

Palestinian youth: a silver lining and a ray of hope

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The news from Palestine, as has been the case for a long while now, is bad and depressing on many levels. The announcement of the “deal of the century” and subsequent gestures from the United States towards Israel, capped off two decades in this century which were disastrous to Palestine and the Palestinians—some would say as bad if not worse than the traumatic year of 1948. These US gestures included legitimising the occupation of East Jerusalem and the Jewish settlements in the West Bank, as well as declaring as legal the prospective future annexation of parts of the West Bank to Israel.

The century began with the brutal suppression of the Second Intifada and continued with a policy of incremental genocide against the Gaza Strip since 2006. These were complemented by racist legislation against the Palestinians inside Israel that culminated in the Nation State Law in the summer of 2018, which many rightly refer to as the Israeli Apartheid Law. In those twenty years, ethnic cleansing operations were carried out daily against the Palestinians in the so-called Area C of the West Bank, particularly in the Jordan Valley and the South Hebron region. Meanwhile, a slower but no less destructive process has continued the “Judaisation” of the Greater Jerusalem area and the bisection of the West Bank through both the apartheid wall and territorial wedges created by Jewish settlements that cut the West Bank into two.

All in all, it seems that there is an attempt to depoliticise the Palestine question by delegitimising the Palestinian narrative of the past. There is a total denial of the Nakba and the Israeli responsibility for it as well as a denial of basic Palestinian human and political rights in the present.

The ability of the Palestinians to deal with these calamities and the offensive against their very existence was hampered by two major factors. The first is the disunity in the national movement, and the second the unwillingness of the political elites in the world, particularly in the West, to meaningfully interfere on their behalf. On the contrary, these elites, be they in the government, the press or in the academy, provide immunity for the criminal Israeli polices on the ground.

Yet not all was bleak. Outside of Palestine, the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement gained momentum since 2005, reflecting a significant change in the civil society’s attitude to Palestine all over the world. A less discernible but no less important phenomenon is the focus of this article—the activity of Palestinian youth, wherever they are. Their activity through Palestine societies at university campuses around the world, culminating each year in the Israel Apartheid Week, has revitalised the global solidarity movement. However, they bring to the fore more than just youthful enthusiasm. These young people also constantly introduce fresh and new ideas, which are—at least for me—a reason not to lose hope and a sign that the Palestinian struggle is far from over. A focused examination of the activities and ideas might help us to assess more clearly the current state of the struggle for freedom in Palestine and its future options.

Palestinian society is one of the youngest in the world. It is not easy to get statistics for every

Palestinian community on the globe; nevertheless, in those for which we do have statistics, it seems that around 57 percent of the population is under the age of 24 and 80 percent under 30. [1] It is probable that other Palestinian communities have a roughly similar age structure.

These young people are the ones who would lead the Palestinian cause in the future. This article attempts to map some of the activity and interrelations of these new forces as well as to assess the ideological trends, aspirations, and mood among this group of Palestinians. This might tell us if these youthful impulses, energising the liberation movement as a whole, will be able lead all of us out of the present dismal period, which is one the worst in Palestine's history.

Like the rest of Palestinian society, the youth live in diverse geopolitical spaces. Of course, there are naturally specific agendas and aspirations determined by the locality of any such group—but there are also common objectives and hopes that affect the Palestinian national movement and the liberation struggle.

The occupied territories

Let us start first with the more unique situations and agendas of some of the groups. The first are the young people living in the occupied West Bank and in the besieged Gaza Strip.

Part of the concerns and fears of this group of youth—as indicated both by recent research and my own intuitive impression after spending long periods of time there—are not different from the overall population in the occupied territories. [2] Paramount among this list of concerns is the ongoing trials and tribulations of living under Israeli direct or indirect occupation, which include harassment by the army, settlers and border police. Particularly concerning is the fear of continued closures, curfews and imprisonment without trial.

More unique among young people is the resentment caused by their further marginalisation within the political sphere and a disturbing sense of exploitation in the social one. The Palestinian National Council is relegating Palestinian youth to an insignificant presence—just three members out of 450 council members come from student unions. [3]

There is evidence that the Israeli occupation forces are targetting youth, and in particular children. Most of the Palestinians killed recently by the occupying army are young people. This is a generation born into the geography of disaster created by Israel, with calamitous effects on its mental and physical wellbeing. They were moulded by resisting this reality, shaping their political orientation.

There is also a prevalent suspicion that bureaucracy, nepotism and corruption block the way for young people into the limited professional opportunities offered under occupation. Unsurprisingly, the level of despair among certain sections of the younger generation is higher in the occupied territories than anywhere else in historical Palestine or aboard. Yet, as I shall note, there are youth movements struggling everywhere against the occupation in their own region and also jointly for a different Palestine.

Similarly to the young Palestinians in the refugee camps of Syria, and some in the refugee camps of Lebanon, the existential fear for one's own life and that of one's family plays a dominant role, often overshadowing visions for the future. Nevertheless, one cannot generalise too much. There are, as I will show, incredible initiatives that combine the existential daily struggles of young Palestinians with a more strategic outlook: envisioning a better and different future.

Other concerns are shared by Palestinian youth wherever they are. One such worry is the continued division between Fatah and Hamas, which troubles many younger Palestinians. There is no great admiration anymore for either, but there is a recognition of their historical role and their current

significance for continuing, or disrupting, the struggle for freedom. On the other hand, there is nothing in attitudes towards the Palestinian Authority (PA) that indicates any admiration at all. This was shown by a recent survey from BADIL, a Palestinian non-governmental organisation (NGO); there is a consensus among young people that the PA is a corrupt body and an impediment to mass mobilisation. [4] However, the BADIL survey also showed there is a realisation that, at the moment, the PA cannot be dissolved from below. As the Arab World for Research and Development research centre has noted, there is recognition that the PA “feeds millions of Palestinians”. [5] There is a fear that the dissolution of the PA would lead to full occupation, and this has deterred young people from supporting this as a strategy. In 2021, although there is not yet a full survey, it seems that no one is sure whether such a possibility is the worst-case scenario.

Whether in the occupied territories, within Israel or in the rest of the world, there is a frustration with the Palestinian political elite’s underestimation of young people’s potential. Young activists constantly remind us that the founders of the Palestinian national movement were themselves young people when they started their activity.

The legacies of the First Intifada

For the Palestinian youth in the occupied territories, the formative event that illuminates their options for the future is the First Intifada of 1987. In that uprising young people came into public awareness because of the central role they played. The youth were part of the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising and this participation contributed immensely to their sense of importance and relevance.

Youth in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip conducted what seemed to many in the West to be the sort of peaceful and unarmed resistance they could support, successfully challenging the Israeli depiction of the Palestinian struggle as an act of terrorism. In the eyes of the Palestinians around the world, the youth led the way in a democratic, egalitarian and massive popular resistance. This was a mode of political action that had emerged before, during the Mandatory period, but had then been replaced by guerrilla warfare between 1948 and 1982. The memory of the participation of young people in the intifada still empowers young people, especially students, because it represents a time when they could enthuse a huge public behind them—not just inspiring action on the ground but also acting as a political compass for the future. Among many of these young people there is a now growing recognition that the achievements of the First Intifada were wasted by the Oslo “peace process”, which began in 1993. Nonetheless they feel that the uprising left an enduring legacy of empowerment.

Indeed, the legacies of the First Intifada are widespread. It showed the power of grassroots’ actions in the neighbourhoods and the camps, driven by direct democratic decision-making while eliminating what one might call “ideological dramas”. These features explain why, despite the imbalance of power between an unarmed society and the strongest army in the region, the uprising lingered on for almost three years. [6]

The “no-nonsense” initiative

These young voices disappeared in many ways during the next, and more militarised, intifada. In many ways, the Second Intifada was a turning point in youth activity, inside and outside historical Palestine. The uprising brought to the fore the paralysing split between the Fatah and Hamas, and this in turn gave rise to youth activism that sought to distance itself from this poisonous split. Young Palestinians in the occupied West Bank called this a move towards “a no-nonsense initiative”, and in many ways this initiative continues today, searching for an alternative route into the future. This energy was channelled into civil society, either in the form of NGOs or youth associations, which

gathered under the umbrella of an organisation called the Independent Youth Movement. [7]

This initiative grew into a popular movement of resistance that has made a powerful intervention since 2003 amid landmark events such as the struggle against the apartheid wall, the Israeli assaults on the Gaza Strip and the Arab Spring. It culminated with a courageous and popular resistance movement, the Great March of Return, at the fences of the Gaza Strip in 2018. More recently, it morphed into localised youth movements. Many of these have their own websites and Facebook pages and are involved in opposing the Israeli attempt to ethnically cleanse large parts of Area C of the West Bank. One such group, for instance, is active in Masafer Yatta (the hilly area south of Hebron). In this region for years now, the army and the settlers have been harassing the local population. In some cases, this has led to the forced eviction of farmers. The youth have resettled these evicted villages so that farmers can return, and they provide escorts for children and farmers who face daily attacks by Israeli settlers on the way to their schools and fields. [8]

This popular movement of protest and resistance is not only directed toward the occupation but also against the mismanagement of power, resources and state funds. The movement guards against signs and gestures of normalisation that can perpetuate the occupation and lend it legitimacy. This is not a new phenomenon; already in the First Intifada, the youth were combating the fatigue felt by some members of the older generation who seemed to have become resigned to the occupation and accepted it as an accomplished fact that cannot be changed.

Therefore, it is unsurprising that many young people would like to re-enact the First Intifada. Indeed, the dismal reality that motivated the intifada in the first place was reinstated after Oslo, and in many ways it is a far worse version of it. The economic situation today is certainly worse, rooted in the Israeli policy of roadblocks, strip searches, deportation, house demolition, separation of families and detention without trial. This is just a partial list of the repertoire of abuses that the occupation inflicts on Palestinians.

It is clear that, just as before, Israel continues to act with particular brutality against non-violent Palestinian individuals and movements. Therefore a new wave of such protest would be met by an even more callous and inhuman response. Some still endorse resorting once more to armed resistance, as was attempted by Fatah and Hamas during the Second Intifada; but this mode of action also generates a cruel Israeli response. In the case of the Gaza Strip, this response verges on the implementation of genocidal policies.

There is no one, single vision of Palestinian youth. Much depends on where one is located. Nevertheless, there are common features and different stresses on the same points. The youth in the occupied West Bank and the sieged Gaza Strip are motivated by concerns about the ongoing political rift between Fatah and Hamas. The focus is still on the end of the occupation but, unlike the older generation, this is much more associated with a full liberation of Palestine. The youth believe that if their views and thoughts were considered, it could end the divisive ideological discord between the main political blocs. They are confident that this unity would play a crucial role in ending the Israeli occupation and gaining freedom for Palestine as a whole. Despite being marginalised (and at times even suppressed) by their leaders, they continue to demand a foothold in politics from above, as well as from below. They are adamant about their right to take part in the process of political decision-making that would determine the future of their homeland.

The “48 Arabs”: the Palestinian minority in Israel

The Second Intifada played a different role in the political life of Palestinian youth inside Israel, intensifying youth activism within civil society. Books such as Dan Rabinowitz’s and Khawla Abu-Baker’s *Coffins on Our Shoulders: The Experience of the Palestinian Citizens of Israel* hailed the

young activists as the proud generation, even to the extent of belittling and misunderstanding the sacrifices and successes of the older generation of Palestinians in Israel between 1948 and 2000. [9] This went hand in hand with the expansion of NGOs and civil society as a whole, propelled by enthusiastic youth activity. Here too, the established political forces in the community—the Arab parties in the Israeli Knesset—were respected by the youth, but also criticised for lack of unity. This has somewhat changed in recent years with the establishment of the Joint List, which comprises all the Palestinian political parties in Israel. Quite a few younger politicians made their way into the list, including its head, Ayman Odeh.

More relevant to this article, however, is the growing youth activity geared towards a one-state solution, looking strategically to the BDS campaign and strongly advocating the Palestinian right of return. This kind of activity tries to counter Israeli policies that are meant to de-indigenise the Palestinians inside Israel and portray them as strangers in their homeland.

A very important part of the struggle, and one which influences the local youth's aspirations and visions for the future, are cultural projects that defend the historical memory of the Nakba. These projects include reconstructions of the villages destroyed in the Nakba, showing both how they looked before 1948 and imagining how they might look after the return of the refugees. These programmes have even led to a small group of young people establishing an actual physical presence on one of the destroyed sites. [10]

These young activists keep the Nakba memory alive. For them and so many other Palestinians, what they are living through is “al-Nakba al-Mustamera”, the ongoing Nakba. This concept echoes the crucial point made by the late anthropologist Patrick Wolfe about settler colonialism: it is not an event but a structure. Israeli policies towards the Palestinians in the past and in the present are informed by the settler-colonial ideology of Zionism, and the incompleteness of the ethnic cleansing of 1948 has shaped Israeli policies towards the Palestinians ever since. Young Palestinians now focus on confronting these policies by demanding rectification of Israel's past crimes as well as the cessation of its current agenda of oppression across historical Palestine. [11]

The commemoration of the Nakba by Palestinian youth is now an annual act; every year, thousands join a march of return to one of the many villages destroyed in 1948. It is attended by all the Palestinian politicians and has become a focus of cultural, as well as political, struggle against the 2011 Israeli Nakba law, which prevents public funding of anybody who commemorates the 1948 events as a Nakba. This annual march was initiated by internal Palestinian refugees in the wake of the failure of the 1991 Madrid Conference to broach the question of refugees. In 1995, the Association for the Defence of the Rights of the Internally Displaced in Israel was founded to organise an annual march of return to the site of a different village on 15 May, placing the issue on the Israeli public agenda.

In the world in which they live—between Israeli citizenship and Palestinian nationality—the indigenous dimension of this annual commemoration helps to define their role both in Israel and in the Palestinian polity. A more accurate definition of who they are is helped by the Zionist, in particular Liberal Zionist, objection to their cultural projects of commemoration. One of the gurus of Liberal Zionism, professor Shlomo Avineri, criticised the commemoration as an act of delegitimisation against the State of Israel, seeing it as expressing a hidden wish to solidify a stronger national movement for Palestinian citizens as a foundation for nation-building all over historical Palestine. [12] Avineri's criticisms reveal just how narrow the differences are between all the Zionist political streams in Israel when it comes to the legitimate rights of the Palestinians. The 1948 ethnic cleansing is equally denied by the Israeli “left” and “right”. If this denial continues and is not replaced by an acknowledgement of Israel's responsibility for the crime against humanity that it committed in 1948 and has compounded ever since, there is no basis for any meaningful

reconciliation in the future.

An important institution in this respect is Mada al-Carmel, founded by author and philosopher Azmi Bishara. This is the only outfit that has provided young Palestinian intellectuals with a space for free discussion about their own history and present conditions: a discussion that is impossible within the Israeli academic establishment. There is a huge human and intellectual capital within the Palestinian community in Israel. Once this community plays a leading role in Palestinian politics in general—a role that both Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation have denied—this potential would enhance the movement for freedom and justice.

There are not many proper surveys of the younger generation's attitudes towards a future solution. Nevertheless, evidence suggests a constant shift from support for the two-state solution to an endorsement of a one-state solution. New initiatives evolving around this idea have emerged recently. The most notable among them is the One Democratic State Campaign. [13] This campaign will eventually become a popular movement when the last believers in the two-state solution admit defeat and jettison the idea. Such ideological vacuums never stay vacant, as Karl Marx taught us.

Finally, this particular group of young Palestinians place the importance of the human rights agenda next to that of the national agenda. Hence a Palestinian state or full Palestinian sovereignty are, in their eyes, as important as civil, economic and social equality. This is why politicians such as Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders are highly regarded by them. Some Palestinian members of the Knesset reflect these ideals; however, they are also almost religiously devoted to the two-state solution, unlike their grassroots members and the younger elements of civil society.

This vision, with a strong stress on the right of return, also resonates with young Palestinians in the refugee camps outside Israel and the occupied territories—some of whom have been made refugees once more in Europe since 2012—and among those in the more veteran exile communities.

The refugee and exile communities

The Zionist leadership envisaged that the refugees would either die out or forget the Nakba. This vision did not materialise. On the contrary, despite all Israeli efforts to divide and erase Palestinian society, its people have not abandoned their rights. Instead, they continue steadfastly to confront Israel's policies of expulsion.

A second survey by BADIL clearly indicates that the third and fourth generation of Palestinian refugees did not “forget” their attachment to Palestine. The survey was carried out in the seven areas where the majority of Palestinians reside: Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. It was conducted among Palestinian young people aged between 15 and 19 years. The survey's findings demonstrate that the vast majority of the respondents sees themselves as Palestinians. As the survey states, “The significance of this majority can only be understood by bearing in mind that these communities were born in forced exile and have never set foot in Palestine—denied by Israel.” The research results depict patterns of unified Palestinian identity despite Israel's attempts to irreparably damage their social fabric through geopolitical fragmentation.

Furthermore, the survey demonstrates that Palestinian youth in separated geographies hold similar viewpoints about their identity and the future. Being a Palestinian is not just a matter of an identity card, but rather a commitment to a struggle for the full liberation of Palestine. [14] This survey, conducted in 2012, is reaffirmed by recent research on the question. The desire for a solution based on the combination of the right of return with the establishment of a democratic state all over historic Palestine is shown even more clearly when one examines the views of the youth among

Palestinian exile communities.

Around the world, this youth is organised in Palestine societies on campus and in movements that encompass all walks of life. Their activity is particularly impressive in the US, where they tirelessly organise events in universities, clubs, churches and mosques, among other places. They have little access to mainstream media platforms—but then, the youth are not particularly fervent consumers of this media, and they do not trust it either.

One meta-organisation for this activity is the Palestine Youth Movement (PYM), which particularly represents young Palestinians in the US. PYM defines itself as “a transnational, independent, grassroots movement of young Palestinians in Palestine and in exile worldwide”. [15] It refuses to have a clear ideological colouring of the left and right, differentiating it from the 1970s political currents within the Palestinian liberation movement, when each one had its international ideological allies. PYM states:

Irrespective of our different political, cultural and social backgrounds, we strive to revive a tradition of pluralistic commitment toward our cause to ensure a better future, characterised by freedom and justice on a social and political level for ourselves and subsequent generations.

This resonates with the agenda of quite a few young people who joined the protests around the world since 2008, from the participants in the Arab Spring to the Gilets Jaunes (“yellow vests”) demonstrators in France. It is a position that echoes socialist and leftist ideas. Yet, as I have noted before, the traditional left and those like me who fully identify with it need to redefine the essence of a socialist standpoint. It must be universal, not Eurocentric, and it should integrate the good old values with the new perspectives and aspirations of the younger generation. For example, one important issue—which deserves a full article by itself—is the attitude towards Islam as a civilisation, and not just religion, in the Middle East, and how this might be part of a worldview that can be relevant and powerful in reproducing a revolutionary alliance on the ground. Another issue is the fear of fully endorsing the solution of a single, democratic state among established left-wing political organisations such as the Labour party, the TUC and the progressive flank of the Democratic Party.

PYM represents a new alliance of identification that has recently been woven between the Palestinians and analogous struggles around the world, as well with the struggle that characterised the Arab Spring. As its website puts it, PYM activism is “deeply rooted in the Arab regional context, which must be freed of neocolonialism in order for the complete liberation of Palestine to become a tangible reality.”

Like their counterparts among other Palestinian groups, PYM is motivated by a strong belief that the youth can reactivate the national movement as a whole and move the fight for liberation forward. PYM feels that its advantage is the articulation of a clear endgame: a common vision of a liberated and democratic Palestine. It is familiar with social movement theory and praxis, working professionally to empower young people and prepare them to expand the struggle in the US. Schooling, workshops, conferences, demonstrations and campaigns are its bread and butter through which it ensures a constant presence in the public mind and in public spaces. Time will tell how successful it is, but it does seem that it has paved the way for a wide support among US youth for the Palestinian cause.

The electronic intifada

Both the youth in various areas of historical Palestine and those abroad are avid users of the

internet, and this is where ideas are being discussed and articulated into a programme of action and a vision for the future. The PYM has an impressive web presence, and this is also true of many Palestinian youth movements. I have already mentioned some of these: the youth in Hebron, the civil society organisations inside Israel and the various youth committees in the refugee camps. A clear discourse about the future is revealed when one looks closely at the information traffic in and between these various sites. They refer to Palestine as “historical Palestine” and see the country as a whole as occupied and colonised; they see the potential for its liberation by popular resistance with help from outside by campaigns such as BDS. This is a new mode of resistance so brilliantly captured by one of the main loci of this activity, the Electronic Intifada website.

This internet presence transcends the physical barriers that, in the past, made the fragmentation of the Palestinian people the main obstacle for united action and vision. However, we should also take into account that there are young Palestinians under occupation and in refugee communities who do not have easy access to the internet; their world is less shaped by this cyber-discourse and still informed strongly by the daily realities of their existential struggle. Since the outbreak of the Second Intifada and the drop of the average income of Palestinian households living in the 1967 Palestinian territories, there has been a sharp increase in the number of Palestinian internet users, especially young people, through connectivity in schools, universities and cafes. In universities, online methods of instruction have had to develop because students frequently cannot reach their campuses due to conditions of siege.

This reality, however, is constantly changing. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, and much more so under its influence, there has been a surge in internet usage. Mainly this is in the education system in the occupied territories and inside Israel. The internet has become the main tool of connection between teachers and students, and has thus turned into a means for intense politicisation and cyber-resistance. Similarly, the spread of smartphones is continuously connecting more and more young Palestinians to the internet.

The Palestinians are now the largest group of users of the internet in the Arab world. It is estimated that more than a quarter of the Palestinians under occupation have constant access to the internet. The Palestinian web is predominantly characterised by a unified youth political discourse about the struggle and its aims. As Makram Houry-Machool, from the European Centre for the Study of Extremism, noted back in 2007, this is part of a “national peaceful political resistance and is one of the most central elements of everyday life”. [16]

Taken together, the common thread of the orientation that is proposed by Palestinian youth activity everywhere points to a clear vision of the future without yet finalising the way forward for implementing it.

The vision is one democratic state in Palestine from the River Jordan to the Mediterranean, dismantling the Zionist institutions, allowing the refugees to return and developing a democracy based on economic and political equality. This would also mean a clear procedure for rectifying past evils through redistribution of land and other means of production between the Jewish settler community and indigenous Palestinians. There are still loose threads to be pulled and woven into this tapestry of a future Palestine, but they are beyond the framework of this article. The most important of them, which deserves further discussion in the future, is the whole notion of a secular state and the question of how the youth loyal to political Islam can be part of this new movement. Constructive ideas, such as that of a civic state rather than secular one, have very recently been proposed. One will have to wait to see how these dialogues develop, but their successful progression will have wider implications for the activity of the left in the West and the Arab World.

The means are the mixture of global solidarity, including support for the BDS movement, an

expanding network of identification with the struggles of indigenous and oppressed groups around the globe, and a united democratic leadership on the ground that will properly represent the younger generation.

Within this vision, there is still a recognition of the shorter-term targets of such a movement, determined by the particular circumstances of each Palestinian group. Three different modes of action represent a potential way to push forward the popular resistance in each locality. In the West Bank, the focus of Palestinian youth is very localised and confronts specific Israeli policies of ethnic cleansing and oppression. In the Gaza Strip, it is focused on the siege and the right of return as two sides of the same coin of Palestinian dispossession. Inside Israel, it is cultural resistance that navigates efficiently between the government's politics of apartheid and denial on the one hand, and the agenda of the established Palestinian parties on the other. All three modes of youth action are less influenced by existing ideological affiliations, are trying to avoid replicating the damaging disunity of national politics, and are committed to non-violent and popular resistance.

Outside of Palestine, there is naturally more stress on visions and long-term strategies. The youth outside Palestine clearly articulates a bold discourse, depicting Zionism as a racist ideology that prevents reconciliation. They face endless and baseless accusations of antisemitism because of this stance, but they have dealt with these quite successfully (and certainly much better than the Labour Party and established left in the Britain).

Although many of the movement's important websites are located in the US, there is clear resentment towards any future Pax Americana. One observer at a youth summit in Ramallah sponsored by USAID reported an example of this. The Independent Youth Movement, which is active in the occupied territories, demonstrated vehemently in a meeting with US officials, writing "USAID, Go to Hell" on a placard. There is a belief that US funds come with selfish interests that will always ultimately demand the return of favours, and thus must be declined. [17]

In the past, and particularly in the 1970s, anti-Americanism characterised struggles against colonialism and imperialism. Nowadays, this is replaced by identification with the struggle of oppressed ethnic and indigenous groups around the world. Nevertheless, the movement still has a strong socialist colouring, because neoliberalism is identified as a crucial part of the coalition of forces that obstructs Palestinian liberation. Neoliberalism is increasingly recognised as another form of settler colonialism, and workers as yet another oppressed group, victimised by the same coalition of forces that are at work in Palestine.

There is also a growing sense that the production of knowledge is an essential tool in the struggle. This is why the campuses are such important sites of this activism, both in terms of students' organisations on the ground and the new orientations in the curriculums and research orientations of faculties. There are now eight centres for Palestine studies around the world, hosting more than 100 postgraduate students a year and working on Palestine as their main topic of inquiry. Many of them revolve around topics that are relevant for the future of Palestine: the struggle against the denial of the Nakba; analysis of antisemitism and Islamophobia in the context of the struggle for justice in Palestine; the relevance of neoliberalism and settler colonialism; the various features of a possible one-state solution; and the practical implementation of Palestinian refugees' right of return.

Despite this incredible production of knowledge and the energised activism on the ground, there is more clarity about the vision of the future than about how to get there. This where the left can play a crucial role, in Palestine and outside it. However, this requires that the traditional left revitalise itself and find a way to have an impact on the overall strategy, without which this newly found vitality could be wasted, as was the case after the 2008 crash and during the Arab Spring.

Much of this will have to do with the organisation and structures of a social movement. It seems that there was disdain towards organisational matters from both those who participated in the global movements since 2008 against inhuman neoliberal economic policies and in the struggle against corruption and oppression in the Arab Spring. One can understand the source of this kind of resentment. For so many, organisations have been experienced as tools of corruption, based on an unmerited hierarchy and producing stagnation rather than progress. However, it is hard to see any alternative to student groups, workers' unions and other political and social organisations if one wants to turn visions into revolutionary realities. Time will tell whether this energy and motivation can be integrated into either existing outfits or new ones. Yet what is clear is that young Palestinians are here and they are active. If they find the way to organise and coordinate their action, they will affect considerably the struggle for freedom and justice in Palestine.

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P.S.

International Socialism

<http://isj.org.uk/palestinian-youth-a-silver-lining-and-a-ray-of-hope/>

Footnotes

[1] For informations about the demographics of the occupied territories, see the Palestinian Statistic Bureau website—http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/lang__en/881/default.aspx#Population

[2] Babatudne, 2009.

[3] Seif, 2020.

[4] BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, 2012a.

[5] The survey is quoted in Mustakbalna, 2017.

[6] Hilterman, 1991, p20.

[7] <https://palestinyouthmovement.com/>

[8] For one such facebook page, see <http://www.facebook.com/media.yas>

[9] Rabinowitz and Abu Baker, 2005.

[10] See Pappe, 2018.

[11] Wolfe, 2006.

[12] Avineri, 2014.

[13] See <https://onestatecampaign.org/en>

[14] BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, 2012b.

[15] <https://palestinianyouthmovement.com>

[16] See Khoury-Machool, 2007.

[17] Unsleuber, 2011.