



The Perspective of Palestinian Youth in 2014

Hope and Defiance for Justice

By Amira Gabarin



Palestine was etched into our minds in 2014. The last few years have included times of immense struggle and conflict for both Israelis and Palestinians. Seen through the eyes of a young Palestinian – one who has been born into the midst of the conflict – the situation could easily be a source of depression and hopelessness. I have personally been deeply affected by the conflict throughout my life – not physically but emotionally. My grandparents on my father's side were displaced from their hometown of Umm Al-Fahm in 1948 and never returned. Although I still have some relatives in Palestine, it goes without saying that we are the lucky ones. The ones who have managed to gain refuge and acquire both Syrian and Canadian nationalities, an identity that we can hold onto.

For me, however, "the issue of Palestine" runs through my veins. It is always on my mind. Raised in Europe and never having visited Palestine, I am often asked, "Why do you care?" following my rather irritating bombardment of Facebook posts and near obsessive involvement – whether through attending protests or translating social media posts for charities in Gaza. I am certainly not someone who loses interest or becomes overwhelmed with the inevitable pessimistic reality of the conflict; because for me, defending and engaging in the struggles of Palestine is not a choice, it's a duty.

When asking the thoughts of young people who live in Palestine, one could expect an array of reactions, including frustration, anger, and perhaps even disengagement with the conflict. Anas, who is 20 and from Gaza, explains: "The majority of youth feel depressed and frustrated, especially in Gaza, because they have lived 3 wars in 6 years." He adds, "I am depressed too, but I am hopeful and optimistic.



"When someone asks me where I'm from, I will always say Palestine. They want us to stop existing because it washes their crimes away, but it's our job to never let that happen." Faris Ali, 19-year-old Palestinian living in Cape Town, South Africa.

I love my country and want to see it free one day!"

This is a recurring theme for many young Palestinians who still live in their homeland: that even though they are beyond frustrated, they possess a beautiful vision of hope, one which I, personally, have lacked, especially after the sheer devastation caused by the military assaults on Gaza in recent years. I have always been aware that Palestinians who are living in the most conflict-stricken areas, such as Gaza, seem to possess the most hope, compassion, and optimism – something that, to me, seems paradoxical. It also seems as if Palestinians who have more distance from the conflict are more pessimistic about the future of Palestine and the situation that exists today.

The message of other youth, who live in various parts of Palestine, is also one of hope and defiance. In the words of Layth, 17, from Jerusalem: "The war in Gaza has made Palestinian youth feel hopeful yet helpless, and eager to achieve something. Thus they created a youth revolution to engage themselves as much as possible, whether by using media or eliminating propaganda. Awareness has become important. At the political level, one grows up fast in Palestine. It's not an option. As young people, we continue to dream

of our stolen identity and the right of thousands of Palestinians to return." Layth brought up a significant point. We need to question what choices Palestinian youths actually have.

Nanor, 19 (also from Jerusalem) told me, "I was brought up in the multicultural surroundings of Jerusalem's Old City, an area in political turmoil, where conflicts between the communities tend to be very strong. I was living in the Old City during the second Intifada and witnessed the horrors of the suicide bombings in Jerusalem, particularly the one that occurred just metres away from my school on the September 4, 2001. As I have matured in this environment, my interest in local as well as regional politics has grown as well."

In these unfortunate yet extremely common cases where such overt and traumatic acts of violence are committed around children, they only have two choices: to give up or to continue the fight for the Palestinian cause. Through conversations I have had, however, it seems evident that fighting for Palestine is the only choice. The significance of social media and the reiterated phrase, "I want the world to see what's really happening instead of falling prey to Israel's propaganda,"

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“What my people go through breaks my heart, but they are lion-hearted people, and I know that their time will come.”
Banna Bazzarie, 19-year-old Palestinian living North Carolina, United States.

is what truly matters to the younger generations. “As a matter of fact,” recounts 19-year-old Faris Ali, “youth are definitely not losing interest in social media. People are much more engaged because all it takes is a share button to spread awareness. The Israeli propaganda machine cannot effectively hide the injustice that Palestinians have to endure, and this leads to much more interest in the cause.”

In this age of technology, Palestinians feel that the rise of social media has played a major role in countering the pro-Israeli bias that is so prevalent. Even given the detrimental and devastating effects of war, many consider that misrepresentation of the truth is the real crime.

Faris Ali’s perspective is one of the most inspiring that I have heard. He said that although he believes that the situation in Palestine is becoming worse as a result of increasing Israeli oppression, there is very strong hope for justice in Palestine. In his words, “Nelson Mandela and the ANC were labelled terrorists, and blacks were thrown to the dogs during apartheid South Africa, but today they are considered heroes. And it was the same for African-Americans in the United States in the 1960s.” I couldn’t agree more. Faris’ background is similar to mine. In 1948 his grandparents were also displaced from the then Palestinian city of Jaffa. He told me that he “grew up listening to stories of mass shootings and of relatives who were blown to bits by the Haganah.

The result was a diaspora and no sense of belonging to any country. And even though most of us have passports and countries to hold us, we’ll always be glorified refugees until we return to our land. We speak of Palestine and it lives in us – the food we eat, the way we speak. When someone asks me where I’m from, I will always say Palestine. They want us to stop existing because it washes their crimes away; but it’s our job to never let that happen.”

No two answers are the same when we ask young Palestinians what the future of Palestine holds. Some say one state, others speak of a two-state solution. Some will speak of 1948 borders, others will laugh at that. The truth is that no one can truly predict the political details of what is to come. However, what all Palestinians know and hold on to is that no injustice can prevail indefinitely. Even given the deep sense of logical doubt about the future of Palestine that I share with many others, we still have a sense of optimism. Whether Palestine and Israel will become one state, two states, with 1967 or 1948 borders are all insignificant details because the one thing that we are sure of is that regimes of oppression and societies founded on apartheid never succeed. Justice will always prevail and my only wish is that I and others in my generation be privileged enough to witness the freedom of Palestine in our lifetime. In the words of 17-year-old Setrag Balian, the Palestinians are “a people who have been fighting an occupation for more than 60 years, a people who have been fighting a military and political superpower, and we still haven’t lost hope. We are today a symbol of courage, a symbol of resistance.”

Amira Gabarin is a Palestinian student who resides in London. She hopes to study international relations next September at university. Amira loves to write about politics, especially the developments of the Arab-Israeli conflict. She has written in publications such as The Telegraph and has her own weekly blog.