

Darweish, Marwan & Andrew Rigby: Popular Protest in Palestine: The uncertain future of unarmed resistance

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During the last decade, the relatively new field of *resistance studies* has seen an upsurge of important contributions that have provided convincing evidence for why unarmed resistance can work (Chenoweth & Stephen 2011, Nepstad 2013; 2011, Schock 2005). Many of these previous empirical contributions have given support for why civil resistance can work. They raise the much-needed theoretical discussions related to the causes for success of unarmed resistance. The common denominator, for most of these studies, rests on the assumption that certain conditions need to be in place for the success of unarmed resistance to follow. Much of the recent resistance research has rigorously and systematically looked into the aspects of conditions needed for successful unarmed resistance, as well as into the stage when these conditions can be seen as being in place. However, this research field is still at its dawn, leaving many questions yet to be answered. Darweish's & Rigby's book *Popular Protest in Palestine: The uncertain future of unarmed resistance* (2015) makes a significant contribution to this research field, with a slightly different but immensely important focus on a topic that is still under-researched. The case study "Palestinians under Israeli occupation" gives new empirical as well as theoretical insights on why popular resistance has (so far) faced difficulties to impact conflict transformation.

Aim, Framework and Structure

The book by Darweish & Rigby (2005) is not merely a diachronic and historical descriptive overview of all forms of Palestinian unarmed resistance. The added value of the book is that it also addresses theoretical issues; more specifically, it discusses what conditions are required and need to be in place for an unarmed popular resistance to have an impact.

This new book shows the dilemmas and challenges that unarmed resisters face in their efforts to end the Israeli occupation.

The monograph has 10 chapters and it links the conclusion to the theoretical discussion that introduces the reader to the authors' structure. The empirical chapters (2-5) give us a systematic descriptive overview and presentation of all forms of unarmed resistance that the Palestinians have applied at one time or another over many decades. The analysis of why the various unarmed resistance forms succeeded/failed to have an impact (i.e., to influence and prevent the Zionists, and later Israel, from taking the control over historical Palestine) is continually linked to the theoretical assumption discussed in the introduction chapter. Giving a historical overview of the unarmed Palestinian resistance since the 1880s, when the first political Zionists arrived in Palestine and began to colonize the area, the book lays out the types of activism that have been used. Bearing in mind the various forms that have been applied, we get to understand that *defensive resistance* has been the most dominant form, especially during the last two decades of unarmed resistance.

In general, when discussing the impact of the various attempts made to prevent Israeli occupation, the authors give rather pessimistic assessments. However, this does not imply that the armed resistance has been more successful. Referring to the ANC struggle to abolish apartheid, the authors underline that in the case of the ANC, violence was used in a more controlled way, which paved the way for maintaining 'the moral high ground, contrasting the actions of the ANC with those of the South African government and its involvement in torture, disappearance, deaths in custody, the violent suppression of internal protest and armed intervention in civil war situations in neighbouring states' (Darweish & Rigby 2015:164). The authors quite rightly underline that 'the Palestinian solidarity movement faces a much greater struggle to lay claim to the moral high ground in the context of the terror campaign of a decade ago when hundreds of Israeli civilians were killed by suicide bombers and the more recent launching of rocket attacks from Gaza that terrorised citizens in Southern Israel and beyond...' (Darweish & Rigby 2015:164). They also render important insights into the way the media operates, and how to apply these insights to support the unarmed activists. Concurrently, from what has been noted, at least implicitly, we

understand that the Palestinians are in a power disparity, also in terms of reaching out to and influencing the Western image of the conflict. It would have been interesting to learn more specifics about how the media “war” between the Israelis and the unarmed resistance is played out, what broker and communication capacities have been applied in relation to the own population - mainly for mobilization purposes, as well as with regards to the outside world - for support reasons.

In Chapters 6-9, the authors delve deeply into: the challenges that Palestinians face at present under Israeli occupation (Chapter 6); the potential roles that Israeli peace and solidarity activists could play (Chapter 7); the possibilities for international humanitarian agencies (Chapter 8); and the importance of various international links and the impact that existing long-term commitments have had (Chapter 9). While the empirical evidence gives a rather pessimistic image of a fairly unsuccessful unarmed resistance history, in the concluding Chapter 10 the authors try to reverse this impression by linking to protests of young Palestinians that have begun to direct their critique against both Hamas and the Fatah authorities (in the West Bank), as well as Israel, the UN and other governments, in March 2011. The chapter also lists conditions that the Palestinians need to consider in order to reverse the rather meagre results achieved by both armed and unarmed resistance.

In many ways, the book integrates perspectives from conflict transformation and peace studies as well as resistance studies. Some references do come from social movement theorizing; but the authors, though not engaging with the vast bulk of these studies, still succeed in providing sufficient theoretical eye openers that should feed this theoretical branch. The book is an important contribution to resistance studies field and should raise great interest in a wide audience. It also links to the debate on the consequences of “liberal peace” as Chandler (2015) 2014, Richmond & Chandler 2014, MacGinty 2014) and many others have addressed recently, though not from an IR perspective or from a ‘peace from above’ angle, but rather from a less studied perspective linking conflict transformation with conflicts, while including asymmetrical power disparities between the conflict actors.

There are quite a few important studies that address the efforts made by various grassroots activists in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Chaitin

2011, Svirsky 2012, Kaufman-Lacusta 2011, Kuriansky 2007, Bar-Siman-Tov 2007, Kaufman et al 2006). Almost all of these studies have a bias in the sense that they see the conflict from a manageable conflict resolution perspective, in which two parties, under the right circumstances, can compromise over territory, for example the two-state solution. Furthermore, they either focus theoretically and/or empirically (Bar-Siman-Tov 2007, Kaufman et al 2006) on conflict resolution issues, or mainly on (social) psychological issues (Kuransky 2007), or solely on power and resistance issues (Svirsky 2012). In contrast to previous works, Darweish & Rigby's study critically explores resistance in a highly asymmetric conflict from a conflict transformation perspective. The study also looks into the specific conflict situation that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict constitutes. The asymmetries, in terms of huge power disparities (military, economic and political) between the Israeli state and the Palestinian occupied society, constitute a particular challenge for unarmed resistance. Darweish & Rigby offer a contrast to previous studies by problematizing this specific conflict category and the idiosyncrasies that follow, in a context with a national group under long-term occupation.

Types of resistance applied

Darweish & Rigby are well aware of the different types of nonviolent actions that are discussed in the literature and build their partly new typology based on an integration of Gene Sharp's (2005, 1973), Ring's (1982), as well as Overy's (1982) studies. With the focus on Gandhi's approaches to unarmed resistance in Overy's study, the authors thereby gain inputs from this tradition, as well. From these studies they extract five forms of nonviolent actions: symbolic resistance, polemical resistance, offensive resistance, defensive resistance, and constructive resistance. These forms are used when describing the history of Palestinian popular unarmed resistance.

In the historical overview, one is struck by how early the reactions came up, and how the fears among Palestinians were triggered by the arrival of (mainly) European Jews to Palestine. Reports date back to as early as 1886, and refer to clashes between the newcomers and the peasants who had been evicted from lands they had cultivated. We learn that already from this point in time, several of the conditions that need to

be in place for an unarmed resistance to unfold, and also to make a difference, simply did not exist in the Palestinian case. Most historical descriptions of how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has evolved report on confrontations that began later, after 1910. The book does track different forms of unarmed resistance that had been tried out long before the use of armed methods that were part of the resistance repertoire in the 1920s and 1930s.

The book does slightly address the difficult issue of identification. It notes that one of the necessary conditions for sustainable civil resistance to work is '[a] strong sense of solidarity throughout the subject population ...' (Darweish & Rigby 2015:9). Rightfully the authors underline that one of the reasons for having complications mobilizing around a national Palestinian cause is that '[t]heir loyalty and sense of belonging was to the family, the clan and the village. Theirs was a sense of locality, not nationality' (ibid: 15). Hence, it is difficult to speak about a national Palestinian movement; it was rather the role of different families, clans, and other social categorizations that mattered more. Even the broader "umbrella-concept" of Arab nationalism only gained mass-based attraction after WWII. Most analysts would agree that mass-based Palestinian national identification began in the end of the 1960s, and particularly after the events at the city of Karameh in Jordan in March 1968, when the PLO managed to resist the attacking Israeli forces and inflict heavy losses on them (Kimmerling & Migdal 1993).

The question about when the Palestinian national identification began is not only subject to academic controversy; it is also a politically sensitive issue. However, those who claim that identification in terms of a national Palestinian identity is something constructed have fewer problems seeing that the construction of Israeli identification also took place in a similar way. This occurred a quarter of a century earlier, and managed to foster mass-mobilized support in particular at the time of the foundation of Israel in 1948. Here the importance of the British Mandate government should not be underestimated, considering it gave the Zionists the possibility to organize the Jewish Agency as a pre-state body, and introduce Modern Hebrew as an official language, alongside Arabic and English. The Palestinian identification, on the other hand, had no broader meaning, and neither did Arab nationalism, which partly

explains the fragmented and socially divided Palestinian public, and their will to mobilize and resist, as well as the fact that ‘... Palestinian leadership was weak and divided...’ (Darweish & Rigby 2015:26). The authors use the label Palestinian as an *ipso facto* phenomenon, due to the historical record they have at hand. Hence, the roots of mass-based unarmed resistance came much later, and peaked around the time of the Palestinian uprising, the first *intifada*, in 1987.

Boomerang effects

Despite the general pessimistic picture portrayed in the study of Palestinian unarmed resistance, it can be noted that the authors still identify some future potential for Palestinian unarmed resistance. The most significant dimensions that may have a greater and more effective impact in future are what the authors call “The Boomerang Pattern”, i.e. the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) movement and its increased international status, as well as the young Palestinians, namely the 15th March movement that began to mobilize and protest against the Hamas-Fatah divide in 2011.

The Boomerang Pattern that is discussed by the authors explains that the Palestinians

‘feel that their influence on their targets is too limited and so they ‘throw a boomerang’ out to external actors and networks naming and shaming their oppressors, in the hope that the boomerang will return and hit their target with international pressure, particularly from international allies of the targeted regime’ (Darweish & Rigby 2015:162).

According to the authors, the BDS movement that was formed in 2005 has the most significant boomerang effect so far. The BDS operates worldwide with efforts to raise understanding that the continued occupation and breach of international law will have a long-term price. To this end, BDS calls for ‘individuals, companies and states to engage in divestment and in an economic and commercial boycott of everything produced by the occupation’ (Darweish & Rigby 2015:163). The movement has gained dramatic growth, as well as international support. The authors could at the time of writing not include that the Israeli Prime

Minister Netanyahu even declared ‘a manifest in Jerusalem against the delegitimization of Israel [and calling] for a “wide front” to combat boycott, and ... to fight BDS’ (quote from Haaretz: <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.659269>, 2nd June 2015). The authors mention briefly the changed EU perceptions towards Israel, but we need more insights on why also the EU is seemingly under the influence of BDS principles. The EU has requested in the new trade agreements with Israel that products produced by settlers in the West Bank are not welcomed to be sold to the EU. The EU has otherwise never used trade, on which Israel is so dependent, as a bargaining or pressure instrument vis-à-vis Israel. The authors say that the BDS and similar international solidarity movements are among the most promising unarmed resistance forms that the Palestinians have at hand. However, when compared systematically with the ANC movement and its way of bringing down the South African apartheid government, it can be seen that on almost every issue BDS is in a disadvantageous position. The authors conclude that

‘... there are significant differences between the case of South Africa boycott and the contemporary BDS movement, which means that however significant the South African boycott was as a factor in bringing an end to apartheid, it does not follow that the Palestinian BDS movement will be able to play the same role in bringing an end to the occupation’ (Darweish & Rigby 2015:168).

The authors also underline that hopes are small that the BDS movement will be successful, considering the absence of political unity among all Palestinian factions, and capacity to mobilize on the inside, as well as in the Diaspora in order to ‘raise the financial, economic, political – and moral – costs of occupation ...’ (Darweish & Rigby 2015:169).

The book also discusses the importance of the Gaza youth Manifesto for change, the program for the so-called 15 March movement, which addressed one of the key issues for unarmed resistance to stand a chance. The political divide, mainly due to the Fatah-Hamas rivalry, has paralyzed much of the Palestinian unity and activism, and the movement demanded an end of the spilt, and that the Palestinian forces should form a unity government with the primary task to end the occupation.

Taking the Gaza youth Manifesto for change as an example for future hope, the authors end the book by underlining seven necessary preconditions. These relate to the need for political factions to unite, to form a unity government aimed at mobilizing the people, and the need to agree and understand that all resources have to be used for this campaign, as well as to ensure that the great powers recognize the situation as a major crisis. Many of these activities would need to be coordinated with the Israeli activists, and resources would need to be mobilized at an international level, as well. In the end, the unarmed resistance activism would need to ensure that the Israeli public understands that ‘ending of the occupation as the basis for substantive negotiations lay the foundation for a shared future for Palestinians and Israelis’ (Darweish & Rigby 2015: 178).

Future research challenges

Summing up the impressions of the book, one realizes that we also have a whole series of new interesting and important issues for future research that are explicitly and implicitly raised in the book. The book highlights much that has been previously untold, and it systematically examines the history of the Palestinian popular unarmed resistance. Much has been written about the Palestinian armed resistance; however, Daweish’s & Rigby’s study helps us recognize the need of a comparative study of both armed and unarmed resistance and the way the two forms of resistance influence each other. The book addresses some aspects of how armed resistance hampers and negatively impacts on unarmed resistance; at the same time, it inspires questions for further research on “resistance” culture, in which armed resistance is part of the national discourse – and more importantly, how it can be changed. How to shift from such a resistance culture to an unarmed culture? Are key figures, similar to Gandhi, Mandela and King, needed to lead this transformation of the resistance culture? Is the unity among political leaders enough (as the authors indicate), or is there a need for communication strategies by local grassroots and (new social) media activists (or a combination) as was the case in the so-called Arab spring events, in order to spur such a shift?

Not less important is the question raised in the book about the characteristics of unarmed resistance. More specifically, what features of resistance – i.e. techniques, methods, strategies and practical knowhow – promote change (i.e. ending occupation/domination/oppression) and which do not? Does the impact of a certain feature vary depending on the context?

In conclusion, the book by Darweish and Rigby is truly inspiring and the rich data we gain from the Palestinian case supports the idea that both *quantitative* and *qualitative comparative analysis* of different forms of unarmed resistance, as well as of different contexts (conflict types), are needed. This will bring further theoretical inputs on how *specific conditions* ('resistance practices') and *direct effect* ('undermining of domination') impact conflict transformation. What needs further attention is a systematic *comparison* of various resistance *practices* under different structural *conditions*. The empirical and theoretical detailed and rich discussions in the book by Darweish & Rigby offer important new suggestions on how to proceed further to develop this important path of the resistance studies field.

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