



# IMPACTS of NVR

from 2004 – 2014

in PALESTINE



# Introduction



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Over the years in Palestine, non-violent resistance (NVR) has been a strong alternative arena to pursue the end to the Israeli Occupation and to reach a just resolution of the current conflict, influencing societal change without using violence.

This paper analyzes the positive and the negative impacts of the non-violent resistance within Palestine from 2004 to 2014. The essay explores the various methods of NVR particularly during the past 10 years, which have provided an additional dimension to this kind of practice. Namely, this essay focuses on the formation of the bodies which represent the NVR and it takes the Popular Struggle Coordination Committees as a case study of NVR in practice: sharing the strategies and tactics, responsibilities and principles, alongside the work of other groups and organizations seeking positive change.

## 1. Methods of NVR in the last 10 years

Even if this paper focuses on the methods of NRV in the last 10 years it is important, in order to contextualize and comprehend the latest developments, to highlight that since the British Mandate period Palestinians have developed different NRV tactics which were able to impact both on local and national level. According to Rigby (2011), in his analysis of the history of the Palestinian resistance, he saw that people managed to use different methods such as: symbolic, polemical, offensive, defensive, and constructive resistance, and these methods were used to develop a theory to analyze the Palestinian struggle.<sup>1</sup>

During the last 10 years of resistance against the Segregation Wall, which building has started in 2002, the local popular committees practiced different methods of nonviolence and tactics of symbolic protests, disobedience, economic, and political noncooperation. Indeed, popular committees represent an alternative and non-violent response to the Israeli Occupation distinguishing themselves for being a grassroots and non-partisan resistance community which mainly tactics are marches, strikes, demonstrations, direct actions and legal campaigns, as well as the support to the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign.



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## 2. Non-Violent Actions

The following section will provide a number of case studies that can be taken as examples of actions that have been organized in the past 10 years by the Popular Committees.

Since years, Popular Committees have strategically taken into account world events in order to link their struggle with a broader world context.

In this sense, for instance, the Popular Committee from Al--Ma'sara village in 2007 decided to show solidarity with the victims of the Virginia University Massacre in which 32 students were killed<sup>2</sup>. They had a commemorative demonstration in which they planted 32 olive trees on the path of the wall with the names of the victims on each olive tree. This was done to pass on the message to the victims' families that Palestinians share their suffering and sadness because daily Palestinians live in a similar situation (pnnhlt 2007).

Many other demonstrations such as, women's demonstrations on International Women's Day and Mother's Day demonstrated to the world the political voice of Palestinian women and their struggle in the occupation. Popular committees organized demonstrations in solidarity with Nagasaki and Hiroshima and for the French revolution, conveying the message, that the Palestinians must also have the right to live with justice and freedom.

In 2009 on the 20th Anniversary of the fall of Berlin wall, a demonstration was held at the Kalandia wall in the West Bank. The demonstrators successfully brought part of the wall down. (France24 2009).

Moreover, marches and disobedience actions took place highlighting Palestine as the Holy Land for believers in any faith from all over the world. Every Easter some local committees organize demonstrations. On the 27th March 2012, 2000 years after Jesus first rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, they recreated his Palm Sunday journey. 150 people and donkeys walked along the wall and one km inside the wall in order to convey the message, to those who believe in God, that everybody must have the right to practice his/her own religion in accordance with the Geneva Convention (active stills 2010).

Most of the actions that popular committees organized can be considered non-violent protest and non-violent intervention. Here are some more examples on the actions and activities organized in the last years which had a deeply symbolic impact.

- *Honor dead*: In Al--Ma'sara village the Popular Committee organized the symbolic crucifixion of a Palestinian. The aim was to create a bridge between the history and the present of Palestine, which nowadays is suffering the lack of peace and justice.
- *Constructive resistance*: Popular Committees arranged different campaigns and activities in order to support people living in the rural areas as an active policy to avoid their displacement . Building houses in the South Hebron Hills Campaign was an incentive for the people living in the area to stay in their lands and to cultivate them (Al Mufaqarah R--exist 2012). Moreover, the Popular committees managed to pressure the PNA to establish projects in the areas which are affected by the wall and the settlements (Palestinian News & info Agency 2013).
- Physical intervention: in 2012, a hunger strike was held in solidarity with the prisoners' strike (PNN 2012).
- Drama and music: the popular committees organized different actions in different villages, involving theatre and music activities. At the end they were able to send their messages of resistance through the music. For example, Al--Ma'sara village hosted in May 2010 the famous Palestinian Singer Reem Bana (International Solidarity Movement 2010).
- Honoring the dead : Bil'in organized a protest in solidarity with Gaza during the operation Cast Lead (International Solidarity Movement 2008).
- People in Bi'lin Village demonstrated in Avatar clothing, using the film's theme of colonization to symbolize their struggle ( Bornat 2010).
- Motorcades: Popular committees organized car rally between Jericho and Jerusalem to show how Israel policy of segregation is not allowing the Palestinians to have access to these roads ( Aruri 2012).
- Boycott: the popular committees organized different actions calling for boycotting the Israeli products (Alhayat 2013) and having a broader role in the BDS movement.
- Non-violent occupation: a group of activists occupied a settlers' supermarket in

November 2012, in order to show the illegality of the settlements and to call for the boycott of Israeli products (Popular Struggle Coordination Committee 2012).

- Pray in: in some villages people pray in their land every Friday or Sunday. For example in Beit Jala a group of persons pray every Sunday on a piece of land threatened by the construction of the wall (The Network for Freelance Photojournalists 2012).
- Judicial noncooperation: Basem Tamimi, a prominent activist from the village of Nabi Saleh, after being arrested refused to recognize the Israeli Judicial system challenging the legitimacy of the Israeli system (The Only Democracy In The Middle East 2013).
- Hiding escape : Abdull Abu Rahamah, an activist, was escaping from the Israeli forces for more than 3 months (personal interview 2012).

## NVR Networks

Since the construction of the Wall in 2002, Palestinians started to form associations and formal bodies in order to represent the NVR. “Stop the wall” campaign is one of the associations that was formed in 2002, which is a coalition of 12 Palestinian organizations. The campaign’s aim is to seek immediate cessation of the building of the Wall, to dismantle of all parts of the Wall and its related zones already built, to return of the lands confiscated for the path of the Wall and to compensate of damages and lost income due to the destruction of land and property. “Stop the Wall” raises awareness about the effects of the Wall and the settlements, through periodic publications (Stop The Wall Campaign 2011).

“National Committee” is another organization that was also formed in 2003 by political parties and NGO’s, in order to follow the legal cases of the farmers in the villages. Later it was connected with the Ministry of the Wall issue which was created by Salam Fayyad government (personal interview with Elias 2012).

The Popular Struggle Coordination Committee (PSCC) was formed 2009 by the members of the Popular Committees on the ground in the villages. Every popular committee is represented by a member at the board of PSCC from the active villages or a member of the general assembly of PSCC. PSCC took responsibility for strategic planning and fundraising. It offered logistics, as well as legal support for Popular Committee prisoners, including paying court fees, lawyer fees, bails and fines (Popular Struggle Coordination Committee 2009). Legal support has continued to focus on specific cases connected to the land. Such as rerouting the path of the Wall in places such as Bodrus, Bi’lin, Jayous, Tulkrem (personal interview Khatib 2012).

The PSCC capacity builds activists by training them in a variety of fields. For example, they conduct media training including how to use cameras, social media, and write press releases (PSCC media 2009). They’ve also established a diploma in International Law and NVR, offered and coordinated by Al--quds University and Barcelona University. They have created a database focused on human rights violations which is used as a source of advocacy. Lastly they organise campaigns such as *We Refuse to Die in Silence* -- a campaign to protect farmers during olive harvests from the violations of settlers by recording these violations and helping the farmers to pick their olives. They also organized a house building campaign for the small community of Al Mufaqarah (Almufaqarah R--exist 2012).

# The Impact of Non-Violent Resistance

This part of the paper will lay out the impacts of NVR in relation to Palestinian education, women's rights, media, international solidarity, and Israeli society. Specifically, perception and ways of learning and applicability of NVR by the young generations of Palestinians will be discussed. Women and their engagement in direct action and NVR will be portrayed, as well as the ideological journeys of those Palestinians involved in militarism who later become NVR activists. The role that media play in mobilizing Palestinians and international people for the cause will be analyzed in relation to the physical impacts of NVR.

The ways how NVR contributed to increasing the international solidarity will be presented, as well as the specific examples of international solidarity in relation to the Palestinian cause. In addition, this paper tackles the effect of NVR on the Israeli society and the joint struggle of Palestinian and Israeli activists working together on NVR.

## Women's involvement in NVR in Palestine

During the history of Palestinian resistance against occupation, women played an important role, especially in the first intifada (Palestiniannews & Info agency 2012). In the popular committees women are not significantly involved in decision making roles, however do have positions in media monitoring and participation in actions. Women regularly participate in the demonstrations in the different villages (SOAS University of London 2011). While some women have been killed by the army in Bil'in village during demonstrations, other women have been arrested – with the examples of Nariman Tamimi, and Manal Tamimi from Nabi Saleh village, Shereen Ala'raj from Alwalajah villages, who are leading women's group activities in their respective villages.

Women's role in the NVR has become more visible in the broader political actions which are taking place across West Bank and Gaza. Women's roles in particular have been central to reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah parties at community levels (Alhayat 2013). But until now men dominating leadership positions in popular committees have not coordinated enough with women to give them positions of power which will allow them to take leadership roles.

## Practice school of NVR

Education on NVR is shared across communities and between generations in practice. The Popular Committees managed to plant "the seeds" of NVR in Palestine into the new generations. We noticed through the experience of the last ten years that young people who started to participate when they were 5/6 years old, and who are now 16/17 years old, are able to lobby for their rights without the use of violence. They are able to pass a message about their rights during the course of direct action in demonstrations. They learn from the leaders of the Popular Committees how to behave and react, and what is the power of non-violent resistance (my observation 2012).

## Awareness through media

One of the primary impacts of NVR is local and international awareness from increased media coverage. Popular Committees have managed to generate media coverage at national level, for example on the front pages of mainstream media in Palestine (for example in the daily newspapers: Alquds, Alayyam). This national media is raising awareness amongst Palestinians.

In terms of Israeli media (with the exception of the left media), it often tries to show that there is no NVR in Palestine, choosing instead to focus on violent actions and clashes that take place in some villages (Kuttab 2003). When NVR is shown in Israeli media, it generates dialogue and discussion on the occupation and challenges their government line. Popular Committees strategically target Israeli society via media in order to find people who support the rights of the Palestinian

## Physical impacts

Popular Committees have managed to legally force the Israeli government to reroute the wall in some places such as Bil'in and Bodruos villages, to allow bring back the land to the people (Just vision 2012). The Popular Committees adopted the tactic of legal campaigns to run parallel to each other in order to put pressure on the Israeli government to move the wall or remove it entirely. The tactic worked, in Bilin after four years of NVR, legal campaigns, and supportive media coverage, the Israeli court decided to remove the wall and the farmers of Bil'in took back 1,000 dunams of their land (Haaretz dailyNews Paper 2010). We cannot ignore the role of popular resistance in the village in achieving this result. At the same time, this gives the resistance of the village the courage to continue organising weekly demonstrations in order to get back the rest of their land.

Impacts of NVR also create significant financial costs for Israel. In many places during the weekly demonstrations the protestors have destroyed parts of the wall many times which cost the Israeli government a lot of money to build again, such as Ni'lin village (Broning 2011).

Boycott Diversity Sanctions (BDS) is a boycott movement that has achieved different success in different countries. The movement has impacted on the academic institutions such as the British University and College Union, also on cultural events such as the cancellation of Elvis Costello's concert in Israel in May 2010, moreover many companies and supermarkets boycotted Israeli products such as Agrexco products (Broning 2011)

## From Militarism to Non-Violent Activists

Many members of the Popular Committees, including leaders, have previously participated in armed resistance groups and in military actions against the occupation. Some of them have also been jailed for long periods of time (Farsakh 2011. P. 124--131). These people now believe in and are leaders of non-violent resistance in Palestine. This history enables trust concerning the people of the Palestinian villages, because the members of the Popular Committees are not NGOs or individuals coming from outside with external agendas.

Abu Alla Mansour, one of the leaders of Bil'in village, is committed to non-violent resistance after a long history of armed resistance since the beginning of the 1970s. His presence on the



committee is a source of power because people in the village trust him. Although they knew him as an armed--resistance--fighter for freedom, now he is known for fighting through non--violent means. Many other people have the same story as Abu Alla Mansour (Farsakh 2011).

## **International Solidarity**

One of the biggest and most important impacts of popular resistance is its ability to generate international solidarity concerning the Palestinian cause since the beginning of the struggle with the Zionist movement. This increased in the first intifada (Kaufman- Lacusta 2008).

The popular committees work with internationals has a variety of agendas; from political commitments to the humanitarian rights of the Palestinians. Their work varies from participating in direct actions, to being observers on the ground in order to discover and document what is happening. A wide range of sectors, including grassroots organizations, solidarity organizations, elected officials and members of parliament, come to Palestine for this purposes (Clark2009).

The International Solidarity Movement (ISM) managed to recruit thousands of internationals to come to Palestine in order to participate in direct actions (Clark 2009). By resisting alongside Palestinians, internationals offer Palestinians a type of protection: they are able to document what is happening on the ground, go back to their own countries, raise awareness, and recruit new activists. They can act as freedom riders, promoting the BDS campaign, and organizing campaigns in their own countries (Broning 2011).

As a result of the international solidarity and popular committee advocacy, the EU Parliament came out with an official statement urging to release the Palestinian prisoners of the popular resistance describing them as human right defenders (International Middle East Media Center 2013). Furthermore, it is important to recall that official representatives from many states attend the hearings at the court for the prisoners of the popular resistance. Likewise, some consulates usually arrange meetings with the popular committees. For example, the BritishGovernment organized a meeting with the popular committees, where the British foreign minister Willam Hague attended.

Popular committees didn't manage some times to agree with the politics of international activists, and in response sometimes that the international people attempt to regain personal power and lead actions themselves. They develop strategies according to their personal agendas, which causes problems. Another important thing as a result of the culture difference, somevillages didn't accept internationals for various reasons, and in many cases there has been sexual harassment against international women.

## **4.7 Israeli society**

NVR is adopted not only in order to pass messages to the world or to the Palestinians but also to the Israelis. The popular NVR can crack the social structure of Israeli society and settlers, as it has already done. We can see some Israelis refuse to be in the army (Refusnik 2002).

Also we can see the changes of the Israeli society towards the Palestinians. We notice that since the occupation of 1967, there have been some Israeli groups who support the Palestinian rights. This solidarity further increased during the First Intifada, after the so--called Oslo Agreements (Kaufman-Lucusta 2008). Later, in the Second Intifada some human right associations were

created to defend the rights of the Palestinians, some specifically focusing on the humanitarian action. In 2002, when the popular committees started to organize the direct actions, more and more Israelis were participating on them. Some of Israelis see the Israeli activists as traitors, because they support the Palestinian rights (anarchistsagainst the wall 2013).

Israeli Intelligence followed non--violent Israeli activists and denied them entry to the West Bank, including Israeli controlled Area C (Anarchists Against theWall 2012). They used oppression to punish activists both inside and outside of Israel. This was a direct result of the impact that those activists were having on Israeli society. NVR may not have fully divided Israel but it led to open discussion and disagreement amongst Israelis about the occupation. It put a case forward that challenged the party line of the Israeli government.

# Conclusion

Popular Committees manage to mobilize people in their villages by spreading information both locally and internationally. They have managed to build bridges from Palestine all over the world, connecting their struggle with other struggles and revolutions in different countries. They organize hundreds of direct actions, generating great media interest, and breaking Israeli law of civil disobedience. There are a number of positive impacts of NVR: empowerment through activism, higher level of trust in the non-violent resistance, strengthening the international solidarity, political change and growing support. Alongside these positive impacts there are a series of challenges: overlaps between violent and NVR being confusing, individual people involved in NVR abusing their positions of power, the international community taking power controlling local organizations through funding agreements, and resistance and frustration from Palestinians who do not want to engage in political action.

