

Palestinian armed resistance: the absent critique

Claudia Saba

Abstract

Advocates for Palestinian rights who operate outside the Fatah-Hamas binary have emerged as a third political tendency in recent years. Palestinian and international activists have advanced an alternative framework through which to act on the Palestine question. Their campaigns, consisting of education, advocacy and direct action, have managed to advance a rights-based understanding of the Palestinian plight. One area that global Palestine activism has not delved into is that of offering a critique of Palestinian armed resistance, as practiced primarily by groups in Gaza. Drawing on the public positions of prominent Palestinian commentators and on media statements made by organizations within the movement, as well as my own participation in Palestine advocacy, I propose that activists have largely evaded a critique of the armed strategy. This paper explores possible reasons for this and argues that activists should engage on this issue. I explicate why this is a legitimate, necessary and feasible task.

Keywords: Israel; Palestine; Hamas; Fatah; Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS); structural hole theory; transformative politics; nonviolence; social movements.

Introduction

Palestine solidarity work is often understood as separate to Palestinian politics and is treated as auxiliary to the actions of Palestinian activists. This paper argues, alternatively, that activism by internationals and activism by Palestinians has come to embody a loose but coherent social movement that is central to the advancement of Palestinian rights in a way that extends beyond solidarity. Palestinian and international activists, although operating under myriad organizations with varying stakes in seeing a resolution to the Israel-Palestine impasse, have, to a considerable extent, coalesced under an umbrella of views about the conflict and a set of conditions required to resolve it. This convergence is noted *inter alia* by the fact that a large number of both international and Palestinian groups have signed up to the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions campaign (BDS) and accepted its principles. Through BDS and other advocacy campaigns activists have made strides into raising awareness about the nature of Israeli aggression and expansionism by reaching out directly to international publics, bound less by the limitations that formal political actors face in the diplomatic arena. With the growing influence of global Palestine activism come responsibilities and opportunities. I argue that among

those responsibilities/opportunities is that of starting a serious debate around the role of armed resistance to Israel and how armed action fits or clashes with a vision for a just resolution to the conflict. While Palestinian agency will remain the principal determinant of political strategy, Palestinian and international activists operating outside the Fatah-Hamas framework can make a useful contribution to the Palestinian national dialogue in this regard.

A debate on armed resistance is urgent because of the danger involved with its continuation. Successive assaults on Gaza have increased in deadliness and there is no sign that regional or international states will take action to ameliorate the lives of Palestinians in Gaza or even to prevent matters from deteriorating further. The assault on Gaza in 2014 caused a far larger casualty rate than that of the other two major Israeli assaults on the Palestinians in the previous five years. In terms of intensity, bomb tonnage and rate of killing, the most recent war was far deadlier than even the Second Palestinian Intifada. Indeed the 2014 summer war on Gaza was the most intense assault by Israel since the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967. Furthermore, it was accompanied by a dangerous violent rhetoric in the Israeli public sphere that included calls for genocide, some of which came from Israeli lawmakers (Abunimah, 2014, Mondoweiss, 2014). At the center of Israel's argument for such violence was the need to respond to Palestinian fire, despite the latter's impotence in inflicting serious losses on Israel. The Palestinian armed resistance strategy is therefore extremely costly and, as I will discuss further down, hopelessly ineffective *vis-a-vis* the occupation.

This paper is organized into three parts. First, based on research carried out for my PhD dissertation in which I studied thirty groups involved in Palestine advocacy operating in the west and inside Palestine, I propose an understanding of global Palestine activism as constituting a movement owned by both internationals and Palestinians. As I will show, this argument goes against some of what has been written by popular Palestinian commentators in their critique of western solidarity, which viewed solidarity as exogenous to Palestinian liberation politics. My perspective on the nature of the movement, as a joint Palestinian-international tendency, will be supported by a number of empirical considerations.

After having established a certain strategic mandate for Palestine advocacy work, the second part of the paper demonstrates the movement's discursive positioning in relation to Palestinian armed resistance. This is done by looking at discourse generated by social movement organizations (SMOs) during and after the 2014 war on Gaza. In July of that year, Israel launched a massive 51-day military assault on 1.8 million Palestinians trapped in Gaza, killing over 2100 people, wounding over 11,000 and rendering 100,000 homeless. Its victims, mostly noncombatants, included some 500 children, patients lying in hospital beds, the elderly and the disabled. Israeli and American politicians and the mainstream media of their countries framed Israel's assault as self-defense against Hamas, whose rockets, we were told, were Israel's target while the lives extinguished were acceptable collateral damage (Khalidi, 2014).

Like many others, I was deeply distressed by this "war", if that is the right term to describe the confrontation given the obscene disparity between the two sides. Thinking back on people that I had met during a trip to Gaza two years prior and remembering how war weary they were even then, I felt a great sadness for their plight and wondered how much say they had in the confrontation that was underway. How would those people, already devastated by previous attacks, hold up under another major military campaign? Did they really all support Hamas's defiant stand against Israel's assault even as it drew more fire? Or would some of those people, at least, have preferred a laying down of arms by the armed groups if this held the possibility of ending Israeli attacks? Certainly, the reaction on Twitter that came from Gazans (the lucky few with mobile connections) was one of defiance. At the same time, prominent Palestinian commentators in the west appeared to support the armed resistance. Through an examination of press statements from five major Palestine-specific SMOs during and in the aftermath of the war, I demonstrate that there was no public critique of the resistance by pro-Palestine activists. This evidence is supplemented by a number of public statements made by Palestinian commentators active in the movement during and before the war.

The third part of the paper discusses the merits and problems of the absent critique. Should Palestinian activists and their international counterparts offer a critique of the armed Palestinian resistance? What are the implications of either doing or not doing so? How would such a critique be received by the Palestinian community? In approaching these questions I draw on network theory and a relational analysis of social movements for transformative politics.

Defining the movement

Fatah controls the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and its post-Oslo peace process offspring, the Palestinian Authority (PA), while Hamas determines how Palestinians respond to Israeli aggression from Gaza. The two tendencies of Fatah and Hamas whose respective methods are those of realpolitik and armed resistance both differ from the methods of Palestinian and international activists operating outside that binary. The third tendency, which emerged in discernable form around the year 2001, may be studied in distinction to the two traditional actors. Moreover, all three tendencies may be studied as relational and collective movements rather than as monoliths since political identities and strategy alter as networks and opportunities shift (Tilly, 1997).

The new activist tendency is often studied from the perspective of international activists who naturally - and perhaps out of deference to the people they support - regard the international component of advocacy on Palestine as separate from the work of Palestinian activists. This separation, on occasion, has been discussed by Palestinian activists. For example, in 2006 a group of prominent Palestinian activists in the diaspora wrote a piece in which they emphasized the need "to draw a distinction between the solidarity movement and the

Palestinian national movement" claiming that "rebuilding the Palestinian national movement is a task of Palestinians in exile, not of the solidarity movement" (Hanieh et al., 2006). This conceptualization, which separates the role of internationals from that of Palestinians, misses that many Palestinians have been organizing independently of Fatah and Hamas and have increasingly preferred to collaborate with international activists. In the diaspora community, Palestinians can be found within the so-called solidarity organizations that have positioned themselves as independent of Palestinian factional politics. However, it is not only such "western" Palestinians that operate independently from traditional actors. In the OPT, mobilization by the popular village committees, the youth movement of 2011, and the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign have also charted an independent path and are also working in conjunction with international activists.

The popular village committees have been holding weekly protests across a number of villages affected by Israel's illegal wall since 2002 and have sought to publicize their campaigns via international solidarity groups. Mindful that Israel is unlikely to respond to their weekly protests, their intended audiences are international publics whom they hope to win over to their cause. This means that collaboration with solidarity groups to attend and spread information about their protests is of central importance to their campaign (Saba, 2014). At the same time the committees have deliberately avoided alignment with any of the political parties. Similarly, the Independent Youth Movement (al-Harak al-Shababi), which sprang up in March 2011, was expressly opposed to cooptation by Hamas or Fatah, instead emphasizing cooperation across borders, both with Palestinians on the "outside" and with international solidarity groups (Hoigilt, 2013: 355). Moreover, both these groups of Palestinian activists support BDS, an inherently outward-oriented initiative whose very success is contingent on international collaboration. What results, therefore, is a movement that is a totality comprised of international and Palestinian input and engaged in collaborative work that extends beyond mere solidarity.

Conceptualizing global Palestine activism as a joint international-Palestinian effort has implications for how the movement is practiced. As a Palestinian myself, I view the recent internationalized grassroots-led tendency within the long Palestinian struggle as representing a phase distinct from previous predominantly nationalist and Islamist expressions of the cause. The new movement does not focus on state making or on religious claims to Palestine. Instead its campaigns have sought to highlight the human rights abuses that Palestinians endure, expose the colonial and apartheid nature of Israel's domination and campaign to end those practices. Therefore it is analytically useful from a macro-historical perspective to assess the new movement as competing with the main traditional actors within Palestinian contentious politics, namely Fatah and Hamas.

It is important to recognize the significant role played by Palestinians in shaping the new tendency of Palestine activism. Based on research into the movement's origins and development, I have identified significant Palestinian involvement

at the foundational, leadership and participatory levels (Saba, 2014). Based on interviews with leaders of Palestine solidarity organizations in the United States, Britain, Ireland, France and Italy, both in the context of how those organizations came to be set up and in their mode of collaboration with groups inside the OPT, it became evident that internationals have heavily relied on the input of Palestinians for their political framing of the conflict. Indeed, the very birth of the current paradigm of solidarity may be traced to the founding of the SMO the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) by a handful of mostly Palestinian activists at the outset of the Second Palestinian Intifada (Seitz, 2003, Saba, 2014). The ISM was pivotal in changing the way international supporters related to the Israel-Palestine conflict, away from the paradigm of "encouraging dialogue" between Palestinians and Israelis and towards the paradigm of standing squarely with the oppressed Palestinian side. Likewise, another Palestinian SMO, the Palestinian Campaign for the Cultural and Academic Boycott of Israel (PACBI), explicitly asked supporters to depart from "peace-industry" initiatives so common in the wake of the 1993 Oslo peace process and instead support Palestinian academic and cultural institutions directly "without requiring them to partner with Israeli counterparts as an explicit or implicit condition for such support" (PACBI, 2004). It was Palestinian agency, therefore, with its demand that internationals recognize the imbalance of power between Israelis and Palestinians, that set the tone for the movement which began to emerge.

Palestinian influence on the tone and politics of solidarity extended into the networks that evolved out of early campaigns. An important consequence of solidarity visits organized to Palestine through groups such as the ISM and Association France Palestine Solidarité, which also played a prominent part in that early period, came in the form of new networks in the west that introduced the Palestine issue onto the agendas of other progressive and leftist causes (Saba, 2014). Hence groups such as the World Social Forum, which in its 2001 conference in Porto Alegre included Palestine as a prominent political agenda item, embraced the Palestine issue as a cause coherent with global struggles against colonization, securitization, and neoliberalism (Collins, 2011). The forging of broad alliances with multi-issue campaigns necessarily shaped the Palestine question into one about equality and universal human rights, and permeated western civil society spaces such as trade unions, churches and anti-war groups in a way that the official Palestinian leadership had never managed to do.

Whether physically present in the OPT or in western countries, the network of support and collaboration between Palestinian actors and their western counterparts has since been evident through the synchrony of campaigns relating to the separation wall, the Gaza blockade, the prisoner hunger strikes and protests against military attacks on Gaza by Israel. Hence, Palestinian activists have sat on committees that organized the Welcome to Palestine campaign, the Gaza Freedom March, the Freedom Flotilla, and have worked transnationally with western groups on BDS (Saba, 2014).

The multivariate alliances that exist between Palestinians and their supporters may therefore be seen as part and parcel of a movement whose aim is to expose internationally Israel's oppression of the Palestinians and pressure civil society and governments to end complicity with the occupier, in order to bring about a just political solution for Palestinians and Israelis alike. Drawing on the classic definition of a social movement as a "network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organisations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity" it would be fair to treat this global activism as a movement, however disparate (Diani 1992: 13). That is, it is more than the sum of the various SMOs that form it by virtue of its distinct political contestation and identity.

Moreover, movements are constituted of associations, members and participants on the one hand, but also of ideas and meanings on the other (Gusfield, 1994: 62). This constructivist approach reminds us that norms are changed by social movements and this change is often measurable only over time. Put another way, social movements are spaces for knowledge production since they often try to change the way grievances are perceived and how the politics of addressing them are practiced (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991). Viewing movements as fluid phenomena - where changes occur not only inside organizational fora but in addition to organized and directed action, and through knowledge production over time - it becomes possible to study movements for the ideas, norms and discourses that they generate.

To summarize the above, whereas activism on Palestine has been studied in the literature on social movements as a solidarity movement, seen from a Palestinian perspective the internationalization of our movement represents a new phase in our historical struggle for rights and may be studied as such. It is this conceptualization of global Palestine activism as a new movement of loosely connected groups, complete with a set of ideas and norms and representing a third way for Palestinian liberation that I assess for an absent critique on armed resistance.

The absent critique

The critique that one would hope to find among activists is around the effects of armed resistance both on Palestinian lives and on the Palestinian cause. The two are not necessarily the same and a positive contribution by armed resistance to the Palestinian cause may work to justify its disastrous results on Palestinian lives. However, I would argue that armed resistance has neither advanced the Palestinian cause nor protected Palestinian lives. On the contrary, it may have strengthened Israel's hand to crush the Palestinians with impunity.

Ever since Hamas became confined to the Gaza Strip it has pursued the "cause" through *inter alia* armed means. It made no gains from this in the form of concessions from Israel; it did not liberate an inch of land and it did not reverse Israel's cruel siege of Gaza. Meanwhile life in Gaza has severely deteriorated as a result of repeated military confrontations with Israel. Israel's latest war on Gaza

"eliminated what was left of the middle class" and sent "almost all of the population into destitution and dependence on international humanitarian aid" (UNCTAD, 2015: 8). Compounding Israel's policies towards Palestinian infrastructure, environment and natural resources, which had rendered Gaza nearly uninhabitable (United Nations, 2012), the armed resistance has proven immensely costly to the Palestinians. As such, one might expect an energetic debate about it among those involved in advocating for Palestinian rights.

For example, efforts could be made to amplify the voices of Palestinians opposed to armed resistance. Campaigns could be launched to publicly dissociate from Hamas's and other armed groups' tactics so as to discourage support for their methods. In particular a debate could be extended on the use of nonviolence for the attainment of political goals, as famously put forth by Gene Sharp (1973). Maintaining nonviolent discipline, according to Sharp's theory of "political jiu-jitsu", can bolster the view that Israel's treatment of the Palestinians is deeply unfair and must be countered. When Hamas launches rockets at Israel it diminishes perceptions of the conflict as lopsided; indeed the rockets may give the false impression that Palestinians can defend themselves. Yes, of course Israel would find ways to undermine an exclusively nonviolent resistance strategy -- oppressive regimes often do. Here advancements in nonviolent theory such as the "backfire" method whereby activists anticipate the oppressor's response to nonviolent mobilization and take action to make it backfire could be discussed by activists (Martin, 2015). And although usual acts of nonviolent resistance such as demonstrations, boycotts and sit-ins would not work in Gaza since it is deprived of direct contact with Israel and the world, alternative acts of protest and civil disobedience could be explored and made possible by collaboration with activists on the outside through the use of information technologies and other means.

Moreover, debates with regard to activists' vision for the cause must interrogate the role of armed resistance. Many activists have proposed a vision of a single state in Israel/Palestine in which all would enjoy equal social and political rights while at the same time ensuring just redress for injustices incurred (Abunimah et al, 2007). Although many SMOs engaged in the movement do not officially take a position on the one/two-state debate, campaigners have increasingly argued that the two-state solution is no longer attainable given the number of Israeli settlements in Palestinian areas. In this context, conferences advocating for one democratic state have become more common (Farsakh, 2011)¹. Debates in this area remain at the theoretical level and have not defined the means of reaching the one state goal. The continuation of armed confrontation between

¹ Farsakh (2011) lists the following conferences as significant: '*Israel/Palestine: Mapping Models of Statehood and Paths to Peace*, York University, Toronto, June 22-24, 2009; *Re-envisioning Israel/Palestine*, Human Science Research Council, Cape Town, June 12-14, 2009; *One State for Palestine/Israel: A Country for all of its Citizens?* University of Massachusetts Boston, March 28-29, 2009; and *The Haifa Conference on The Right of Return and the Secular Democratic State in Palestine*, Haifa, May 23, 2010.'

Israel and Palestinian groups is likely detrimental to the prospects of a single democratic state. However this, to my knowledge, has not been addressed. On the contrary, there is confusing discourse around campaigns such as BDS that seems to leave the door open to armed resistance. For example, in an assessment of BDS in the Palestinian publication *Al Majdal*, one author warned of the "dogma" of nonviolence that could come to plague BDS and asserted that "violent and nonviolent tactics have always co-existed as forms of resistance and they are likely to do so in the future" (Sultany, 2013: 15-16). Nonviolent discourse among Palestine activists, according to Sultany, "has become more fashionable today since it resonates with Western perspectives" (Sultany, 2013: 15). This sort of talk needs to be challenged by a healthy and rigorous debate on the real merits of committing to unarmed methods. I provide further examples of Arab commentators who criticize nonviolence in a later section. For now, suffice it to say that evading criticism of armed resistance has become the norm among many people active in the movement, as I demonstrate in the next section.

Statements on the 2014 Gaza war

In order to gauge how activists reacted to the 2014 assault on Gaza, and more specifically to search for a critique of Palestinian rockets, I looked at public statements released by five major organizations involved in global Palestine activism, two of which are Palestinian-led. A total of 40 documents issued by the five prominent organizations were examined for the period during the 51-day war and the period immediately following. Although only publicly disseminated material was studied, it reflected the main messages of prominent participants within global Palestine activism. Documents were studied for references to Hamas and the Palestinian armed factions more generally, and to see whether they contained any critique of Palestinian armed resistance. Since one would not expect criticism of the oppressed side to come from those who stand in solidarity with it in the midst of war but perhaps only once fighting has ended, statements in the three months following the end of the war were also studied.

I found no reference to the armed resistance in the statements issued after the war, and only scant reference to it during the war. Therefore what is presented below is the result of statements issued during the war since the statements after the war contained no reference to the armed resistance. The exception is the statement issued by the Russell Tribunal on Palestine which was released only after the war had ended.

The first three of the five SMOs studied are prominent Palestine advocacy groups operating inside the United States, the fourth organization is led from Palestine and the fifth organization is transnational.

The US Campaign to End the Occupation (USCETO), founded in 2001, is a coalition of 400 affiliated organizations in the United States whose stated mission is it to bring about a US policy that would uphold human rights and

international law in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Of only two statements issued in the period under study one focused on the Gaza crisis. In the statement entitled "Obama Applauded for Freezing Missile Deliveries to Israel" USCETO evaded any reference to Hamas rockets². Instead it focused on the US's complicity in the war. Since USCETO's mission is to change US policy towards Israel, which it regards as detrimental to the Palestinians, its lack of public pronouncement on the role of Palestinian armed resistance was not surprising as that would deviate from the organization's main focus.

Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), another major SMO with 35 national chapters in the US, issued a total of eighteen statements during the war and in the three months following. Although there was no elaborate critique of the armed resistance, several statements made clear the political position of the organization: while violence was rejected and abhorred by all sides, JVP rejected the narrative of "cycle of violence" between two peoples locked in interminable conflict and asserted that violence occurs within an overall context of structural violence, primarily that of the occupation of the OPT. For example, in a statement issued on 18 July entitled "Jews Across the US Oppose the Assault on Gaza" it was explained that "this violence has a root cause: Israel's illegal occupation"³.

The US Palestinian Community Network (USPCN), another US-based SMO of notable size, founded by American Palestinians in 2008, released eight statements during the period under study. In one of these, on the eve of the final ceasefire, entitled "Victory for the Resistance in Gaza, as the Struggle for a Free Palestine Continues", the armed resistance was lauded:

Israel clearly lost this battle on both military and political levels. One of the strongest armies in the world could not accomplish its goal of disarming and defeating the unified Palestinian resistance in Gaza. All the Palestinian resistance groups participated together in the defense of our land, and proved, like in 2006 in Southern Lebanon, that Israel's military is not invincible. [...]our people recognize that the victory in Gaza was a victory of resistance, and not of negotiations.⁴

² USCETO. "Obama Applauded for Freezing Missile Deliveries to Israel" 14 August, 2014. US Campaign to End the Occupation. <http://endtheoccupation.org/article.php?id=4135#sthash.WJyPcaf8.dpuf>
For USCETO's mission statement see website brochure. (n.d.) <http://endtheoccupation.org/downloads/brochurefebruary2013.pdf> (Accessed on 8 May 2015)

³ JVP. "Jews Across the US Oppose the Assault on Gaza" Jewish Voice for Peace. 18 July, 2014. <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/blog/jews-across-the-us-oppose-the-assault-on-gaza> (Accessed on 8 May 2015)

⁴ USPCN. "Victory for the Resistance in Gaza, as the Struggle for a Free Palestine Continues" US Palestinian Community Network. 29 August, 2014.

For USPCN, Palestinian armed resistance was not critiqued for its ineffectiveness or strategic purpose, but instead praised as though it had been victorious. Parallels were drawn with Hizbullah's 2006 resistance to Israeli assaults on Lebanon, which had cost the lives of over a thousand people and devastated Beirut's infrastructure. Moreover, a binary was presented between "negotiations" and "resistance", the former in derogatory terms aimed at the Fatah-run PA and the latter in laudatory terms. The binary implied that "negotiations" or "resistance" were the only two options open to Palestinian strategists. This choice between only those two options is a recurring theme among Palestinian commentators involved in global Palestine activism, a concern that I will return to.

So far, the relevant statements of three permanent SMOs have been presented. To diversify my search for statements that might have addressed the armed resistance, I turned to two temporary SMOs set up for specific campaigns: the BDS campaign and the Russell Tribunal on Palestine (RToP). BDS, the Palestinian civil society call for a boycott of Israel until the latter complies with international law, has been taken up by a majority of SMOs looking to the Palestinians for guidance on how to advance their work (Ananth, 2014, McMahon 2014, Saba, 2014). Given the BDS campaign's centrality to global Palestine activism, its press statements seemed an obvious place to look for a critique of the armed resistance, particularly since BDS is by definition an explicitly nonviolent Palestinian tactic, and, moreover, is Palestinian-led.

The RToP, meanwhile, was chosen because of its high profile within the movement and because it had organized a public session to assess the assault on Gaza that I attended in Brussels in September 2014. The body, which operates like a court, composed of figures internationally renowned for work in legal and ethical disputes, heard evidence from a number of journalists and other witnesses to the war and produced a document of findings based on testimonies from those witnesses. What I analyzed in the case of the RToP was the twelve-page summary of findings given to the attendees of its press conference in Brussels on 25 September 2014. Neither of the BDS campaign nor the RToP offered a specific critique of the Palestinian armed strategy in the documents analyzed, although one BDS-affiliated organization implicitly criticized the violence as I shall elaborate below.

Since the BDS call comes from the BDS National Committee (BNC) BNC documents were analyzed. Bear in mind that the BNC is the largest coalition of organizations representing Palestinian civil society according to its founding member, Omar Barghouti (Saba, 2014: 92). In the period under study, this SMO published a total of eleven statements issued either by the BNC itself or on behalf of its member organizations. The content of these statements may be

<http://uspcn.org/2014/08/29/victory-for-the-resistance-in-gaza-as-the-struggle-for-a-free-palestine-continues/> (Accessed on 8 May 2015)

summarized broadly as calling on the international community of supporters to urgently intensify BDS work in response to the horrific attacks that were being launched on Gaza at the time. One statement among those studied alluded to the armed resistance. Printed by the BNC on behalf of Kairos Palestine, a coalition of Christian Palestinian organizations, the statement urged that Israel and the international community recognize that the Fatah-led PA had chosen the "path of peace", and "maintains its right and constant position" but had unfortunately "lost its popularity among its own people, who see that these ways of peace facing Israeli violence are fruitless"⁵. The statement therefore implied that nonviolent tactics had long been the method of the official Palestinian leadership but that Israel, through its non-reciprocation of those peaceful methods, had effectively given rise to renewed support for armed resistance.

As for the summary of findings by the special session of the RToP, again here, there was no discussion of the Palestinian armed strategy apart from a reference to the international law-sanctioned right of people living under colonial rule or under a foreign occupation to resist occupation (RToP, 2014, 3)⁶.

In summary, western-led USCETO and RToP focused on the havoc wreaked by Israel's war and appealed for the urgent end of western complicity in Israel's actions. JVP did the same but also made a point to say that it opposed violence by all sides. The findings from these three SMOs is to be expected given that the *raison d'être* of groups based in the west is that of advocating for the end of the occupation with the aim, via the boomerang model, to pressure the powerful countries of the Global North to end their complicity in Israel's actions⁷. Since such solidarity organizations tend to take a principled position to not get involved in the internal affairs of the Palestinians, it came as no surprise that an elaborate critique of Hamas and other armed groups was not offered⁸. What was

⁵ BNC. "Diplomatic pressure for Peace: A call for Sanctions from Palestinian Christians", statement by the National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine Kairos Palestine, published by the BDS National Committee. 1 August, 2014. <http://www.bdsmovement.net/2014/diplomatic-pressure-for-peace-a-call-for-sanctions-from-palestinian-christians-12463> (Accessed on 8 May 2015)

⁶ RToP. "The Gaza War (2014) under International Law: An Inquiry into Israel's Crimes, Responsibility, and the Response of the International Community". Russell Tribunal on Palestine, Extraordinary session. Brussels, 25 September, 2014.

⁷ "The boomerang' model which Keck and Sikkink (1998: 12-13) identified in relation to human rights groups that appeal to states in third party countries to pressure an offending regime is also used by Palestine activism in its appeal to international publics to pressure their governments to hold Israel accountable.

⁸ The case study results have necessarily been more the result of absent content than of existing content. During the course of my dissertation research into global Palestine activism SMOs, I did come across some public critique of Palestinian resistance, however it was of a limited quantity. For example, the *Palestine Solidarity Committee Seattle* tackled the issue of resistance by clearly stating that it was against all forms of violence that targeted civilians, whether this came from Palestinian or Israeli sources. See <http://www.palestineinformation.org/civiliantargets.html>

however surprising, was the absence of this critique among groups like the BDS/BNC and the USPCN. Both those SMOs are ostensibly Palestinian-led, thereby giving them the moral authority to reflect on Palestinian resistance strategy. However, as described above, the BNC largely sidestepped the discussion, while the USPCN published a statement in support of the armed resistance.

Possible explanations for the absent critique

One could argue that it is not the role of the above organizations to publicly critique Palestinian armed factions since that would render them vulnerable to pro-Israel groups keen to show that the Palestinian camp is divided. Perhaps such discussions happen privately then? According to personal firsthand experience in Palestine advocacy in a number of solidarity groups, as well as evidence gathered for my PhD research into Palestine activism, discussion around Palestinian armed resistance as a liberation strategy is evaded because it is seen as outside the scope of control of the movement⁹. Advocates for human rights operate on a different plane to those who take up arms to gain their rights and this in itself represents a gulf between the two types of actors. In addition to being ideationally removed, movement practitioners within global Palestine activism are also physically removed from the machinations of the Palestinian factions, particularly from those groups operating inside the besieged Gaza Strip. This physical separation can easily give rise to the impression that armed group strategies are a world onto themselves, beyond the comprehension or influence of civil society actors that use nonviolent means to pursue political goals. Another possible reason for this omission is that international members of the movement may be purposely avoiding certain complexities of Palestinian politics in order to avoid internal splits and breaches with Palestinians (Landy, 2014). Whatever the dominant reason for the absent critique, if we are to overcome it, the lead will likely have to come from Palestinians involved in the movement.

In the first part of this paper I discussed the influence that Palestinian practitioners have exercised on the movement with regards to framing the central issues of occupation and imbalance of power. In this they have been very successful, a testament both to their ability to assert their views and to their western colleagues' openness to listen. That is encouraging and hints at the possibility of a useful debate on Palestinian armed strategy if a sufficient number of Palestinian activists were to introduce the sensitive discussion.

Thus far, to my knowledge, this has not happened. Instead, there have been a number of interventions by prominent Palestinian commentators to the opposite effect. Consider the following words written during the height of the

⁹ My Palestine advocacy experience includes work within the Irish Anti-War Movement and Irish Ship to Gaza, the Irish campaign of the Freedom Flotilla.

2014 war on Gaza by prominent Palestinian commentator and editor of the Palestine Chronicle, Ramzy Baroud (2014):

Palestinians cannot be judged for defending themselves and for resisting Israel to end its military occupation ... Armed struggle is a right defended by international law for people living under foreign occupation.

In addition to uncritically defending the armed resistance, Baroud employed the binary of pitting Palestinians into one of only two camps, that of armed resistance, and that of collaboration with the enemy, when he said:

There can be no bad vs good Palestinians. There are those who resist, and those who collaborate with the enemy; those who pay the price, and those who benefit from the occupation.

In other words, criticizing Hamas was construed as supporting Fatah, making matters awkward for those who want to challenge the policies of both.

Similar sentiments on resistance strategy more generally have been expressed by others. Consider a piece two years earlier by Palestinian activist and journalist, Linah Alsaafin (2012), entitled "How obsession with "nonviolence" harms the Palestinian cause" in which she wrote:

Israelis and internationals and unfortunately even some "enlightened" Palestinians champion "nonviolent resistance" and consider throwing a rock to be a violent act. The argument goes that throwing rocks tarnishes the reputation of Palestinians in the western world and immediately negates the "nonviolent/peaceful" resistance movement. This argument falls into the trap of western- (read, colonizer) dictated methods of acceptable means to resist.

Both Baroud's and Alsaafin's interventions have the effect of discouraging discussion of Palestinian resistance. In Baroud's opposition to (presumably) western "judgment" of the resistance and in Alsaafin's invocation of the threatening "colonizer", the message, whether intended or incidental, is that non-Palestinians, whoever they may be, should not interfere with Palestinian political strategizing. This warning is also meted out to what Alsaafin sarcastically calls "enlightened" Palestinians who stray from the mantra that all resistance is good resistance.

These examples are indicative of the opposition that those involved in global Palestine activism can expect to come up against if they attempt to analyze various forms of resistance, including the rocket strategy adopted by Hamas in recent years. Activists, it would appear, are expected to focus on advocacy but not to engage in strategic movement making. This edict has become a norm

within the culture of many SMOs, defining what is appropriate or inappropriate debate. It stagnates the movement and perpetuates a situation whereby activism is limited to support rather than extending to transformative politics.

There is an important context for this aversion to debating armed versus peaceful methods. In a study on the underreported practice of nonviolence practiced by Palestinians in the Second Palestinian Intifada, Julie Norman (2015) investigated why nonviolent tactics failed to spread on a wide scale as had happened during the First Intifada. She found that the notion of nonviolence had become distorted with the Oslo peace process whose nonviolence workshops and trainings approached Palestinian subjects in a patronizing and unhelpful way. A narrative was propagated by the myriad Oslo-associated, western-funded projects that nonviolence was a way of life rather than a means of resistance. The few projects which did teach nonviolence as *activism* used western examples from the American civil rights movement rather than local precedents from the First Intifada and Palestinians' own traditions of nonviolent civil disobedience. Oslo nonviolence discourse therefore had the effect of equating notions of nonviolence to an accommodation with the status quo, to normalization of the occupation and to passivity. Nonviolence lost its correlation with agency for transformative politics.

The absence of a critique of the armed resistance among activists can also be connected with efforts to reverse years of racist misinformation propagated by Israel about the Palestinians. In order to address the imbalance in public discourse about the origins and nature of the conflict Palestinian commentators, in particular, are loathe to criticize the resistance in terms that may appear to echo Israeli propaganda about Palestinians as violent terrorists (Abu Nimah, 2007). The thinking goes that if Palestinian tactics are criticized then this will play into the Israeli narrative of self-defense and the latter's need to kill Palestinians in the name of security, thereby wasting years of hard work spent on reframing the conflict as one about colonization, occupation and violence by the occupying power. From discussions with them, it is clear that international pro-Palestine activists take their lead from their Palestinian comrades and refrain from critiquing armed strategy for the same reason. I propose that the two critiques, that of Israel and that of the Palestinian response to its aggressions, are not mutually exclusive. Nor must those opposed to Fatah's role refrain from criticizing the armed strategy of its rival, Hamas. Not only does silence about the problems of armed resistance threaten to detract from the ethos of global Palestine activism as a nonviolent movement, but we also miss an opportunity to contribute fresh ideas on a political strategy where the energy and cost poured into armed resistance is redirected towards a winnable strategy.

Global Palestine activism and transformative politics

Legitimacy

The first question that activists might ask is whether their role can legitimately extend to critiquing Palestinian political strategy at all. In my earlier discussion about the nature of global Palestine activism as a movement "from below" whose efforts at network-building and advocacy in the west have overshadowed those of traditional Palestinian factions, I sought to demonstrate that the movement has become integral to the Palestinian struggle as a whole. It has been grassroots activists that have led demonstrations, campaigns and direct actions against Israeli policies in recent years and thus become the voice of pro-Palestinian politics on the streets of western countries. Given this state of affairs, and given that Palestinian agency is built-into the movement, it seems legitimate for participants to engage in political strategizing that includes an interrogation of the role of armed resistance to Israeli aggression.

If one views global Palestine activism not as external to Palestinian liberation politics, but rather as a modern tendency within the latter, then the movement's role becomes comparable to that of other Palestinian political movements. It should be recalled that both Fatah and Hamas started life as small movements with external input. Fatah began its existence through informal meetings among small groups of Palestinians in exile in the 1950s. "Wherever there [was] a concentration of Palestinians ... between '58 and '62, there was a Palestinian movement", remarked one of its founders (Cobban, 1984: 23). It took a decade for Fatah to coalesce into a force capable of fending off Israeli attacks as it did in the Jordanian village of Karameh in 1968 (Sayigh, 1997: 178), or to become the main political force in the Egyptian-established Palestinian Liberation Organization (Sayigh, 1997: 71). Similarly, Hamas began life in 1987 as a small movement that drew on the existence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine, the latter an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (Roy, 2011: 19-21). Therefore, Palestinian political movements are neither immutable nor immune to external influence. As with the rise of groups such as Fatah, Hamas and others, it is conceivable that global Palestine activism and its participants could give rise to a new political force in the Palestinian body politic.

Seen in this light, an intervention by participants within the movement into the political strategy of the Palestinian camp need not be seen as an intrusion into the affairs of others or as the negation of Palestinian autonomy (Landy, 2014). On the contrary, an intervention by activists has the potential to alter the current state of deadlock in Palestinian contentious politics. For several years, the policies of Fatah inside the West Bank and those of Hamas inside Gaza have merely reproduced the structure around them. In the former's case, policies have failed to curb Israel's expansion through illegal settlements or to remove its continued military occupation. In the latter's case, rocket fire has not only failed to reverse Israel's blockade of Gaza, but conditions in Gaza have severely worsened as a result of recurrent military confrontations. With no visible sign of an alternative "traditional" faction to break the cycle of Israel's violence and the

Palestinians' response to it, activists should look seriously at their own movement's potential for transformative politics.

Capacity

Here we must explore the question of whether activists could indeed exercise influence over Palestinian political strategy. In its short history global Palestine activism has been successful in its externally-oriented work of improving understandings of the Palestine question by exposing Israeli policies. It has not, so far, focused internally on the arena of Palestinian politics. Dealing with the question of armed resistance requires that the movement orient itself internally as well as externally. But does it have the capacity to do this? I think the answer lies in exploring why it has been successful in its internationally-oriented work.

In its work of building solidarity for the Palestinian plight internationally the movement has been a political entrepreneur. According to social network theory, "political entrepreneurs", be they individuals or collective actors, use ideas and actions to create structural change within a political landscape (Goddard, 2009a: 251). The Freedom Flotilla (FF) campaign which sailed boats towards Gaza, most dramatically in 2010, provides one example.

Although unsuccessful in ending Israel's devastating blockade on Gaza, the FF campaign succeeded in achieving two important results. The first was the highlighting of the Gaza situation to international audiences in a way that traditional Palestinian actors had failed to do. Hamas's pleas to lift the blockade had been largely ignored by the media because of its designation as a terrorist outfit. Meanwhile, Fatah, perhaps partly due to its feud with Hamas, had also failed to effectively highlight the severity of the blockade. After Israeli forces stopped the FF and killed nine activists aboard one of its ships international attention became drawn to Gaza in a way it had not been before. With the FF campaign, the blockade was temporarily widely publicized in the international media with the term "siege" even making it into mainstream news (Martin, 2010).

The second effect of the FF campaign was that of pressuring Israel to increase, if only slightly, the amount of goods allowed into Gaza. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "following the tragic results of the flotilla's attempt to break the blockade, Israel announced a package of measures to ease the access restrictions it had imposed on Gaza since June 2007" (OCHA, 2011: 2). Although the effects of this "eased" blockade were soon reversed by Israel, it is clear the campaign and the reaction it drew from Israel managed for a brief time to both expose Israel's harsh treatment of the Palestinians and force its hand to ease the closure policy, however minimally. I have written about this case study in detail elsewhere (Saba, forthcoming 2016). For the purposes of this paper, the point is that global Palestine activism has the potential to tilt the power imbalance in favor of the Palestinians from its positioning as an internationalized Palestinian movement.

By way of its positioning as a semi-outside actor, global Palestine activism succeeded in launching a campaign that Palestinians alone would not have been able to implement. Since Israel routinely kills Palestinians extra-judicially and with impunity, it is not far-fetched to conceive that had the various Gaza flotilla campaigns consisted purely of Palestinian activists, Israel may have used even greater lethal force against them and the matter may have received much less media attention. International activists are pivotal to the movement *because* they are internationals, and because many of them are westerners. Israel cannot eliminate them with the same level of impunity and media blackout.

Another campaign that illustrates the importance of global Palestine activism's insider-outsider positioning is the BDS campaign. Traditional Palestinian factions could not have run this campaign with the same degree of success it has attained, however limited the latter remains. The Fatah-run PA, much less a group like Hamas, does not possess the networks within western university campuses, churches and trade unions that grassroots activists have forged in recent years. Moreover, the PA, through its engagement with the Oslo peace process to whose adherence its very survival depends, could not openly call for a boycott of the state with whom it is supposed to be negotiating. And yet Palestinian factions benefit from the campaign. Indeed it is conceivable that the threat of BDS served as a bargaining chip for the PA to advance its campaign for a labeling of settlement goods at EU level (Barker and Reed, 2015). In this way, BDS created a political opportunity for the wider Palestinian camp by changing the political environment around the Israeli problem. As with the FF, also with BDS, global Palestine activism's positioning as a Palestinian-international, insider-outsider movement effectively gave it the power of broker between Palestinians and the outside world.

Can the movement's ability to act as a political entrepreneur be extended internally to the Palestinian political camp? Political entrepreneurs, that is, agents who can effect structural change, have been found to occupy a position of broker between actors that would otherwise remain disconnected (Burt, 2004, Goddard, 2009a). This theory, sometimes called "structural hole theory", posits that brokers in a network who operate in the space between more conventional groups within a network are optimally positioned to introduce new ideas. Their ideas are better received by other actors in the network precisely because they operate outside of the institutionalized - even ossified - frameworks of traditional actors who themselves are disconnected from each other, as Fatah and Hamas, and large sections of their constituencies, are today. Consequently, these agents have greater success at introducing new norms and even new identities into a system (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). Global Palestine activism fulfills the role of broker in its externally-oriented campaigns, aimed at the world, thanks to its distinction from traditional Palestinian actors and from Israel. Although working for a just resolution to the Palestinian plight, the movement also offers a just solution for Israelis wishing to live in an apartheid-free, equal society, and indeed projects an image of a movement aimed at that vision, particularly through calls for a single democratic state. I posit that the movement can replicate this broker role internally inside the Palestinian camp

because of its positioning as independent from Fatah and Hamas while nevertheless belonging to the broader network of Palestinian contentious politics.

Let us consider the existing structure more closely. The Fatah-dominated PA in Ramallah is wedded to the ongoing diplomatic process with Israel that it pursues through periodic negotiations and by lobbying western governments to support the establishment of a Palestinian state. Hamas, on the other hand, is wedded to the idea that liberation will come through armed resistance. The constituencies of each political entity are presumably similarly entrenched in one of these two positions. But there are two important points to consider. One is that there is a Palestinian constituency that remains unsatisfied by either of those strategies. This is evident from initiatives like BDS to which a large number of Palestinian civil society organizations have signed up. It is also evident in the work of popular village committees in the West Bank which have consistently resisted the co-optation of their weekly protests by either Fatah or Hamas (Saba, 2014). It is further evident from polls that show 28 percent of Palestinians in the OPT support popular nonviolent action as a means to liberation (as opposed to the remainder 26 percent who support continued negotiations and the 42 percent who support armed action) (PCPSR, 2015: 5). Palestinians seeking a third path therefore represent a large constituency inside the OPT which could potentially become much larger should a new movement offer a vision and strategy for a winnable campaign.

The second point is that global Palestine activism is helpful to both Fatah and Hamas in their politics *vis-a-vis* Israel. As mentioned earlier, Fatah likely benefitted from BDS in its campaign for a labeling of settlement goods, and Hamas benefitted from the FF boats because they highlighted the plight of Gaza (Martin, 2010). Indeed, the whole Palestinian body politic stands to benefit from campaigns that expose Israel in the west. This earns the movement a certain level of authority and command. It follows that debates and ideas put forth by its participants would reverberate across the Palestinian body politic and across Palestinian society. Through diffusion and socialization, a debate on resistance strategy has the potential to provoke discussions around the utility, validity, cost and sustainability of armed resistance inside the wider Palestinian arena of contentious politics.

At the beginning, it is sufficient in my view, to simply challenge the norm that currently exists about Palestine SMOs not interfering in Palestinian strategies of resistance. The aim of starting a fresh debate around armed resistance should not be aimed necessarily at shifting the policies of armed groups, but at proliferating an active debate among Palestinian *society*, beginning with the Palestinian diaspora and activist community. Since norms "do not appear out of thin air" but are "actively built by agents having strong notions about appropriate or desirable behavior in their community", it follows that the introduction of the absent critique would represent a bold step against existing discursive norms (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 896). As with any entrepreneurial action, the success of achieving a lively and constructive debate

around this question carries risks. Structural hole theory posits that success is contingent on the position of movement actors in the network and on power relations related to ideology and hegemony. In other words, depending on how a political entrepreneur's ideas are received within the wider network, they can either strengthen or sever ties by resonating or appearing dissonant with particular coalitions (Goddard, 2009a).

Challenges

The first obstacle likely to be faced by the introduction of such a debate would come from Palestinian actors resistant to the idea of reformulating the methodology of Palestinian resistance. A January 2015 poll found that 76.5 percent of Palestinians in the OPT supported "the continuation of rockets from the Gaza Strip on Israeli cities and towns until Israel ends its siege and closure of Gaza" (PCPSR, 2015: 14). This group overlaps with the 28 percent of OPT Palestinians, cited earlier, who believe that non-violent protest is the correct path to liberation. Rather than reading this contradiction as a case of Palestinians wanting it both ways, it should be read as a reflection of the very harsh living conditions that Israel's blockade of Gaza has caused - in Gaza, 73.7 percent describe living conditions as either "bad" or "very bad" (PCPSR, 2015: 10). Support for armed resistance may be read as stoicism and also as a rejection of the Fatah-run PA, which has been unpopular for some time. There is also the issue that over time and following much oppression at the hands of Israel, many Palestinians have come to believe that armed resistance is the only appropriate response to Israel's violations, but this belief is borne of emotion rather than reasoned debate, the latter being largely absent. Even in the face of evidence to the contrary, many people continue to blindly hold the belief that liberation can come through armed means.

Such deeply held views about Palestinian liberation strategy, like deeply held views about desired outcomes, are difficult to change. Consider for example, Yasser Arafat's inability to reach a compromise settlement with Israel at the 2000 Camp David talks. Israeli intransigence towards the Palestinians had hardened public opinion and polarized the debate around issues such as the right of return of refugees and the indivisibility of Jerusalem. Arafat was conscious that his constituency would not accept certain terms within the settlement (Pressman, 2003, Goddard, 2009b). This made it difficult for him to compromise beyond what he thought his society would accept. Similarly, the revival of the armed strategy that came with the surge in Hamas's popularity means that a debate around the armed resistance would be met with stiff opposition. Supporters of armed resistance, such as that exercised in the most recent assault on Gaza in 2014, will point to Hamas's success in standing up to Israel. People will say, for example, that Hamas managed to shut down Israel's airport for two days during the war, a feat unheard of in the history of the PLO. In the context of a conflict that has persistently resulted in losses for the Palestinians it is understandable that people look up to the armed militants for

at least "hitting back". This does not mean that such views should not be challenged, nor that they are immune to change.

Political identities within movements alter as opportunities and political networks shift (Tilly, 1997: 59). This does not happen without some upheaval. The production of ideas by social movements is highly contingent on modes of dissemination and modes of organizing, therefore practitioners would have to approach the debate carefully and sensitively (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991: 69). Regardless of the difficulties global Palestine activism practitioners can expect to run into in approaching this discussion, an examination of the armed resistance at a time when Israeli aggression has become ever more deadly is urgent and necessary.

Consistency

A further point worth making is around the question of consistency. Global Palestine activism comprises organizations and participants that are highly critical of the Fatah-run PA and rightly criticize its policies. A quick perusal of the Electronic Intifada demonstrates the ubiquity of this critique. BDS founding member, Omar Barghouti, has explained that it is impossible for the PA to stand behind BDS since the Oslo setup made it "inherently incapable of supporting any effective resistance strategy" (Barghouti, 2011: 56). However no similar criticism has been made about Hamas, whose potential alignment with BDS can hardly be feasible or credible given that its strategy of direct military confrontation jars with one founded on building civil society support to hold Israel accountable. Practitioners need to ask themselves whether their nonviolent tactics can work alongside armed struggle or whether parallel armed struggle diminishes the power of nonviolent tactics.

The challenge for movement practitioners is to decide how to relate to the two main political actors: the realpolitik Fatah camp on the one hand and the armed resistance camp of Hamas on the other. While much has been written about the shortcomings of the PA in activist fora, hardly anything has been written about the policies of Hamas. For instance one could note that funds are wasted when directed into militarization instead of more pressing needs such as housing and civil infrastructure. Certainly much of the de-development Gaza has undergone is directly related to Israel's blockade, but how much of it is also a result of Hamas's armed policy? Approaching such questions would strengthen global Palestine activism because it would necessitate deeper engagement with Palestinians from various camps.

The role of activists is not to cheerlead existing factions, but to articulate a third path. That peoples under occupation are legally permitted to resist through arms does not mean that they should do so. Movement practitioners should question the armed strategy by proposing an alternative overall resistance strategy. Currently Fatah and Hamas are both weak. There exists a space which can be filled by bold actors willing to challenge traditional strategies and replace them with new ones.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the internationalized pro-Palestine movement with and by Palestinians has remained largely silent on the utility and validity of armed resistance to Israeli aggression. While the movement has critiqued Fatah-run PA policies it has evaded a similarly energetic critique of Hamas and its resistance strategy. I discussed the positioning of the movement as a potential broker within the larger network of Palestinian contentious politics and argued that this gives activists a good vantage point from which to launch a critique of the armed resistance and propose alternatives. Far from giving Israel ammunition to attack the Palestinians, such a critique could strengthen the role of global Palestine activism and campaigns such as BDS by reviving political discussions around strategy. Social movements, after all, are about people taking action to change relations of power and existing social arrangements. Silence on a major aspect of the struggle stifles this agency.

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About the author

Claudia Saba has a PhD in political science from University College Dublin and lectures in international relations in Ramon Llull University. Claudia has over five years' experience in advocacy work on Palestine. In 2011 she acted as media spokesperson for Irish Ship to Gaza, the Irish segment of the Freedom Flotilla. She has lobbied the Irish government and met with all main political party leaders in the context of lifting the blockade on Gaza. Her research interests include cross-culture socialization processes and movement building. She can be contacted at [claudia.saba AT gmail.com](mailto:claudia.saba@gmail.com).