

CORNERSTONE

A PUBLICATION BY SABEEL ECUMENICAL LIBERATION THEOLOGY CENTER



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REFLECTIONS: COVID-19 IN PALESTINE.

The way we face our challenges determines the probability of overcoming our problems and the potential of coming out as stronger individuals and communities. In this edition of Cornerstone, Sabeel, with the help of a number of writers, reflects on human nature and how people react when they face a major problem. Many scholars believe that when facing problems humans react by going through phases: (a) ignoring the problem, or even denial of the problem (b) fear, panic, and anger (c) compromise with the problem, trying to live with it (d) depression (e) acceptance of the problem and dealing with it proactively.

It is true that people deal with any problem in different ways: some spend more time in one of the above phases than the others, some might get stuck in a certain phase and feel unable to move forward without help. But it is almost certain we must deal effectively with all phases to overcome the problem successfully.

Today in Palestine there are many problems that our people are facing, however two major problems stand out at the time of writing this Cornerstone:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic and its devastating effects on our lives.
2. A Political reality that seems to dismiss any chance for a just solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Sadly, many in the world now believe that



since Israel refuses to comply with international law, the only solution relies upon a concession of the Palestinian people: a total concession to the Israeli government's political proposals. The political changes in this period of history threaten to diminish the chances of our Palestinian people for a just political solution.

In the preparation of this Bible study, Sabeel conducted an online gathering that brought together 20 different Bible study facilitators from both Palestine and Israel. Since 2015, Sabeel has been training Bible study facilitators that were nominated by their different parishes. The trained Bible study facilitators work with their respected churches to form Bible study groups in their respected communities. As of today, Sabeel has helped in forming over 30 active Bible study groups that serve mainly women, young adults and youth groups.

Matthew 26: 31-56

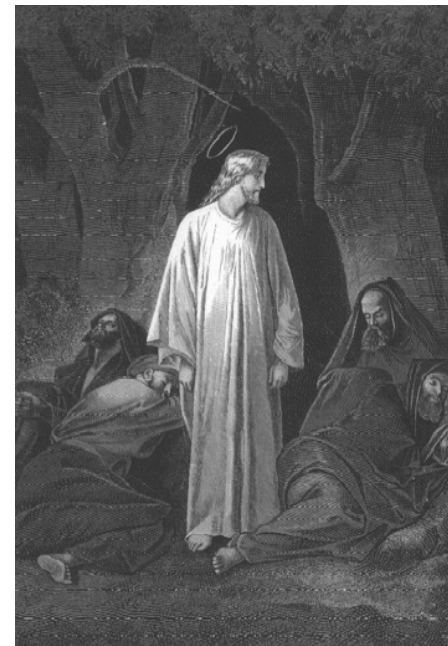
³¹Then Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written,
'I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the
flock will be scattered.'

³²But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." ³³Peter said to him, "Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you." ³⁴Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." ³⁵Peter said to him, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And so said all the disciples.

³⁶Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ³⁷He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. ³⁸Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." ³⁹And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." ⁴⁰Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? ⁴¹Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." ⁴²Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." ⁴³Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. ⁴⁵Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

⁴⁷While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him." ⁴⁹At once he came up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. ⁵⁰Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him.

⁵¹Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁵²Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?" ⁵⁵At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. ⁵⁶But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.



In preparation for the Bible study, a discussion took place among the Sabeel staff and volunteers to find the best scripture reading on a major problem that faced Jesus and his disciples. A Bible reading that dealt with the arrest of Jesus was chosen.

After finishing with the last supper, news was out that the decision was made that Jesus was going to be arrested and plans had been made to hand him over for crucifixion. Jesus, the teacher and leader of a small movement, was being betrayed by the corrupt religious authorities of that time and handed to the Roman occupation authorities. The conspirators believed that by eliminating Jesus his followers would be scattered and the movement would come to an end.

Reading the story we can reflect on the human reaction of the disciples:

Denial of the Problem

The disciples slept in the garden of Gethsemane. It is possible they were tired, but also they found in sleep a way to ignore the problem that they were now outlaws and being chased by the people in power.

Political crisis: we feel that our leadership, political parties and advocacy bodies are asleep. Little action is being taken in comparison to the huge political threats we are facing. Our adversaries are creating realities on the ground while we are overwhelmed by their power and might.

COVID-19: Many people continue to ignore and deny the threat that this pandemic is causing. Unfortunately, conspiracy theories and misleading information that have no scientific basis currently dominate the Palestinian people.

Fear, Panic and Anger

The moment that Jesus is arrested, a disciple pulls out a sword and attacks. When Jesus diffuses the situation and the disciples realize the power and might of the mob that came to arrest Jesus, they run away in panic. Even the disciple who claimed that his love and loyalty to Jesus were nonnegotiable denies Jesus out of fear three times "before the cock crows."

Political Crisis: People react differently when they face fear and anger. Some think of immigration as a way to pursue a better life while others use violence by joining a militant group or even reverting to individual acts that have a violent nature.

COVID-19: Unfortunately and very worryingly, both domestic and inter-community violence is on the rise in Palestine. Both children and women are the most vulnerable to violence.

Compromise

It is normal when one faces a major challenge to compromise and find a way to live with the problem. After a few moments of resistance, the disciples surrendered to the might of the religious establishment and the Roman empire. Jesus was left to walk the way of the cross on his own; the movement had lost its leader and they were scattered and on their own.

Political Crisis: Many Palestinians feel that the occupation is eternal and nothing we can do will make a real change. Many people in Pal-

estine try to compromise on their demands for justice, sometimes only to be granted job opportunities, a military permit to receive health treatment, a minimal ration of water, etc. Regardless of how much we are willing to compromise, our quality of life continues to deteriorate.

COVID-19: The long months of total lockdown have failed to put an end to the pandemic. The people have tried to live with the sad reality of COVID-19, but life does not simply go back to normal. It is evident that we must defeat the virus by finding a treatment and vaccination.

"He [God] might have been a wafer in the hands Of priests this day, or music from the lips: Of red-robed choristers, instead he slips Away from church, shakes off our linen bands To don his apron with a nurse: he grips And lifts a stretcher, soothes with gentle hands The frail flesh of the dying, gives them hope, Breathes with the breathless, lends them strength to cope."

N. T. Wright, God and the Pandemic: A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and its Aftermath

Depression

From the scripture readings related to the passion of Christ, one can conclude from the silence of the disciples that they have surrendered to depression. The disciples are in shock as they see their aspirations

evaporating as Jesus heads to the cross. The weeping and wailing, the betrayals and denials, the cowardice and terror all contribute to the intense sadness and feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and worthlessness of the disciples.

Political Crisis: Unfortunately, today in Palestine we find little hope. Many of our people feel helpless and no longer see a clear path that will deliver the long anticipated justice. We have been failed by the international community, by the Arab world and most importantly by our leaders.

COVID-19: For many months, Palestine, like the rest of the world, has combated COVID-19. However, the cases continue to be on the rise and the dead are in the thousands. All the effects and uncertainty of COVID-19 continue to change life as we know it and one can easily feel depressed.

Acceptance

The gospels indicate to us that the disciples were able to control their emotions and actions at Pentecost. The group of the same disciples who were occupied with fear, cowardice and confusion became the voices of truth and courage in the streets of Jerusalem. Not only had they accepted the implications of the crucifixion and death of their leader, they most importantly understood their responsibilities to keep the movement alive. The Book of Acts and early church history informs us that the dangers did not disappear, yet the disciples, like Jesus, understood that the cost of true liberation is paved

with suffering and persecution. The disciples had managed successfully to transform the challenge they faced into power and inspiration to continue the movement.

Political Crisis: The Palestinian people must accept that true liberation will only be the fruit of nonviolent resistance. There must be no compromise on the rights of our people, we must remain steadfast and have faith in the power of our just God. We the Palestinians must rise up and take control of our destiny.

COVID-19: Like many other diseases, COVID-19 must be overcome with both medical research and social responsibility. The power of COVID-19 is not only its fast spreading and mortality rates, but its ability to make many people lose hope and resort to violence or surrender to depression. Focusing on the goodness in human nature and by multiplying good deeds, we can be proactive in defeating the virus.

It is true, Jesus himself pleaded through prayer, *“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me;”* The weight of the cross was heavy and this is what Jesus realized. Jesus had done no sin, and his work during his ministry had brought only good news to the oppressed and people on the margins. Jesus understood the inevitable was going to happen: evil that night would come out victorious because the good people were sleeping.

Even Jesus, God in flesh, became depressed: *“I am deeply grieved, even to death.”* There is no record elsewhere

in the gospels where he felt so bad that he told any of his disciples about it, but that’s what he did that night. Jesus did not try to put on a good “spiritual looking” front for them. He was honest with them about how bad he was feeling. This text, that might show a weakness in the human nature of Jesus, brings lots of courage to many of our people who are facing major challenges. Jesus understood the meaning of fear and panic, disappointment and even depression, yet Jesus never denied or ignored the problem, nor was he willing to compromise.



LOVE TRANSCENDS PANDEMIC

Dr. Samah Jabr

It is okay to take the avenue of escape for a little while. When the bumpy roads get too rough and the turn of events too painful, it is acceptable to want to hide and break free from the overdose of reality. It is perfectly alright to sweep life’s hardships under the carpet and take a moment to catch one’s breath. As long as it does not drag on for too long, escapism is a natural reaction that people from all walks of life (the highly intelligent included) often resort to.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, several people—from different parts of the world—denied the mere existence of the virus, and others dismissed its deadly impact on human beings. Aside from using it as a coping mechanism by which to feel less vulnerable, there are plenty of reasons for the denial of the pandemic. For instance, some may favor their own individual well-being over the interest of society, and thus belittle and dismiss the impact of what may

disrupt their daily activities. Another possible reason for the denial lies in the firmly held belief that the world’s technological advances will certainly be able to sort out this dilemma in a matter of days.

Despite the large number of people infected with the virus, their percentage in relation to the total world population is still small. We still find entire cities and neighborhoods where not a single person has been infected and where no one has died from the virus. This has created a false sense of security and served as a distraction from the severity of the pandemic.

Moreover, the erosion of trust in governments has caused some people to question the need of following precautionary measures, without bothering to verify the information and check their scientific validity. On the contrary, most residents have instead preferred to put their full trust

in YouTube videos and Instagram posts—none of which are backed by scientific references.

Personally, I cannot keep company with those in denial, regardless of all the layers of strain and fatigue that I personally undergo due to the current health crisis. I regularly find myself depleted of energy after exhausting days of work at the quarantine centers of the West Bank, where I provide psychological support for the overburdened medical staff looking after patients of COVID-19. I coach the medical teams on caregiving and emphasize that mental care should be a major part of the medical care provided for the patients.

It is both alarming and depressing to see how people were lulled into a false sense of security at the end of the first lockdown. This resulted in a growing number of cases that rose vertically, while the cause of the virus spread remains unknown.

The danger is no longer connected with travelers returning from abroad, or employees from outside the Palestinian Territories (the borders of which are not in the control of Palestinians) who are coming back to a crowded village, refugee camp, or urban neighborhood and potentially creating a focus of infection wherein the virus will be easily transmitted. By now, the issue has gotten out of hand, and the pandemic is being spread like wildfire at weddings and funerals.

So, what happened in Palestine?

We handled the first phase of the pandemic quite well, yet we seem to have lost control during the holidays since the governmental instructions enforcing closure through the Eid [holidays] were elusive to the general public. After all, the streets had been bustling and there was a full opening in the last weeks of Ramadan before the call for the lockdown. This fact led to distrust of the governmental measures and provoked protests demanding to observe the holidays, to the point that two young men from Dheisheh refugee camp (Bethlehem) were wounded. In this respect, these events created an environment dangerously conducive to conspiracy theories. Several people started to make a connection between the outbreak of COVID-19 and Israel's annexation plan. As the plot thickened, the sense of denial about the health crisis and the disregard of preventative measures escalated. "This coronavirus is a main element of the so-called Deal of the Century," I was told by some, while others considered the pandemic as a cov-

er-up for the Palestinian Authority's salary cuts, or a scheme to get international funds. Some went as far as claiming that closing Muslim places of worship was part of a conspiracy against Islam and a means for Israel to extend sovereignty on al-Aqsa and al-Ibrahimi mosques.

Amid the finger pointing and blame games, the governorate of Hebron became the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak, the "Wuhan of Palestine," so to speak. Meanwhile, Palestinians living in Jerusalem and Israel have been held responsible and condemned for transmitting the virus to the West Bank. I have a friend from Jaffa, living in Ramallah, who now changes his accent when speaking with people in fear of getting rejected and bullied. It is not surprising that the particularity of the Palestinian political situation under Occupation erodes public trust and gives rise to a flood of conspiracy theories that run rampant at a time when people are helpless about the current health pandemic, among all other issues. Amidst the social stigma and ill repute of the quarantine procedures, people have opted to not only keep quiet about their symptoms, but to also deny them altogether in fear of losing their jobs and financial resources. As a result, the novel coronavirus has been lurking behind the scenes and increasing by the day.

With that said, there—in the quarantine centers I visited—is no room for denial. At the center in Dura, Hebron, corpses of fathers and mothers are angled into bags and taken out on a day-to-day basis. Meanwhile,

sons and daughters are prohibited from seeing their deceased parents or washing the bodies. As soon as they detect the early symptoms, they place their parents in quarantine, bid them farewell, and hope to see them shortly. Sadly, however, the COVID-19 symptoms for the elderly and unhealthy quickly trend worse. Before they know it, they have to take their very last breaths—without the company of their families and dear ones. Such is the condition they



find themselves in. It is an unprecedented, shocking, and despairing sight.

I spend plenty of time washing and sterilizing before heading back home. I try my best to avoid contact with my elderly parents. No matter how hard I try, however, I still have not managed to break the endless loop of worrying. This is especially the case now that the virus has ceased being a distant concern "somewhere out there" in quarantine centers and among employees and travelers. The coronavirus has gone beyond work environments; it has infiltrated our closest social networks and hit friends and relatives. Every morning, I attentively listen to the latest statistics and keep myself in tune with

research updates, hoping to hear some good news about a new test, vaccine, or treatment that would put an end to this crisis.

Since the beginning of this pandemic, I have been working all day long to combat its psychological effects through developing a national plan that responds to mental health needs during the crisis. This tireless work leads me to cope with a lot of stigma, bullying, and overall social denial. I handle many sensations of panic and anxiety in the quarantine centers and see how some suffer from horrific hallucinations in the intensive care units. This is not taking into account all the hard work and heavy burdens that were part of working in the field of mental health prior to the pandemic.

This virus has had quite an impact on my life. I must say things got personal between me and this virus after airports were shut down and friends from overseas were cut off from us. It has been almost half a year of separation and isolation—with no meeting, embracing, or greeting. The online meetings do not quite quench my longing, and the ongoing seclusion intensifies my emotional stress during those times.

Since the first week of March, the outbreak of the coronavirus occupied most of my time and attention. The pains of patients, hardships of health workers, and my own separation from loved ones have taken a heavy toll on me. They put me on autopilot mode and placed me in a state of emotional numbness. Just today, my colleagues at the Dura quarantine

center told me about Jihad al-Suwaiti, the young man from Hebron who climbed up the outer wall to the hospital's upper floor to observe his mother's condition from the window of her room. He sat outside, watching her in her last moments, before she died of COVID-19. This story deeply captured my heart. It reignited my spirit and managed to break me free from my emotional numbness.

"We have a chance to do something extraordinary. As we head out of this pandemic we can change the world. Create a world of love. A world where we are kind to each other. A world where we are kind no matter what class, race, sexual orientation, what religion or lack of or what job we have. A world we don't judge ... because that may be us if things were just slightly different. Let love and kindness be our roadmap."

Johnny Corn - Irish Actor

I understand people's urge to escape the horrendous circumstances every now and then. I am also aware that a glimmer of light is all it may take for us to move from denial to acceptance. It is our little hope that can transform us to behave rationally and responsibly in the face of the lived reality. The things that shine a light and inspire hope, for me, are the stories that illuminate my heart. Such human stories—like the story of Jihad and his mother—capture the essence of love, and they make

me realize that transcendental love shall overcome this fleeting disease.

Dr. Samah Jabr is a Palestinian Jerusalemite psychiatrist, psychotherapist, and writer. Since 2016, she has been Chair of the Mental Health Unit at the Palestinian Ministry of Health, and has written columns about the psychological consequences of the Israeli occupation in Palestine since the early 2000s.



FROM THE CHAOS OF FEAR, PANIC AND ANGER TOWARDS COMMUNITY BUILDING

Zoughbi Zoughbi and Tarek Zoughbi

“Freedom does not equal individualism; Freedom equals Community”

Rev. James Lawson

The continued threat of annexation, with the crippling effects of COVID-19, and the increasing alarming rate of unilateral human rights violation by Israel, continues to instill fear and a sense of hopelessness for the Palestinian people. The most immediate challenge lies in miti-

gating the anxiety, panic and stress, and paranoia that these injustices continue to perpetuate, and more so to instill a feeling of hope and strengthen the sense of community.

Rates of domestic violence have been growing at a rapid and alarming rate. This violence is strengthened and supported and in part an ineffective and unhealthy response to the growing tensions and ever-deteriorating socio-economic political realities that are faced by the Palestinians as individuals, groups, and collectives. Politically, the continued threat of annexation is strong and increases stress levels, especially in light of the USA embassy move and formal

recognition of the annexation of Jerusalem. Economically, the sanctions placed on Gaza and the restrictions on the West Bank, coupled with the lack of control and sovereignty over borders, limits economic growth and leaves the Palestinian community dependent on Israeli and international goods (so long as the Israeli government allows for its transfer through the borders which they control). Furthermore, the inability of the Palestinian Health ministry and centers to be able to meet the health needs of the community, should COVID-19 continue to spread, has rendered lockdowns the most effective method and tool for risk mitigation and security. This

has increased unemployment and has necessitated and demanded the employment of the already-slim savings of the Palestinian communities. And socially, the absence of rule of law, and law and order, that can be applied, protected, and implemented by a friendly government and personnel, have rendered chaos in many of our communities. For, it is too clear to many of us, that our own government has limited sovereignty, and that those tasked and mandated with protecting us, are powerless in the face of the Israeli Government and Occupation.

It is out of this bleak reality, during these dangerous and precarious times that there exists a dire need for psycho-social support and resilience building. Stress levels, anxiety, depression, and other psychological and emotional consequences of the continued practice of occupation and of this too ‘normalized’ and internationally ‘accepted’ injustice is greatest and growing. The traumas are many and are rooted in the people’s continued suffering of home demolitions, land confiscation, humiliation and violence at checkpoints, deprivation of the freedom of movement, the denial of permits to go to Jerusalem, arbitrary detention, the systematic attacks led by Israeli settlers with the tacit support of the Israeli army on Palestinian communities, lands, and homes, as well as the continued abuses and injustices faced by many Palestinian political prisoners.

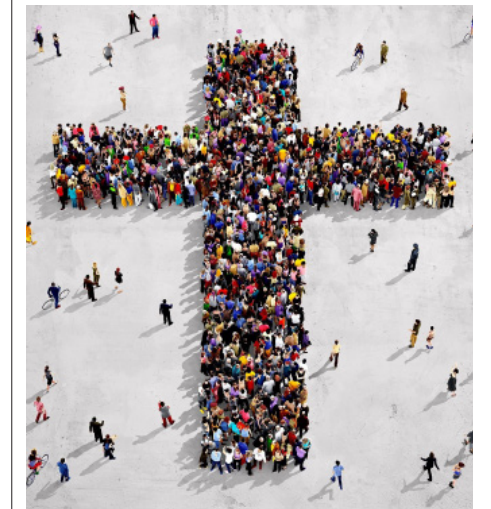
According to Drs. Abdel Hamid Afa-na, Samir Qouta, and Eyad El Sarraj, researchers at the Gaza Community Mental Health Program, in an arti-

cle published in November 2004, “*Around a third of Palestinians are in need of mental health interventions, yet mental health services are among the most under-resourced areas of health provision*”.

The above mentioned findings were recorded prior to the ever-deteriorating realities, including the last major violent assaults on Gaza. Today, an overwhelming majority, ever inching to encompass the entire population, is in dire need of Psychological intervention. And our work is two-fold, with our first duty and responsibility lying in encouraging our people to seek needed psychosocial support and help, while breaking the prevailing societal stigma against it, and second, in ensuring that the help is available and effective. We need to raise awareness about the importance of psycho-social support which will help our communities air out, ventilate, cast out fear and paranoia, and grow, helping us realize hope and build resilience, steadfastness, and strengthen community. In this light, we need ways to uplift the people’s spirits, enhance their steadfastness, and empower their resilience. We need to learn how to become more compassionate and equip ourselves with shared empathy towards each other.

We need to enhance our unity, while working for diversity in unity. We are in need of each other whether we are weak or strong, poor or rich, and need to enhance our unity, while also celebrating our differences, regardless of our social, economic, educational background, or political and ideological orientation. Thus, we at Wi’am

work toward the realization of the wisdoms of epistle Paul, especially in his letter to the Corinthians:



1 Corinthians 12:12-27
One Body but Many Parts

¹² *There is one body, but it has many parts. But all its many parts make up one body. It is the same with Christ. ¹³ We were all baptized by one Holy Spirit. And so we are formed into one body. It didn’t matter whether we were Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free people. We were all given the same Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ So the body is not made up of just one part.*

It has many parts.

¹⁵ *Suppose the foot says, “I am not a hand. So I don’t belong to the body.” By saying this, it cannot stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ And suppose the ear says, “I am not an eye. So I don’t belong to the body.” By saying this, it cannot stop being part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, how could it hear? If the whole body were an ear, how could it smell? ¹⁸ God has placed each part in the body just as he wanted it to be. ¹⁹ If all the parts were the same, how could*

there be a body? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts. But there is only one body.

²¹ The eye can't say to the hand, "I don't need you!" The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²² In fact, it is just the opposite. The parts of the body that seem to be weaker are the ones we can't do without. ²³ The parts that we think are less important we treat with special honor. The private parts aren't shown. But they are treated with special care. ²⁴ The parts that can be shown don't need special care. But God has put together all the parts of the body. And he has given more honor to the parts that didn't have any. ²⁵ In that way, the parts of the body will not take sides. All of them will take care of one another. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honored, every part shares in its joy.

²⁷ You are the body of Christ. Each one of you is a part of it.

In this spirit, we are all part of one body with many parts. We may be oceans apart, and separated by many degrees of freedom and rights, but we are all connected through our humanity and one world. As John Donne wrote *"No Man is an Island entire of itself; Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; If a cloth be washed away by the Sea, Europe is the less...and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee."* Expanding upon his sentiments and words to be more inclusive, we focus to include all walks of this Earth, men, and women, European, and non European. It is also here where we cry boldly, and proclaim to our body: We are hurting and have been suffering for

many generations, and although but one part, just like we belong to the land, we belong to this body!

We, Palestinians, live in big prisons as well as in small cells. If Martin Luther King were alive, He would write letters from Bethlehem jail, Gaza jail, and the many other bantustans which make up our communities. And we have our own share of letter writers, waiting to be heard, and waiting for the world to respond; To respond not with accusations, and sympathy, but instead with a commitment towards justice, love, and empathy.

Alas, we continue to live in a pressure cooker situation, in which our atmosphere turns more violent, as our helplessness displaces our anger towards each other: In the last few months, since March 5th (The beginning of the COVID-19 spread in Palestine), we witness more domestic violence, more societal crimes, more killing, and ultimately, more chaos. As mentioned earlier, the unemployment rate has been increasing drastically, especially in Bethlehem, since a large share of its economy is tourism-dependent. The unemployment rate before the pandemic was around a staggering 30% However, that number is estimated conservatively at over 80% today. Many are given half salaries, while many others are turned away from work due to the limited and dwindling resources available, all while prices continue to rise, and bills continue to demand payment. This continuing situation is proving to be larger than our churches, institutions, and government, as the needs continue

to grow, while the resources and support available remain steady at best. The situation will continue to deteriorate and promises increasing levels of violence. Since the beginning of 2020, at least 23 persons have been killed internally, as around 60% of people have lost their jobs, at the same time that home demolitions, land confiscations, imprisonment, and soldier and settler violence persist. This is one of the most fragrant recipes for violence, and crime, and it may be intentional; 70% of the weapons bought by Palestinians come from the Israeli military. This is a paradoxical course of action for a government that continues to practice oppression under the pretext of security.

“There is a
“continuing
community-
creating reality
that moves
through history
Rev. Dr. M L King Jr.”

Please look at the chart at the end of this article which summarizes some of the major human rights violations from the periods of Jan.1st to July 1st, 2020.

In looking at the depressing facts and figures, one thing becomes clear: How to deal with Stress and Trauma is both the question and our most immediate challenge.

Nowadays, stress reduction is needed more than ever and must be combined with trauma coping, and one day, trauma healing. We are in need of a holistic approach to effectively mitigate the consequences of this bleak reality. This includes economic packages, the implementation of just law and order, in which people are able to enjoy their rights and privileges, as well as social security, and the right to enjoy freedom, sovereignty, and opportunity.

Here is a brief list of some of the tools employed at Wi'am and other grass-roots organizations:

1. One to one consultation
2. Group Therapy
3. Compassionate listening or prophetic listening sessions ... (Listening by heart)
4. Airing out through storytelling
5. Theater of the Oppressed
6. Singing and telling jokes
7. Screaming
8. Breathing exercises
9. Holding on and letting go workshops
10. Sports and group walks in nature (Environmental and recreational trips)
11. Spirituality and prayers, like through Bible Study and other activities

To summarize, as a result of the declaration of a state of emergency in the Palestinian land and the consequent restrictions placed on movement, we are witnessing a hike in household tension, increased domestic violence, and family feuds. As a civic organization, Wi'am with its lively staff are putting courage and power together to respond creatively

to the urgent needs of our people. Wi'am's current emergency response aims at alleviating the challenges of the family in general and responds to the psycho-social needs of families, children, women, and youth. In cases of Domestic violence, our intervention can be summarized in the following points:

1. Providing psychosocial support to families, children, women, youth.
2. Providing mediation and Counseling for cases of domestic violence in the family that affects women, children, young people and families in general. In that respect, we are witnessing an alarming increase in cases of on-line bullying and family disputes as the result of losing jobs, lack of movement and no schooling.
3. Providing online Educational workshops, discussions with our networks, social workers, discussing ways of dealing with cases of domestic violence, ways of assisting victims facing psycho-social Trauma.
4. Facilitating Online Discussion groups with parents, especially men, with mediators, and lawyers to develop work strategies on ways of dealing with family disputes, and cases of domestic violence
5. Organizing Online meetings with "Emergency Response Groups" and putting emergency plans to respond to family needs at the Humanitarian level by providing food rations, and children's needs.

The need for our work continues to

increase, but we remain hopeful, and continue to believe in the resilience and steadfastness of our community and people. We will overcome COVID-19 and its imposed consequences, but we remain cautious as the threat of annexation continues to bode over us. But, still we remain steadfast and believe that no injustice will last forever. We believe in the one body, and hold to hope that it will soon awaken to the suffering of some of its parts. We hold onto hope in the collective responsibility that the world will assume, and for the foundation of justice and love which will define its work. As it is, Annexation is not the only challenge we have. We want to end the Israeli Occupation. Liberation and emancipation is what is desired and needed and we call for justice and only Justice, knowing full-well, that "justice delayed is not justice denied". For too long the Occupation's policies and practices, as well as the world's silence, has falsely claimed that we do not belong to this body, and today, as all the yesterdays, stand firm and tall, and exclaim that we belong to the whole and the whole is an integral part of us, and we echo Mandela's sentiment in proclaiming that until the least and greatest of us has been freed, we are all bound! So, let us continue to work towards freedom for all! And, let us build this greater, inclusive community and let us expand it till all know they belong!"

Human Rights Violation by Israel from January 1st to July 1st 2020

	Administrative Detention الاعتقال الإداري	Men الرجال	Women النساء	Children أطفال	All الاجمالي
Imprisonment الاعتقال	565	1391	70	304	2330

	Gaza Strip قطاع غزة	West Bank الضفة الغربية	All الاجمالي
Death الاستشهاد	6	16	22

Injuries	إصابات	21
House Demolition	هدم منازل	9
Uprooting Trees	تكسير وقلع واتلاف اشجار	914
Break-ins	اقتحامات	78
Demolition and confiscation warrants	اخطار بهدم او مصادرة منشأة	15
Confiscation of property	مصادرة ممتلكات	18
Land confiscation	مصادرة اراضي	3
Settler attacks	اعتداءات من قبل المستوطنين	44
Military checkpoints	حواجز عسكرية	38
Flying checkpoints	حواجز عسكرية مفاجئة	394
Degradation of land	جرف أراضي	2
Building settlement units	بناء وحدات استيطانية جديدة	7000

Wi'am is a grassroots organization established in Bethlehem in 1994, it aims to improve the quality of relationships and to promote peace, justice, a culture of acceptance, and reconciliation in the community. Wi'am strives alongside other forces in the community to build a society based on active participation, citizenship, democratic norms and values, and separation of the four powers (executive, legislative, judicial, and media).



PANDEMIC INEQUALITY IN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

Abdallah Awwad

History has taught us that pandemics don't discriminate. But at the same time, it has also taught us that pandemics do expose inequality in the system of power and domination, where the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized are hit hardest. As for the indigenous people living in the geographical area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, the spread of the virus has added a challenging burden to an already existing complex reality of 72 plus years of structural control and oppression. Thus rendering the Palestinian people's exposure to the virus more severe and hampering their ability to effectively confront it.

When COVID-19 was first detected in China in late December 2019, Palestinians didn't take the outbreak of the virus very seriously. But when it reached nearby countries and news of high mortality rates began to emerge from advanced nations with strong healthcare systems, panic and

fear were caused among Palestinians. Caught between Israel's restrictions and a dysfunctional healthcare system, a major outbreak could turn devastating.

While the outbreak was already surging in Israel, it wasn't until March when COVID-19 was first discovered in the West Bank, when seven employees of a Beit Jala hotel, near Bethlehem, contracted the virus from a group of Greek tourists. The Palestinian government acted quickly by first closing off Bethlehem and later declaring a state of emergency in the entire West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Security forces were dispatched across the West Bank to impose order and the Ministry of Health operated in full capacity to contain the spread of the virus, receiving widespread praise from the public.

However, the current pandemic has uncovered how more than 72 years of settler-colonial rule has engineered

a reality of structural inequality and health disparity. According to the Dean of Boston University School of Public Health, the social, economic, and environmental conditions that shape the health of populations are not just the products of contemporary circumstance; they are part of a historical continuum(i). This applies to the Palestinian people: Palestinian health is affected by Israel's ongoing legacy of displacement, mass expulsion, land theft, dispossession, discrimination and continued state-sponsored violence.

Israel has fragmented the West Bank, a territory occupied in 1967, into Areas A, B, and C, impeding Palestinians' access to healthcare. Similarly, Palestinians in East Jerusalem suffer from deeper isolation and marginalization and are discriminately neglected from the Israeli healthcare system in the same manner as Palestinian citizens of Israel.

In densely populated Gaza, the situation is critical under a continued Israeli blockade. Gaza's healthcare system has been exhausted by long years of siege, three major military assaults, and a severe shortage of medical supplies. Figures show that Gaza hospitals have 60 intensive care units available for nearly 2 million people, making it impossible for Gaza to deal with a major COVID-19 outbreak.



Other Palestinian groups are of particular vulnerability to the COVID-19 crisis. Palestinian prisoners in Israel, who suffer from deliberate medical negligence, are held in crowded prisons that lack proper ventilation and access to sanitization supplies, making it a breeding ground for the virus. Palestinian workers inside Israel are also faced with a similar plight. They are forced to work and stay in conditions which violate hygiene standards and are dumped at the nearest military checkpoint the moment they show any symptoms of sickness.

Outside Palestine, Palestinian refugees face high-risk exposure to the

virus, where overcrowding in refugee camps and dire living conditions, coupled with unfair policies of host countries and UNRWA's budget difficulties amid donor fatigue as a result of the 2018 decision of the Trump Administration to halt financial support for the agency, make the fight against COVID-19 outbreak a losing battle.

During the first phase of the outbreak, while some Palestinians believed in conspiracy theories surrounding the virus and others laughed it off as simple flu, they have shown a great sense of responsibility in halting the spread and abiding by health guidelines.

In difficult times, Palestinians have always shown a spirit of resilience and collaboration. They can cope with challenging situations. Years of colonial occupation have taught the Palestinians to rely on themselves and create an alternative plan to adapt to any situation. In light of the COVID-19 crisis, Palestinians persevered and organized themselves to deal with the new situation. Local committees were formed and stepped up their efforts to raise awareness, distribute food and hygienic materials to needy families, disinfect public places, and monitor entrances of each community, especially in Area C. They even expressed their full solidarity with nations hard hit by the virus, such as Italy and China.

July 1 was a tipping point. At this point it was becoming increasingly clear that the outbreak may get out of control. With the heavy impact the COVID-19 crisis had on Pales-

tine's ailing economy, initial closure measures began lifting at the end of May, leading to a spike in cases, with Hebron becoming the epicenter of the pandemic in the West Bank. The surge was attributed to social gatherings, particularly weddings.

The occupying power is obligated under international law to guarantee health services to civilians living under its military rule. Israel instead continues its pattern of brutal occupation as usual, which includes – but is not limited to – home demolitions (including COVID-19 clinics in Hebron and the Jordan Valley); detaining civilians (including activists distributing informative brochures), food parcels, and medical supplies and volunteers disinfecting public spaces in East Jerusalem; and shooting, bombing and conducting military incursions at any time.

Collectively, these Israeli structural conditions combined with years of historical injustices and denial of national and health rights for the Palestinian people create a formula for tragedy. Yet, Israel, with the unwavering support of the Trump Administration, continues to implement the explicit aim of the Zionist project to transform the whole of Palestine into the land of Israel. This principle of its long-standing policy is based on liquidating the Palestinian people, territory, and national aspirations for self-determination, to bend the Palestinians to their will and force them to accept their defeat.

Now there are concerns that Israel's impending annexation of large swaths of the West Bank – although

in practice the West Bank is already annexed – will entrench a formal and rooted system of apartheid. Impunity and lack of accountability have assisted Israel in enforcing its own agenda and moving beyond the international consensus on the situation of the Middle East.

Palestinians find themselves trapped between looming formal annexation and a health crisis with limited and restricted resources. But the Palestinian people's instinct to survive and resist will always stand in the face of any plans that aim to eliminate their existence and sever their deep connection to their historical homeland. By tackling the root of the problem, I believe we can find answers and solutions.

[i] <https://www.bu.edu/sph/2017/03/12/history-as-a-determinant-of-health/>

Abdallah Awwad serves as director of the office of Member of the PLO Executive Committee, Dr. Hanan Ashrawi at the PLO Department of Public Diplomacy and Policy. Prior to his current post he was the director of the office of the Secretary-General of the PLO Executive Committee. Abdallah received his BA in Media and Communication Studies from North Park University, Chicago in 2009. Abdallah is a member of the Sabeel General Assembly.



DEPRESSION IN THE PALESTINIAN COMMUNITY DURING COVID-19

An interview with Yoad Ghanadreh

My name is Yoad. I am a clinical psychologist and a supervisor at the Palestinian Counseling Centre (PCC). I have been working here for more than 15 years. The PCC is a non-governmental organization active in the field of mental health for more than 35 years. I work with clients on the individual level, with children and adults, as well as with couples and groups. As well as this work, I am a mother to three children.

Are you seeing a rise in cases of

people with depression or other psychological issues as a result of COVID-19? If so, what kind?

In general, Palestinians are like any other community in the world—we have the full spectrum of mental health problems. The situation in Palestine is that we are very experienced in trauma and we have cumulative traumas in which parents, children, and grandparents have all been exposed to the same problematic situation for more than 70 years now, so we can't always measure a rise

or deterioration in statistics because the situation is chronic.

In general, we have a higher percentage of all mental health problems but that does not mean that Palestinians are sicker; we think that the context is sicker. When you are depressed it is not because you are feeling bad and helpless because you don't believe in the future; you are depressed because you believe too much in the future, not because of little hope and lots of despair—the depression is because our children have hopes and dreams and cannot fulfill them.

COVID-19 is a situation where all our problems are exacerbated. We are experienced in checkpoints, in closures, in a low employment rate, and all these things, but now with COVID-19 the occurrence of these situations is higher. Until now, we don't see more depression, but more anxiety and aggressive reactions. We believe that depression comes later because whenever there is a situation which is threatening their mental health, people tend to go into survival mode and that means that people try to act, they try to do something. That's why, in the beginning, we see people doing more gardening, more cooking, and telling more jokes—it's a kind of way to survive. We believe that if the situation continues, the anxiety that people have will not be translated into action, but may be more into violence and other responses, but we can't tell if it will develop into depression.

Does the Centre see a difference between Palestinians in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza in

the mental health issues they have?

Actually, what happens in the West Bank is seen ten times worse in Gaza. The situation in Gaza is that people there are much more enclosed, and all the options are closed to them along with a very bad financial situation. We see Gaza and occupied Jerusalem as the most problematic areas. Of course, the West Bank is still under occupation—including East Jerusalem—but still in the West Bank we see that people can communicate with one another and, now before further annexation, they feel that they own their land and homes. In Jerusalem, on a yearly basis, more than one-thousand citizens are losing their citizenship and that is causing very high rates of social problems. So Gaza is the worst case and then Jerusalem in terms of mental health, but again it is the context which is sick more than the people.

Are depression and anxiety taboo subjects in Palestine?

Not at all. Before, people thought that psychologists and counselors would not have anyone asking for help. Now you can go to any organization that provides mental health support and you will see waiting lists of hundreds of people. People in Palestine are very much aware of what is happening, especially when it comes to their children; when their children are suffering the parents usually want to address it and ask for help. So maybe they don't use the term depression but anxiety. Of course, they describe it as restless, stressed out, or preoccupied. And sometimes they speak about

mental breakdown or psychological breakdown. So people do access help. But now, as we are seeing less and less familial connections due to checkpoints, the separation wall, difficulties of transportation, and freedom of movement, people are finding it more difficult to access others for help and support. This is another aspect that we have to take into consideration.

Traditionally, how has Palestinian society dealt with depression and related conditions?

We are like any other society: we speak to our families, we speak to our friends, we speak to religious figures, we speak to trusted people, and a very high percentage of Palestinians speak to their doctors. Maybe mental health wasn't the top priority, but we see our doctors as the main soldiers protecting our health: you address your doctors for whatever you think you need to. Palestinians have many psychosomatic reactions, so many of us display less in terms of psychological symptoms but our bodies communicate what we feel. So usually doctors are those who see what is happening, and if a person doesn't go to address a psychologist or counselor doctors do that job. We at PCC are also trying very hard to work with religious figures, because Palestinians will trust whom they see as the traditional authorities. We want religious figures and churches in Palestine to be more cooperative with mental health professionals so that we can work together to meet the needs of our people.

In what ways are people finding

their lives affected by COVID-19, its effects on the economy, short-term plans, and education?

In terms of economy, of course Palestinians suffer from a very high rate of unemployment and poverty and, you know, when your basic needs are not satisfied you can't think about other needs. People need to eat, feel safe, and have housing, water, and electricity to meet basic needs. COVID-19 has opened wider the wounds of financial instability.

In terms of children, remote education wasn't working in Palestine. The majority of families don't have internet or computers and the system was not prepared for remote education, so children just stayed home and did nothing. Alternatives such as going out are not always possible due to the military situation and occupation. So parents are more afraid, not only from COVID-19, but also of the political situation. So children were kept at home and we see more and more aggressive reactions. It's a natural response to feeling locked down, and the Palestinians don't have any feeling or assurance of future stability. They don't trust what the future will bring: What will happen next with the Palestinian Authority? Will they have work to return to after COVID-19? For example, I work in a stable organization and know that after the pandemic I will still be working here, but for the majority of Palestinians this causes a very high rate of anxiety and stress.

Are you finding that children and young people are being affected by the pandemic, and in what way?

I'll start by talking about my children. I live in Jericho. Jericho is currently locked down, and with annexation imminent, people are restless and children are stressed because children rely on their parents to calm them down and parents are the source of emotional regulation for their children. We see that parents are not now emotionally capable of providing this kind of emotional support as they themselves are overwhelmed: with 70 years of occupation and COVID-19 it's all too much.

There is a big problem of mistrust in the government ministries. Parents don't feel they can trust the Ministry of Health. Even though the ministry is trying to do all they can, you can't trust ministries under occupation. Palestine is not an independent state: how can you trust your ministry if it is under occupation? This stress and uncertainty experienced by parents is why children have lost their parents as their main source of comfort and reassurance. With no schools and no alternative to schools, children also do not have the support of their friends. On the other hand, we know that children are more resilient and capable of creativity, but it is important to realize that our children are also lost and afraid of what is going on around them.

We see in the media that women are being more severely affected by the effects of the pandemic due to a rise in physical and mental domestic abuse. Is this reflected in the work of the PCC?

Our Centre doesn't work directly or specifically with domestic violence. However, our philosophy is that it is not the women who are sick and need help, it is their husbands—we need to address the male and not the victim. There are many organizations such as the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC) in the West Bank who work in this area and we refer to them. We do know, however, that in a situation such as this pandemic, women become double victims.

What advice would you give to Palestinians and internationals to help care for their mental health at this time?

In general, I hope that the occupation will end, and Palestinians will be free. I think that we all need to practice some kind of control over our lives. You can practice control in the management of your everyday life such as dressing and eating when you get up—not automatically but as an individual in control of your own life. I advise that everyone should practice some kind of control and try to do things that comfort them and do something meaningful every day—whilst understanding that we are all stressed. People are suffering worldwide, but try to listen to music, eat well, move, and enjoy as much as possible. Seek social interaction, albeit remote, but don't close yourself off: connecting with others will help everyone. So in general, practice self-control, rely on your energy, connect with others, and—this is important—believe that it will end. Humanity will keep going.

You mentioned the annexation earlier. How do you think the uncertainty around annexation alongside COVID-19 and ongoing occupation is affecting people?

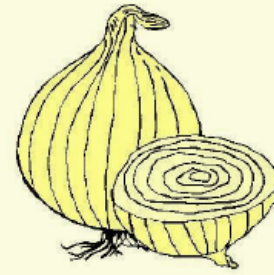
As I said, it's a cumulative trauma and Palestinians will not stay motionless. There will come a point when Palestinians say, "no more!" We don't trust any other systems—not international, not local, not governmental. We trust ourselves and people will do something to help themselves. At the moment, people are a little bit confused about annexation; they don't really understand what is going to change in their everyday life. People will go out and change the situation, not only towards external powers but also internally. When change comes it will happen here on the ground and towards Israel. This is the normal circle of history; this is the normal reaction of people under occupation—people are not chairs and tables and action is the normal reaction. We will see a reaction. When? We don't know. But I think annexation is adding to the internal energy of people to seek change.

Are there any positive stories which have come out of the current situation and, if so, can you share one?

I'll talk about PCC: In times of trauma, people become one unit—they work together. The staff here are volunteers and we changed our work from direct therapy to online. Many professionals, including PCC, are going into the media, into radio, into different electronic platforms and trying to share their knowledge and experience with others. Professionals

in the current situation are more willing to contribute their skills and support to others and this is something very beautiful. Another thing I think is happening is that people are starting to reflect on what life was like before, how we lived our lives. People here, and all over the world are expanding their view on what is important in life, what is less important in life, and how—after COVID-19—all humanity will be different. COVID-19 has made it very clear that we are all in the same situation: People in the West Bank understand more about what life is like in Gaza because of the lockdown; internationals are understanding more about life in the West Bank because of their lockdowns. I hope that people develop a feeling of unity and that no one is immune—if I'm sick then my neighbor will be sick, the Israelis will be sick, the Jordanians will be sick, and everyone will be sick. We are one humanity and I think people are beginning to understand this. Of course, this isn't reflected yet on the political or diplomatic levels, but individuals realize that we are one—the illusion of separation is not there anymore. I see this understanding as a positive one.

Yoad Ganadreh is a clinical psychologist and a supervisor at the Palestinian Counseling Centre (PCC).



Palestinian Counseling Center

The Palestinian Counseling Center was established in 1983 by a group of psychologists, educators and community activists to provide professional and quality mental health care to Palestinians in Jerusalem and the West Bank. Since its inception, and through its team of multi-disciplinary counselors and experts, the PCC has served as a catalyst in promoting community-based development and introducing the concept of mental health in Palestine. At the time of its founding, mental health services in the region were restricted to psychiatric treatment for mental disorders at mental health hospitals and private clinics operated by psychiatrists. Treatment methods used were largely archaic, limited to bio-medical approaches, including medication and electric shock therapy. To counter these potentially harmful tactics, work at the center began, on a voluntary basis, through awareness-raising efforts in schools on the importance of mental health counseling and working with children exposed to physical and political violence. Since then, the PCC has passed through a number of phases in its development process that have led to its present shape and character.



THE REALITY ON THE GROUND: FROM PANDEMIC TO LAYERS OF OCCUPATION AND CONFUSION

Sam Babour

Throughout the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic there has been an unfortunate sense of denial within the Palestinian people. People have been going about their day-to-day lives as if nothing is happening, mask wearing has been minimal, and gatherings happen on a regular basis. Questions about why this is the case have to be asked and the answer to these questions are mired in the multiple strains under which Palestinians live – occupation, threat of ongoing annexation, and poor government.

Before the reasons behind the current denial of the Covid-19 pandemic can be addressed, background needs to be given to those multiple strains faced by Palestinians:

Occupation and the threat of ongoing annexation

Israeli annexation of Palestinian lands and Israeli dominance over Palestinian lives comes in a variety of shapes, forms, and flavors. Understandably, the international community and many Israeli citizens are in an uproar today about the impending Israeli annexation of large swaths of the West Bank, however, their hypocrisy can no longer be concealed.

Not only is this yet another act of de jure annexation by Israel, but the upcoming act of annexation is being made out to be the overarching issue at hand. It is not, per se. For decades, Israel's actions on the ground have al-

ways pointed to the dangerous place we have reached today. For countries of the world or Israeli citizens to be surprised that the U.S-Israeli partnership is about to embark on another catastrophic and illegal act is only evidence that they have been sleeping at the wheel for decades. The time has come for serious stakeholders to hold Israel accountable for all their acts, in Occupied Palestine and Israel, and not only threaten to take action if the next round of annexation materializes.

Palestinians in Israel

The horrendous reality of the Palestinian communities inside Israel—in places like Akka, Haifa, Nazareth,

Jaffa, and the Negev—is not about being regulated to sit in the back of the bus; they could only wish for such blatant racism. Here, racism is multi layered ideological, well-camouflaged, state-sponsored, and non-stop.

Anyone who thinks that stopping the next Israeli annexation of additional parts of the West Bank would bring peace closer would be well-advised to peel away the veneer of democratic façade, one that covers an Israeli plan with only one goal in mind—completing the campaign of ethnically cleansing Palestinians—on both sides of the Green Line—that started with the creation of the State of Israel.

I witnessed the state of Palestinian citizens in Israel on a visit to Northern Israel in 2012. My trip took place on a beautiful fall day, I sat in a friend's living room in the village of Fassouta at the northern tip of Israel, adjacent to the Lebanese border, in the part of Israel called the Galilee. This is where the Palestinian citizens in Israel are concentrated. Five generations of Palestinians were sitting in the room. As expected in Palestinian society, within no time, politics was the focus of the discussion. But this political discussion had a different twist from what most of those following this conflict are accustomed to. The issues had to do with the Palestinian citizens in Israel and how the Israeli government systematically and structurally discriminates against them.

Bilateral negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis, better known as the infamous Middle East

(Oslo) Peace Process, began with a model (and accompanying actions on the ground) of *Gaza and Jericho First*. The idea was that the Palestinian Authority, which the Oslo Accords created, would start by being set up in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank city of Jericho, a sort of pilot phase before subsequently deploying to all of the Palestinian areas defined in the Accords. The standing joke at the time was that what Israel, the military occupying power, really meant was *Gaza and Jericho Only!*

With two decades of a never-ending “peace process,” Israel diverted the world's attention, including the Palestinian leadership, away from the discriminatory workings within Israel itself. As the parties quibbled over who violated the Oslo Agreement first and most, Israel never stopped strangulating the Palestinian towns and villages inside it. Even back then, some of the mainstream, international research outfits, such as the International Crisis Group (ICG), were forced to take note. Their March 2012 report titled, “[Back to Basics: Israel's Arab Minority and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict](#),” stated:

“World attention remains fixed on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but a distinct, albeit related, conflict smoulders within Israel itself. It might be no less perilous. Jewish-Arab domestic relations have deteriorated steadily for a decade. More and more, the Jewish majority views the Palestinian minority as subversive, disloyal and – due to its birth rates – a demographic threat. Palestinian citizens are politically marginalized economically underprivileged, ever more unwilling to accept

systemic inequality and ever more willing to confront the status quo.”

That's researcher-talk for a slow and calculated campaign of displacing an entire population in broad daylight—world, take note.

One strategy, multiple applications

A startling realization, when traveling around the Palestinian farming villages in the Galilee, is that the hilltops are dotted with gated, Jewish Israeli communities and Israeli government-declared nature reserves, all creating a physical barrier to the natural growth of the native Palestinian communities. Added to these physical obstructions to Palestinian development, Israeli law provides for another platform, a legal one, whereby hundreds of Israeli communities can keep out Palestinians on cultural grounds.

Coming from the occupied territory of the West Bank, these physical obstacles and legal tools looked to me much like the illegal, Jewish-only settlements that surround every Palestinian city. The physical location of both types of these residential colonies is not random, but rather a sharp demographic weapon to interrupt and stunt the growth of the Palestinian communities.

I wanted to see more but had to head back home to the West Bank. Now that I am a Palestinian ID holder, which means I have West Bank residency status issued by the Israeli occupation authorities, I cannot be in Israel as a tourist. My U.S. citizenship—my only citizenship—is

useless now that I am classified as a West Bank Palestinian in the Israeli government's eyes. Israel is the only place on earth where I am not recognized as the American that I am! Thus, my Israeli military-issued permit, which allows me to enter Israel, restricts my movement so that I have to be back by ten in the evening to what I call my *cage*, also known as the metropolitan area of Ramallah.

What is now clear to me, and wasn't when I first arrived in Palestine shortly after the Oslo Accords were signed, is that the system of command and control, which oppresses nearly five million Palestinians under military occupation, is strikingly similar to the system which controls nearly two million Muslim and Christian Palestinians inside Israel, who are Israeli citizens.

The ultimate Israeli goal is to erase Palestinian collective memory, limit Palestinian education, squeeze Palestinian living space, and strangle any serious notion of Palestinian economic enterprise. But Palestinians are not going anywhere. This was confirmed when I asked a law student from this Galilaean village where he plans to be in five years. Without hesitation, he answered, “Here, in my village, and not for the next five years, but for the next 10 and 20 and 100 years.” Eight years have passed since his answer. He is still in his village, now married and with a son.

After hours of deep discussion in that quiet Palestinian village of Fassouta, tucked away in the velvet-like green hills of the Galilee, a veteran Pales-

tinian researcher, who was quiet for most of the time, spoke in a calm, definitive voice. He said that everything we were discussing, in terms of how much harm Israel is doing to Palestinians living in Israel and under military occupation, is true, but in the village, the numbers speak volumes. Over the past 72 years, since Israel's creation, and despite all of its attempts to force the Palestinians off the land, the population has increased as per official Israeli statistics. As long as the Palestinians exist on this land, he asserted, their rights are bound to be realized.

Annexation here, annexation there

The ultimate goal of more annexation is to get more Palestinians to voluntarily leave Palestine and Israel.

All the way home, I could not get out of my mind a new political slogan that would reveal the extent of the Palestinian tragedy, *The Galilee First*. Instead of managing the conflict as if the only contentious issue is about those of us living under Israeli military occupation, the international community, Israeli citizens, and Palestinian leadership as well, should call for the world to witness the reality of Palestinians inside Israel.

If Israel is bent on discriminating against one-fifth of its citizens, what should we expect of it in the occupied territory, areas that are not internationally recognized as Israel? Indeed, the next time I am asked what I think the solution to this conflict is, my answer will be ready: Let us start with full equal rights for Palestinians inside Israel. In other

words, The Galilee comes first if Israel—and the world—is serious about peace and truly desires historic reconciliation with the Palestinians.

Politics and Confusion

The Israeli occupation seeps into every aspect of life, including our internal affairs. This is not an excuse for our state of affairs, but rather a fact that has always been there and must be understood and taken into consideration as we plan our actions. It is these desired “actions,” or lack thereof, where lack of clarity enters.

“What draws me to Palestine, then, is neither nationalism nor patriotism, but my sense of justice, my refusal to remain silent in the face of injustice, my unwillingness to just go on living my life -- and enjoying the privileges of a tenured university professor -- while trying to block out and ignore what Wordsworth once called the still, sad music of humanity.”

Saree Makdisi, *Palestine Inside Out: An Everyday Occupation*

First, there is President Mahmoud Abbas. Positioned more as a king governing by presidential decree, than president of an operating political system, President Abbas is at a loss as to how to address the multiple fronts imposed upon him.

From Israel, he has no partner with whom to do anything. From the West, he hears repeated statements of how they now “get it,” but he is yet to find them acting to hold Israel

accountable. The Arab heartland is so disfigured that he can barely keep up with the states in their domino-style collapse in order to understand their role. From his own street, he is faced with a loss of hope that has turned at times to violence.

The scenario playing out in the streets has the dangerous possibility of spinning out of control. One day President Abbas turns a blind eye to the protests and violence, the next he sends his security forces to quell the protesters, sometimes violently. Onlookers trying to understand the strategy are left with the same sense of loss felt by Palestinians looking for coherent leadership.

Second, there is the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the Palestinian political agency, at least in name. It is there and not there at the same time.

The PLO is alive and well in the international arena. The successful 29 November, 2012 UN General Assembly resolution acknowledged “that the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, in accordance with a decision by the Palestine National Council, is entrusted with the powers and responsibilities of the Provisional Government of the State of Palestine”.

The same resolution went on to “Decide[s] to accord to Palestine non-member observer State status in the United Nations, without prejudice to the acquired rights, privileges and role of the Palestine Liberation Organization in the United Nations as the representative of the Palestin-

ian people, in accordance with the relevant resolutions and practice.”

Legally, all is in order, but politically, all is a mess.

The PLO Executive Committee consists of 18 members, including the president. Article 14 of the PLO bylaws stipulates that the Palestine National Council (PNC) must convene in the event that one third of the members of the Executive Committee resigns, in order to choose new officers.

In August 2015, President Abbas resigned as head of the PLO Executive Committee. In addition to Abbas’ resignation, Hanan Ashrawi, Ahmad Majdalani, Saeb Erekat, Ghassan al-Shakaa, and Mahmoud Ismail also resigned, thus invoking the need for a session of the PNC - which has not met to strategically define policy since 1988.

President Abbas tried to call for a PNC meeting before the end of 2015 but was forced to postpone the call, given the impression from many, including key figures in his own FATAH party, that the entire episode was a political stunt to gain legitimacy, which had been severely damaged given his term as president had long expired and the PNC is today an empty shell.

Third, there is the Palestinian Authority (PA). Trying to play the role of a government, but lacking the bare minimum resources or real authority to do so, the PA goes through the daily motions of an operating government bureaucracy. Israeli actions

and Palestinian disunity have both stripped the PA from its ability to develop into a full-scale government.

Today, it is more of a national non-governmental organization (NGO), forced to align with the donors that keep it alive, than an executive body implementing properly legislated policy.

That said, the PA is not a foreign body, it is part and parcel of our community and, albeit limited, is an important platform that needs a new scope of work. It does not need threats that it will be dismantled, which would only leave our education and health care systems, among others, to our occupiers to manage.

Fourth, Palestinian civil society remains the wild card. Large chunks of civil society have been hijacked by donor agendas. To remain alive and meet payroll, just like the PA itself, this chunk has little to offer in changing the deteriorating status quo. Here I include the majority, if not all, of the political parties that comprise the PLO.

That noted, there is another part of civil society that is more rooted in its communities and can be seen and heard challenging the phenomena of violence, as well as addressing the weaknesses in the political structures. A week does not go by without veteran political players meeting to craft a way forward; their weakness is that the youth are usually meeting separately among themselves.

Fifth, Palestinians living outside of the grip of Israeli occupation. Here

again, there are organized into the forced fragments created by Israel. Each fragment has its own challenges, priorities and dynamics. The most exciting of these are the Palestinian citizens of Israel who, although facing extreme conditions from Israel’s right-wing government, are more outspoken and politically organized today than they have ever been.

Yet to be mobilized are the refugee communities and the Palestinian diaspora, two major levers that have the potential to be real game-changers once they enter the political ring. Last but not least, there is the international community, which has become an integral part of the internal Palestinian reality. As it relates to internal Palestinian politics, the international community is a double-edged sword.

Without donors, the PA collapses and any repairing of the Palestinian political system will move from being in repair mode to reconstruct mode, a shift that should not be taken lightly, as Israel has made it publicly clear that any Palestinian agency will be made to surrender on its terms. On the other hand, with donors, Israel gets a free ride to continue its policy of slow ethnic cleansing while all the time paying lip-service to peace.

I envy no one trying to navigate through this reality, but I am also convinced that without an operating political system that can utilize the full capabilities of the Palestinian people, those under occupation and those living free from occupation, no one will succeed in safeguarding our path toward freedom and inde-

pendence.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recently told the Security Council that the wave of attacks in Israel and Palestine was driven by a “profound sense of alienation and despair” among some Palestinians, particularly the young.

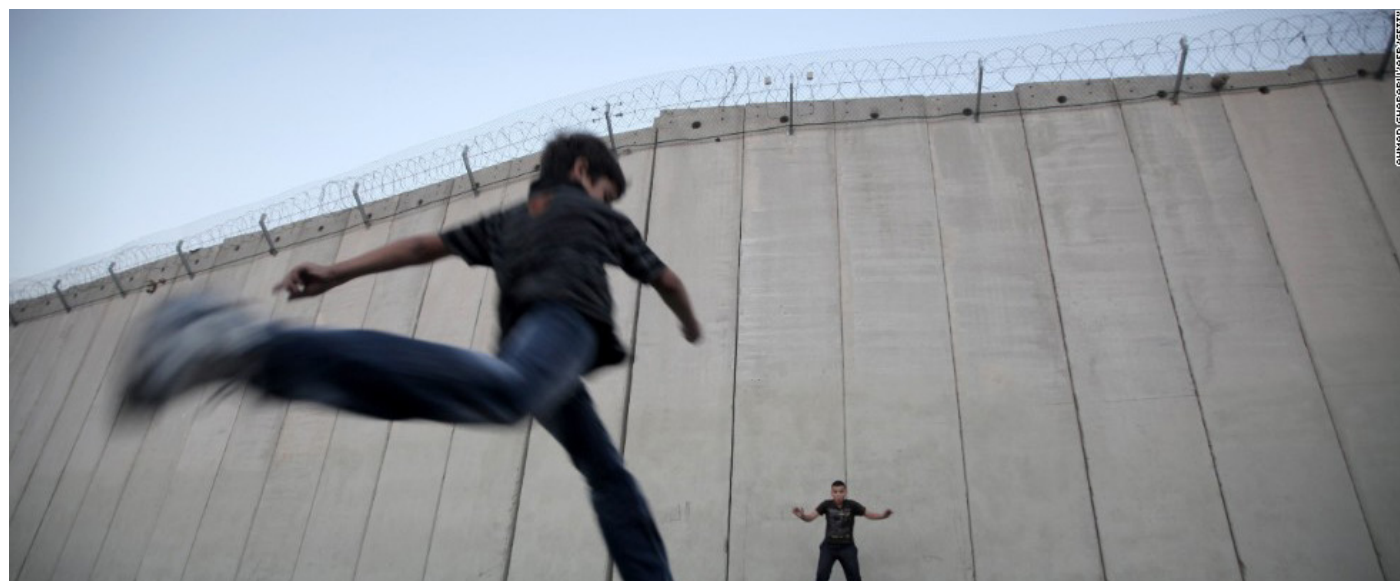
He continued, “Palestinian frustration is growing under the weight of a half century of occupation and the paralysis of the peace process. As oppressed peoples have demonstrated throughout the ages, it is human nature to react to occupation, which often serves as a potent incubator of hate and extremism.”

It is through the lenses of these multiple layers of confusion and occupation that we must view the current denial of the Covid-19 pandemic. Palestinians are naturally wary of any more restriction being placed on their daily lives including the closure of Israeli checkpoints during lockdown with no indication when, or if, they will reopen and the limits put on those Palestinians who work in Israeli settlements causing them to lose out on work or be parted from their family for extended periods of time. Many Palestinians have also come to a point politically where they have lost trust in the actions of their own governments (led by Fatah in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza) therefore, many are reluctant to follow restrictions and mandates put upon them by those in power. The solution to this denial and lack of trust is hard to see, obviously a just and peaceable end to the occupation and annexation of Palestinian

territory would improve the living and working conditions for many, however, a political change is also required. Whether the recent talk of elections being held within the next six months will make some move towards a government in whom Palestinians can place their trust is uncertain but it would certainly open a door to such a movement.

This article is curated by Sabeel from two articles by Sam Bahour ‘Layers of confusion choke internal Palestinian affairs’ published in Middle East Eye (29th January 2016) and ‘The Galilee First, if the world is serious about Israel and Palestine!’

Sam Bahour is an American businessman and entrepreneur. He was born to a Palestinian father and Lebanese-American mother. He moved with his family to the Israeli-occupied West Bank in the 1990s following the signing of Oslo Accords to become involved in developing the economy of the future Palestinian state.[1]Bahour was born in Ohio in 1964. He graduated from Youngstown State University in 1989 with a degree in computer technology, and subsequently worked for several American software firms, before moving to the West Bank in 1995.



MOVING FORWARD A PATH TO LIBERATION

Omar Haramy - Sabeel Administrator

Reflecting on the current situation, the odds are not in favor of achieving a just solution to the Palestinian Israeli conflict. Yet faith does not rely on odds or facts. Palestinian Liberation Theology is founded on three important tenants *Inclusivity, Justice, and Nonviolence*. I personally believe that the path for liberation is within our grasps if we pursue the following steps:

Justice

We have a local saying: whenever two Palestinians meet to discuss a just solution to the conflict, we end up with three different opinions. It is time for Palestinians to come to an agreement on what is an acceptable solution to the conflict. The Palestinian people must also be aware

that any proposed solution must come with consequences. Internal discussions must be conducted openly among all Palestinians to discuss the different end game scenarios to our struggle. The Palestinian people must include our friends and supporters, regardless of their faith or nationality, and including Israelis, in such a discussion. A joint decision must take place to agree on what path must be pursued:

- Two-state solution based on International Law
- Liberation of all historical Palestine
- One state solution for both Palestinians and Israelis
- Any other creative solutions

The path the Palestinian people choose will have serious effects on

the solidarity we will receive; we will be able to keep some friends and advocates, and we might lose others. The final decision is a Palestinian decision.

As Sabeel we strongly believe that the most realistic and just solution is the two-state solution with a basis in international law. A two-state solution based on international law not only achieves justice but also has the potential for restorative Justice.

Reconciliation

There are numerous serious divisions among the Palestinian people, and a divided movement will not be able to accomplish liberation for the people who are on the margins. Instead, the divisions are a tool that ensures

the sustainability of our oppression. Reconciliation must take place in three areas:

- *Palestinian Political Reconciliation:* the divisions of Palestinian political factions have had long lasting negative effects on the Palestinian people and our national struggle. The most recent major division is evident between Fatah and Hamas, who have created two different governments with two different agendas and visions for the path forward in our occupied territory. We strongly believe in freedom of speech and that different points of view must be celebrated; however, if consensus is not possible among the divided factions, the democratic process must be the judge. Political factions and leaders who have committed crimes must be held accountable and brought to justice. For true political reconciliation to take place, our people must hold the different political factions accountable for their past crimes and misuse of power. The lack of accountability of our political leadership has created a form of impunity and is on the path to create a corrupt totalitarian leadership.
- *Civil society and community reconciliation:* For years, Palestinian civil society has stepped in to help provide the services our people have been deprived of due to years of occupation and lack of government. Many such initiatives started with goodwill, yet they have fallen into the inevitable problem of relying on

funding, leaving a large segment of civil society hijacked by donor agendas. To remain alive and meet payroll, this segment has little to offer in changing the deteriorating status quo. The civil society has moved from a possible agent for change to competing in a market where the first goal is the continuity of their organization, rather than the well-being of their community.

The process of internal Palestinian reconciliation is extremely challenging and requires accountability and transparency. Unfortunately, without reforming our own Palestinian family, achieving any progress on any political solution to bring justice to Palestine will be destined to fail.

Nonviolence

The Palestinian people have been using a variety of forms of resistance depending on the realities on the ground and available resources. Although one could argue that the majority of the Palestinian struggle has been nonviolent, at few times in history has our nonviolent struggle been well-coordinated and maintained. As Sabeel we believe that the only way is the nonviolent way for the following practical reasons:

- Israel is far more powerful when it comes to military might. Palestinian armed struggle has no chance.
- Only a few Palestinians could participate in the armed struggle. Nonviolent resistance is accessible to all our people.
- Nonviolence is less costly for our

people and saves many lives.

But as people of faith, practicality is not the only reason; our values are even more important. Nonviolence is far more ethical than violent resistance; it is the way to challenge the oppressor without losing our humanity, nor denying the humanity of our oppressor. As Gandhi said: "an eye for an eye will make the world blind."

And Sabeel believes nonviolence is the way of Christ: Jesus spoke truth to power without lifting a sword. As people of faith, we strongly believe that the teachings of Jesus have proven their effectiveness throughout the past 2000 years, and we have faith that the way of Christ is still applicable in the world.

The Palestinian people must regain faith in themselves and commit to speak truth to power using the power of nonviolence through community resistance. The Palestinian people must spend less time analyzing Israeli politics and the international power balance and instead take the struggle to our fields, streets, and cities. History proves that there is no force that can suppress a united, determined, and persistent community of oppressed people demanding justice.

The founding values of Palestinian Liberation Theology are very applicable today and with faith we can create our own destiny.

NEW HEADS OF CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM



Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa OFM

On 24 October 2020, Pizzaballa was appointed Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem by Pope Francis. On 28 October 2020, Pope Francis bestowed Patriarch Pizzaballa with the pallium, a symbol of his authority as metropolitan archbishop and his unity with the pope. He took canonical possession of that see on 6 November 2020 in a private ceremony in the presence of Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli, Apostolic Delegate to Jerusalem, the Auxiliary Bishops of Jerusalem, and the Patriarchate's College of Consultors.

Bishop Coadjutor Hosam Naoum

On Sunday 14 June in St George's Cathedral, Jerusalem, Archbishop Michael as Primate of the Province joined Archbishop Suheil Dawani and Bishop Peter Eaton of Southeast Florida in making a new Coadjutor (Assistant) Bishop for the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem. Hosam Naoum, previously cathedral dean there, will in due course succeed as Jerusalem's Anglican diocesan bishop.



Bishop Camil Afram Antoine Semaan

The Synod of Bishops of the Patriarchal Church of Antioch of the Syrians has elected as exarch for Syrian faithful in Jerusalem, Palestine and Jordan the Reverend Camil Afram Antoine Semaan, currently parish administrator of the same circumscription, to which the Holy Father had granted his assent, assigning him the titular see of Hierapolis of the Syrians.



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PURPOSE STATEMENT *of* SABEEL

Sabeel is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, promote unity among them, and lead them to act for justice and love. Sabeel strives to develop a spirituality based on justice, peace, non-violence, liberation, and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities. The word 'Sabeel' is Arabic for 'the way' and also a 'channel' or 'spring' of life-giving water.

Sabeel also works to promote a more accurate international awareness regarding the identity, presence, and witness of Palestinian Christians as well as their contemporary concerns.

It encourages individuals and groups from around the world to work for a just, comprehensive, and enduring peace informed by truth and empowered by prayer and action.

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