

An account of Palestinian popular struggle for freedom

Palestinian Prof. Qumsiyeh: It's beyond occupation, let's call it colonization

By Mohammad Memarian*

Mazin Qumsiyeh, born in 1957 in Beit Sahour, Palestine, received his Ph.D. in Zoology/Genetics from Texas Tech University in 1986. Along with his academic career, he has also been an outspoken supporter of Palestinian resistance. His contribution to the Palestinian cause reached a wider global audience in 2004 when Pluto Press published his *Sharing the Land of Canaan: Human Rights and the Israeli-Palestinian Struggle*. And after serving on the faculties of the Universities of Tennessee, Duke, and Yale for some years, he and his wife returned to Palestine in 2008. He currently lives in Bethlehem. In an exclusive interview with *Iran Daily*, he explained his views regarding the current conditions and prospects of Palestinians.

I hope you are fine, Mr. Qumsiyeh.

Alhamdulillah [praise be to God].

As this is my first time speaking directly to a Palestinian living in Palestine, let me ask you this: How is life treating you generally?

It's a tough life as we are dealing with a wicked enemy who tries to make our lives miserable.

Has it succeeded?

Not enough to achieve its goal.

Which is?

Making a land without people by ethnic cleansing of Palestinians.

I'd like to know a little more about you. What's your job?

I founded and volunteer in the Palestine Institute for Biodiversity & Sustainability in Bethlehem, and the Palestine Museum of Natural History which I manage with my wife full time.

I assume "unemployed" is a condition many Palestinians share with you.

I'm unemployed by choice, but that's essentially true.

Why by choice?

To do a work worth doing for the sake of our cause, which is a form of resistance. I have dedicated myself to it, working 16-17 hours a day, seven days a week unpaid.

How does your work contribute to resistance?

Let me make it as simple as it can be. Merely being here as a Palestinian, even if one does nothing else, is pure resistance. Being born here, marrying, eating and drinking, sleeping, breathing, teaching our children, all are forms of resistance against an enemy determined to empty out our land.

However, you managed to become a public figure of sorts for the Palestinian resistance. How did it begin?

I was born here and that fact alone suffices for the Israelis to consider you a resister. I started my active resistance when I was twelve years old, more than fifty years ago.

I mostly meant your books which, as I gathered in my searches, many people liked.

Many hated them as well! But that's something you should expect if you do something mean-

ingful. A meaningful act invites support as well as rejection, criticism as well as praise. The point is that, one should believe in something fair, and then act upon it, no matter the consequences.

In terms of negative reactions, you mean public criticisms or things like that?

That, as well as official harassment. Several governments targeted me with harassment and questioning during my travels. I was detained many times by the Israeli government. The US government has put me on some sort of black list for travel. Even Jordan and the Palestinian authority questioned me for my activities.

Back to the meaningful act, what meaning do you intend your books, writings, and speeches to convey?

I just want humans to obey their conscience and respect human rights, justice, and equality for all. We, Palestinians, need the world to understand that colonizers shouldn't be allowed to steal our land and abuse our loved ones. That's simply a matter of conscience; when you look at the mirror, you should be able to tell yourself that you're not colluding with the devil. This collusion is widespread, and more than often unwittingly, by seemingly benign gestures such as neutrality or impartiality.

As Howard Zinn said, "You



Mazin Qumsiyeh

can't be neutral on a moving train". I don't think anyone, in clear conscience, can be neutral toward a regime that shoots civilians, has killed more than 100,000 and injured 800,000 since 1948, most of whom were not engaged in anything other than merely being Palestinians, which, of course, by Israeli definition, equals being a terrorist. I don't think anyone, in clear conscience, can be neutral toward a regime who has put one million Palestinians in jail, out of our total population of some 13 million, many of whom are underage. And for that matter, it's a regime that allows minors as young as 12 years old, to be jailed. I suspect that even North Korea doesn't allow that.

You've had the opportunity to live in other countries, right?

Yes, I had the opportunity. I am a citizen of the United States, where I was educated and worked for 25 years. I left it in 2008 to move back to Palestine.

Why?

I considered that at that time I would be more useful to the cause at home than abroad.

How useful – if I may ask?

You know, in the US I had to get out of my way to contribute to the Palestinian resistance and cause. Here, everything I do contributes: Buying things, eating and even



A protester holds a flag of Palestine during the demonstration near the fence in Gaza, Palestine, on August 25, 2021.

sleeping is a contribution to the cause as it hold off colonialism.

Do you imagine a future when you and your fellow compatriots are freed from occupation?

Let me correct you right there. It's not merely occupation, it should be properly called colonization. There are many instances of military occupation in history,

military might. Take a look at the plans they conceived in 1919. They wanted all of Palestine, one-third of Lebanon, one-third of Jordan, as well as parts of Syria and Egypt's Sinai. Now consider what they have achieved in terms of their territorial conquests. And even in the territories under their current control, even among the Jews themselves, not everyone

Given all the differences, then, what is the best strategy to fight against the "colonization" you mentioned?

The best strategy is simply to resist. The point is that, in such a situation, when someone invades your home to make it their own, you don't get much of a choice. And it's very natural. Against a beast, you can't devise a grand

strategy. You just want to survive. The Palestinians just want to survive and live the way they lived for thousands of years.

However, there are different modes of resistance: Militarized, armed, popular (which might be somehow violent but not exactly armed), or absolute non-violence exemplified by Gandhi.

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supports the expansionist, monolithic aspirations of Zionism. I can fairly, yet firmly, say that 70 percent of the population under their sovereignty are against Zionism. How long can you maintain a minority's control over the majority? And they no longer can commit genocide on the scale of things they perpetrated in the 1940s, even though things they do today is no less horrible, such as the blockade of Gaza.

But I assume it's not a simple matter of majority vis-à-vis minority.

Of course not. Like every other instance of apartheid, Israel has created a tier system of social rankings which comprises a dozen classes of people. At the top of the pyramid, as one might call it, are Ashkenazi Jews (of European origin). Then come Sephardi Jews, Mizrahi Jews, and other intra-groupings of them. Then we have several classes of Palestinians with the Gazans, at the bottom of the pyramid, who are literally dying in an open air prison. That's what an apartheid system does: Making different systems of discrimination based on background. In terms of maintaining a caste system as such, Israel is the world record holder, with perhaps Saudi Arabia as runner-up with their system of royal family vs. common subjects, though much far behind Israel, maybe not even comparable.

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The Church of Nativity in Bethlehem, the biblical birthplace of Jesus, is a major pilgrim destination for Christians of various denominations.

many countries, Iran included.

Why do you say invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan were "Israeli wars"?

Because they thought it was beneficial for Israel and did it on behalf of Israel. The Project for New American Century & neo-conservative think tanks in Washington D.C., called for regime change in Iraq in the 1990s and explained that it would be good for Israel. And the US used the excuse of 9-11 to attack those countries.

But how was it beneficial for Israel?

They thought it would create puppet regimes like in the UAE and Saudi Arabia. But it didn't turn out exactly as they wished. The outcome in Iraq was even worse for them than the outcome in Afghanistan. Yes, Saddam is gone, but many in Iraq's government, military, militia, and public are strongly anti-Zionist. So it happened to be against their prediction.

Why did it not happen the way they wished?

The main reason behind their miscalculation was the fact that they underestimated the power of people, pretty much the same way they underestimated the power of Palestinian tenacity to stick to their land despite incredible odds and against threats of ethnic cleansing.

As for your Iranian audience, what's the most significant point you want to make?

First, people need to understand why Palestine is important. Palestine is the Achilles' heel of Western hypocrisy. President Biden talks about human rights while sending billions of dollars' worth of weapons and ammunition to Israel which it uses to commit war crimes and crimes against humanity; to kill, harass, and otherwise terrorize Palestinians.

Secondly, very few make obscenely huge profits out of outrageously inhumane situations of war, racism, and colonialism while the majority of people pay the price. Forget about us being Palestinian and you being Iranian; forget about false dichotomies, Palestinian vs. non-Palestinian, Sunni vs. Shia, Jewish vs. non-Jewish. Oppose those few profiteers who profit from pitting people against each other. In other words oppose imperialism, racism, Zionism.

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