

Humanity

The Meaning of 1967 War

Leila Farsakh

In any attempt to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the 1967 war, it is inevitable to reflect on the meaning of Israel's phenomenal victory and the transformations it brought about to the Middle East. In this regard, much has been written about the profound implications of the 1967 war on Arab world; the fall of Arab nationalism; the rise of Islamic politics; and the consolidation of authoritarian regimes as a way to deflect the failure of Arab states towards their own citizens. Even more has been written on how the war strengthened Israel's economic, regional and international stature and set the terms for a peaceful settlement between it and its neighbors on the basis of land for peace, as enshrined in UNSC resolution 242. Numerous publications have explored the legal, political and demographic means by which Israel's acquisition of land by war, which international law considered "inadmissible," has been consolidated over the past fifty years, making the concept of temporary occupation obsolete, if not altogether absurd. The construction of over 200 settlements accommodating nearly 800,000 settlers in the West Bank, the siege of Gaza that incarcerates over 1.8 million Palestinians—70 percent of which live below the poverty line—and the absence of any horizon for implementing the two-states solution, are just a few examples of the impasse reached after fifty years of Israeli occupation.

The present special volume of *Humanity* provides an original, and much-needed, contribution to the on going debate on how to analyze and understand fifty years of Israeli occupation. To start with, it highlights how the 1967 war cannot be the crutch from which to understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is because the events that led to the war as well as its consequences can be abstracted from the colonial foundation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with all its ruptures and continuities. The Israeli occupation, thus, needs to be situated within the imperial legacy of the British Mandate, one that sowed the seeds of racialized conception of governmentality and colonial technologies of development, as the article of Jacob Norris nicely shows. This imperial worldview considered Zionism the engine of development in Palestine, one capable of civilizing the indigenous land and people, without financially burdening the imperial center. Together with the Balfour Declaration, whose hundredth anniversary is also marked this year, the British mandate reified Jewish political rights while denying the Palestinians'. It conferred the right to self-determination to European Jewish immigrants at the expense of the native Arabs, which the Mandate considered still in need of tutelage before achieving political and economic maturity.

Another central theme often discussed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the extent to which the 1967 war defined the contours of a political solution based on the erasure of Palestinian rights. The erasure of the Palestinian people is perhaps clearest in

United Nations Security Council resolution 242 in November 1967, which calls for a “just settlement to the refugee problems,” without mentioning the Palestinians even by name, let alone their rights protected by UN resolution 194 and UN resolution 181, which recommended the partition of Palestine in 1947.

This volume enriches our understanding of the tensions between imperial interests and national struggles against erasure by exploring the different patterns of violence and resistance by Israelis and Palestinians and how these transformed the temporalities of the occupation. Baconi’s insightful piece explores the evolution of Hamas’ rhetoric and approach to negotiation with Israel in the light of Israel’s onslaught and disengagement from the Gaza Strip. Anziska’s original paper reveals how Palestinian failure to achieve a state does not originate in the Oslo peace process. It needs to be traced back to the Camp David peace agreements in 1979, which set the framework for dealing with Palestinian individual, rather than national, political rights, and created the diplomatic language from separating the rights of people from their land. As Anziska brilliantly shows, the USA colluded with Israel to prevent Palestinian statehood, offering the Arab residence of the West Bank and Gaza an autonomy whose structure is by and large reproduced in the Oslo peace accords.

One could argue that the major legacy of the 1967 war is the way in which Palestinians fought their erasure by asserting their right to self-determination, be it through the PLO’s call for a democratic state in all of Palestine, inclusive of Christians, Jews, and Muslims, the Arab League’s resolution in 1974 acknowledging the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and/or the international recognition of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza by over 123 states in 2012. But the story of the past fifty years can also be read as one in which the Palestinian national struggle has failed because of its obsession with the idea of the nation-state as the only expression of its right to self-determination. This was the trophy the PLO sought to achieve by accepting partition of Palestine as a solution and signing its historic compromise with Israel in 1993. It is a right that metamorphosed into Palestinian self-governed Bantustans under Israeli, rather than British, tutelage by 2017.

A hundred years after the Balfour Declaration affirmed Zionist claims to Palestine and denied the Palestinians equal political rights to Jewish immigrants, the Palestinians have managed to overturn their erasure and assert their right to exist as people. Seventy years after the partition plan was voted on and accepted by Israel and the international community, the Palestinians adopted it only to realize that their nation-state was emptied of any sovereign content. Fifty years after the 1967 war, the two-states solution has been tried but failed to materialize as Israel’s colonial rule has been transformed rather than ended. While this volume does not offer us any solution to the conflict, nor does it need to. It helps the reader rethink the relationship between self-determination and territoriality, native and settlers, sovereignty and rights. In this regard, the volume is an invaluable contribution to our understanding of transformative occupation and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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