



## Palestine can be won in a street fight (02/05/2014)

Susan Abulhawa

*"We know all too well, that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians."*

Nelson Mandela

Palestine has always been the underdog, a country slowly being wiped off the map, a society daily and methodically being dismantled by Israel. As a principally unarmed and oppressed indigenous population, Palestinians are perceived as powerless against the military supremacy of Israel's technological death industry, persistently outmanoeuvred by Israel's political cunning and endlessly bullied by a Western world that has made a game of diplomacy and intrigue from our miserable fate.

We've lost so much to Israel's boundless plunder. Over and over, we lose. Home, heritage, life, dignity, security, hope, culture, narrative, orchards and olives, history and artifacts, livelihoods, innocence, language and identity. They've excavated our souls, renamed our villages, poured concrete over our ancient cemeteries, made brothels of our churches and mosques, and claimed our hummus, falafel and maqlooba as the traditional food of Jewish foreigners who daily arrive to take our place.

But we're still here - fighting, dreaming, writing, dancing, painting, loving, having babies - because, as Mahmoud Darwish once said: Hope is not a topic. It's not a theory. It's a talent.

And now, nearly 70 years since our demise began, we are finally arriving on the street, the space where we are vastly more powerful than Israel. The global street is where Israel has no real defences against us. Here, Israel is virtually powerless, and they've done all they can to keep us off this global street. Israel's overriding strategy of conquest has always been to keep Palestinian resistance under their purview of power, which exists principally within two realms.

### Physical power

The first is physical power. Israel is among the world's most innovative exporter of death technology - sophisticated hardware, software and terror services which they hone and test on Palestinian bodies and minds. We cannot beat them in military or guerrilla battles, because we have no physical power against such brutality. We tried and we failed on that front.

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The second sphere of Israel's power exists among the powerful elite, the layer of humanity that is motivated and persuaded strictly by power, money and political expediency, such as some heads of state, media bosses, corporate officers, and others

who feed off colonialism and vulture capitalism. This is where we've been since Oslo, wandering the halls of power, knocking on powerful doors, begging for justice, and in return patronised, blamed, demeaned and manipulated.

Until now, the Palestinian struggle has mostly been waged in these two realms, where we will always be overpowered by Israel's colonialist malfeasance and pillage. Only once before did we manage to move the Palestinian struggle beyond Israel's control. It happened during the first intifada. Although our brave young people, armed with rocks, posed no physical threat to the military might of a nuclear state, they managed to turn the tides and shift the power, because for the first time, our struggle reached the global street.

For the first time, ordinary people around the world could see the lie that Israel was fighting an existential war against a dangerous foe. The images and stories of Israeli policy of breaking the bones of rock-throwing children made their way into the living rooms of masses, where discussions of morality were injected into the conversation on Palestine. This was "the street", the global space of public participation where words like freedom, justice, liberation, resonate. For the first time, media around the world questioned and criticised Israel. The plight of Palestinians was becoming recognised as an indigenous people's fight for survival against Zionist expansionism and ethno-religious supremacy.

Thus, the first intifada moved the Palestinian struggle away from Israel's spheres of power, and planted it firmly in this realm of morality and popular legitimacy. Israel's decision to then "negotiate" with the PLO was nothing more than a ploy to reposition Palestinian resistance back within their range of control. Until then, Israel had refused to recognise the PLO and did what it could to obliterate them. But then we moved our fight to the streets of the world, exposing the moral dimensions of our struggle.

Israel's only viable option then was to create a new diplomatic theatre (Oslo Accords) wherein to tuck us once again out of view and off the street, because Israel had no legitimate defence against a native people's cry for freedom when that cry reached beyond their prison walls and beyond their friends in the elite layers of political and economic power.

Oslo and its ensuing insidious "Peace Process" achieved a great and protracted silence, both from Palestinians and from the world, allowing Israel to continue its original ethnic cleansing programme unimpeded.

### The fight over morality

But now we have arrived at another moment of a popular street fight based on morality, legitimacy and justice. The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Campaign has shifted the dynamics of power and moved the battle for Palestine once again into the realm of global awareness and public participation in a native people's struggle for liberation.

Israel's response has been two fold. They're employing the tried and tested tactic of negotiations for "interim agreements". According to a Haaretz report, in addition to "advancing the peace process with the Palestinians [to] stave off a large portion of the boycott threats", other tactics include "a massive PR campaign against pro-boycott organisations", filing "legal suits in European and North American courts against organisations that are proponents of the BDS movement", lobbying for the creation of new laws under which more people can be prosecuted for boycotting Israel, and finally stepping up surveillance of BDS supporters, which would involve operations by the Mossad and Shin Bet.

All of these tactics are meant to silence debate, to intimidate people of conscience and to unravel unified calls for justice. Remarkably, not one of the suggested tactics attempts to put forth a compelling moral counter argument to BDS.

And the reason for that is simple. The spiritual poverty of a colonial state obsessed with creating and maintaining a particular demographic profile does not appeal to popular notions of morality. The assertion of a military state's security needs in order to justify ongoing destruction of the indigenous population is not convincing in this era of information, where people can see what it looks like to demolish a family's home whose principle offence is not being Jewish, and know that this happens nearly every day; to see what it looks like to arrest children with slight bodies and fresh urine stains from fear in their pants, and know that there are hundreds more just like them who languish in Israeli jails, tortured, without charge or trial and without access to their parents; to watch videos of terrifying night raids that burst through people's homes and drag the young and old from their beds, haul them off to a grim fate, and know that this is routine; to read report after report from human rights organisations detailing the terrible minutiae of daily cruelty and humiliation, and know that this is Israeli state policy that has been in effect for decades.

That's why Israel cannot win this battle, as long as we keep our struggle in this realm of morality. Richard Falk called it a "legitimacy war". It's also a global street fight, because justice, legitimacy and

liberation do not emerge from negotiations, military occupation, oppression, corporations, or colonial courtrooms. Freedom is almost always borne from the theatre and agony of struggling in the streets.

For Palestinians, who have been fragmented and exiled all over the world, BDS gives us a way to unify and use our tragedy of dislocation to multiply the avenues available to us. It's an opportunity to welcome and reciprocate the solidarity of people of conscience. It's a realm to celebrate our native roots and to exercise our talent for hope.

This global street is where a defenceless oppressed indigenous people have a chance at justice. There is nothing for us in negotiations with the powerful elite.



**Wala**  
**from My Voice Sought the Wind**  
Susan Abulhawa

It's 3 am  
In the cattle cage

The line is long  
And thick  
With bodies

You wait

A jibneh sandwich  
With cucumber  
In a plastic bag  
Clutched in your callused laborer's hand

Your wife prepared your breakfast and lunch  
She was up before you  
And together you prayed a predawn salat

She kissed your face and said  
Allah ma'ak ya habibi  
Allah be with you, my love

You kiss the faces of your sleeping babies  
You haven't seen them awake in months  
And you wonder  
Has Walid's voice begun to crack yet?  
Have Wijdad's hips begun to flare?  
How big was Suraya's smile when she came home  
with her report card?

It's 4 am  
In the cattle cage

Still, you wait  
The line before you is so long  
And behind you now, it is longer

Few speak  
You're packed so damn tight  
That you hold one another upright

You see your own fatigue  
Reflected in the weariness etched on  
The faces all around you

You look away  
Pine for a smoke  
But who the hell can afford that?

You stare at the graffiti beyond the  
Iron bars holding you in  
Written just for you  
Written  
By zionist settlers sucking the breath from your  
lungs

You understand the meaning  
Of their English words  
"Die Sand Niggers"

Sometimes  
You pine for that, too.

It's 5 am  
In the cattle cage

The soldiers arrive  
The line loosens  
You take one step forward  
Propelled by the weight of bodies  
Behind you

Your jibneh sandwich  
With cucumber  
In a plastic bag  
Is crushed.  
It never survives

It's 7 am  
In the cattle cage

Now is your turn  
You produce your papers  
Unfold and refold  
Eyes down  
Heart down  
Your shoes are down on their luck

But  
You're out of the line  
Fifteen men before you were pulled aside  
And you tried not to look  
Not to hear the one begging  
Don't hit me

It's 7:30 am  
On the cattle bus

You ride  
The country they stole from you  
Seeds outside your window  
And you imagine  
The man you would have been  
The man you should have been  
Out there  
Riding the family steed  
The thoroughbred mares your grandfather  
Raised and nurtured and loved  
In a Palestine  
Un-raped  
Un-stolen

It's 8 am  
You get off the cattle bus  
Your crushed jibneh sandwich  
With cucumber  
In a plastic bag  
In one hand

Your eyes down  
Heart down  
You put your toolbox down to knock  
On the zionist settler's back door  
Where the help goes

But  
The zionist settler boss-man yells  
Wala  
Mish hon el yom!  
Not there today  
Boy!

And all you can do is thank Allah that your  
Wife and your babies are not  
There to hear them call you  
Wala

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