 (Sharp, 2003; Muller, 2014).

When reviewing the history of popular resistance, one must need mention Henry David Thoreau, one of the pioneers to write about popular resistance, and the first one to use the term "civil disobedience" in his famous article in which he protested slavery repression and persecution in the US-led war against Mexico (Paulson, 2005; Sharp & Gonzalez, 2013).

There is no precise definition of the concept of "resistance", but it can be viewed as a tool used by the weak to confront those who are stronger than them in order to attain his rights, freedom or preserve his dignity. The intellectual, Azmi Bishara, sees it as “a human movement more than an act of physical reaction.” He also indicates that its linguistic origin in the law shows that for every individual, there is a reaction or resistance to friction or gravity, for example, the violence of resistance in its simplest layers is actually a secondary act of violence, and it is a reaction to the first original occupation violent act (Bishara, 2009).

When viewing the political dictionary, we found a number of names that are used to express nonviolent resistance like the power of truth, peaceful protest, peaceful resistance, peaceful civil resistance, non-military resistance, non-militarized insurrection, civil disobedience, popular action, popular resistance, nonviolent resistance, nonviolence, struggle for nonviolence, and peaceful resistance (Sharp's Dictionary of Power and Struggle, 2011).

The concept of the power of truth relates to the power of the spirit and the power of love; Gandhi calls it “Satya Gharha” and it rules out the use of violence because man is incapable of knowing the absolute truth; therefore, he does not deserve punishment. However, it seems right to a person what seems wrong to the other. Ghandi calls it “The power of love”, where

he concludes from his experience that the persuasion of the truth is not through the use of violence against the opponent, but by blaming the error of sight and compassion, and patience which means personal suffering. As a result, his doctrine came to mean the showing of truth, not by causing suffering to the opponent, but in fact by showing self-suffering (Sharp, 2003; Paulson, 2005).

The sociologists and politicians have tried to define the concept of nonviolence. According to Sorokon, nonviolence is a peaceful and calm behavior that is inclined towards understanding, affection and harmony with others, and avoids force and conflict with adversaries (Mahatma Gandhi, 1997). However, Sharp (2003) argues that nonviolence is a civilized practice that requires the party that adopts to resolve its problems and conflicts with others to adopt humane and peaceful methods based on conciliation and appeasement, and to relinquish some rights in order to resolve disputes to achieve their ambitions and the interests of the conflicting parties without resorting to violence as an option to solve problems and crises (Muller, 2014).

Historically, Palestinians started to use civilian resistance strategy in order to shake off the Israeli occupation in the First Intifada in 1987 and widely in 2005. The first peaceful protest against the construction of the Apartheid Wall in the village of Badrus in 2003 took place in a protest demonstration, which joined about 110 people. The experience moved to a number of villages where the Apartheid Wall was being erected, such as Bil'in, Ni'lin, Ma'asarah, the Prophet Saleh, and Kufr Qaddum (Sheikh, 2012).

The Palestinian people have created new means of popular resistance, most notably is organizing protests and using the method of legal resistance. They were able to persuade the United Nations to adopt a disapproval stance against the construction of the wall. The International Court of Justice issued in 2004 its disapproval verdict to this effect (Sheikh, 2012).

The Popular Struggle Coordination Committee (PSCC) is a grassroots initiative formed by prominent activists in the popular committees around the West Bank and across the Palestinian political spectrum. The PSCC is an independent initiative, not affiliated with a single political faction. The popular committees organizing model is rooted in a tradition of Palestinian nonviolent mobilization. The PSCC was established in 2008 in order to facilitate

fruitful communication between different popular committees throughout the West Bank (Sheikh, 2012).

The strategy of PSCC were highlighting the military repression of ordinary civilians through civic and grassroots mobilization; it also promotes human rights, sovereignty, and an end to the Israeli occupation by encouraging the implementation of international law through nonviolent resistance using different tactics of which mainly are weekly demonstrations and marches in various villages, tree planting, and tents solidarity (Nazzal, 2010).

Palestinian activists also built Palestinian villages in the form of figures that mimiced the Palestinian villages that were destroyed and its inhabitants displaced, on lands threatened by confiscation such as the village of Bab al-Shams and the village of Bab al-Karama (Hasan, 2007).

Furthermore, they staged sit-ins and faced in a non-violent manner with their bodies and bare chests the bulldozers that tried to uproot olive trees. They also implemented economic boycott of Israeli products, especially settlement goods. They held demonstrations every Friday in a number of villages, Nabi Saleh, Bil'in, Ni'lin, Ma'asara, and Kufr Qaddum (Hasan, 2007; Nazzal, 2010). The minister, Ziad abu Ein, was killed by Israelis during his participation in civilian resistance manifestation in 2014.

Civilian resistance is a popular topic of debate in conflicted societies in general, and in the Palestinian question in particular. Several articles and studies, which have been published, researched this topic as a multidimensional phenomenon, as well as addressed it theoretically and through applied research. In a recent study, Mubaid (2012) found out that the Palestinian people lacked consensus on the use of one method of struggle; however they achieved positive results in the use of peaceful resistance in a number of villages through implementing boycott and civil disobedience. The study of Sheikh (2012) concluded that the Palestinian people are inclined towards peaceful popular resistance in accordance with the results of the field study conducted on a sample representative of the various sectors of the Palestinian people.

Moreover, Nazzal (2010) concluded that peaceful resistance is a kind of struggle, as it tried to change the misconception among the Palestinian people, who considered this type of struggle as a surrender. On the other hand, Kreuer (2008) indicated that there is no simple answer to

examine the question of how young Palestinians today negotiate resistance and mobility from different perspectives, since youth in Palestine were not just divided over the big dilemma between the collective, national duty of resisting the Israeli occupation and the individual, and personal aspirations of mobility. They are also at variance about many smaller issues and details related to the forms and aims of both; and the ways in which these dilemmas are negotiated seem to be as diverse as the individuals involved.

Furthermore, Hasan (2007) argued that the option of nonviolent popular resistance is not a new option for the Palestinian people, since this type of struggle has also earned international sympathy for the Palestinian people and provided them with supports in kind as well as moral support. At the same time, it revealed the ugly image of the occupier in the international community. The study of Stephan (2003) concluded that official-level negotiations in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are insufficient; a strategy of sustained, nonviolent direct action involving all parties, with adequate moral and material support from the international community, can help break the cycle of violence and pave the way to a just peace.

To sum it all up, the previous literature recommended the significance of the adoption of the nonviolent resistance option in confronting the Zionist occupier and uncovering its crimes. They considered the nonviolent struggle to be the most effective means of salvation from the occupier.

## **Purpose And Scope**

The objectives of the study were to identify the civilian resistance in the Palestinian society as perceived by the youths; to explore the factors that can affect their perception; and then to open new prospects for further studies in the related field. The study addressed new and important topics in the history of Palestinian struggle under the on-going Israeli occupation; the study, considered to be the first and leading of its kind best based on the authors' knowledge, hinges upon the youths that played a pioneering role in being the leaders and impetus for liberation revolutions.

## **Hypothesis**

Based on the reviewed literature, the set objectives, questions and variables of the study, the following hypothesis is proposed:

There are no statistical significant differences at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$  in the civilian resistance as perceived by the Palestinian youth according to their gender, religion, place of residency, and community affiliation.

Delimiting variables for the scope of the study was based on participants' demographic characteristics which included gender, religion, place of residency, and community affiliation, in addition to the civilian resistance index.

## Methods And Design

The study is quantitative in nature using the questionnaire that is appropriate for the exploratory nature of the research. The target population consisted of Palestinian youth (15-30 years of age) in the West Bank during 2017, which included 629,883 youths in all: 321,928 males to 307,955 females (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016). The overall sample comprised of three hundred and eighty-four youths (196 males and 184 females) at the West Bank stratifiedly selected based on gender. The sample size was calculated using the sampling web, <http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>, sample size calculator, with a margin error of 0.05.

The perception of civilian resistance was evaluated using an index of a 19-item scale developed by the researchers. A 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neither, disagree, strongly disagree) was used to measure the responses, and the participants were requested to complete the questionnaire in the West Bank. The sampling survey instrument sought background information such as the participants' gender, religion, place of residency, and community affiliation.

Validation of the instrument proceeded in two distinct phases. The initial phase involved a group of referees and expert arbitrators who provided comments on the tool. The second phase involved the implementation of a pilot study (N=30) to validate the survey using exploratory factor analysis. Factor loading for all items exceeded 0.60 (0.62 to 0.82), which implied that those items were suitable to measure each item of the study instrument among the sampled youth. The reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha and Guttman split-half coefficients to ascertain reliability and consistency of the survey. Cronbach's Alpha and Guttman split-half for the survey instrument was 0.87 and 0.86, respectively, indicating excellent reliability and consistency.

The demographic breakdown of the participants was as follows: gender, religion, place of residency, and community affiliation. In total, the sample comprised three hundred and eighty-four youths. The males represented 51.6% of the participants, while the remaining 48.4% were females. Majority were Muslims (88.7%) compared to 11.3% Christians. Half (51.8%) of the youths were from the rural places, 30.8% urban, and 17.4% from refugee camps; only 29.7% of the participants classified themselves as active community members.

Data was analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). The questionnaire items were rated on a 1–5 Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree). Thus, the highest score indicated a strong perception of civilian resistance. Descriptive statistics gauged civilian resistance scores among the sampled population. The following statistical techniques were measured: T.test, One way analysis of variance, Tukey test, Cronbach's Alpha, Guttman Split-Half Coefficient, and Factor Analysis. The mean score of civilian resistance scale as perceived by the sample of three hundred and eighty-four participants was moderate (M 3.19 SD 0.35). The study observed that almost all of the Palestinian youth surveyed (63.8%) had a moderate perception of civilian resistance.

Furthermore, the findings revealed the indicators of the civilian resistance as perceived by the youths ranked in descending order as follows; defining popular peaceful resistance topic is necessary for Palestinians (M 4.04 SD 0.63); as a Palestinian I am concerned about knowing popular peaceful resistance (M 3.87 SD 0.71). The youth indicated that some people behave illogically when they speak of popular peaceful resistance topic (M 3.79 SD 0.64); and dealing with popular peaceful resistance should be approached carefully (M 3.75 SD 0.95). Moreover, the youth emphasized that everyone has the right to adopt appropriate resistance approach even if the people view it in other ways (M 3.69 SD 0.96); popular peaceful resistance is a vague concept in the Palestinian minds (M 3.68 SD 0.63); popular peaceful resistance increased the sympathy of world public opinion with the Palestinian issue (M 3.65 SD 0.69); popular peaceful resistance is an effective strategy for retrieving Palestinian national rights (M 3.64 SD 0.95). Besides, the youth also indicated that popular peaceful resistance increased the sympathy of world public opinion with the Palestinian issue (M 3.61 SD 0.79), since it highlighted the fair Palestinian cause in international forums (M 3.59 SD 0.84).

Moreover, the study investigated demographic breakdown of the civilian resistance among the youth with the aim of identifying differences. The findings revealed that religion and

place of residency do not indicate any significant difference. However, it was found that gender and community affiliation are significant variables. In relation to gender, the differences favored males (M 3.30 SD 0.25) compared to (M 3.09 SD 0.40) for females. T.test value was (-6.077 P=0.000).

Finally, differences were found in youths' community affiliation, which favored active community members (M 3.25 SD 0.28) compared to (M 3.05 SD 0.45) for inactive community members. T.test value was (-4.462 P=0.000).

## **Discussion**

The findings of the study revealed that the Palestinian youth experienced a moderate perception of civilian resistance. Palestinian experience under the Israeli occupation was and is still the most tragic one after sixty-eight years of the Nakba, which is a key date in the history of Palestinians, in terms of the victims and violence it has left behind as a result of acts of killing, injury, handicap, physical and psychological torture through house demolition, confiscation of lands and water, arrests, raids, pursuits and other forms of violence. Palestinians have always faced the most brutal occupier that history had ever known (Sanbar, 2001; Banat, 2010).

The civilian resistance has been developed within the framework of the Palestinian struggle to defeat the Israeli occupation. Accordingly, the resistance strategy holds fast to a fixed title which indicates that as long as there is occupation, there is resistance. This simply means its continuation on the long run besides other forms of resistance until the expulsion of occupation. It is certain that the Palestinian people cannot stand fold handed and do nothing towards the crimes of the occupation and turn its back in a sign of surrender? Self defense is part of human composition and temperament. Anyone who traces the history of the world will find that response to aggression by all forms of resistance is a subjective historical phenomenon that does not relate to one people than the other (Qasem, 2004).

According to the study's findings, the males scored a higher perception of civilian resistance than females. The above findings are considered normal in the Palestinian society which has conservative customs and traditions, male patriarchal dominance and social upbringing which is based on gender inequality. Patriarchal ideology is deeply rooted in the Palestinian society, where the notions of father and brother are prevalent. According to these notions, male



dominance supports the structure that keeps men in positions of power, authority and control (Barakat, 1993; Banat, 2014, 2105B). This creates a larger space for males compared to females in relation to the nature of social ranks, roles, freedom, responsibility, large scale engagement in community, which increased their participation in the civilian resistance.

The study also revealed that religion and place of residency do not denote any significant difference in the perception of the civilian resistance among the Palestinian youths. This implies that the perception of the civilian resistance is not actually influenced by these variables and is more likely to be affected by other factors other than religion and place of residency.

Finally, findings revealed that active community youth members have a strong perception of civilian resistance. Basically; civilian resistance is based on the interaction and contact between community members. Civilian resistance takes place within a community context, where people engage in civilian activities in many formal and informal civilian networks. Forms of participation are determined by issues arising within a community, a place, and include its culture, norms, values, institutions (Cicognani et al., 2008). Considering the degree of involvement in civilian activities, results of descriptive studies conducted in several nations in the last 20 years have provided a fairly consistent picture of increasing apathy toward traditional politics among youths, but also showed evidence of interest in a range of no mainstream forms of civil involvement, including voluntary activity (Verba et al., 1995; Youniss et al., 2002) as cited in Cicognani et al. (2008).

## **Conclusion And Recommendations**

Civilian resistance is the practice of achieving goals by civil groups in order to challenge a particular power, force, policy or regime without using violence; its forms of action may include, demonstrations, vigils and petitions, strikes, go-slows, boycotts or any related tools. Accordingly, the Palestinian resistance of the Israeli occupation is considered a natural response. Civilian resistance is one of the legitimate resistance means; in fact, the occupation conditions are the reason behind having such kind of resistance. Thus it is illogical to blame the Palestinian people, who are the victims, for what they are doing? They are only defending themselves. It is the right of the occupied people in all laws and jurisdictions, whether heavenly or earthly, to defend themselves, their holies, homeland and people, and have the right as well to use all forms of struggle to achieve their independence. With more focus, we

will find that Palestinian people starting with the family, school and the larger society respectively raise the youths on an authentic culture of struggle and resistance focused on shaking off the Israeli occupation; this culture grows inside the youths without any barriers or hesitations. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. To address the Palestinian curriculum with civilian resistance concept as an important component in Palestinian question.
2. Defining civilian resistance concept is necessary in the Palestinian society using different media outlet.
3. Further studies to establish a clearer understanding of civilian resistance in the Palestinian society is recommended.
4. A cross-sectional study would be interesting for more understanding of civilian resistance in different cultures.

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