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## **Gaza 2009: Culture of Resistance vs. Defeat** **By Dr. Haidar Eid, The Electronic Intifada** **BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator**

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Can the brutal 22-day Israeli war on the Gaza Strip be considered a victory for the Palestinian people? Photo by [Matthew Cassel](#).

The ongoing bloodletting in the Gaza Strip and the ability of the Palestinian people to creatively resist the might of the world's fourth strongest army is being hotly debated by Palestinian political forces. The latest genocidal war which lasted 22 days, and in which apartheid Israel used F-16s, Apache helicopters, Merkava tanks and conventional and non-conventional weapons against the population, have raised many serious

questions about the concept of resistance and whether the outcome of the war can, or cannot, be considered a victory for the Palestinian people. The same kind of questions were raised in 2006 when apartheid Israel launched its war against the Lebanese people and brutally killed more than 1,200 Lebanese.

At the beginning of the Gaza war, we were told by certain sectors of the Palestinian political leadership that "the two sides are to blame: Hamas and Israel" and that "Hamas must stop the launching of the rockets from Gaza." Resistance in all its forms, violent and otherwise, was considered, by these same people, "futile." Now that there are fewer bombs raining down on Gaza, the conflict focuses on whether the outcome of the war was one of victory or defeat. For the Israeli ruling class the answer is clear -- in spite of the fact that none of the objectives announced at the beginning of the war have been achieved. It is clear because they, like the defeatist Palestinian camp, simply use the numbers of martyrs, disabled and homeless to determine victory and defeat.

This approach fails to acknowledge that none of the so-called "objectives" of the war have been achieved: Hamas is still in power; rockets are still being launched; no pro-Oslo forces have been reinstated in the Gaza Strip. The question now being raised by some Palestinian intellectuals and political forces, after the (un)expected brutality of the Israeli occupation forces, is "was it worth it?" The "it" here remains ambiguous depending on the reaction of the listener/reader. What is of interest here is the radical change that some national forces, especially the left and their intellectuals, have gone through in their mechanical, as opposed to dialectical, interpretation of history and their role, thereafter, in its making.

The war on Gaza has emerged as a political tsunami that has not only put an end to the fiction of the two-state solution and brought liberation rather than independence back to the agenda, but it has also created a new Palestinian political map given the intellectual debate vis-a-vis the outcome of the war. This new classification of the Palestinian intelligentsia and ruling classes has led to many ex-leftists joining the right-wing anthem of Oslo and its culture of defeatism. Not unlike the Oslo intelligentsia, the new pragmatic left is characterized by demagoguery, opportunism and short-sightedness. The conduct of these NGOized intellectuals (those emerging from western-funded "nongovernmental organizations" -- NGOs) does not show any commitment to their national and historical responsibility.

Michel Foucault's famous formulation, "where there is power, there is resistance," helps us to theorize the political and, hence, the cultural resistance, represented in some of the (post)war discourse. Within the context of resistance, it is worth quoting Frantz Fanon's definitions of the role of the "native intellectual" during the "fighting phase": "[T]he native, after having tried to lose himself in the people and with the people, will ... shake the people ... [H]e turns himself into an awakener of the people; hence comes a fighting literature, and a national literature."

On the other hand, there are intellectuals who, according to Fanon's theorization, "give proof that [they] [have] assimilated the culture of the occupying power. [Their] writings correspond point by point with those of [their] opposite numbers in the mother country. [Their] inspiration is European [i.e. Western] ..." Hence the adoption of the Israeli narrative by some intellectual sections, including NGOized leftists, whereby Israel was exonerated of its crimes: "we are to blame for what happened;" "we were not consulted when Hamas started the war!" and "the people are paying the price, not the resistance movement;" "Hamas should have renewed the truce;" "we cannot afford to lose so many lives; Hamas should have understood this;" "there was no resistance at all on the streets of Gaza; resistance men ran away as soon as they saw the first

tank."

By the same token, one would also condemn the Algerian, South African, French, Vietnamese, Lebanese and Egyptian resistance to occupation. The same logic was used by the Bantustan chiefs of South Africa against the anti-apartheid movement, by the Vichy government of France, the South Vietnamese government, the reactionary Egyptian Forces against the progressive regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1956, and even by the Siniora-Jumblatt-Geagea-Hariri March 14 coalition in Lebanon in 2006.

Obviously, these intellectuals' assimilation of the Western mentality, through a process of NGOization, and hence Osloization, makes them look down upon the culture of resistance as useless, futile and hopeless. Resistance, broadly speaking, is not only the ability to fight back against a militarily more powerful enemy, but also an ability to creatively resist the occupation of one's land. The Oslo defeatists and the neo-left camp fail to use people power creatively or even to see that it exists. They are defeated because they want to fight the battle on Israel's terms -- through the adoption of an Israel-Hamas dichotomy, rather than apartheid Israel vs. the Palestinian people -- instead of looking at their strengths: that they are the natives of the land, they have international law supporting their claims, they have the moral high ground, the support of international civil society, etc.

One good lesson from the South African struggle is the way it tried to define resistance and its adoption of what it referred to as "the four pillars of the struggle" to achieve victory over the apartheid regime: armed struggle, internal mass mobilization, international solidarity, and the political underground. Alas, none of these pillars seem to fit within the paradigm of the Palestinian neo-left.

The principled critical legacy of the likes of Ghassan Kanafani, Edward Said and Frantz Fanon is no longer the guiding torch of the NGOized left -- the secular democratic left which is supposed to be, as Said would argue, "someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations [or donors], and whose *raison d'être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug." A fascinating, and timely, remark by Hungarian philosopher George Lukacs points the way that the NGOized left should be talking right now: "When the intellectual's society reaches a historical crossroads in its fight for a clear definition of its identity, the intellectual should be involved in the whole sociopolitical process and leave his ivory tower."

Decolonizing cultural resistance insists on the right to view Palestinian history as a holistic entity, both coherent and integral. It also reflects a national and historical consciousness that Palestinians are able to be agents of change in their present and future regardless of the agendas of western donors, the Quartet and other official "international" bodies. Yet we see that the neo-democrats of Palestine are unable to acknowledge Palestinian agency because they refuse to respect the will of the people as expressed through the ballot box. This position is meant to synergize with that of their donors and international bodies who have worked hard over the last two years to delegitimize Palestinian agency.

This lack of political consciousness and the search for individual solutions -- the major characteristics of defeatist ideology -- contradict the collective national reality of the colonized Palestinians. Political consciousness must begin with a rejection of the conditions imposed by the Israeli occupation and the Quartet (Russia, the United States, the United Nations and the European Union) on the majority of Palestinians and even more crucially, a rejection of the crumbs that are offered as a reward for good behavior to a select minority of Palestinians. Indeed, class consciousness is dialectically

related to the struggle for national liberation. It is the interests of some NGOized groups, ex-leftists, and neo-liberals, whose defeatist perspective on the outcome of Gaza 2009 is being disseminated with the help of some unpopular media outlets, which is at stake here -- not the interests of the Palestinian people who have gained even more legitimacy through their steadfast resistance to the Israeli bombardment.

Osloized and NGOized classes argue that the only solution to the Israeli-Palestine conflict is the establishment of two states which basically means the creation of an independent Palestine on 22 percent of Mandate Palestine. They maintain that the only way to reach independence is through negotiations, though more than ten years of negotiations have not moved the Israeli position at all. The establishment of a Palestinian state is not mentioned in any of the clauses of the Oslo agreement, thus leaving the matter to be determined by the balance of power in the region. This balance tilts in favor of Israel, which rejects the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state, in spite of its recognition of the Palestinian people and its national movement the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). No Israeli party, neither Labor, Likud nor Kadima is ready to accept a Palestinian state as the expression of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. The impasse negotiations have reached has proven the oppositional camp correct.

Hence the "shocking" results of the 2006 elections, in which Hamas won the majority of the seats of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Both liberals and leftists were "surprised" and even felt "betrayed!" Accusations of the "immaturity" and even "backwardness" of the Palestinian people have been thrown around since then. Nothing was mentioned about the failure of "the peace process;" nor the end of the two-state solution, and thereafter, the necessity and need for a new national program that can mobilize the masses; a program that is necessarily democratic in its nature; one that respects resistance in its different forms and, ultimately, guarantees peace with justice.

It is this lack of a political vision and a clear-cut ideological program that allows for the contortions of the Osloized classes. It is this lack that makes it prepared to recognize a "Jewish state" alongside a Palestinian state, including the legitimization of discriminatory practices applied by Israel against its non-Jewish, i.e. mainly Palestinian citizens and residents since 1948, and the end of the right of return of more than six million of refugees. What we are constantly told, is either accept Israeli occupation in its ugliest form -- i.e. the ongoing presence of the apartheid wall, colonies, checkpoints, zigzag roads, color-coded number plates, house demolitions and security coordination supervised by a retired American general -- or have a hermetic medieval siege imposed on us, but still die with dignity. The first option seems to be the favorite of some NGOized "activists."

The new, much-needed program, however, must make the necessary link between all Palestinian struggles: the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, Israel's ethnically-based discrimination and rights violations of more than one million Palestinian citizens, and the 1948 externally displaced refugees. Gaza 2009 was not a defeat but a victory, because in Gaza the Israelis shot the two-state solution in the head; it is a victory achieved with the blood of those children, men and women who sacrificed their lives so that we could live and continue to resist, not surrender. Those Palestinians that are mourning the demise of the two-prison solution are out of step with new facts on the ground: there can be no going back to fake solutions and negotiations; it is time for a final push to real freedom and statehood. They can join other Palestinians, and internationals, in their demand for a secular, democratic state in Mandate Palestine with equality for all or they can walk into the dustbin of history.


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