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Nonviolent Resistance to Israeli Occupation: Peaceful Protests in the West Bank

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*Introduction*

Nonviolence is not a word typically associated with the Palestinian resistance movement in the Western media. Despite the framing of the conflict in black and white terms in which Palestinian behavior towards Israelis is depicted as constant violent, acts of nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience have long been part of Palestinian society’s response to increasing Israeli encroachment on Palestinian land. This is not to say that violence has not also been part of Palestinian response; it is in direct contrast to media portrayal, however, that it in fact has not been the only response. Stereotypes and biases cannot be undermined without understanding both aspects of resistance. While some more objectively directed academics have acknowledged that suicide bombing and other terrorist acts represent the weapons of the weak in a disproportionate power relationship, the wider international community does not accept or justify terrorist acts undertaken by Palestinians. Thus although the violent attacks against Israeli civilians have attracted international attention, it has been mostly negative and critical of Palestinian actions.

Palestinians will continued to be painted as the victimizers rather than the victims of Israeli oppression as long as violence – whether justified from an unbiased historical perspective or not - is utilized. As long as the international media can find instances of such acts, the Palestinian cause will continue to be viewed as unjust and illegitimate. It is only when Palestinian resistance becomes clearly and inarguably nonviolent that the movement will regain international legitimacy, an essential development if conditions in Israel/Palestine are ever going to change. As long as the status quo continues, it is the Palestinians who will continue to suffer. Only by embracing nonviolent resistance as the sole method of resistance against Israeli military control, and reposition themselves as the victims of foreign occupation that violates international law, will the international community be forced to acknowledge, and act, on behalf of the indigenous Palestinian community.

The potential nonviolent resistance has for changing the current status quo was not lost on Palestinian community organizers; in fact, since the unofficial end of the second *intifada*, nonviolent tactics of resistance have become an increasing reality in the West Bank. Such a tactic change has also not gone unnoticed by international and Israeli peace activists and intellectuals. Increased media focus since 2005 on the nonviolent struggle by Palestinians for freedom from over forty years of Israeli occupation has threatened the black and white portrayal that has allowed Israel relative freedom from international scrutiny of their behavior in the Occupied Territories. Attempts by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) to suppress these demonstrations have garnered international attention, and opened the door to establishing the legitimacy of Palestinian claims of injustice. Allegations of human rights violations in Western media, as well as an increase in international and Israeli activists working in solidarity with Palestinian communities, have contributed to the rapid growth of nonviolent methods in the West Bank. In the last year alone, the number of weekly organized civilian protests have jumped from two in West Bank cities to at least ten, involving up to 2,000 protestors a week – and the Israeli government themselves admits that the numbers keep rising.[[1]](#footnote-1) In order to ascertain the real potential this movement holds, current efforts by Palestinian activists, in solidarity with international and Israeli peace activists, to nonviolently resist Israeli occupation must be explored, as will Israeli military responses to these civilian demonstrations. The question of what constitutes nonviolent resistance must also be considered. For the sake of clarity, I use the term peace activist in the Palestinian case study to refer to anyone committed to and engaging in nonviolent resistance efforts against Israeli occupation of the West Bank and continued violation of Palestinian human rights.

Continued overzealous IDF attempts to crush this grassroots movement will only fuel the spread of the movement, as the international community will be faced with repression of civilian protests of demonstrators committed to achieving their goals exclusively through nonviolence by excessive force. Israeli military efforts may in fact undermine their own moral and political position in the eyes of the international community. The increased collaboration with Israelis and foreign activists also committed to peaceful change in a region so conflict-torn will contribute to the legitimacy of Palestinian claims. Palestinians are currently at a potentially life-altering crossroads: strong commitment to nonviolent ideals could change their future for the better; regeneration into violence, even by a portion of West Bank inhabitants, could undermine the great ground they’ve regained in the past five years in the name of justice. Such a change in attitudes within the Palestinian community as well as the international community may combine to finally achieve what Palestinian violence alone could not – Palestinian freedom from foreign military occupation and self-determination.

*Nonviolent Resistance in the Palestinian Context*

The tradition of Palestinian nonviolent resistance to Israeli violations of Palestinian rights has a long history. Nonviolent resistance was part of the initial Palestinian response to early colonial declarations establishing a homeland for the Jewish people beginning with the Balflour Declaration of 1917 and continuing through the mandate period (1921-1947), concluding with the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan. While the founding of the state of Israeli coincided with [or incited] violent acts of war, nonviolent tactics were also present.[[2]](#footnote-2) Palestinian Arabs responded primarily with nonviolent methods in challenging the British mandate, immigration of Jews, and exclusive enterprises being developed under Zionism, including petitions, organizing delegations, as well as noncooperation methods such as social, economic and political boycotts and resignation from jobs in the British colonial administration.[[3]](#footnote-3) The lack of acknowledgement in the international community of the nonviolent resistance efforts undertaken by Palestinian organizations – whether based on ignorance or deliberate design, depending on the actor - contributes to the lack of political will to challenge Israel to change the status quo – or rather, to withdraw from the Occupied Palestinian Territories and be held accountable to International Law. From the last years of British administration of Palestine, a British and Zionist prototype of responding to violent struggle but not to collective nonviolent action by Palestinians over changes to their land and society became entrenched.[[4]](#footnote-4)

As we shall see, that nonviolent resistance efforts exist at all is a testament to the will of Palestinian desire for justice, for Israel does not willingly allow nonviolent protest movements to spread or demonstrations to take place. As the case studies of individual villages in the present day West Bank will illustrate, the Israeli military responds to nonviolent resistance initiatives aggressively to the detriment of unarmed civilian participants, and is currently using all means available to it to extinguish it. As the following case study will illustrate, Israel’s aggressive stance towards nonviolent resistance has not changed during the past forty years.

“In September 1967 – three months after the decisive war in which the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem were occupied – Palestinian leaders decided to launch a campaign against the introduction of new Israeli textbooks in Palestinian schools. They did not initiate terrorist attacks, as the prevailing narratives about Palestinian opposition would have one believe, but rather the Palestinian dissidents adopted Mahatma Gandhi-style methods and declared a general school strike: teachers did not show up for work, children took to the streets to protest against the occupation and many shopkeepers closed shop.

Israel's response to that first strike was immediate and severe: it issued military orders categorizing all forms of resistance as insurgency – including protests and political meetings, raising flags or other national symbols, publishing or distributing articles or pictures with political connotations, and even singing or listening to nationalist songs. Moreover, it quickly deployed security forces to suppress opposition, launching a punitive campaign in Nablus, where the strike's leaders resided. After a few weeks of nightly curfews, cutting off telephone lines, detaining leaders, and increasing the level of harassment, Israel managed to break the strike.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

While the events of the Six Day War and its aftermath in 1967 have had a resounding impact on Israeli-Palestinian relations, for the purpose of this study, the focus will be on acts of nonviolent resistance carried out from the First Intifada in 1987 to the present day. It is apparent, however, that from the first days of its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Israel would respond with brute force against any form of Palestinian grassroots nonviolent resistance movement.

*The First Intifada* (1987 – 1993)

Contrary to the claim that ‘the concept of ‘non-violence’ was totally foreign to the Palestinians, civil disobedience and other non-violent methods of protest have been cornerstones of the resistance to occupation, especially during the first *intifada* when non-violent activism was more widespread and successful than previous efforts at mobilizing popular resistance.[[6]](#footnote-6) Although the first *Intifada* will inevitably invoke images of the violence it degenerated into, this civil society movement was actually born out of principles of nonviolent resistance. Ultimately overtaken and long since overshadowed by those advocating armed resistance, the first two years of the *Intifada* were nonetheless marked by acts of civil disobedience and nonviolent tactics expressing Palestinian grievances against the unjust and illegal actions by the state of Israel.

Rather than shootings or bombings, it was mass popular protests, including various methods of nonviolence, that were the first measures taken by Palestinian civil society in 1987 to express its frustration and discontent with Israel’s occupation. Protests took the form of strikes, boycotts and other civil disobedience techniques.[[7]](#footnote-7) One of the main approaches was a product boycott against Israel, promoting Palestinian goods and services as the moral and politically imperative alternative. Methods such as tax boycotts, peace marches, and general business and school strikes were also utilized. Mubarak Awad, a leading proponent of non-violent protest during the first *intifada,* encouraged Palestinians to refuse work on Israeli settlements, boycott Israeli goods and meetings, withhold tax payments, violate curfews and establish alternative institutions to supplant the Israeli administration. In response to his efforts, which helped popularize the *intifada,* Israel deported him.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Palestinians embraced nontraditional forms of civil disobedience as well. One example of the Palestinian’s commitment to eschew all things enforced by the occupying power was their refusal to follow Israel’s daylight savings time calendar. Although such a method may appear fruitless, it nevertheless shows Palestinians’ determination to achieve their own just independence. Palestinians made appointments, opened schools, and followed business hours according to 'Palestinian time’; in response, soldiers often broke the watches of Palestinians that were not set on 'Israeli time.'[[9]](#footnote-9) Actions like these in combination with traditional nonviolent methods of marches, prayer vigils, sit-ins, and formed a strong foundation for nonviolent methods to spread across Palestinian communities in the West Bank during the early years of the *intifada* despite harsh Israeli suppression and retaliation.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Unfortunately, as history shows, the nonviolent nature of the First *Intifada* proved unsustainable. By its third year, the movement disintegrated into violence after Israel’s incarceration, deportation, or discrediting of the very activist intellectuals who had sustained the uprising’s nonviolent character.[[11]](#footnote-11) Extremists advocating the use of violence as the only way to end Israeli occupation overtook the nonviolent movement. The weapons of this phase of *intifada* – that of armed resistance – were still somewhat weak, although used with deadly intent and consequences. As the weaker actor in this radically asymmetric conflict – no number of smuggled guns could rival superiorly armed and trained IDF – the Palestinians utilized old guns and stones to attack military and civilian targets. It was attacks on the latter that garnered (and continues to garner) the most international criticism. Using stones from the ground, “the 'weapon' most available to them” to attack soldiers and settlers; settlers, who had no alternative but to use roads that went through or near Palestinian communities, became constant targets of Palestinian stone throwing.[[12]](#footnote-12) Rather than reinforcing their position of the weaker actor desperately needing assistance in the conflict, such civilian attacks quickly undermined much of the morality and legitimacy that the movement had gained in the international community. Despite the violent tern the intifada ultimately took, the uprising, particularly in its early years, had effectively forced the international community to reconsider Palestinian calls for freedom from occupation and their right to self-determination.

“What the first *intifada* accomplished, before it was hijacked by extremists, was to cause defenders of the status quo (in this case, the United States and Israel) to recognize the legitimacy of calls for change and to accept that the advocates of change were neither criminals nor perpetual malcontents. This was a crucial step. In this era of ubiquitous and contentious media coverage, recognition of a protest movement’s legitimacy inevitably leads to a reappraisal of the propriety and proportionality of the actions that are being taken to defend the status quo. When authorities are seen to be overreacting, as was in the case during the nonviolent phase of the first *intifada*, support for change grows. During the second *intifada,* the images of Israeli civilians blown apart by Palestinian suicide bombers have given the defenders of the status quo the upper hand.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

*The Second Intifada* (2000 – 2005)

The Second *Intifada* began nonviolently in 2000, although it too degenerated into and was overtaken by advocates for violence. Indeed, the second *intifada* represents perhaps one of the most violent phases in the last sixty years of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Comparatively, the second *intifada* utilized violent methods more extensively than the first. The Palestinians' use of firearms, especially against settlers and settlements near populated Palestinian communities, is perhaps one of the key differences between the two uprisings; coupled with this development is Israel's unprecedented use of tanks, missiles, and attack helicopters to suppress Palestinian protesters..not since the 1967 war has Israel used such heavy weapons against Palestinians.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Contrary to how most academics and politicians paint the second *intifada*, however – as a movement violently attempting to destroy the state of Israel and its citizens, rather than legitimacy attempting to overthrow a militarily occupying force – the *intifada* did include nonviolent efforts at resistance even amid violence being undertaken by more desperate, radical elements of the Palestinian community. In retrospect, it has become clear that much of the *intifada’s* depiction as a phase of sheer brutal violence by Palestinians can be attributed to deliberate media efforts, much like Western press operates during the current struggle for Palestinian freedom. According to the Middle East Report in 2002,

There were in fact “efforts to encourage non-violent protests against the occupation during the current uprising [the second *intifada*]. Indeed, the majority of *intifada* activities have consisted of marches, rock-throwing demonstrations, sit-ins, and the like. The armed actions carried out by Palestinians over the past two years have been minor compared to the many other mundane acts of resistance. ‘It’s the media, both local and international, which have focused only on the armed actions. But this is a misrepresentation of the situation.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

In a study comparing the violent nature of the first and second intifadas, Daoud Kuttab notes that while, “a few Palestinian groups have advocated non-violent resistance throughout the second *intifada*, this strategy was promoted mostly by intellectuals, expatriates, and internationals working in solidarity with Palestinians. Attitudes towards non-violence are largely related to how important one considers international opinion. Indeed, there is much evidence to buttress the argument that international opinion cannot be swayed, and that the conscience of foreign governments and peoples would not be moved by Palestinian non-violent demonstrations and the probably deadly Israeli response.”[[16]](#footnote-16) It was in this spirit that many Palestinians viewed violence as the only way to achieving their dreams of independence, or if not, then it was the way to keep the eyes on the international community on the region. It was hoped that by keeping Israel/Palestine in the news, the major powers would be forced to rectify the situation; unfortunately for the Palestinians, their violent tactics had the opposite effect, horrifying most of the world with bloody clips on the evening news while alienating much of their core Israeli and international peace activist support. Prior to the second intifada, international activists and like-minded Israelis demonstrated in solidarity with Palestinian suffering, and worked to achieve a peaceful settlement to the conflict. It is difficult to ascertain if the majority of Palestinians were in fact behind the use of violence to maintain the attention of the international community and attempt to free themselves from Israeli control; nonetheless, it is clear that during the second *intifada,* the voices advocating for nonviolent resistance went unheard. Not all of the blame can placed on Palestinian advocates for violent measures, however; Israeli efforts may have also contributed to the violent turn the second *intifada* experienced.

*Haaretz* journalist Akiva Eldar revealed that the top Israeli security echelons had decided to “fan the flames” during the uprising's first weeks. He cites Amos Malka, the military general in charge of intelligence at the time, saying that during the second *intifada's* first month, when it was still mostly characterised by nonviolent popular protests, the military fired 1.3m bullets in the West Bank and Gaza. The idea was to intensify the levels of violence, thinking that this would lead to a swift and decisive military victory and the successful suppression of the rebellion. And indeed the uprising and its suppression turned out to be extremely violent.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Unfortunately it is nearly impossible to tell how much was Palestinian belief in violence as the most effective or the only tactic that could grant them their freedom from Israeli Occupation, or if deliberate Israeli containment deserves the blame. As with many events in Israel/Palestine, the truth most likely lies somewhere in between these two extremes. Thus, although there have long been Palestinian advocates of non-violence, they were drowned out by the militancy of the second *intifada* that began in late 2000 and erupted into waves of appalling suicide bombings.[[18]](#footnote-18) And while the second *intifada* petered out after both sides exhausted their capacity to live with extreme violence, hope has reemerged in the post-2005 Occupied Palestinian Territories. While Palestinian resistance has always included nonviolent tactics beyond the headlines,[[19]](#footnote-19) today, in rural villages from Bilin and Jayyous to Nilin and Beit Ommar, this kind of Palestinian persistence against Israel’s separation barrier and illegal settlements is paying off – and attracting the participation of international supporters and Jewish Israelis. Palestinians have been using classic nonviolent strategies such as strikes, demonstrations, and civil disobedience since before the modern state of Israel came into being in 1948. But recently, new momentum, fresh media attention, and an increasingly harsh crackdown by Israeli occupation forces have thrust these strategies into the spotlight.[[20]](#footnote-20)

*The Third Intifada?*

After years of armed struggle, which led to much bloodshed and limited gains, Palestinians are seeking to use popular resistance on a mass scale -- including weekly marches, strikes and international boycotts -- to put pressure on Israel and mobilize world opinion in support of the Palestinian cause.[[21]](#footnote-21) Since 2005, villages throughout the West Bank have begun organizing nonviolent resistance activities against Israeli occupation. Like a creeping, part-time intifada, the Friday protests have been gaining ground.[[22]](#footnote-22) Nabi Saleh, Beit Ummar, Sheikh Jarrah, Beit Jalah, Budrus, Nablus, al-Walajah, Bil’in and Ni’ilin are but a few of the Palestinian villages that have been sites of recent, often repeated acts of nonviolent resistance to Israeli Occupation. These sites are home to peace marches, sit-ins, tree-planting initiatives, product and service boycotts, and other efforts by Palestinian activists, often in conjunction with Israeli and international peace activists, protesting both elements of Israeli Occupation as well as the continued occupation in its entirety. Proponents hope civil disobedience, part of a strategy they call the White Intifada, also will flummox Israeli authorities in their efforts to crack down on protesters waving banners rather than shooting automatic rifles, and cast Israeli soldiers as oppressors.[[23]](#footnote-23) There is not a formal, united nonviolent resistance movement among Palestinians, although this may change in the future. At this stage, activists that share similar ideals may share tactics and ideas, but continue to operate largely within their own specific region and addressing the specific aspects of Israeli occupation that cause the most Palestinian suffering in their context. What follows is a village study, covering some of the major sites of nonviolent resistance with the aim to explore the range of tactics used and an examination of any positive or negative change associated with the village’s active resistance.

*Nabi Saleh*

The village of Nabi Saleh, located near Ramallah, recently made news after the village’s natural spring became inaccessible due to the route of the security wall[[24]](#footnote-24) and the expansion of a nearby Jewish settlement. The Halamish Settlement has confiscated nearly half of An Nabi Saleh’s orchard and farmland since it was founded in 1977, and, according to village residents, the settlement confiscates more land each year without consent or compensation of the landowners.[[25]](#footnote-25) In the most recent development in the village’s struggles, settlers from the illegal settlement took over the outlying village land that borders the village’s natural spring. Since that time, villagers have been prevented from accessing the spring. Peace marches have been held in Nabi Saleh every Friday since January 2010, in which Palestinian and Israeli activists attempt to reach the spring but are stopped from reaching their destination by force of arms courtesy of the Israeli Defense Force. The District Coordination Office of Israel has confirmed the spring is on Palestinian land but nearly a kilometer before reaching the spring, the demonstration is routinely met with dozens of soldiers armed with M16 assault rifles, tear gas, rubber bullets and stun grenades.[[26]](#footnote-26) As a protest against both the continued illegal settlement activity as well as the construction of the separation wall used to confiscate Palestinian lands, the peace marches have recorded upwards of 150 participating peace activists. Although billed as nonviolent (the majority of the participants face the well-armed IDF weaponless), stone throwing has occurred. On Friday, March 10, 2010, a group of older villagers marched toward the spring, where they were met with tear gas and stun grenades, and scuffled with soldiers on the road. Seeing this, other villagers spilled down the hillsides swinging slingshots and pelted the Israelis with stones.[[27]](#footnote-27) The presence of stone throwing youths causes some to reconsider the nonviolent nature of the Nabi Saleh protest marches. Although the issue of stone throwing will be considered further later on, one must bear in mind precisely what Palestinian villagers are up against. The lives of those living in Nabi Saleh have become drastically worse under Israeli occupation: the route of the separation wall and the expansion of nearby settlements have deprived Nabi Saleh villagers of access to the local spring, which supplied the area with fresh water.[[28]](#footnote-28) Despite the Israeli government’s self-admission that Nabi Saleh villagers have the right to walk across their own to reach the natural spring that has supplied their village with water for decades, nonviolent marches attempting to reach their legally recognized village spring continue to be met with armed force by the Israeli military.

*Beit Ummar*

Beit Ummar is another site of recent demonstrations of nonviolent resistance by Palestinians and other peace activists in solidarity with the Palestinian cause. In March 2010, Israel declared the Cave of the Patriarchs and Joseph’s Tomb as Israeli heritage sites, sites that also hold religious significance for Muslims. Palestinians saw this declaration as another attempt by Israel to establish ‘facts on the ground’ that would ensure their complete control over religious sites in Israel/Palestine that are sacred to both Judaism and Islam in the event of a peace settlement being reached. Such a declaration exacerbated the tense standoff between the Occupying Israeli military and Palestinian civilians, and many feared that violent riots would erupt. Rather than a violent outburst, however, a more startling event occurred in Beit Ummar. Palestinian civilians organized what can only be described as a highway sit-in. Demonstrators organized by the Beit Omar National Committee managed to occupy and block the main road from Jerusalem to Hebron, Route 60. The demonstrators were able to topple the fence that surrounded the military checkpoint controlling access to Route 60, and gathered on Route 60 waving flags and chanting slogans.[[29]](#footnote-29) Their victory did not last long, however. Despite the peaceful nature of the demonstration, the soldiers immediately started pushing people violently and using stun grenades, injuring one person. The soldiers then went on to invade the village, which provoked clashes that resulted in the injury of three Palestinians.[[30]](#footnote-30) The sit-in style of civil disobedience utilized by residents of Beit Ummar, in addition to being quite unique in typical Palestinian nonviolent resistance tactics, and historical nonviolent resistance globally. The efforts in Beit Ummar, however, also serves to illustrate actions some critics say undermine the nonviolent nature of the demonstration.

Shlomo Dror, a spokesman for the Israeli Defense Ministry, said such demonstrations are not nonviolent because they include stone throwing and attempts to damage or break through the security fence. "Unfortunately, these events are not quiet,” Dror said. “There is always some level of violence connected to them. The army has no problem with peaceful demonstrations; it's their right to demonstrate. Our problems begin when property is damaged.”[[31]](#footnote-31)

Damaging aspects of Israel’s complex security apparatus enacted to control Palestinian movement throughout the West Bank is seen by many as dangerous and violent, and thus undermining any potential legitimacy such a demonstration could have garnered.

*Beit Jala*

Beit Jala has also been a site of nonviolent demonstrations against Israel’s construction of the separation barrier. Organized by Bethlehem’s anti-wall committee, peace marches have been undertaken in earnest since early 2010 in response to the February resumption of construction of the separation wall through Cremisan Monastary lands as well as thousands of dunums[[32]](#footnote-32) of private Palestinian lands. One such protest was conducted on March 6th, 2010, during which time the protesters marched toward the site of the separation wall's construction, demanding the work halt and that a stop be made to land confiscations. Israeli forces responded by firing tear-gas canisters and stun grenades at participants.[[33]](#footnote-33) The demonstration was attended by Palestinian, Israeli and international activists, including well-known Fatah party members as well as Fayiz as-Saqa and Mubarak Awad. Although the organizers denied using violent tactics in their demonstration, Israel military representatives depicted the incident as less an act of peaceful protest and more a violent riot. Commenting on the incident, an Israeli military spokesman said, "around fifty Palestinian rioters were throwing stones at Israeli security forces who responded using riot dispersal means."[[34]](#footnote-34) The different language used to describe the demonstrations by Israeli government and military forces as opposed to nonviolent activists makes determining the truth of a particular event nearly impossible. When stones are thrown, the former will emphasis this to discredit the protest and attempt to undermine any gathering legitimacy for engaging in nonviolent actions, while the latter will minimize the stone throwers, perhaps attributing them to a few angry youths that did not constitute any substantial portion of protest participants. Although the precise level of commitment to nonviolent principles of the participants cannot be verified, this demonstration does illustrate the increasing participation of Palestinian Authority officials as the nonviolent movement gains momentum and international legitimacy; even government officials have begun to see the power potential if a mass mobilization of popular resistance emerges with the blessing of at least some actors in the international community.

*Budrus*

Another method of nonviolent resistance popular with the Palestinian resistance movement is exemplified in the village of Budrus. Budrus residents, Israelis and international activists combine nonviolent protest marches with concrete actions to attempt to change the status quo. In a Land Day commemoration ceremony in March 2010, more than 100 demonstrators engaged in a nonviolent march and tree planting action. The IDF used tear gas, sound bombs and rubber-coated steel bullets to violently repress the commemoration as the group walked towards the separation barrier.[[35]](#footnote-35) As the demonstration reached the fence, a well-organized frenzy erupted in which people began planting the trees within a meter of the thin fence that separated the villagers from their land – so called ‘no mans land’. Those who weren’t planting chanted with dignified rage and emotion.[[36]](#footnote-36) What is of note in the Budrus actions is the clear IDF prediction that the demonstrators were attempting to attack the soldiers and break down the barrier. When the group breached ‘no mans land’, some of the land confiscated from their village to create a safety barrier around the separation barrier itself, and merely began planting trees, the Budrus organizers noted, “the IDF soldiers appeared intimidated and surprised”.[[37]](#footnote-37) It is clear that tree-planting initiatives in order to physically reclaim the land stolen from them were not expected, and that the IDF was unsure of how to respond to such an explicitly nonviolent tactic. After ten minutes, the IDF resumed shooting low-flying tear gas at the demonstrators, and when this did not disperse the crowd, they began shooting rubber-coated steel bullets at the heads and torsos of those involved until the crowd was back outside of the interim zone and on their side of the security station.[[38]](#footnote-38) Even then, the demonstration continued for two hours until the IDF was force to retreat until they could amass a larger military force, which they did a half hour later. In their wake, the IDF left behind the remnants of 1200 spent tear gas canisters, percussion grenades and rubber-coated steel bullets.[[39]](#footnote-39) Despite the best attempts of crowd control, the peace march and tree-planting demonstration was successful in their aims, and doubly successful in providing a new outlet for nonviolent resistance to Israeli oppression. With a positive conclusion, Budrus organizer noted that even though “the IDF returned into the village after a brief time with two of the twelve jeeps that had amassed just outside the fence, but seemed to realize that there violent repression would not quell the nonviolent popular struggle in Budrus. Through the use of nonviolent resistance Budrus successfully moved the wall into no-man’s land.”

*Nablus*

Nablus, located in North-central region of the West Bank, has also been a center of protests against Israeli Occupation. Iraq Burin, a small village southwest of Nablus, was the site of a controversial demonstration in late March 2010. Activists and locals were conducting a nonviolent demonstration to protest restrictions on access to their lands beneath the Jewish-only settlement of Har Brakha. The presence of such illegal settlements typically means that a border area for security must also be created for protection of the illegal settlers, resulting in further land confiscations and restrictions for the legal Palestinian inhabitants of the region. The demonstrators set out on a protest march towards the village’s lands after midday prayer, and were immediately confronted by soldiers who shot bursts of live ammunition in the air; the soldiers then shot tear-gas and rubber bullets towards the villagers in an attempt to prevent them from reaching their own lands.[[40]](#footnote-40)

*Sheikh Jarrah*

The East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah has also been the site of nonviolent protests against increasing Israeli control over the area. The current situation for Palestinians living Sheik Jarrah is especially tense, as both Palestinians and Israelis claim East Jerusalem as the capital of their peoples, and the protests subsequently further on edge than in other areas. The neighborhood, which includes the tomb of the Mishnaic sage Shimon Hatzadik, was a Jewish enclave until 1948, when the last Jewish residents fled during the War of Independence ahead of the Jordanian Army.[[41]](#footnote-41) In the aftermath of the 1948 War, in which hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were displaced, and Israel gained control over lands designated Palestinian territory according to the 1947 UN Partition Plan, 28 Palestinian families were resettled in Sheikh Jarrah by the United Nations Relief Works Agency through the Jordanian government who had control over the West Bank from 1948-1967. The permits issued were legal under the Jordanian legal system, but would be deemed illegitimate and illegal when Israel gained control over the land after the Six Day War. Initially, the Israeli government followed the United Nations decision and allowed the Arab families to remain there, but delegated the issue to the Israeli judiciary system to be decided on a case-by-case basis once Jewish settlers began contesting ownership. As of April 2010, 30 claims have been filed by radical Jewish settlers against Palestinian families to have them evicted from their homes in order to allow the rightful owners of the land, the Jews, to resettle there. Arguing that the Arab families have encroached and built upon land that was legally purchased by Jews 60 years ago, the Palestinians must leave this majority-Arab neighborhood as well as pay their own expulsion and legal processing fees.[[42]](#footnote-42) According to plans discussed by the Jewish settlers, the neighborhood will ultimately be entirely Jewish.[[43]](#footnote-43) As of March 2010, three extended families totaling nearly sixty people have been evicted from their homes and left to live on the street as Jewish settlers took over their homes. The legality of the land is further complicated by allegations of forged land ownership documents used as evidence in Israeli court that allowed Jewish settlers to possess the Palestinian homes. Indeed, the United States protested the decisions, questioning the authenticity of an Ottoman-era bill of sale as well as the discrimination and illegality of the evictions.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Previous protests in Sheikh Jarrah in December 2009 ended in the arrest and detention of dozens of Israeli, Palestinian, and international activists, on the basis that their nonviolent protest marches and vigils were somehow in violation of Israeli law. This attempt by the Israeli government to prevent peaceful protests has raised sharp questions as to the government’s commitment to civil society’s right to demonstrate nonviolently for political change. In January 2010, however, a Jerusalem judge deemed the activists’ arrests illegal; additionally, the same court went on to rule that the demonstrations are within the boundaries of the law.[[45]](#footnote-45) Despite the court rulings, the Israeli police have continued to attempt to end demonstrations in Sheikh Jarrah, as well as restrict access to activists attempting to participate. Noting the increasing restrictions on peaceful protests in Israel, the Israeli daily *Haaretz* estimated that 100 activists have been arrested during protests in Sheikh Jarrah, although most were released by judges who criticized the police conduct.[[46]](#footnote-46) In the case of Sheikh Jarrah, Israel’s attempts to stymie the protest movement appears to have backfired, only encouraging more Israelis to become aware of, and take action against, the increasing government control over Israeli and Palestinian civil liberties. One such nonviolent demonstration took place during the last week of January, attended by more than 300 activists. This record number of Israeli demonstrators in East Jerusalem’s Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood on Friday challenged the trend of continued arrests and threats to protesters, in addition to the continuing evictions of Palestinian families from their homes. After the clashes between Israeli police and the protestors in the past months, it was a sign of the commitment both within Palestinian organizations as well as the Israeli left to ending the illegal practices by the state of Israel, even to the point of facing police equipped with riot gear unarmed. Many attendees expected the demonstration would end in dozens of arrests and possibly even violence, although this fortunately did not turn out to be the case.[[47]](#footnote-47)

*Bil’in and Ni’lin*

The villages of Bil’in and Ni’lin located near Ramallah are the two most internationally renowned sites of nonviolent demonstrations in the West Bank, attended by increasing numbers of Palestinian, Israeli and International activists. Conducting demonstrations both individually and collectively, these villages undertake some of the most organized, thought out and developed acts of nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience to Israeli Occupation in the West Bank. The scope of their actions are unprecedented, at least in recent history of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, and serve both to inspire other nonviolent Palestinian organizations as well as provide an outlet to allow Palestinians to pro-actively participate in advocating for change. By developing a strong, organized local committee, attracting international press, and remaining committed to nonviolent methods despite increasing Israeli brutality, these villages pose one of the biggest threats to Israel’s moral and political legitimacy in the international community.

For over five years, residents have been protesting against the Separation Barrier, which cuts directly through the village and separates more than 50 percent of their land. The wall in this area is especially contentious, for its route has frequently been blamed on Israel’s desire to easily annex settlements like ultra-orthodox Modi’in Ilit built in the West Bank between Bil’in and Ni’lin into the Israeli state. According to Bil’in leadership, although the village sits two and a half miles east of the Green Line, Israel has taken roughly 60 percent of our 1,000 acres of land in order to annex the six settlements and build the wall around them. The wall’s route is particularly devastating for a village that relies primarily on agriculture, for most of their agricultural land now lies beyond the wall, out of reach. Bil’in’s 1,600 residents depended on farming and harvesting olives for their livelihood.[[48]](#footnote-48)

To this end, activists continue to hold peace marches every Friday in Bil’in as they have since the construction of what the Palestinians call the “Separation Barrier, or the Apartheid Wall”. Men, women and children from Bil'in have marched, carrying signs and Palestinian flags, along with their Israeli and international supporters, in civil disobedience and protest marches against the seizure of the village's land for Israel's construction of its wall and settlements. In light of their unwavering commitment to achieving positive change through nonviolent protests, Bil'in has become a symbol of civilian resistance to Israel's occupation for Palestinians and international grassroots movements.[[49]](#footnote-49) Having learned from the experiences of villages like Budrus and Biddu, which resisted the wall nonviolently, Bil’in has also committed itself to nonviolent resistance efforts even in the face of increasing IDF brutality, hoping to highlight that Israelis and Palestinians can coexist in peace and security. Bil’in activists held demonstrations to try to stop the bulldozers from destroying their land during construction of the wall, even chaining themselves to the olive trees being bulldozed to illustrate that taking the trees’ lives takes the village’s life.[[50]](#footnote-50) Bil’in demonstrations also include letter distribution to the soldiers attempting to stop them, in which they ask the soldiers to think before they shoot, explaining that they are not against the Israeli people but against the building of the “Separation Barrier” on their land. The Bil'in demonstration was always intended to be non-violent, although there are sometimes groups of half a dozen younger, angrier men lobbing stones at the soldiers with slingshots.[[51]](#footnote-51) It must be acknowledged that there is indeed some level of truth to IDF claims of Palestinians throwing stones, which in one instance caused a soldier to lose an eye (while leaders say they're against such violence, followers don't always hold the line). This particular civil disobedience taps into Palestinian nostalgia for the first *intifada* in the late 1980s, marked by grass-roots participation and stone-throwing.[[52]](#footnote-52) According to the demonstration organizers, however, this is the exception, not the rule, when it comes to the weekly demonstrations. “We chose to resist non-violently because we are peace-loving people who are victims of Occupation. We have opened our homes to the Israelis who have joined us; they have become our partners in struggle. With them, we have held more than 50 peaceful demonstrations since February alone.[[53]](#footnote-53)

The struggle in Bil’in was not confined to marches and vigils; they also took their grievances to Israeli and International court. In 2004, the International Court of Justice at The Hague ruled that the wall, built inside the West Bank, in itself is illegal under international law, as are all Israeli settlements.[[54]](#footnote-54) More importantly, however, was the Israeli Supreme Court decision in 2007 that the wall in Bil’in is illegal according to Israeli law, and must be rerouted. Three years later, the military has refused to implement the courts ruling, and the wall remains in its illegal position.

The organizers of Bil’in resistance also hold an annual International Conference on Nonviolent Resistance, attended by Israelis, Palestinians and international activists, academics and government officials. Advocates of nonviolent tactics for political change are invited to hold panels, serving both as educational workshops and venues to provide continued encouragement to the cause. Such an event indicates a willingness to discuss current tactics and possible improvements, nonviolent resistance in other geo-political contexts, and to hear from Palestinians themselves responses of the efforts of Bil’in and other villages. For Bil’in organizers, the grassroots nature of this protest movement is an asset, not a liability, and should be embraced if positive change is ever going to be affected. At Bil’in’s second annual conference in 2006, Mairead Maguire, Nobel Peace Prize Winner for her work with nonviolent peace activists in conflict-torn Northern Ireland civil society in the 1970s, attended and gave a lecture. Her attendance speaks volumes to the legitimacy of commitment to nonviolent resistance tactics being undertaken in Bil’in, and for the international community, it served as a first view of Israeli response tactics to peaceful protests. Her testimony, in lieu of her experience and award winning work in areas of violence framed as sectarian but ultimately about land control and power, is particularly revealing.

“I was invited to attend a nonviolent conference in Bil’in and to give a talk there. At the end of the conference, we were invited to participate in a nonviolent demonstration with some of the Palestinian members of parliament, and Israeli peace activists and local villagers and several hundred international peace activists from over twenty countries. We walked along to try to walk up toward the separation wall, and it was a totally nonviolent protest. And we were viciously attacked by the Israeli military. They threw gas canisters into the peace walkers, and they also fired rubber-covered steel bullets. As I tried to move back and help a French lady, I was shot in the leg with a rubber-covered steel bullet, and the young Israeli soldier who shot me was only twenty meters from me. I was stunned by it, and then later on, after having some treatment by the ambulance medics, I went back down to the front line with the peace activists, and we were again showered with gas. I was overcome and had a severe nosebleed and had to be taken by stretcher to the ambulance and treated. And I witnessed there a Palestinian woman, maybe around in her sixties, and an old Palestinian man with blood on his face. These were over twenty-five unarmed peace people who had been viciously attacked by the Israeli military. And it was a completely peaceful protest. It was absolutely unbelievable. I never in all my years of activism witnessed anything so vicious as from the Israeli military.”[[55]](#footnote-55)

Maguire’s international experience prepared her for police brutality, but participating in unarmed confrontations with the IDF was beyond even her ken.

This year marked the 5th Annual International Conference on Nonviolent Resistance, held the last week in April 2010. This is a landmark event, for it is the first time since the breakup of the two main Palestinian political forces, Hamas and Fatah, four years ago, that all the Secretary Generals of the parties will participate in one of the conference panels. In addition to the remarkable presence of the political parties, the major representatives of nonviolent Palestinian movements in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza, and the main international solidarity initiatives will be in attendance.[[56]](#footnote-56) The inclusion of nonviolent activists from Gaza is important for establishing any future Palestinian-wide popular resistance movement, but their efforts have been less successful and less publicized due to both Hamas’ control of the media as well as the continuing Israeli blockade of the entire Strip and thus does not represent a vital component to the unfolding West Bank efforts.

Efforts in Bil’in and Ni’lin have garnered international praise for their commitment to nonviolent resistance tactics for ending Israeli Occupation, even from the progeny of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. Martin Luther King III, the son of Martin Luther King, Jr., continues to spread his father’s heritage, decades after the latter led one of the most important civil rights battles in human history.[[57]](#footnote-57) The Middle East Nonviolence and Democracy (MEND) and The Center for Democracy and Community Development (CDCD), said King would deliver a speech at the conference, and discuss the role of nonviolence as a vehicle for ending of the occupation. The conference will focus on the use on nonviolence in forwarding the aim of creating an independent Palestinian state.[[58]](#footnote-58) In an interview at the Peres Center of Peace in Jaffa, King explained his optimistic civil society-based doctrine and its importance in overthrowing Israeli occupation:

“Civilians must take part in solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in non-violent ways, even if the government views protests and conscientious objectors as violent. Having heard about the weekly rallies in Bil’in and Ni’lin, which the Palestinians view as a non-violent protest while the army thinks otherwise, I visited the area, (not during a rally) and found similarities to a different time in history.” He also sees a similarity between the calls for a boycott against Israeli universities or products made in Israel and the actions of the movement led by his father several decades ago.[[59]](#footnote-59)

Non-violent and popular resistance activities have been supported recently by both Palestinian Authority and Fatah officials,[[60]](#footnote-60) with the five-year trend of weekly anti-wall protests spreading beyond the founding villages of Ni’lin and Bil'in, to five villages protesting on a regular basis, and dozens of others holding rallies to mark significant occasions; in Gaza, groups continue to non-violently protest the imposition of an Israeli controlled no-go zone eating up what experts say is 20% of the arable land in the Strip, using non-violent marches. The lack of change in the status quo in these areas makes continued commitment to nonviolent resistance difficult to maintain, and thus any and all positive press on these peaceful protests can contribute positively to changes in international opinion. Positive press such as coverage of the efforts of Bil’in and Ni’lin is essential in order to reframe the conflict. In addition to descendants from American nonviolent civil resistance movements taking note, family of the Indian nonviolent resistance movement have also acknowledged the great work being undertaken in Palestine. In early April 2010, Rajmohan Gandhi, grandson of the late Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi, visited the West Bank village of Bil'in, where he praised popular committee members for their role in promoting non-violent resistance.[[61]](#footnote-61) Unfortunately, international recognition for their nonviolent methods have not resulted in any change in Israeli response to demonstrations conducted in solidarity with Palestinian rights and freedom.

*Al-Walaja*

Inspired by the experience of other Palestinian villages, al-Walaja demonstrators are part of a small but growing core of protestors combining civil disobedience with legal petitions to fight Israeli policies.[[62]](#footnote-62) Al-Walaja has fallen victim to destruction by Israel on two fronts, as many villages are. The construction of the separation barrier, combined with the continued land grabs by three recently developed settlements – Gilo, Har-Gilo, and Giv’at Yael – has decimated the village’s land and livelihood, leaving the village with less than four and a half kilometers of land, or 22% of its original size.[[63]](#footnote-63) Despite the strength of the occupier, however, the villagers of al-Walaja, in solidarity with other local, Israeli, and international activists, refuse to let this abuse unfold without resistance.

"Before Bil’in, people never had faith it would achieve anything, neither nonviolence, nor the legal system," says Mohammed Dajani, a political science professor at Al Quds University. "Maybe this will be a response to the skeptics, that, 'Look, it works.'" While Palestinian militants dominate international headlines through suicide bombings and firing rockets on Israeli towns, residents of Bil’in and a handful of other tiny farming villages like al-Walaja have eschewed the armed struggle.[[64]](#footnote-64)

In the same pattern as the villages of Bil’in and Ni’lin, al-Walaja, located west of Bethlehem, is also a site of nonviolent protests against the Separation Barrier. In this village, the barrier created ostensibly for ‘security reasons’ cuts off large swaths of land from the village, separating the villagers from their livelihoods. During the construction of the separation barrier, Palestinian and Israeli activists linked arms and chained themselves to olive trees in order to delay Army bulldozers from cutting a path for the electronic fence that would separate the villagers from their land.[[65]](#footnote-65)

The use of only nonviolent tactics is a deliberate move by the demonstration organizers with both moral and political implications. Although Palestinians often glorify the armed militiamen and those killed in battle with Israel, protest leaders say the nonlethal tactics have one crucial advantage: it attracts Israeli and international peace activists, who in turn bring sympathetic media coverage. "We use nonviolence as a way of life.... We learned from many experiences: like India, Martin Luther [King], and South Africa," says Samer Jabber, who oversees a network of activists in the villages surrounding Bethlehem.[[66]](#footnote-66) In al-Walaja, however, the protests would be meaningless without a challenge in the Israeli courts. Villagers fear that the construction of the separation wall – set to be more than 400 miles long total, affecting 92 Palestinian communities – will leave the hamlet completely surrounded.[[67]](#footnote-67) The demonstrations have continued over the past three years in al-Walaja in reaction to continued construction on the barrier. During a demonstration in late April 2010, Palestinian, Israeli and foreign activists blocked Israeli bulldozers for three hours from uprooting olive trees; the demonstration was dispersed, however, and one Palestinian was arrested while others claimed police officers forcibly removed them and used clubs.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Despite the nonviolent nature of the spreading resistance movement in the West Bank, Israel's occupation, like any other military operation, speaks only the language of violence and brutality when dealing with Palestinians, whether facing armed militants or unarmed protesters.[[69]](#footnote-69) Nineteen Palestinians have been killed in confrontations over the barrier since 2004.[[70]](#footnote-70) Palestinians from other areas now call people from Bil’in "Palestinian Gandhi’s”, and yet in the face of our peaceful resistance, Israeli soldiers continue armed attacks against peaceful protests.[[71]](#footnote-71) The effect this violent response has had, however, and will continue to have, on the nonviolent resistance movement may ultimately not be the one that the Israeli military intended to cause.

*Israeli Responses to the Nonviolent Protest Movement*

The Israeli military has developed a myriad of tactics to respond to the growing nonviolent resistance efforts of Palestinians in solidarity with Israeli and international activists. In addition to the media’s continued smear campaign against Palestinian resistance (in which they receive attention only for violent actions and silence for their nonviolent ones), such tactics range from deportation, detention of Palestinians, arbitrary arrest of Israelis and internationals, use of illegal weaponry in violation of international law, and measures to incite violence. The village of Bil’in has been a victim to many of these methods. The Israeli army is using more lethal weapons and greater violence against protesters, and arresting many people, including many protest organizers. In Bil'in alone, twenty-nine residents have been arrested in the past three months (as of Sept 2009), twelve of whom were children; almost all were arrested during military raids in the middle of the night, and their detention has been extended repeatedly.[[72]](#footnote-72) These are but a few common occurrences in the mighty arsenal available to the superior military force that simultaneously represents the brutal aggressive occupier and yet also holds all of the moral legitimacy of the victim in the eyes of the international community. Such a combination results in the current situation in the West Bank and Gaza: Israel can use whatever means they feel are necessary to accomplish their goals without fearing international repercussions for any violation of human rights, Israeli law or international law. Israel, which markets itself as the region’s only democracy, has snatched dozens of villagers in night raids over the past 18 months; since 2005, 18 Palestinians have been killed and more than 1,500 have been injured in anti-wall protests.[[73]](#footnote-73) The escalation of violent response to nonviolent resistance tactics does not bode well not only for participants advocating for essential human rights and freedom from unjust occupation, but also for Israel’s moral and political legitimacy in the human community.

Village raids are a common occurrence in the aftermath of peaceful demonstrations in areas of repeated and effective resistance, especially areas that are receiving international press. During these incursions, villagers are often trapped in their homes and interrogated, whether the members had participated in the demonstration or not. Known organizers of demonstrations receive even more attention from the military during these incursions, and are often taken to Israeli security offices for further interrogation or even detention. The following events that occurred in al-Walaja this past week are unfortunately not at all usual for the West Bank.

Following an anti-wall protest in Al-Walaja in late April 2010, Israeli border police entered the village and surrounded the home of a detained Palestinian, trapping at least 40 people in the home for two hours. The home of 40-year-old Hatem Al-Araj was host to women and children when it was besieged. Witnesses said troops withdrew after two hours without incident, and said it was unclear what they wanted with those in the building. Village council representatives said the Al-Araj home was a gathering place for locals and internationals that had earlier participated in an anti-wall rally, where they had protested the latest site of wall construction. During the siege of the Al-Araj home, witnesses said Israeli forces raided several others, detaining three young men for allegedly throwing rocks at Israeli forces.[[74]](#footnote-74)

In what Israel’s *Haaretz* newspaper recently called a “war on protest”, Israeli security forces have launched a series of raids in the West Bank over the past two months to detain Palestinian community leaders organizing protests against the wall. In addition to regular arrests of Palestinian protesters, Israel has recently adopted a new tactic of rounding up community leaders and holding them in long-term administrative detention. A *Haaretz* editorial called these practices “familiar from the darkest regimes”.[[75]](#footnote-75) Since the first stirrings of nonviolent resistance after the end of the Second Intifada, Israel has been utilizing the practices of arbitrary arrest and detention to undercut any substantial united Palestinian resistance movement from flourishing in the Occupied Territories. As discussed previously, during the First *Intifada* Israel effectively undercut much of the nonviolent movement’s momentum by deporting main organizers such as Mubarak Awad.

There are many examples of the arbitrary arrest, interrogation, and detention Palestinians face in the West Bank. In recent months, Israel has targeted leaders such as Jamal Juma, Mohammed Khatib, Mohammad Othman, and Abdullah Abu Rahme of Bil’in with detention without trial and trumped-up charges.[[76]](#footnote-76) This is a constant threat for all Palestinians, both those participating in resistance to illegal occupation, but also those who are merely in the wrong place at the wrong time or look suspicious. Abdullah Abu Rahme, a schoolteacher and head of the popular committee in the village of Bil’in, has been in jail since December for arms possession. The charge refers to a display he created at his home of used tear gas canisters fired by the Israeli army at demonstrators.[[77]](#footnote-77) Such an absurd charge would not hold up in any court of law concerned with justice; unfortunately, Israel is not obligated to ensure their Palestinian detainees benefit from due process.

Members of the popular committee in Bil’in and other villages that organize resistance to Israeli occupation all face the threat of detention without any foreseeable release. As Neve Gordon noted,

“Israel had to find a way to end the protests once and for all and has begun a well-orchestrated campaign that targets the local leaders of such resistance. Clearly, the strategy is to arrest all of the leaders and charge them with incitement, thus setting an extremely high "price tag" for organizing protests against the subjugation of the Palestinian people. The objective is to put an end to the pro-peace popular resistance in the villages and to crush, once and for all, the Palestinian peace movement.”[[78]](#footnote-78)

Another example of Israeli efforts to undermine the nonviolent resistance movement by targeting the movement’s leadership is the recent arrest of Ibrahim Burnat, a Bil’in local, in February 2010. The Israeli authorities issued a conditional release of a member of the Popular Committee against the Wall and Settlement building, Mohammed Khattib, on bail of 10,000 Israeli Shekels and with the condition of not participating in any of the protests by appearing at the nearest Israeli police station every Friday between 12:00- 5:00pm.[[79]](#footnote-79) This is an extremely obvious but effective way to eliminate some of the participants in Bil’in’s weekly nonviolent demonstrations, and in some ways illustrates the recognition of Israel of the power of continued mass nonviolent demonstrations in the West Bank. Israel appears to be willing to do whatever it takes to squash the resistance movement, for its continued existence and growth pose a far greater threat to Israel’s current strangle hold over Palestine than any violent movement ever could. If this tactic of resistance continues, it may succeed in turning the tide of international opinion, which could in turn force the Israeli government to change its behavior towards the people and territory of the West Bank.

Fearing a paradigm shift to grassroots resistance, Israel reacted in the only way it knows - with violence and repression. Over the past six months, 31 Bil'in residents have been arrested, including almost all the members of the Popular Committee that organizes the demonstrations. A similar tactic is being used against protesters in the neighboring village of Ni'ilin, which is losing over half of its land to Israel's wall and settlements. Over the past eighteen months, 89 Ni'ilin residents have been arrested.[[80]](#footnote-80) The sheer volume of prisoners this indicates Israel is attempting to hold seems more trouble than such a policy is worth. In fact, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, more than 7,000 Palestinians (including 270 under the age of 18) are currently held in Israeli prisons. Of those, 264 are held under administrative detention, meaning they are held without trial.[[81]](#footnote-81)

Internationals activists working in solidarity with Palestinian and Israeli activists have also seen increased attempts to curb their efforts over the past five years. On this front, Israel utilizes two extremely effective means to achieve their goals: restricted immigration and deportation. Anxious to prevent international activists from participating in demonstrations or working with organizations that advocate for Palestinian rights, the Israeli authorities have also turned their attention to the foreign activists, deporting those who have overstayed visas or violated their terms.[[82]](#footnote-82) Activists who manage to gain entry into Israel face the threat of constant deportation by Israeli authorities during their stay. This poses a problem for peace activism and humanitarian work in the West Bank and Gaza because of recent measures taken by Israel to limit work permits granted to NGOs and organizations that work with Palestinians. With these tight restrictions, more and more internationals are able to gain entry into Israel with only a tourist visa, valid for four months and preventing them from working. “Israel knows that the non-violence struggle is spreading and that it’s a powerful weapon against the occupation,” said Neta Golan, an Israeli activist based in Ramallah. “Israel has managed to stop most international activists from getting here by denying them entry at the borders, but those who do get in then face deportation if they are arrested or try to renew their visa.”[[83]](#footnote-83)

The Israeli courts ordered the release of two foreign women arrested by the army in the West Bank during a nighttime raid on the Palestinian city of Ramallah has highlighted Israeli officials new tactic: using immigration police to try to deport foreign supporters of the Palestinian cause. Human rights lawyers say Israel’s new offensive is intended to undermine a joint non-violent struggle by international activists and Palestinian villagers challenging a land grab by Israel as it builds the separation wall on farmland in the West Bank.[[84]](#footnote-84) Another recent victim of the Israeli policy was Eva Novakova, recently appointed the ISM’s media coordinator who was accused of overstaying her visa and was deported before she could appeal to the courts. Human rights lawyers say such actions are illegal. Omer Shatz, the lawyer representing Ms Marti and Ms Chappell, said a military operation into an area like Ramallah could not be justified to round up activists with expired visas. “The activists are not breaking any laws in Ramallah,” he said. “The army and immigration police are effectively criminalizing them by bringing them into Israel, where they need such a visa.” Israel’s control over all of Palestine’s borders, and its frequent violations and/or complete noncompliance to previously agreed upon treaties – mainly the Oslo Accords which designate the area of Ramallah as Area A and thus completely under the Palestinian Authority control[[85]](#footnote-85) – renders clear discussion on such issues impossible.

In addition to restricting freedom of movement of international activists, Israel has also begun imposing further restrictions on the movement of dissident Israelis. The Israeli military has attempted to prevent Israeli activists from entering the West Bank to participate in anti-occupation demonstrations. The most recent development is the IDF’s blanket decree forbidding certain cars belonging to known Israeli activists from entering the West Bank on Fridays, regardless of who is actually in them, where they are heading or the purpose of their trip.[[86]](#footnote-86) The IDF compiled a document entitled “Data of vehicles used by left-wing Israeli activists and anarchists to reach demonstrations in Ni’ilin and Bil’in”, listing the registration number of eleven vehicles.[[87]](#footnote-87) With this list, the IDF prevents any listed vehicles from crossing the Rantis checkpoint, necessary in order to reach the demonstration villages. Israelis prevented from attending noted that, “they are not surprised the army is taking yet another step against them; the army has recently been investing a great deal of intelligence effort in preventing us from demonstrating”.

Efforts by the Israeli administration to incite violence are harder to measure, although many academics and politicians do argue that they are a often used tool of the state. Despite vehement protestations that the Israeli government desires peace in Israel/Palestine, and it is only the lack of a partner in peace that is preventing any agreement from being laid out, the state has undertaken actions during the last thirty years that raise questions as to their sincerity. One act that has been criticized as patent incitement by both Palestinians and Western academics and politicians alike is the 2000 al-Aqsa Mosque visit by Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon. Many interpreted this act as a public desecration of Islam as a whole, and the Arab world reacted with rage. The Palestinian response was quick: violence erupted, and the Second *Intifada* was born. Whether this was merely the last straw in a string of offensive Israeli measures against the already oppressed Palestinian people or if it was the deciding factor that led to the outbreak of protests and riots in the West Bank is not clear; nonetheless, the sheer audacity of Sharon’s visit – the implications of such an act were easily predicted – cannot be ignored. It will be future acts of this nature that pose the greatest threat to the future of the slowly growing nonviolent resistance movement.

Most recently, it has been argued that Israel has gone out of its way in recent months to goad Palestinians into violent confrontation, most clearly with the naming of two places deep in the West Bank as ‘Israeli Heritage Sites’. The sites of Cave of the Patriarchs (the Ibrahimi Mosque) and Rachel’s Tomb are claimed to be holy sites by both Israelis and Palestinians, and the designation as heritage sites, a public claim to effecting sole control over the area, is not only extremely controversial, but detrimental to peace process. Days of protests followed this declaration. The Ibrahimi Mosque was also the site of a terrorist attack by Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein in 1994, during which 29 unarmed Palestinian Muslim worshippers were murdered. If the Israeli government was committed to establishing peace in the region, actions could have been pushed off to a later date or presented in a less antagonistic manner so as to avoid appearing as nothing but measures of incitement. Rather than attempting to dissolve tensions by tacitly acknowledging that Muslims, Christians, and Jews (and thus Palestinians and Israelis) hold many of the same sites sacred in their religion and culture, and thus may have to ultimately share jurisdiction over them, the government has themselves fanned the flames as well as openly allow radical Jews to do the same within Israel/Palestine.

Israel has also lately increased their presence and focus on the area of al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, the third holiest site in Islam that is physically inseparable from the Temple Mount, a sacred site to Judaism. This site inspires passion in both Jews and Muslims, and both the PA and the Israeli government must tread carefully to avoid inflaming the constituents of the other. Lately, however, the Israeli government has ceased any attempts to pretend to be concerned with any future political compromise. In addition to repeatedly deploying soldiers around the compound, Israel has announced that it will expand the Jewish prayer area at the Western Wall, despite a Jerusalem court's decision that such a move would violate the status quo agreement that has governed Jerusalem's holy sites since Israel seized the Old City in the June 1967 War.[[88]](#footnote-88) Such actions lend themselves to easy misinterpretation (or correct interpretation) by more radical Palestinians and Israelis as declarations of war against the religion or group as a whole, in which violence would be the inevitable, tragic outcome. Such acts of incitement could spell the nonviolent resistance movements doom if Israel continues to behave provocatively, for it may prove impossible to prevent violence from breaking out if members see the other as desecrating their religion.

Such acts have not gone completely unreported. Non-Western press, as well as non-mainstream press in the West has been focused on these and other provocative actions in the recent months. As the Electronic Intifada published, a further escalation was the reopening of the "Hurva," a Jewish synagogue just a few hundred meters from the al-Aqsa Mosque. With growing numbers of Jewish fundamentalists insisting that they be allowed to pray inside the Haram al-Sharif, many of whom advocate demolishing the al-Aqsa Mosque and building a third Jewish temple in its place, the reopening was universally condemned in the Muslim and Arab world. It was also reported in Israeli press that according to a 300-year-old rabbinical prophecy, the reopening of the synagogue foretold the construction of the third temple in the place now occupied by the al-Aqsa Mosque. Yet when Palestinian leaders called for a "day of rage" in response to these provocations, the US sharply criticized them for overreacting. Weeks later when Israel opened another synagogue in East Jerusalem 100 meters closer to the Haram, Washington was silent.[[89]](#footnote-89) Rather than attempting to avoid increasing the already palpable tension and rage among the Palestinians and handle a difficult political situation sensitively, the Israeli government is publically staking their claim to all Palestinian lands they desire, despite any future political repercussions, and the international community remains unresponsive.

Other more controversial methods to quell the nonviolent resistance movement on a smaller scale include the use of force against unarmed protestors. The villages of Bil’in and Ni’lin serve as contemporary case studies of clashes between the Israeli military and Palestinian, Israeli, and international activists during ‘non-violent’ peace marches. As Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Mairead Maguire can personally testify, the marches from these villages encompass the physical marching of activists attempting to breach the Apartheid Wall and culminate with the IDF physically forcing them to retreat.[[90]](#footnote-90)

“I was invited with my friend to attend a nonviolent conference in Bil’in. Afterwards we were invited to participate in a nonviolent demonstration with some of the Palestinian members of parliament, Israeli peace activists and local villagers and several hundred international peace activists from over twenty countries. We walked along to try to walk up toward the separation wall, and it was a totally nonviolent protest. We were viciously attacked by the Israeli military. They threw gas canisters into the peace walkers, and they also fired rubber-covered steel bullets. As I tried to move back and helping a French lady, I was shot in the leg with a rubber-covered steel bullet, and the young Israeli soldier who shot me was only twenty meters from me. I was stunned by it, and then later on, after having some treatment by the ambulance medics, I went back down to the front line with the peace activists, and we were again showered with gas. I was overcome and had a severe nosebleed and had to be taken by stretcher to the ambulance and treated. And I witnessed there a Palestinian woman, maybe around in her sixties, and an old Palestinian man with blood on his face. These were over twenty-five unarmed peace people who had been viciously attacked by the Israeli military. And it was a completely peaceful protest. It was absolutely unbelievable. I never in all my years of activism witnessed anything so vicious as from the Israeli military.”[[91]](#footnote-91)

This is not a unique case. For the past five years, protests undertaken every Friday in Bil’in and Ni’lin have been met with the same brutal tactics: sound bombs, water cannons, tear-gas, rubber bullets, and even live ammunition have been the IDF’s response to unarmed protestors advocating for the return of their land and freedom. According to Israeli and international law, strict regulations must be followed when such military weapons are utilized (except for the last, which should not be utilized except in the most extreme circumstances). These regulations have been repeatedly ignored when the military is faced with nonviolent protests. Tear gas canisters and rubber bullets are fired at protestors at close range, well within the forty-meter distance prescribed by international law when utilizing such weapons

The International Solidarity Movement has been working closely with a number of local Palestinian popular committees in organizing weekly demonstrations against Israel’s theft of Palestinian land under cover of the building of the wall. In one incident that threatened to embarrass Israel in international press, Tristan Anderson, 38, an American ISM member, was left brain-damaged last March after a soldier fired a tear-gas canister at his head during a demonstration against the wall in the Palestinian village of Ni’lin.[[92]](#footnote-92)

An even more alarming development concerns Israel’s use of live ammunition to break up peaceful protests. The Israeli army recently resumed the use of 22 caliber sniper fire for dispersing demonstrations, though use of the weapon for crowd control purposes was specifically forbidden in 2001 by the Israeli army's legal arm. Following the killing of unarmed demonstrator Aqel Srour in Ni'lin last June, Brigadier General Avichai Mandelblit, the Israeli army's Judge Advocate General, reiterated the ban on the use of .22 caliber bullets against demonstrators, to no effect. In addition to Srour, since the beginning of 2009, 28 unarmed demonstrators were injured by live ammunition sniper fire in Ni'ilin alone*.*[[93]](#footnote-93)

One recent example took place in the aftermath of the Iraq Burin demonstration against land confiscation by Israeli settlers supported by the IDF discussed previously. In an attempt to quell this protest and prevent any future activity, Border Police jeeps invaded the village of Iraq Barin shortly after the demonstration, arresting three people and raiding multiple houses. It was that this time that, according to the demonstrators, live shots were fired at a small group of young men, some of which were throwing stones. Palestinian and international news reported, “Mohammed Ibrahim Qaddous, 16, was shot dead with live ammunition when a Border Police force raided his village of Iraq Burin near Nablus to quash a demonstration this afternoon, at which time another 16 year old was shot in the head and critically injured” as well.[[94]](#footnote-94) That the former was killed by a shot in the back [as he faced away from the IDF] raises questions as to the level of threat he could have possibly posed at the time of the illegal shooting.

In the face of improbable steadfastness and commitment to nonviolent protests - when even brute force, interrogating and detention of demonstration leaders and later of children, and of repeated attempts to incite violent riots did not stop the weekly protests, and the international community began to pay attention – Israel resorted to a blanket military order, designating Bil’in and Ni’lin and other main focal points of protests as ‘closed military zones’. This designation makes any mass gathering involving non-locals immediately illegal. The Israeli Central Command himself, Avi Mizrahi, signed the decree designating the land between the Apartheid Wall and the villages of Bil’in and Ni’ilin closed military zones between 8 AM and 8 PM every Friday for a six-month period.[[95]](#footnote-95) Such an attempt to cut off local Palestinian activists from Israeli and International support smacks of desperation. This order was put in place as of March 2010, and remains in place; despite this additional burden, however, the weekly protests continue to take place with both local participants and their diverse brothers and sisters in solidarity.

As the weekly report from the week of April 16, 2010, testifies:

“The weekly nonviolent protest started by holding the Friday noon prayer on the lands close to the wall. As protesters marched towards the wall, Israeli troops showered them with tear gas and rubber coated steel bullets. Some youth responded by throwing rocks at the soldiers. A number of protestors chocked as they inhaled the tear gas and were treated by field medics. The protesters demanded the release of all prisoners from Israeli jails. The residents of Ni'lin have been defying an Israel ban to demonstrate for the fourth week in a row. A month ago, Israeli authorities declared the village a closed military zone to prevent international and Israeli supporters to come to the village.”[[96]](#footnote-96)

The continued commitment of local Palestinians and their activist partners to nonviolent resistance in the face of abuses by the Israeli army in compliance with Israeli government wishes is astonishing.

*Looking Forward*

After examining the current major sites of nonviolent resistance tactics by Palestinian activists in solidarity with Israelis and internationals, it is clear that although other Palestinian villages are increasingly following Bil’in’s lead, it remains to be seen whether this kernel of nonviolence will grow into a full-fledged movement.[[97]](#footnote-97) The sites that are currently utilizing nonviolent tactics appear commitment to their path, at least for the near future. As with many other aspects of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, the issue of using force against civilians is a murky topic. Unarmed typically connotes civilians without weapons, but as the IDF and the Israeli-interest driven press repeatedly insists, Palestinians are frequently guilty of throwing stones. Israel’s increasingly brutal response to nonviolent demonstrations has caused alarm both internationally and within Israel itself, assisting the project to reframe the conflict as that of the oppressed attempting to break free from the yoke of a powerful oppressor, rather than the stereotypical Western assumption that Palestinians are merely terrorists attempting to wipe Israel off the map. Israel’s escalating crackdown suggests that the movement is not only already considered a threat to Israel’s apartheid-style rule, but also has the potential to develop into something more important.[[98]](#footnote-98) Nonviolent resistance to Israeli Occupation in the West Bank is not yet a unified movement, nor is it taking place in the same manner in every village, if it is taking place at all. Many Palestinians are still leery of embracing nonviolence as their single tactic, having seen in the first two *intifadas* how ineffective a strategy it may be.

An interview with Jonathan Cook, a Nazareth based journalist who writes extensively on the Middle East and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, sheds insight into the potential the nonviolent resistance movement has if Israel continues to withhold Palestinians freedom from oppression and illegal occupation.

“The media often represent this as a battle between young hot-headed Palestinian stone-throwers and over-excited Israeli soldiers. That's largely a fiction. On the Palestinian side are to be found a cross-section of the resisting community, including its leaders and many middle-aged villagers who have families to support. It takes a great deal of bravery to stand off regularly against heavily armed Israeli teenagers, a significant number of them Jewish religious fanatics raised to believe they are fighting a holy war and many of the others raised to believe that the "Arabs" are a primitive, barbaric people.

As for the question of effectiveness, the answer is that the protests have undoubtedly been successful. The naked violence that Israel is forced to unleash against the protesters, and the subsequent raids to arrest the protest organizers, indicate just how much of a concern they are to Israel. In the case of Bil’in and elsewhere the protests have successfully led to a change in the route of the wall that has restored to the villages some of their desperately needed farmland. The protests are also an important way for ordinary Palestinians to feel they have some agency in the conflict, both against Israel and in forcing a different agenda on to their corrupt national leadership. If Israel deepens its apartheid rule in the West Bank, such campaigns of civil resistance are almost certainly the face of the future.”[[99]](#footnote-99)

The increasing Israeli and international participation in nonviolent demonstrations in solidarity with Palestinians speaks to the increasing awareness of the reality of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict that biased media has attempted to hide. Internal dissent within Israel’s Jewish population as to how Israel’s treatment of Palestinians fits in with the espoused national story, and furthermore, with the shared moral guidelines of Judaism and humanism, will ultimately assist the Palestinian’s desire, and right, to freedom. Israel’s continued behavior is tragically reminiscent of a colonizer’s attempt to subdue or forestall the inevitable national rebellion from materializing by sheer force or arms against unarmed civilians and media control for international public relations. That the colonial period is over should bear no mentioning, and yet that appears to be the most accurate description of the current status quo within the West Bank and Gaza.

Despite the apparent strength of the movement and its advocate’s commitment to nonviolence, there are no guarantees that this will not change. In the near future Israeli government will come to a moral and political crossroads, and be forced to make a choice: continue to allow nonviolent demonstrations to take place and risk an international public relations disaster, or crush the movement once and for all by whatever means necessary. Unfortunately it would appear that the current administration is leaning towards the latter, unwilling to give up control of the West Bank and Gaza to allow the creation of a Palestinian neighboring state. And while activists are willing to risk bodily harm for their principles while the threat of actual death is low, increasing Israeli brutality may change this. Much of the safety of participants is insured by international surveillance. If Israel decides that the movement must be crushed at all costs, the price tag may become too high for activists to risk participating, no matter how strong their principles. 18 activists have died in anti-wall protests in the West Bank to date; if the IDF decides that one mass killing will end the movement, it is always possible that it will risk seeing how far their stranglehold on Western media extends. And indeed if the suppression of the Goldstone Report as well as the brutal killing of Rachel Corrie is any indication, Israel and its network of friends may in fact succeed.

The future of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is unpredictable, and is very much effected by its geopolitical context. Whether this ‘third intifada’ will ultimately succeed where the previous two have failed, if Palestinians will remain committed to nonviolence to achieve their goals and thus sway the international community in their favor, is anyone’s guess. For peace-loving Palestinian activists, however, their path is clear: remain committed to nonviolent resistance, encourage other Palestinians to join, use modern age technology to break the media stranglehold and hope that this is enough to spark a fire that will awake the world to the immoral and illegal Israeli Occupation and lead Palestinians to freedom.

In an op-ed article in *The Nation*, Mohammed Khattib of Bil’in echoes these sentiments and calls out for the world to take note.

“Several months ago we were warned by Israel's occupation forces that they intended to crush the popular struggle. Why has the Israeli government decided now to increase the suppression of demonstrations and to break the spirit of protest leaders? Maybe because they realize that the nonviolent struggle is spreading, that more and more villages have created popular committees that are organizing demonstrations. Perhaps the crackdown is a result of their concern and the growing international movement for the boycott of companies and businessmen such as Lev Leviev who are involved in Israel's land grab. Or maybe they fear that the new American government could learn through our demonstrations that Israel's wall is a means to annex land for the growing settlements, and that nonviolent Palestinian protests are being brutally suppressed. Israel's actions suggest that it is intimidated by people struggling for their rights in a nonviolent manner. The Israeli government seems to believe that Palestinians who struggle while partnering with Israeli activists endanger Israel's occupation and that tearing down human walls is a dangerous act. Perhaps what the state of Israel fears most of all is the hope that people can live together based on justice and equality for all.[[100]](#footnote-100)

In order to allow the Palestinians to speak for themselves, the only respectful and empowering conclusion is this: Let their voices be magnified, and heard.

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