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# Israeli–Palestinian Conflict: The Origins And Current Issues

In this analysis of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, I will be discussing the historical context of the conflict as well as Palestinian responses to this conflict. When looking at the Palestinian response, I will be interpreting the perspective of the characters Usama and Basil from the novel *Wild Thorns*.

For centuries there were ancient conquests of Israel, the land was ruled by Jewish people throughout centuries before the common era, but there was a huge gap of history where they did not rule this land but rather were small parts of the communities that inhabited it. In the 19th century, the land of Palestine was inhabited by approximately 90 percent Muslim, 6 percent Christian, and 2 percent Jewish (Tarpley lecture, 11/26/2019). In the late 19th century, a group in Europe decided to colonize this land. They represented an extreme minority of the Jewish population, known as Zionists. Their goal was to create a Jewish homeland, and before deciding on Palestine, they looked at locations in Africa and the Americas.

At first, this immigration created no problems. As more and more Zionists immigrated to Palestine, however, many hoped to take over the territory for a nation-state, and the indigenous population became progressively concerned. Ultimately, violence broke out, with storms of violence increasing. The rising of Hitler to power, paired with Zionist activities to derail efforts to place Jewish refugees in Western nations, prompted increased immigration of Jews to Palestine and increased conflict (Tarpley lecture, 11/26/2019).

In 1947 decided it was time to bring in the United Nations (Bentley and Ziegler, 893). Instead of allowing the people themselves to create their own state and government system, the UN chose to regress to an outdated method of an external power dividing the land of other people. Under substantial pressure by the Zionists, the UN advised that 55% of Palestine be given away to create a Jewish state; despite the reality that this group accounted for only about 30% of the total population and owned less than 7% of the land (Tarpley lecture, 11/26/2019). While it is widely publicized that the subsequent war ultimately involved five Arab armies, the fact that throughout this war Zionist forces outnumbered all Arab and Palestinian troops together is less well known. Moreover, Arab armies did not invade Israel as virtually all battles were fought on land that was said to have belonged to the Palestinian state.

Lastly, it is important to recognize that Arab armies only joined the fight after 16 massacres were committed by Zionist forces, including the grisly massacre at Deir Yassin of over 100 men, women, and children. By the end of the war, Israel had conquered 78% of Palestine; three-fourths of a million Palestinians had been made refugees (Bentley and Ziegler, 893); more than 500 villages and towns were destroyed; and a new map was established where each town, river, and city received a new Hebrew name, because all the reminders of Palestinian heritage were to be erased. Israel denied this population's existence for decades.

In 1967, Israel conquered even more land. During the Six Day War, in which Israel's forces launched a highly successful surprise attack on Egypt, Israel captured the remaining 22% of Palestine that had managed to escape from it in 1948, this land gained is known as the West

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Bank and Gaza Strip. Since according to international law territory acquired by war is not recognized, these are occupied territories and do not actually belong to Israel.

At the core of this ongoing conflict are two main challenges. First, attempting to maintain a culturally unequal state inevitably has a destabilizing effect, particularly when it is largely of foreign origin. The original population of what is now Israel was 96 percent Muslim and Christian (Tarpley lecture, 11/26/2019), yet, these refugees are forbidden to return to their homes in the self-described Jewish state and the Israelis systematically discriminate against Palestinians in Israel.

Second, the ongoing military occupation of Israel is extremely oppressive, with Palestinians having no real control of their own lives. Thousands of Palestinian men, women, and children are held in Israeli prisons and few of them have had a legitimate trial. Palestinian borders are controlled by Israeli forces (Khalifeh, 10-20). Men, women, and children are strip-searched (Khalifeh, 10); people are beaten; women in labor are prevented from reaching hospitals; food and medicine are blocked from entering Gaza, producing an escalating humanitarian crisis. Nearly every day, Israeli forces attack, harm, abduct, or sometimes kill civilians.

The story opens by introducing Usama, a young man coming back from a few years time away from Palestine in which he solidified his status as a rebel, and has now come to rejoin his family and fight for the Palestinian cause. In a nutshell, Usama believes wholeheartedly in a violent Palestinian rebellion against Israeli forces. He believes that security and political independence are mutually inclusive. So long as the occupation endures, Usama's sanity and existence depend upon resistance. This approach forces him to de-humanize the Israelis in order to fight them more violently, but it also forces him to compensate his compassion for his own people when one of his rebel missions involves blowing up Palestinian buses that bring workers over the border to Israel.

Usama represents a certain faction of extremists with this particular violent attitude, who are angered even by their own people who have tried to settle into everyday life under Israeli occupation.

"Usama watched Shahada's exaggerated gestures and burned with rage. Have you forgotten the cheap cigarettes of your past? He thought. Why don't you give some of this great advice to your father, my fine fellow? God help your poor father! Go on, enjoy yourself my friend, strut around and be happy. Let Israel strut like a turkey-cock and do as it wants with us" (Khalifeh, 92).

Usama believes he can see straight through those who have taken advantage of the Israeli government and are using it to benefit themselves rather than fighting it off for national pride. Despite this insight, he is still ignorant of the needs of his own people. Indeed, he despises many of those he meets, either as materialists, like Shahada, or collaborators, like Zuhdi, or both. Usama persuades himself that he has no stake in the daily lives of Palestinians.

He cannot understand why his best friend, Adil, now works in Israel to support his family, he believes such actions to be betraying the Palestinians. Adil's family does not have the wealth to support themselves that Usama's does, so one must question whether Usama's struggle is a worthy, yet privileged one. The 'revolution' is everything to him, to the point that if his cousin, Adil, is on the bus that Usama blows up, Usama thinks he can accept the loss.

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The first time Usama meets up with Basil after his return to Palestine, he is very surprised to see how involved the young people are in politics. There is a group of boys sitting around a coffee shop discussing the occupation, and Usama realizes that 'It was the first time he'd heard young people discussing issues that never would have occurred to them before the occupation' (Khalifeh 59).

This symbolizes the loss of innocence that the occupation has caused. Normally, young men of Basil's age shouldn't be paying attention to politics, they should be concerned with school and socializing. But now that Palestine's been occupied, they have been forced to grow up much quicker and face reality.

One major problem with the loss of innocence that's occurring is that these boys are beginning to plot terrorist rebellions against the Jewish military. When Usama and Basil go to the market, they speak with Haj Abdullah, who is absolutely terrified of what the boys are plotting because his son, Hani, is one of Basil's friends.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Usama, that these boys might get in involved in something... You know how many are in prison?... They're a generation only God can control" (Khalifeh, 73).

Throughout this whole conversation, Usama keeps telling Haj Abdullah to 'just let them talk,' insisting that these boys are merely discussing politics. Finally, though, at the end of the chapter, Basil protests that they don't just talk, although he doesn't admit what exactly they're plotting. This does, however, give away the fact that the boys are no longer boys; they are men planning an attack against the military.

There is great significance in the scene where Basil is arrested. There are children flooding the streets, yelling and laughing at the Jewish soldiers. They cry out to express their outrage at the occupation.

"But children were now emerging from all the houses, at first lurking in dark corners like mice, starting out at the soldiers and laughing and winking at one another... The soldiers began to chase the boys, who scampered home, slamming the doors behind them. Then out they came again. A soldier caught one of them and started to beat him, and the mothers let loose a stream of curses on all who'd had a hand in the creation of the state" (Khalifeh 104).

Just a page later, Basil is thrown into a patrol car and taken to jail for this attack on the militia. This serves as a symbol of the complete chaos that the occupation has caused. There is absolutely no innocence left in Palestine, even the children are getting arrested. His father is cold as Basil is taken off, showing no remorse or sorrow that his son is in jail. He merely says, "But what came over the boy? Does he think he can free Palestine all by himself?" (Khalifeh 106). When that is exactly what Basil thought. Khalifeh is trying to show that the occupation will not be over until everyone pitches in to help. Basil and his friend's attack didn't accomplish much and that is because they received no help from the older men. While the children have lost their innocence, they have not lost their hope.

In my investigation of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, I have discussed the origins and current issues of this conflict as well as the response from Palestinian people. One of the main responses I observed through this analysis is that violence and injustice breed more violence and injustice.

