**Existential questions for Palestinians**

[Dr Saulat Nagi](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/dr-saulat-nagi/%22%20%5Co%20%22More%20Articles%20by%20Dr%20Saulat%20Nagi)

June 17, 2021

Devastated, destroyed, disillusioned, and desolated by Zion-imperialism, the Palestinians are once again standing at the crossroads of history. Stranded in the political wilderness, ditched by the Arabs, forgotten by the ‘civilised’ West — the Palestinians need to reflect on the effectiveness of the arrows in their own armoury, which, unfortunately, are few and far between.

The barbaric cycle of Israeli violence, especially the most recent, has brought several simmering issues to the fore. The question of what is to be done, which haunted Lenin, has come back to haunt them. Keeping in view the reactionary docility of the Palestinian ruling class — comprising the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation) and Hamas — this is the time for the younger generation to introspect.

Like any other bourgeoisie, the PA (Palestinian Authority) — which is viewed by British historian and activist Tariq Ali as little more than a joint Israeli-US co-production — is not only incompetent but also corrupt to the core. Having no independent authority in the West Bank, it has become nothing more than the gatekeeper of Zionism. The clairvoyance of Palestinian-American intellectual Edward Said and Palestinian poet and author Mahmoud Darwish had foreseen everything. They condemned the Oslo Accords as the Treaty of Versailles for Palestine; that is, a meek capitulation to western imperialism that had deferred, if not denied, the possibility of Palestinian liberation.

Ironically, Hamas — a Palestinian offshoot of the Muslim-Brotherhood — was originally wooed by Israel when it went by the name of Mujama al-Islamiya. Then, under the leadership of Sheikh Yassin, it was enabled in order to counter the secular PLO, dominated by Yasser Arafat’s Fatah party. Indeed, Hamas today claims to speak for the majority of the Palestinians. But being a political spokesperson and being the political representative of the people and safeguarding their socio-economic interests are two distinct things. Despite donning a different hat to the PLO — Hamas’ economic outlook is identical to that of its adversary.

Ironically, Hamas was originally wooed by Israel when it went by the name of Mujama al-Islamiya. Then, under the leadership of Sheikh Yassin, it was enabled in order to counter the secular PLO, dominated by Yasser Arafat’s Fatah party

In the aftermath of the First World War, the Wafd organised itself into a nationalist political party in Egypt and contested and won general elections in 1924; while calling for internal autonomy, constitutional government liming the powers of the monarchy, civilian rights and Egyptian control of both Sudan an the Suez Canal. Naturally, this bold anti-imperialist stance did not go down well with the British, the monarchy and the feudals. They responded by dismissing the Wafdist government and installed Ismail Sidky; an authoritarian but a loyal premier. Writing in Socialist magazine The Monthly Review back in 2011, the Egyptian-French political scientist Samir Amin explains: “It was not by chance that, to counter this [anti-imperialist] threat, the British Embassy and the Royal Palace actively supported the formation in 1927 of the Muslim Brotherhood, inspired by ‘Islamist’ thought in its most backward ‘Salafist’ version of Wahhabism as formulated by Rachid Reda—the most reactionary version, antidemocratic and against social progress, of the newborn ‘political Islam’.”

In 1936, the Wafd staged a comeback and with the entry of the Communist Party and student movements in the political arena, the simmering anti-imperialist struggle blossomed in 1946. Once again, the Brotherhood came to the rescue of the British. Wafd was shown the door again and the Sidky experiment was tried once more but the revolutionary tide was too strong to be stemmed. The 1950 elections brought the Wafd to power for the third time and it immediately revoked the Anglo-Egypt treaty and started a guerrilla movement to liberate the Suez Canal from British control. The effort was stymied by burning the city of Cairo with the Brotherhood cast in the role of accomplice.

Formed by Hassan-al-Banna in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood remains a conservative organisation which aims to spread political Islam through charity. While firmly believing in the property structure — it opposes western cultural influence, gender equality, and secularism and follows the Gramscian doctrine of creating hegemony through consent, winning hearts and minds through a passive revolution by offering material help to the downtrodden. Historically, the other movements of a similar kind are India’s RSS (1925), Pakistan’s Jamaat-e-Islami , JI (1941), and Turkey’s Justice and Development Party (1983). JI founder Abul A’la Maududi idealised Hitler and Mussolini and one of his followers, Sayyid Qutb of the Brotherhood – who conspired against Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and was hanged – is still known as ‘father of Salafi Jihadism’’.

Political Islam manifests the depoliticisation of the Muslims by their states. Dominated by dictators, religious parties insinuated among the masses through charity. In the absence of Communist parties — banned by totalitarian regimes as antagonists to socialism — the religious parties backed by the ruling classes and the West find an open field to garner support among the people. The structure of the Brotherhood is hierarchal and undemocratic. Subservience to God and the leader are considered divine law.

Once Nasser departed from the political scene, the deviation to the neo-liberal economic order under Anwar Sadat and later Hosni Mubarak excelled. Before yielding to Israeli-US hegemony, Sadat, needing the support of the religious right, integrated Brotherhood into the power structure. The latter was given control of education, the courts, and the media. As Samir Amin puts it, the “sole permitted public speech was that of the Salafist mosques, allowing the Islamists to boot, to pretend to make up the opposition’’. The phenomenon was repeated in Pakistan where the Zia regime doled out power to the Jamaat and the US, siding with the arrangement, helped destroy the capability of the people of Egypt and Pakistan to confront the challenges of the modern scientific world. All of which underscores that religious organisations can only grab power with state-backed manipulation. History repeated itself in post-Mubarak elections when Mohamed Morsi, during the second round, became the joint candidate of Egypt’s military, bourgeoisie, and Islamists.

The Brotherhood in Egypt under Morsi fully cooperated with Israel. It destroyed tunnels leading to Gaza that provided the economic lifeline to the people there. Hamas, on the other hand, refuses to recognise Israel. This is a contradiction that cannot be bridged unless one understands the logic of Hamas’ existence. The Palestinians living in occupied Jerusalem, mostly without citizenry rights, are ruled by the Zionist state of Israel. And, as such, suffer direct oppression compared to those living in the West Bank and Gaza. When the eviction of those living in Sheikh Jarrah began, local residents protested peacefully and when this gained momentum, Hamas launched rocket attacks knowing full well that a disproportionate Israeli response would ensue; where Netanyahu was floundering in hot water both electorally and legally.

The barbaric response caused carnage. The indiscriminate slaughter of the people of Gaza continued for eleven days and once the destructive instinct of western imperialism — that wanted to teach innocent Palestinians a lesson — was gratified, only then did the ceasefire come into effect. What was the point of launching an attack on Israel? Zvi Ber’el, writing in the Israeli daily, Haaretz, back in May of this year, explains that Hamas remains an Israeli asset, in much the same way that Hezbollah is for Iran. Hamas’ existence, therefore, “guarantees that Israel won’t be dragged into a renewed occupation of Gaza. This saves the costs of day-to-day management, the direct responsibility for providing public services, and especially, it halts any plan for an Israeli withdrawal from the territories as part of a peace agreement, if Hamas adheres to its principles of nonrecognition of Israel and an armed struggle against it”.

If Zvi Ber’el is right, the only alternative for the younger generation of Palestinians is to reject the ruling class and lead itself, marching alongside the people of the world, towards fullest emancipation.

*The writer, an academic has authored books on socialism and history. He can be reached at saulatnagi@hotmail.com*