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Perspectives on the Israel-Palestine Conflict: A Historical Analysis through Palestinian Narratives

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Perspectives on the Israel-Palestine Conflict: A Historical Analysis through Palestinian Narratives

Submitted by: Hossam Elaraky

5/13/2024

Abstract

This paper presents narratives gathered from open-ended interviews with Palestinians who have experienced the Israel-Palestinian conflict firsthand. Through these narratives, the paper aims to provide insights into the human side of the conflict, highlighting the emotions, struggles, and aspirations of individuals affected by the ongoing turmoil. The narratives are organized chronologically into four sections, each focusing on a key event in the conflict's history: the British Mandate, the Arab-Israeli War and the Nakba, the First and Second Intifadas, and the Israel-Hamas War. The speakers interviewed come from various backgrounds and hometowns, offering unique perspectives on the impact of these events on their lives and communities. Despite differences in experiences and viewpoints, a shared experience of resilience and perseverance emerges.

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Introduction

The Palestine-Israel conflict has been ongoing since 1948. The conflict has led to tremendous consequences throughout the Middle East and resulted in the unfortunate loss of numerous lives. Israeli occupation, accomplished through the construction of settlements and land acquisition, has led to the displacement of millions of Palestinians. According to Davis Jr. (2024), an estimated 6 million Palestinian refugees reside in Middle Eastern countries, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank. Consequently, many refugees who have remained in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank have lost contact with family members within the region. The Palestine-Israel conflict is also a humanitarian crisis, with most Palestinians struggling to meet their basic needs of food, water, and shelter (International Rescue Committee).

This project aims to conduct open-ended interviews with Palestinians who have experienced the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Each interview lasted from 45 to 90 minutes. In this study, I used pseudonyms for the interviewees to protect the identity of the speakers. The testimonies presented in the paper are paramount to understanding the conflict and the political landscape. These narratives offer a multitude of insights about Palestinians affected by the conflict. Due to a lack of media coverage and communication, it can be difficult to understand the perspective of Palestinians who have experienced the war. Through these narratives, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the diverse range of emotions, struggles, and aspirations of Palestinians, highlighting the resilience and perseverance of individuals facing adversity. These firsthand accounts challenge stereotypes and misconceptions, offering a more nuanced portrayal of the Palestinian experience. Through engaging with these narratives, readers can also develop a greater awareness of the humanitarian consequences of the conflict, which include the displacement, trauma, and loss experienced by Palestinian communities.

The paper is chronologically divided into four sections highlighting a specific event of the Israel-Palestinian conflict from its inception to the present. These four events are the British Mandate, the Arab-Israeli War and the Nakba, the First and Second Intifadas, and the Israel-Hamas War. Open-ended interviews were then conducted in-person and over the phone with Palestinians who have lived in Palestine at some point in their lives and experienced the conflict. Each section contains narratives addressing the events, accompanied by my reflections on these accounts.

Section I describes the British Mandate and the creation of the State of Israel. This event is crucial and lays the foundation for the Israel-Palestine conflict. Before the British Mandate, Palestine remained a territory under the Ottoman Empire. However, due to the decline of the Ottoman Empire and World War I, Great Britain was able to conquer the Ottoman Empire and determine the fate of Palestine. Negotiations began with Zionist members of parliament, leading to the proclamation of the Balfour Declaration. This declaration allowed the Jewish people to obtain rights on behalf of Great Britain to establish an independent Jewish state. Consequently, this declaration led to the revoking of the rights of Palestinian citizens living in the former Palestinian territory. The Balfour Declaration marks a tragedy for Palestinians and ultimately resulted in the loss of Palestinian identity.

Section II recounts the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the resulting consequence of Israel's victory—a victory that led to the displacement of 700,000 Palestinians in the event called the Nakba. The main catalyst for the war was the United Nation's passing of Resolution 181, a plan that sought to divide Israel into separate Arab and Jewish states. Arab states within the region disagreed with this plan and sought to change the dynamic towards the reinstatement of Palestinian land and removal of the Jewish people. Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq carried out military operations and invasions on the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). However, these invasions remained futile, and the IDF successfully resisted these attempts. The war resulted in armistice agreements between Israel and the

Arab states, and Israel remained in control of the territory gained from Resolution 181. The Arab-Israeli War led to a devastating event for the Palestinian people: the Nakba. An event that resulted in the loss of homes and land for the native people of Palestine. The Nakba resulted in the displacement of 700,000 Palestinians, many of whom lost contact with family members and were unable to return to their homes or land.

Section III outlines the first and second intifadas, which were pivotal periods in the Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation. The first intifada erupted in December 1987 following a tragic collision within the Jabalya refugee camp, leading to the deaths of four Palestinians. This event ignited widespread unrest, with Palestinians establishing local organizations to coordinate protests and civil disobedience. In response, Israel escalated its use of force, imposing curfews, conducting mass arrests, and resorting to live ammunition against demonstrators. Despite international condemnation, the resilience of Palestinian resistance persisted until the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, which aimed to facilitate peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The optimism following the Oslo Accords was short-lived as tensions remained due to unresolved issues such as Israeli settlements in the West Bank and the uncertain status of Palestinian refugees. The catalyst for the second intifada was Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, a revered site in Islam, seen as provocative by Palestinians. This visit sparked widespread protests and riots, met with harsh Israeli crackdowns using live ammunition and tear gas. The second intifada, lasting from September 2000 to February 2005, resulted in the deaths of 3,000 Palestinians and 1,000 Israelis, further entrenching the cycle of violence and deepening the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Section V of the paper discusses the conflict between Hamas and Israel that erupted on October 7th, 2023. It started with a surprise attack by Hamas, leading to intense fighting with Israeli

settlements. The conflict resulted in a high toll of casualties on both sides, with at least 1100 lives lost and 1500 wounded among Israelis and at least 232 deaths and 1,700 injuries among Gazans. Israel responded with airstrikes, including targeting hospitals, drawing condemnation for violating international law and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. The destruction of critical infrastructure, displacement of families, and psychological trauma, especially among children, are presently occurring. Additionally, the damage to essential infrastructure heightened the risk of disease outbreaks and exacerbated suffering among civilians in Gaza.

Interviewees

Mohammed and Mahmoud Suleiman (brothers)

Mohammed was interviewed on 03.11.2024 at his home, and Mahmoud was interviewed on 03.17.2024 over Zoom. Mohammed is a real estate manager, while Mahmoud is university professor. Mohammad resides in the United States with his family, and Mahmoud currently lives in Lebanon. Both brothers moved from Palestine to Kuwait when they were 3 years old. Their dad is from Jaffa and mom is from Al-Quds

Hamza Ali

Hamza was interviewed on 03.17.2024 at his place of work. He currently is a catering manager at a local hospital in the United States. He moved from Palestine to the U.S. in 1999 when he was 21. His entire family is native to Nazareth.

Bashar Sharif

Bashar was interviewed on 03.24.2024 over the phone. He manages a local mosque in the United States He moved from Palestine to the U.S. in 1980 when he was 18. He was born in Asira ash-Shamaliya, and that is the village where his parents are from.

Mahmoud Ali

Mahmoud was interviewed on 03.24.2024 in person at a local café. He currently owns several businesses in the United States. He moved from Palestine to the U.S. in 1990s when he was 25. He was born near the Gaza border after his dad moved from Ashkelon.

Ameer Saleh

Ameer was interviewed on 05.10.2024 over the phone. He works as a biomedical engineer at a large hospital in Dubai. He moved to the UAE in the 1960s when he was 3 years old. He was born in Gaza after his parents moved his entire family to Ashkelon.

Section I – The British Mandate

Historical Background

Before World War I, Palestine remained under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. At the time, most of the population in Palestine was Muslims, with smaller communities of Jews and Christians. The communities that existed then mainly had peaceful relationships and shared similar cultures. At the beginning of World War I, the Ottoman Empire was already facing a severe decline due to the Libyan War in 1911-1912 and the Balkan Wars from 1912-1913. These wars, which weakened the Ottoman Empire, led to territorial losses.

From 1915-1918, the region of Greater Syria underwent a severe famine that had devastating consequences. The famine led to the loss of an estimated half a million deaths (Khalidi pg. 20). This tragic event left a profound impact on the region and its people. Consequently, due to the condition of the Ottoman Empire, the British Empire had little opposition. The British Empire would launch a military onslaught on Palestine and the Ottoman Empire, eventually capturing Jerusalem in December 1917.

Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, the British Government started to contemplate the future of Palestine. Negotiations between the British and the Zionists commenced in February 1917. The Rothschilds, an extremely wealthy and prominent banking family, submitted an official draft alongside Chaim Weizmann and Lord Balfour. The road to the establishment of the Jewish State of Israel officially began in 1917 when the British Government issued the Balfour Declaration.

The Balfour Declaration, a significant diplomatic statement, expressed the British Government's support for the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine. This declaration marked a crucial turning point as it provided a formal endorsement from a major world power for the Zionist aspirations of creating a Jewish homeland. By securing the backing of the

British Empire, Zionists gained considerable leverage in their pursuit of establishing a Jewish state. The declaration carried immense symbolic and political weight, setting the stage for subsequent developments that ultimately led to the establishment of the State of Israel.

The establishment of a Jewish State allowed Britain to strategically control Palestine and, ultimately, support the Zionist movement. By endorsing the idea of a Jewish homeland, Britain gained leverage and influence in the region, enabling it to maintain a significant presence. By aligning with the aspirations of Jewish settlers in Palestine, Britain aimed to solidify its position in the region and counteract other powers' influence, such as the Ottoman Empire and later, emerging Arab nationalism. A Jewish State would provide Britain with a reliable ally in the region, potentially serving as a buffer against perceived threats and bolstering its geopolitical standing.

On September 16, 1922, the League of Nations approved the Mandate for Palestine, which acknowledged Britain's governance of Palestine. The mandate acknowledges Jews as the only people with national rights and a historical connection to Palestine. It was not until the Nazis came into power in 1933 that the Jewish population began to increase dramatically (Khalidi pg. 40). The Jewish economy began to take over the economy of the native Palestinians. In 1939, the Jewish population had grown by over 30 percent since the mandate's approval (Khalidi pg. 40). In October of 1937, the Palestinian population began to militarize and revolt against the Zionist movement. The Arab revolt lasted for two years and resulted in the death, imprisonment, and exile of 14 to 17 percent of the male Arab population (Khalidi pg. 44).

Narratives

Mohammed Suleiman

“The Balfour Declaration to me represents a historical injustice and the beginning of displacement and loss of homeland. The Balfour Declaration symbolizes colonialism, dispossession, and the denial of our rights. It is a historic injustice and an ongoing struggle for Palestinian self-determination and right of return.”

Mahmoud Suleiman

“People [Palestinians] just take it because they dictated the narrative from the beginning. This is really the imperial powers wanting a state like Israel [to have control over the Middle East], and this was the plan from the beginning. Sadly, they will protect it no matter what, unless things shift.”

Bashar Sharif

“This is almost similar to what the Americans did to the Native Americans, where they would come in and remove them, and they [Americans] were smaller numbers. But then the British came in control. So, what happened at the start was that more immigrants [Jews] started coming into Palestine and alarming the Palestinians. And that's when we had the Balfour Declaration. At that time, Palestinians felt like they'd been, you know, betrayed by the British. And they put them under the bandits of immigrant Israelis, and Jews started to come to Palestine in large numbers. That's when they started killing Palestinians and massacring them.”

Reflection

Although none of the speakers has personally been impacted by this incident, they all seem incredibly passionate about it and see it as a loss of their Palestinian identity. Many Palestinians feel that the Balfour Declaration is more than just a historical document; it is also a driving force behind their suffering and expulsion. Due to the loss of their homeland and the ongoing fight for their right to self-determination and return, these speakers feel that injustice has been done to them.

The Balfour Declaration's underlying power dynamics are explained by Mahmoud Suleiman's perspective, which also shows how imperial powers fabricated a story that supported Israel's creation. His story suggests a larger goal of dominance over the area and exhibits skepticism toward Great Britain's and other nations' intentions. Bashar Sharif highlights the historical patterns of colonization and displacement by drawing comparisons between the struggles of Native Americans and Palestinians. Sharif highlights the solidarity of Palestinians in their fight against injustice by drawing parallels between their experiences and those of other oppressed groups.

All in all, these stories provide insight into the Balfour Declaration, covering everything from its historical background to its ongoing effects on Palestinian communities. They explain the enduring trauma inflicted by colonial legacies and the urgent need for recognition, restitution, and justice.

Section II – The Arab-Israeli War and the Nakba

Historical Background

In 1947, Resolution 181 passed by the United Nations sought to divide the land of Palestine into separate Arab and Jewish states. This resolution sparked a violent upheaval between the Jewish and Arab communities. Arab leaders were fearful of losing significant portions of their land and perceived the resolution as unjust due to the idea that the territory was historically theirs. The resolution was viewed by many Arabs as an imposition by external powers, primarily the Western nations, without adequate consideration of the interests of the indigenous Arab population. Palestinian Arabs attempted to impede the resolution, and some volunteered to fight with the Arab Liberation Army, carrying out attacks on Jewish forces. After Israel declared its independence on May 14, 1948, neighboring Arab states declared war on Israel. These states, including Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, began carrying out invasions against the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).

The Arab-Israeli War of 1948 concluded with armistice agreements between Israel and the Arab states by March 1949. These agreements established temporary ceasefire lines and solidified Israel's control over much of the territory allocated to the Jewish state under the United Nations partition plan, as well as additional land beyond those borders. However, the aftermath of the war had profound and lasting consequences for the region. It shaped the trajectory of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and laid the groundwork for decades of geopolitical tensions and disputes over territory, refugees, and national identity.

Meanwhile, the Nakba, meaning catastrophe in Arabic, referred to the displacement of Palestinian Arabs during the Arab-Israeli War. Following the war, Israel had control of over 78% of the territory. Approximately 80% of the Arab population were removed or fled from their homes and land. At least 720,000 of 1.3 million of these displaced Palestinians became refugees (Abu-Laban, et.

al. 2022). Many of these Palestinians ended up living in refugee camps established in neighboring Arab countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt. Some Palestinians ended up in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which were under the control of Jordan and Egypt, respectively. Additionally, a small minority of Palestinians become Israeli citizens. They faced challenges in terms of political representation, socioeconomic disparities, and discrimination.

Narratives

Mohammed Suleiman

“My mom used to hide when this started. When she saw them, she used to hide since she was scared of what they [IDF] were going to do. They would hear talks about rape, and that happened all the time with, you know, exactly. I mean, most of those Palestinians, when they left during the Nakba and stuff, it was under the perception that, oh, we're coming back. Of course, most of them left everything in their homes. They had the key. I mean, my grandfather had the key to his home. He had the papers for his land, the farming land he had. And now it's farmed by Israelis.”

Hamza Ali

“My dad was born in 1946 and some of my family decided to run away. However, my father didn't want to leave. My grandfather ended up losing his home to Israeli soldiers, and he didn't want that to happen to him. We stayed so that we could keep our land. I used to ask my father where his brothers and cousins were since they fled Palestine. He never knew because there was no communication before, and he lost all contact with most of his family.”

Bashar Sharif

“People got their homes demolished if they did something, like my uncle got his house demolished when I was very young. I wasn’t born during this time, but I’ve heard stories of Israelis completely taking over villages. Small cities and villages were flourishing at the time. 1948 is a very dark history for what happened to the Palestinians. When they started committing massacres in 1968, people had no choice. They were forced to flee, and many towns had their name changed. If you go to some forest area, you might see features of someone’s home or the floor of someone who used to live there. They tried to completely erase their memories, erase their towns, but it is in their hearts. Many Palestinians are still sticking to the idea of the right to return. A lot of people took the keys to their homes with them and passed them on from generation to generation. When they died, they gave the key to the second generation just to keep the memory of the Nakba in their hearts. People were completely expelled from their homes. They used to have orchard trees and lemon trees in their backyard, and life was so peaceful. In a heartbeat, they had to leave their gardens and beautiful homes. Instead of having the smell of flowers in their garden, they were put in a tent somewhere.”

Mahmoud Ali

"During the Nakba, my family had a lot of land. My uncle, after the occupation, had to work with Israelis to keep the land. It was a big farm with greenhouses and all that. My uncle worked there for 25 years, and he was the biggest contractor in the region. He would bring in Palestinians from nearby towns to mill the corn and harvest the strawberries and melons. My uncle had two buses, and he used to take the employees there every day. One day, we decided to have a picnic on the farm, and my uncle took the two buses and picked up every family member. I was 15 years old at the time and one of the youngest on the trip. While on the bus, my uncle pointed to a demolished house, and he said, “look that is your grandpa’s house that he built with bricks and clay and where your dad used to live.”

As kids, we would play around the demolished house. We ended up finding an old pot that my grandpa used to use to make coffee. We still have it to this day. My grandma passed away at the age of 100, and she had the keys to that house until the day she died. She also had a Palestinian ID since she was a nurse aid back in the 30's."

Ameer Saleh

"I took a trip one summer to visit my family in Gaza. During that trip, my father took me and my brother to see our old home. On the house was the plaque with my grandfather's name still on it. We decided to knock on the door, and we were greeted by an Iraqi Jew. He said, "I understand that this is your home, so you can have my house in Iraq." We said, "We don't want your house in Iraq, we want our home back." I don't think they understand the pain we feel to have our homes taken from us and forcibly moved to countries all over the Middle East and refugee camps."

Reflection

Most of these speakers voiced support for the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and wished that Arab countries would continue fighting against Israel. These speakers are disappointed in Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E, and Egypt for trading with Israel and would like to see more support from the Arab states. The Nakba has affected every single one of the speakers. It has resulted in the loss of their parents' or grandparents' homes and farmland. These speakers all reflect on the enduring impact of the Nakba and share narratives passed down through generations.

Mohammad recounts his mother's fear of IDF soldiers and the loss of their home. Despite being a toddler, he could still see the fear in his mother's eyes, and the effects of trauma endured in the children who have lived or are currently living in Palestine during the war. Despite the risks, Hamza

Ali's family chose to stay and hold on to their land. Their courage represents hope for Palestinians in the reclamation of their land. Hamza also describes the devastating loss of family ties due to other family members being relocated to different areas. This is an unfortunate reality for many Palestinian refugees, and the results are traumatizing due to refugees not knowing the status of their family members and whether they are alive. Bashar Sharif speaks of demolished homes and erased memories, highlighting the struggle for the right of return. Mahmoud Ali's farm, once prosperous, became a reminder of lost homes and livelihoods, preserved through family memories and mementos like an old coffee pot and the infamous key passed on to the younger generations. Ameer Saleh is also affected by the loss of his grandparents and father's home. He describes the misunderstanding of Jews who occupy the homes of displaced Palestinians, and the reminders left from the Nakba, such as his grandfather's name on the house. Overall, these narratives reveal the deep emotional scars and resilience of Palestinians in the face of displacement and occupation.

Section III – The First and Second Intifadas

Historical Background

In December 1987, Palestinians residing in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip launched an uprising to end Israel's occupation of their territory. This pivotal moment marked the onset of the first intifada, a term translating to "shaking off" in Arabic. As the Palestinian national movement gained momentum within Palestine, even a minor incident had the potential to spark widespread unrest across the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Such was the case with the catalyst for the first intifada: a collision involving an Israeli army truck and two civilian vehicles within the Jabalya refugee camp, resulting in the tragic deaths of four Palestinians. Following this incident, Palestinians throughout the region established local organizations guided by a secret Unified National Leadership (Khalidi 169). Small-scale riots erupted across the area, marked by minor attacks against Israeli forces involving rocks and Molotov cocktails. However, after a month of civil unrest, Yitzhak Rabin, Israel's Defense Minister, ordered a significant escalation in the use of force by the Israeli military.

In response to Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli military amplified its efforts on Palestinian protesters, employing harsh measures such as curfews, mass arrests, and the use of live ammunition against demonstrators. These actions fueled considerable discontent among the Palestinian population, leading to a cycle of violence and retaliation. The first intifada quickly gained international attention, drawing condemnation from human rights organizations and sparking debates about the Israeli occupation and Palestinian rights. Despite the tactics employed by Israeli forces, the resilience of the Palestinian resistance movement persisted, with grassroots organizations playing a crucial role in organizing protests, strikes, and acts of civil disobedience. The first intifada ultimately lasted until the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, marking a significant milestone in the ongoing struggle for Palestinian self-determination. The Oslo Accords attempted to provide a framework for peace

negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). This resulted in mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO. The Palestinian Authority (PA) was established to govern parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and a process was created for Israeli withdrawal from these territories. The period between the first and second intifada was one of optimism, and Palestinians saw the Oslo Accords as an opportunity to gain some of their lands back. Unfortunately, this optimism didn't last for long as tension remained in the region due to Israeli settlements remaining in the West Bank, and the rights of Palestinian refugees remained uncertain.

The catalyst for the second intifada was the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The mosque is the third holiest site in Islam, and its visitation was viewed as disrespectful by Palestinians. As a result, a wave of protests and riots were carried out, with Israeli forces resorting to live ammunition and tear gas to restrain the rioters. The second intifada lasted from September 2000 until February 2005 and resulted in the death of 3,000 Palestinians and 1,000 Israelis (Britannica, 2024).

Narratives

Mohammed Suleiman

“The intifadas resulted in a lot of mistrust between both Israelis and Palestinians, and this is not something that benefits either side. I visited Palestine after the second intifada in 2007, and you could still see the tensions between both sides. You know, kids throwing pebbles at Israeli forces, and young Israeli soldiers, like 18 and 19 years old yelling at them. Anyways, when I went to visit, I reached the border at 8 am and was interrogated until 2 pm. They took me from room to room for no reason since I was technically just a visitor from the United States. Finally, after they released me, I thought

I was going to have to call my own taxi since I assumed the taxi driver that my brother had called me would have been long gone. To my surprise, he was still there. I asked him why he waited that long. He told me he knew that was going to happen and that it was very common following the intifada. This treatment is not fair to Palestinians, and our lives shouldn't be dictated by young 18- and 19-year-olds with guns.”

Bashar Sharif

“This is a humanitarian crisis. Their [Palestinians'] daily lives are affected, and these Israeli militants had access to such detrimental weapons. They hindered the movement significantly. Kids that threw small stones were met with bullets. They killed people traveling in cars. There was a significant danger posed on the Palestinians, and it made life miserable.”

Mahmoud Ali

“I came back for the first time since I lived abroad in 1986, but things got much worse in 1987. A lot of people, mostly kids, participated in throwing stones. They would get killed, jailed, or injured a lot of the time. Then, unfortunately, in 2000, Sharon and his army went to Jerusalem. They did something to the Al Aqsa Mosque there. And that erupted or caused the first Intifada. That was a brutal hit to the Palestinians because they destroyed a lot of infrastructure, Israel constructed their movement, and they put a lot of people in jail. It caused a huge setback to the peace. A lot of families were affected. My dad, at that time, was having a heart attack, and they had to use a different road because the roads were bad. There's a lot of bad things. It was a major setback to the livelihood of Palestinians. On top of that, Israeli settlements and settlers increased. They became much more brutal. A lot of people lost their land, and restrictions were increased. The first Intifada was much different than the second. The

first one involved stone and was minor, but the second one involved a deadly weapon. I went home in 1995, right before the first Intifada.”

Ameer Saleh

“There were small-scale riots in the 70s. They used to booby trap pens and throw them at the students. When students would try to write with the pens or unscrew them, they would explode. When my father died, he had 3 fingers on one hand from all the bombs being dropped.”

Reflection

These narratives show the enduring impact of the First and Second Intifada on the lives of individuals caught in its midst.

Mohammed Suleiman's account highlights the universal atmosphere of mistrust and oppression faced by Palestinians, even as visitors to their own homeland. His experience at the border, enduring hours of interrogation and poor treatment, speaks to the systemic injustices endured by Palestinians on a daily basis. The depiction of young Israeli soldiers wielding power over Palestinians emphasizes the unequal power dynamics at play in the region.

Hamza Ali and Bashar Sharif both emphasize the humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict, with innocent civilians enduring the brunt of violence and restrictions imposed by Israeli forces. The use of deadly force against Palestinian children, as described by Bashar Sharif, highlights the disproportionate and often indiscriminate nature of Israeli military tactics, which worsens the suffering of Palestinian communities.

Mahmoud Ali's narrative offers a historical perspective and tracks the trajectory of the conflict from its early stages to the present day. He speaks about the long-standing grievances and injustices faced by Palestinians, from the destruction of infrastructure and the expansion of Israeli settlements to the suppression of Palestinian resistance movements.

Ameer Saleh's recollection of the violence inflicted upon Palestinian students, including his own father, serves as a reminder of the human cost of the conflict. The use of explosive devices targeting innocent civilians exemplifies the brutality and disregard for human life that characterizes the Israeli occupation.

Collectively, these narratives shed light on the enduring impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on Palestinian lives, marked by displacement, dispossession, and systemic oppression. They call attention to the urgent need for a just and lasting resolution to the conflict, one that respects the rights and dignity of all people involved.

Section VI – The Israel-Hamas War

Historical Background

The conflict between Hamas and Israel, which erupted on October 7th, 2023, serves as a stark reminder of the ongoing tensions in the region. Initiated by a surprise attack by Hamas, militants launched a barrage of gunfire and rockets from Gaza into Israeli settlements, resulting in a devastating toll of hundreds of Palestinians and Israelis. After the attack, more than 1100 Israelis died, and Hamas took about 250 hostages. In response, Israel declared war on Hamas, unleashing retaliatory airstrikes that inflicted further casualties. Tragically, the cycle of violence claimed the lives of at least 35,000 Gazans (Al Jazeera, 2024). The recent aerial bombardment of Gaza, particularly concerning is the targeting of hospitals by Israel, has drawn widespread condemnation and raised significant humanitarian concerns. The deliberate targeting of medical facilities, which are protected under international law, represents a grave violation and exacerbates the already dire situation in Gaza.

These attacks on hospitals not only result in the destruction of critical infrastructure but also severely hinder the ability of medical professionals to provide essential care to the injured and sick. Moreover, they instill fear and panic among civilians, who rely on these facilities for lifesaving treatment.

The damage caused to Gaza as a result of the bombardment extends beyond physical infrastructure. Entire neighborhoods have been reduced to rubble, displacing countless families and leaving many homeless. The psychological toll on civilians, particularly children, is immeasurable, as they endure the trauma of constant airstrikes and the loss of loved ones.

Furthermore, the destruction of essential infrastructure such as water and sanitation facilities exacerbate the already precarious humanitarian situation in Gaza, increasing the risk of disease

outbreaks and further suffering among the civilian population. Israel did not allow the flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza and famine became an everyday reality.

Narratives

Mohammed Suleiman

“I think one of the biggest things is that they're saying that they're trying to get rid of Hamas. Hamas is the problem, whatever. I mean, if they are trying to get rid of it, imagine like you're living there, you're like a citizen of Palestine, you were born there, raised there, and 20,000 women and children are killed. Your entire family is killed by the Israelis. It's like, you're not going to just be like, okay, they were trying to kill Hamas. Like, everything's fine now. If they kill my mom, my dad, my brother, like my entire family, it's like, what are you going to do? You're going to go fight. You're going to fight the people that killed you. They're creating three soldiers for every person they kill. Yes, Hamas made mistakes. At the same time, if you lift it up to the Palestinian Authority and the West Bank, we will not have a Palestine anymore, right.”

Mahmoud Suleiman

“They're taking advantage of the Rafah border to make so much money off the poor people that are trying to get out. I'm trying to be in some way hopeful. It's a very tough time now. And it's hard to tell when there is going to be some hope in ending this situation. I mean, the only hope, I want to put it this way: it is these amazing young men that are hiding underneath the ground and willing to come out and sacrifice their lives to at least inflict some pain on the occupying forces in Gaza. And they continue to do it after six months. It's just beyond belief really that they're able to do this, and I admire the steadfastness of the people in Gaza, and how they even in the middle of all of this, they're trying

to have some resemblance of celebrating Ramadan and praying and hundreds of them in front of a mosque that is destroyed, and it's just beyond imagination. God bless them, and may God give them patience to hold on and to survive this genocide. And inshallah, it'll end the way we want it to end. And Palestinians will get their land back.”

Bashar Sharif

“It has been about six months of war now. People are starving; there is famine, targeting, and killing. Everyone who walks gets killed. Schools, infrastructure, and antiquities were all destroyed. All those old antiquities of Palestine are completely gone. There is a lot of stealing and confiscation. Children, women, and the elderly are dying at alarming rates. There is no livelihood whatsoever. They used to have people in universities and hospitals. Now all the hospitals are being destroyed. Tons of babies are on incubators. Where is the oxygen for them to live? It is very barbaric and brutal.”

Mahmoud Ali

"They're not doing anything. Yeah, I mean look at Egypt. Just to leave the Gaza Strip and cross the Egyptian border, you must pay \$10,000. Egypt is trying to make money off it. People in Gaza cannot find clean water to drink. It's Ramadan, and they don't have food. And those poor countries, they ship hundreds of containers every day to Israel. They ship all the fruits and all the vegetables, all supplies to Israel. The prices for their citizens now are triple or quadruple. It's so hard because all their produce goes through Israel. They send food and medicine every day to Tel Aviv. The people in Gaza Strip can't find clean water. My family stays in the north. Do you know how much a liter of gas is? My brother bought one liter for 180 shekels; it was \$50. A gallon is 4 liters, so the gallon of gas in the north is \$200. It is \$100 for one cigarette, one single cigarette, my brother buys my dad five cigarettes a day. A 25-pound bag of flour used to be \$10. Now it's \$1500, and sometimes \$2000 to \$2500 US dollars. They used to have the carton with the eggs, three eggs for like 70 cents, now each egg is \$10.

People sold their wives' jewelry and their cars. If they don't have the resources then they run after the aid, and they get killed from the falling crates. They have no choice, and if they don't do anything, they won't eat. People do not eat three meals a day there, they eat one or two bites a day. You know my mom passed away three weeks ago. She passed away from lack of food and medicine, and my dad is not doing well either; he has heart problems and diabetes. He hasn't had medicine since the war started. They couldn't get medicine or vitamins. They eat bread and rice. Even canned food is hard to get. There is nothing. In the south, you can find it at a higher price, but in the north, it is like looking for a needle in a haystack. If you find something, it is so hard and so expensive. There is not even a single home in Gaza Strip standing tall the way it was before. Seventy-five percent of those houses were demolished completely.”

Reflection

The Israel-Hamas war is still going and has had a profound impact on these speakers. Due to the severity of the war, the morale of each speaker is at an all-time low. Most of these speakers are pessimistic because of this war and don't see a potential solution. They are hurt due to the large loss of lives, especially women and children. Additionally, they are fearful of family members who still live in Palestine and live in obscurity about the fate of their families every day. These narratives paint a picture of the ongoing suffering and hardship endured by Palestinians living in Gaza. Reflecting on their words elicits a profound sense of empathy and sorrow for the immense challenges faced by individuals and families caught in the middle of the conflict.

Mohammed Suleiman's perspective highlights the tragic cycle of violence and retaliation that has remained prolonged in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. His portrayal of the devastating loss, desperation, and hopelessness experienced by Palestinian families shows the persistent trauma

inflicted by the ongoing hostilities. Mahmoud Suleiman's words convey a combination of admiration for the resilience of the people of Gaza and a sobering acknowledgment of the grim reality they face. His description of young men willing to sacrifice their lives in resistance speaks to the profound sense of injustice and desperation that drives their actions, even in the face of overwhelming odds.

Bashar Sharif's account provides a stark portrayal of the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza, characterized by widespread suffering, deprivation, and destruction. The systematic targeting of civilians, the destruction of essential infrastructure, and the deprivation of basic necessities paint an unpromising picture of life under siege.

Mahmoud Ali's narrative focuses on the human cost of the conflict. His story of individuals and his own family struggling to survive amid skyrocketing prices, scarcity of essential goods, and lack of access to medical care are a clear reminder of the urgent need for humanitarian intervention.

As I reflect on these narratives, I am reminded of the urgent need for a just and lasting resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one that prioritizes the well-being and dignity of all affected individuals. The stories shared by these speakers serve as powerful reminders of the human toll exacerbated by war and violence. We must work towards a future of peace, justice, and reconciliation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Israel-Palestine conflict has been a long and tedious struggle since its inception in 1948. It has resulted in significant human suffering, including displacement, loss of life, and humanitarian crises. The British Mandate played a crucial role in shaping the conflict's trajectory, leading to the displacement and loss of Palestinian identity. Subsequent events, such as the Arab-Israeli wars, the Six-Day War, and the Intifadas, further heightened tensions and created a cycle of violence and occupation.

The narratives edify the real-life experiences of Palestinians directly impacted by these events. They emphasize the profound impact of conflict on individuals, families, and communities.

Moving forward, the international community must increase its efforts to facilitate a just and lasting solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. This requires a commitment to dialogue, diplomacy, and respect for international law to address the underlying grievances and aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians. Only through genuine engagement and cooperation can sustainable peace be achieved.

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