

Palestinian Non-Violent Resistance

and the Apartheid Analogy: Framing Israeli Policy in the 1960s and 1970s

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Abstract

Israel/Palestine is a context in which the term *apartheid* keeps reappearing. As a historical analogy and cultural shorthand, it functions as a powerful Palestinian weapon when used to describe Israeli policy and actions in what amounts to a battle of narratives in the international arena. For a long time, Palestinians have been known solely for their violent struggle but using loaded vocabulary to depict their lives and experiences under Israeli control is more than just using a certain word, it is a strategic choice. The earliest uses of the apartheid analogy have long been placed in the 1970s, but evidence of its use can already be found before the United Nation's General Assembly (UNGA) declared apartheid a crime in 1973. The first instances happened simultaneously with the development of the organized Palestinian national movement in the 1960s.

Focusing on Fayez Sayegh (1922-1980), an academic and UN special rapporteur to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, I argue that such historical analogies need to be read as a non-violent tactic of resistance within the Palestinian struggle. Sayegh was almost singlehandedly responsible for introducing the apartheid analogy at the United Nations--my primary contextual interest. His analyses of racial segregation, however, were thoroughly countered, making his engagement for Palestine seem like a failure (Feldman 2015: 18). And yet, his early attempts to bring the apartheid analogy into wide circulation along with the increasingly more complicated situation on the ground show results: Today, the term has become common usage in describing Israel and puts enormous pressure on the country. The spread of the apartheid analogy shows that non-violent forms of Palestinian resistance, which in the 1960s and 1970s were almost invisible internationally, long existed.

Keywords

Apartheid, Israel/Palestine, Palestinian non-violent resistance, Fayez Sayegh, United Nations, battle of narratives

Introduction

As soon as Donald Trump’s “Peace to Prosperity” plan was unveiled in January 2020, the term *apartheid* re-entered discussions for what the Americans presented as their vision for peace in the Middle East: a demilitarised Palestinian state with no territorial contiguity, alongside a much more powerful Israeli one in control of movement, borders, security, and natural resources. Louise Bethlehem, a scholar of the transnational movements of the signifier “apartheid,” which she understands as both “a word and an idea” (2018: 47),¹ argues that one of its main characteristics is “restlessness” (2018: 48) since “the possibility of refraction or reinscription endures beyond the [South Africa] apartheid regime” (2018: 50). Israel/Palestine serves as a compelling example of such reinscriptions. While analyses of Trump’s proposed plan as well as the aptness of calling on South African apartheid as a comparative device continue what is evident in the heatedness of the debates is that using this specific term to describe Palestinian lives speaks to the power of apartheid as a metaphor that has taken root far beyond its original historical context. Bethlehem suggests that “apartheid moves things”—including the Afrikaans neologism itself (2018: 50). In this article, I will show that Palestinians have long understood this fact and have used the term for decades as an element in their national struggle.²

¹ Bethlehem builds her understanding on Saul Dubow’s argument that “the word itself condensed a powerful set of fears and hopes” (2014: x).

² This struggle has three phases: a) from 1882 to 1948; b) from 1948-1967; c) from 1967 until this day. The first phase, which included the Great Arab Revolt 1936-39, was dominated by the struggle against the British Mandate and the increasing Zionist immigration and its national endeavors. The second phase, which started with the Nakba, the destruction of Historical Palestine and the dispersion of around 750,000 Palestinians, was primarily a situation of finding one’s feet in exile or while living under Israeli or Jordanian control. In the 1960s an organized national movement developed. From 1967 onwards, the main focus of the struggle became the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories.

For a long time, Palestinians were primarily known for their armed fight against Israel, an image their opponents like to uphold so that the world continues to imagine Palestinians as terrorists. This perception – and the reality of the violent Palestinian struggle (Alexander 2003, Sayigh 1997) – has been powerfully introduced in the international arena in the 1960s and 1970s, with the 1964 founding of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) under Yasser Arafat (Becker 2014, Nassar 1991). At the same time, however, there have also always been attempts to struggle non-violently for the Palestinian homeland, and, more than anything, against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian Territories (Norman 2010, Pearlman 2011, Qumsiyeh 2010). Today, BDS, the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement, which was initiated by Palestinian civil society in 2005 and inspired by the fight against South African apartheid, has grown into a global campaign, generating continuously increasing attention for the Palestine question.

One central aim in the Palestinian struggle is creating awareness and support for their cause. Using loaded terms to describe Israeli policies in the West Bank and Gaza is a common strategy employed when addressing international audiences, especially in recent years. I understand this tactic as a non-violent strategy of resistance. In this context, words and the collective memories and narratives that they draw on function as a cultural shorthand in the struggle for hearts and minds around the world.

Apartheid is a particularly powerful signifier to describe Israeli policy and actions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories – and sometimes within the 1948 borders – that likens Israel to South Africa and its policy of racial segregation and the application of different laws for different groups of people living side by side. Being seen as similar or even equal to the South African regime is a problem for Israel, which from the very beginning forcefully combated this historical analogy in public relations campaigns (Poggrund 2014). Despite these efforts, however, the use of the apartheid analogy has grown enormously and today, it is frequently wielded by pro-Palestine activists, for instance in ‘apartheid weeks’ on university

campuses. The term also provides the discursive origins for the BDS movement, currently the most successful element of the non-violent Palestinian struggle. However, the apartheid analogy is not just a particularly sharp object in the toolkit of activists, it has appeared in many contexts, such as former US president Jimmy Carter's 2006 book *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*. In March 2017, a UN report then found Israel to be an "apartheid State" (Falk and Tilley 2017). This finding was later retracted because of Israeli and U.S. pressure.

Though the research places the beginnings of the apartheid analogy for the Israeli context in the 1970s (Soske and Jacobs 2015: 2, Ellis 2019: 2), some evidence can be found already before the United Nation's General Assembly (UNGA) declared apartheid a crime in 1973.³ Interestingly, the first instances happened simultaneously with the development of the organized Palestinian struggle for the homeland, which, as shown above, was primarily dedicated to a violent overthrow of what many identify as a settler colonial context (see e.g. Massad 2006; Veracini 2006; Yuval-Davis and Stasiulis 1999; Wolfe 2006). In this article, I will read the use of the apartheid historical analogy as one element of the struggle for international recognition for the Palestinian situation against an Israel which has long made a well-organized effort to provide the world with the country's perspective of the situation. Exploring early Palestinian uses of the term apartheid primarily at the UN as the paradigmatic international forum, I argue that these are a non-violent political strategy within a Palestinian/Israeli struggle over narratives where both sides aim to create international support for their cause.⁴ I will focus on the work of Fayeze Sayegh (1922-1980), an academic and civil servant who served as UN special rapporteur to the International Convention on the

³ Nitzan Tal and Louise Bethlehem have shown that in the Israeli context, comparative references to apartheid were already made since the early 1950s (2019).

⁴ It is important to note that the United Nations status of the two countries is not the same: Israel has been a full member since 1949, but the Palestinians have only been a permanent observer since 1975. In 1998, resolution 52/250 brought with them additional rights, including the right to speak. Celebrated in the West Bank and Palestinian communities around the world, in a *de facto* recognition of statehood, the State of Palestine was voted a non-member observer state in 2012. This means that Palestinians had and continue to have less access and rights.

Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination from 1968 until his death (Feldman 2015: 31-32). Sayegh is almost singlehandedly responsible for introducing the apartheid analogy at the United Nations, and he also brought it into circulation in academic contexts. That Sayegh (and others) would use this setting to insert the Palestinian narrative is no great surprise, after all, it is the best platform to reach out to the entire world. More than that, the UN has always had a part in the situation: One of its earliest resolutions, number 181 which was passed in 1947, concerned the partition of Mandate Palestine.⁵

Adding to this argument, I want to suggest that such historical analogies need to be read within the developing Palestinian struggle for their homeland. The armed resistance movement brought Palestinians global attention, but it did not necessarily sway the world into supporting their cause. Unlike today, the use of the term apartheid to depict life in Palestine was rare in the 1960s and 1970s, but I want to suggest that this has numerous reasons, among them the fact that non-violent actions was not yet at the forefront of the Palestinian struggle. I maintain, however, that even in this early period of the organized Palestinian national movement, such strategies were employed despite the fact that, at the time, Palestinians were more commonly perceived as fighters for their cause. They had created their image as militants by way of some high profile plane hijackings⁶ and other attacks like the ‘Munich Massacre’ during the 1972 Summer Olympics when fighters of the Black September organization kidnapped and killed 11 members of Israel’s Olympic team along with a German police officer (Reeve 2011). Non-violent forms of their struggle were yet to gain power in the international arena – on the ground, civil acts of resistance have always existed – but today,

⁵ To name but some significant issues during the period explored: in 1949, the UN created UNRWA, to provide humanitarian aid to Palestinian refugees. Resolution 242 (1967) calls for the Israeli retreat from captured areas. In 1968, the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People started the so-called settlement investigation. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (UNGA Resolution 3376) was established in 1975. Here, a seismic shift took place as repatriation rights (previously, the Palestine question was regarded mainly as a refugee problem) and the right to self-determination were aligned. 1977 saw the founding of the UN Division for Palestinian Rights.

⁶ Indubitably the best-known figure in this context is Leila Khaled, dubbed “the poster girl of Palestinian militancy” (Irving 2012).

the extensive reach of the term apartheid linked to Israel shows that this form of resistance has not just grown but works. Using such a powerful signifier was rare at the beginning – but even then such contestations using words rather than Kalashnikovs were happening and are a forerunner to non-violent strategies like the BDS movement, which Palestinians and their supporters employ today. Investigating the early uses of the apartheid analogy allows us to see that an undercurrent of non-violence has always existed under the surface of the Palestinian national movement, but the growth of BDS into a transnational movement based on the analogy shows how “apartheid moves things” (Bethlehem 2018: 50) far beyond the original historical context of the signifier.

At least in the West, little is known how Israel rules day-to-day life, including its security, economic, and legal aspects, in different Palestinian communities. Most frequently, apartheid as a historical analogy is applied to areas under Israeli occupation since few know what exactly it means to live ‘under occupation.’ The term ‘occupation’ itself lacks explanatory power, so better-known images can fill in the blanks in an international audience’s mind. Using the historical analogy for such an audience does not only concern the power relations between the two peoples, – which are impossible to truly challenge on the ground given how entrenched the Israeli occupation and the settlement project are –, but pertains to the images and realities the term apartheid calls up.

For a long time, the portrayal of the Palestinian situation was controlled by the stronger side, Israel. The international perception, however, has been shifting. Among the influential factors for this change are the power of social media where Palestinians disseminate knowledge about their lives or Israeli NGOs like *B’tselem*⁷ and *Breaking the Silence*⁸ dedicated to exposing the suffering the occupation causes, to both Israelis and the

⁷ <https://www.btselem.org/>

⁸ <https://www.breakingthesilence.org.il/>

world. Yasir Suleiman's *A War of Words: Language and Conflict in the Middle East* which teaches us about language as a site of contestation and power between Israelis and Palestinians, highlights that "the important role of language in shaping the political perception of the international community" (2004: 138-139). As a loaded and widely known signifier, apartheid has traction around the globe and is involved in shifting the perception of the situation in Israel/Palestine, especially in the West where Israel's portrayal of events has long dominated.

However, apartheid is not just a term used within activist and diplomatic interactions, also scholars found apartheid to be an appropriate framework to analyse the situation primarily in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, even if Israel does not engage in practices of petty apartheid. Two main issues reappear in the scholarship, a) different sets of laws apply for Israeli settlers and Palestinians, and b) '*hafrada*' (Hebrew: 'separation') remains the official policy aiming to separate Israeli and Palestinian populations. The academic discussion of the apartheid analogy has emerged in the 1980s and 1990s but has recently increased (cf. Clarno 2017; Ghanim and Dakwar 2018; Pappé 2015; Peteet 2016; Soske and Jacobs 2015; Tilley 2012, Zreik 2004).⁹ Showing the resonance of the term, every use draws cycles of often emotion-driven refutations and assurances even in the academic debates.¹⁰ Suffice is to say, however, that an agreement whether or not Israel is an apartheid state seems as remote as a resolution of the situation on the ground.

Fayez Sayegh: Fighting with Words

⁹ Already in 1979, Elia Zureik wrote that "While official *de jure* apartheid of the African variety does not exist in Israel, national apartheid on the latent and informal levels ... is a characteristic feature of Israeli society." [1979 p. 16:]. Applying the concept to the Palestinian minority in Israel, this is one of the earliest uses of apartheid as an analytical lens.

¹⁰ A frequent accusation that comes with the rejection of apartheid as a fitting analytical lens is that it implies a denigration, delegitimation even, of Israel (cf. Cohen and Freilich 2018, Ellis 2019; Nelson 2015; Sabel 2011: 28)

Both Israel and the South African apartheid state were established in 1948, Palestinian uses of the term, however, did not happen until the 1960s and, more prominently, in the 1970s. This timing gives us two contexts to consider: a) the occupation of the Palestinian Territories and the Israeli settlement project following the 1967 war that made the apartheid framework applicable in more straightforward ways than within the state of Israel and b) the beginnings of the organized Palestinian national movement.

To illustrate these early appearances of the apartheid analogy, I want to focus on Fayeze Sayegh, probably the crucial catalyst to bring the term apartheid for the Palestinian situation into the UN and thus into broad circulation. Sayegh, though today less in the spotlight, was one of the most significant public intellectuals promoting the Palestinian cause before Edward Said. In 1975, he became the chief architect of UNGA Resolution 3379, which maintained that Zionism is a form of racism. Though a talented academic, it is in particular due to his decades of working at the UN that Sayegh came to be considered “one of the most visible spokespersons of the Palestinian cause in the West” (Abu Khalil 2014). A Palestinian-American later in life, Sayegh was born in Kharaba, then Mandatory Syria, where his father served as a minister. The family soon moved to Tiberias where he grew up. He went to school in Safed and then received his higher education at the American University of Beirut and Georgetown University.

In 1965, Sayegh founded the Palestine Research Center (PRC) in Beirut (Feldman 2015: 31-32). During the 1982 Lebanon war, Israeli soldiers looted the PLO-affiliated institute and its archive of some 25.000 volumes along with documents, photographs, and microfilms, a leading depository of Palestinian cultural heritage.¹¹ As the director-general, Sayegh also founded the centre’s paper *Shu’un Filastiniya (Palestinian Affairs)* in 1971, which, under his influence, became one of the first vehicles to transport the apartheid analogy

¹¹ Following international pressure, Israel returned the collection – minus the films – in 1983, upon which it was moved to Cyprus. Nonetheless, this looting has not only complicated the research into Palestinian history but was also a symbolic act aimed to silence the Palestinian narrative.

for the situation in Israel/Palestine to a popular level (Clarno 2009: 66). Here, we see the emergence of the term within the Palestinian national movement in Beirut of the 1960s, then the capital of the movement in exile. In this context, it was mostly used in Arabic, meaning that the West was not yet the primary addressee, but soon, academic and more popular publications in English also opened the path to a broader circulation of the apartheid analogy.

As early as 1965, the year of the PRC's founding, Sayegh argued that Zionism's racial doctrines are self-segregation, exclusiveness, and supremacy (Feldman 2015: 37), thus theorizing the situation in terms of segregation, the central characteristic of apartheid. From this time onwards, he used a comparative apartheid analysis to show that the racial segregation imposed by Israel included and in some ways went beyond the South African situation:

Nowhere in Asia or Africa — not even in South Africa or Rhodesia — has European race-supremacism expressed itself in so passionate a zeal for thoroughgoing racial exclusiveness and for physical expulsion of 'native' populations across the frontiers of the settler-state, as it has in Palestine, under the compulsion of Zionist doctrines.

(Sayegh 1965: 24-25)

However, Sayegh not only employed this comparative lens calling on segregation, he also wrote explicitly about "the Zionist practitioners of apartheid in Palestine" (Sayegh 1965: 27). He viewed Zionism a system of exclusion and believed that it was an erroneous ideology that could be challenged and ultimately left behind by "awakening" human conscience (Sayegh 1967). As a solution to the situation on the ground, he suggested an integration modelled on the civil rights struggle in the United States.

In Sayegh's meticulous analyses as a PLO associated scholar, we see that he was part of the multi-layered national struggle. The PRC and its publications exploring the situation in Israel/Palestine from an explicitly Palestinian perspective, and Sayegh in particular, were influential in adding the race/racism and settler colonialism angles to the analysis and thus

ultimately pushed for the ‘Zionism is Racism’ equation publicly espoused in UNGA Resolution 3379. This places the scholar and diplomat as an influential figure in this early period of the organized Palestinian national movement. While the PLO and other organisations engaged in an armed fight, his work, specifically the use of historical analogies to draw international attention to the cause, furthered the non-violent struggle.

It was during his work at the UN that Sayegh brought the apartheid analogy into broader circulation, reaching far beyond the impact of his academic work. While serving as special rapporteur to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination he employed terms such as ‘genocide,’ ‘crimes against humanity,’ ‘racist discrimination,’ alongside apartheid. Unsurprisingly, he faced fierce resistance for using such terminology against Israel (Baer 2015: 21). Both in his diplomatic and academic work, Sayegh was making double use of the term apartheid, on the one hand as an analytical framework to analyse the situation on the ground, on the other as a trope employed within the Palestinian struggle for the homeland.¹²

The UN offers an ideal framework for analysing the apartheid analogy because here, we not only literally have the entire world in the room, but more importantly, over the years, we can document the increase of the Israel = apartheid equation which was not only picked up in UNGA debates but turned into resolutions condemning Israel’s policies and actions.¹³ It was in this forum that Israel and the question of apartheid had been linked as early as 1961. Then, Hendrik Verwoerd, South Africa’s Prime Minister and architect of apartheid’s ideology and its policies called Israel an apartheid state. Speaking to the General Assembly in response to Israel voting against South Africa in an anti-apartheid resolution, he said:

¹² I want to thank Shimrit Baer for this double understanding of Sayegh’s use of the term apartheid which finely disentangles the range of engagement we see in his work, especially in his diplomatic engagements.

¹³ Studying the UN and Israel can cause pushback from many as especially those who consider themselves supporters understand it as a forum biased against Israel.

Israel is not consistent in this new anti-apartheid attitude. Otherwise, they would have been prepared to be swamped and destroyed by the Arabs around them. But they took Israel from the Arabs after the Arabs had lived there for a thousand years. In that I agree with them. Israel, like South Africa, is an apartheid state” (Joseph, 1988:12).

Israel, well aware of the negativity of the term, was outraged. In 1963 UN speech, then Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir insisted on the country’s anti-apartheid stance and denounced all racism and racial discrimination.¹⁴

The 2017 report calling Israel an apartheid state is not a first at the UN. Much like the Palestinian uses of the term have a historical context, so do the UN reports and resolutions: In the mid-1970s the growing black consciousness movement and discourses around South African apartheid led to an increase in awareness of race-related questions and inequalities worldwide. We already see this in the earliest linkage of apartheid and Zionism at UN level in UNGA Resolution 3151 on policies of apartheid of the South African government which was passed in 1973. Here, mention is made of an “unholy alliance” between “Portuguese colonialism, South African racism, zionism [sic] and Israeli imperialism” (United Nations 1973). Other UN documents later reuse the powerful “unholy alliance” phrasing when bringing together and jointly condemning apartheid and Zionism.

After this initial bracketing of Zionism with recognized forms of racism and colonialism, the UN passed resolution 3379 in 1975, which declared Zionism a form of racism at the insistence of the Arab and Soviet voting blocks. A clear victory for the Palestinian cause, it was withdrawn in 1991 as a concession to Israel around the signing of the Oslo Peace Accords. In this General Assembly resolution aiming to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms, Zionism is not explicitly called apartheid, however, the two are not only named as different forms of racial discrimination, Zionism also follows apartheid in

¹⁴ For an in-depth discussion of the Israel, apartheid South African, and the United Nations triad in this period, please see Giladi 2018.

the list, imprinting a close connection on the reader's mind. Moreover, the resolution's preamble refers back to the earlier UN level linkage of the two in resolution 3151, calling it an "unholy alliance between South African racism and Zionism." It also "tak[es] note" of resolution 77 of the Organization of African unity which submitted "that the racist regime in occupied Palestine and the racist regime in Zimbabwe and South Africa have a common imperialist origin, forming a whole and having the same racist structure and being organically linked in their policy aimed at repression of the dignity and integrity of the human being" (United Nations 1975).

In his role as special rapporteur fighting racial discrimination, Sayegh made a statement supporting the ruling of Zionism as a form of racism to the UNGA to the Third (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) Committee. In these comments, he defined terms such as 'Zionism' and 'racial discrimination' and maintained that a metaphorical "ideological kinship of Zionism and apartheid" (Sayegh 1975: 23) causes the racial discrimination in Israel-Palestine. In this landmark statement at such a significant occasion for the Palestinian struggle, his explicit linking of Zionism and apartheid is a critical point in the global diffusion of the apartheid term for Israel. The fact that Palestinians and their allies managed to pass resolution 3379 which fuses Israel with South Africa was the catalyst for heated debates around Israeli racial discrimination. This resolution is among the reasons that caused the subsequent rise of the apartheid analogy.

Building on his work at the PRC, Sayegh continued to apply apartheid as an analytical lens to bring the situation in Israel/Palestine to the attention of the world by way of the UN. One way how he did so was by contemplating Israel's collaborations with apartheid South Africa which, while kept a secret, grew immensely after 1967 and the beginnings of Israel's occupation of Palestinian Territories (Polakow-Suransky 2010). In the developing partnership between the two countries, Sayegh saw Israel's support for South Africa as reproducing, or even intensifying its form of racial discrimination in Palestine. Keith Feldman analyses

Sayegh's presentation of racial segregation at a UN symposium on "Racism and Racial Discrimination Defined," where Sayegh spoke about "the mutually reinforcing interactions of racist systems" (1982). Highlighting this partnership, he proffered that the "deepening ties between Apartheid South Africa and Israel" were not merely a policy issue but pointed to the inherent structure of apartheid itself (Feldman 2015: 55).

During his work on behalf of Palestinians, Fayez Sayegh used apartheid both as an analytical tool and a metaphorical trope with much emotive power shaping the international discourse and aiming to cause condemnations and the political isolation of Israel. However, over the years, also the situation on the ground, where the occupation and the settlement project have now lasted over half a century, offers increasingly more points for comparison. As the 2017 UN report shows, the linkages and comparisons have become only more common, as shows in academic explorations and public uses.¹⁵ Considered from a perspective that conceives of the situation as a 'battle of narratives,' such an increase is a political win for the Palestinians (unlike the situation on the ground).

Palestinians and Israelis have very different conceptions of past and present. Indeed, the conflict does not happen only on the ground; it is also a struggle over the narratives of its causes and status, as well as an explanation of current events (cf. Bar-Tal et al. 2014, Rosenberg 2006). According to cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner, collective narratives are "social constructions that coherently interrelate a sequence of historical and current events; they are accounts of a community's collective experiences, embodied in its belief system and represent the collective's symbolically constructed shared identity" (1990: 76). While awareness of these contested narratives has grown only recently, it has been a fact from the beginning of Zionist activism in Palestine and most certainly since 1948.

¹⁵ In a study analyzing the linked terms Israel and apartheid in media around the world, researchers of the Israeli Institute for National Security Studies found only 50 articles during the years 1967 to 2000, but some 1,741 articles from 2001-2015 (Israeli and Hatuel-Radoshitzky 2015).

The contested narratives, however, also have an international aspect as this conflict has always been of global interest and involvement, in particular, since the 1967 war. How the struggle is presented and received by the world is essential to both sides as all peace negotiations happen within broader contexts where primarily the U.S., but also Europe and the Arab countries play a strategic role. As with any conflict staged before an audience, both sides aim to present themselves in the most favourable light, hoping to convince the observers that they have the truth on their side and are the ones deserving of support. National narratives, especially when addressing an international public, are carefully crafted, and words are employed deliberately as diplomats like Fayeze Sayegh allow us to observe.

Israel has long put much effort into *hasbara* (the word stemming from the Hebrew for “explanation”), its soft diplomacy aiming to control the international narrative about the situation on the ground. However, Israel’s image has also been influenced by the memory of the Holocaust as well as cultural elements like Leon Uris’ *Exodus* (1958), the highest-selling Jewish American novel to date. *Exodus* presents the pre-state period and early Israel as a fledgling, new-born state grown out of the ashes of Auschwitz and continuously attacked by Arab forces. David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, said that “as a piece of propaganda, it’s the best thing ever written about Israel” (King xxi). Otto Preminger’s film adaptation (1960), which stars Paul Newman as the young Israeli hero, only further ingrained the Israeli narrative of the young state as David fighting the Goliath of Arab countries in the Western imagination. Indeed, Matthew Silver argued that it raised Zionist engagement, even amongst non-Jews, to unprecedented levels, especially in the U.S. (2010). Nonetheless, the 1967 war, while on the one hand bringing high Western regard for Israeli prowess, also brought increasing criticism due to the occupation and the settlement project. This negative effect has increased even as official *hasbara* efforts have been expanded, especially to influence the depiction of Israel on the internet (Lazarus 2012).

Until recent years when Palestinians started harnessing the power of social media, their story of exile and occupation never reached a media impact like Israel's narrative did. In fact, the West wondered for a long time who these 'Palestinians' were. Media reports such as the 1950 documentary "Sands of Sorrow" with Dorothy Thompson (cf. Stonebridge 2018) created some early awareness of the 1948 refugees, but the Western interest soon died down, and the Palestinians faded from view. In his preface to *Dreams of a Nation*, Edward Said wrote: "the whole history of the Palestinian struggle has to do with the desire to be visible. Remember the early mobilizing phrase of Zionism: 'We are a people without a land going to a land without a people'?" It pronounced the emptiness of the land and the non-existence of a people" (2006: 2). Writing for a volume about Palestinian cinema, an art that literally engages in make Palestinian lives visible, he highlighted a problem true on a larger scale. In 1986, Said had himself published a book of life writing, photographs, and testimony of Palestinian lives entitled *After the Last Sky* to illustrate the complexities of Palestinian lives to an English-speaking audience. Even though Palestinian literature written in the period explored most famously by novelist Ghassan Kanafani and national poet Mahmoud Darwish which have reached "iconic national and regional status" (Bernard 2013: 3) as part of the Palestinian resistance,¹⁶ they, and other authors, were not translated into English until the turn of the century, aside of some rare and today impossible to find Darwish poems (Creswell 2009: n.p.).¹⁷ Arguably the first time the West, in particular, became aware of the continuing plight of Palestine was in the 1960s and 1970s when fighters started attacks worldwide.¹⁸ Their

¹⁶ Most noteworthy here is Kanafani's 1966 study in which he defined Resistance Literature and set out a framework for the role of literature within the Palestinian struggle for the homeland (cf. Harlow 1987, Klemm 1998). However, *Resistance Literature in Occupied Palestine, 1948-1966*, though re-issued in 2013, is not available in English translation yet.

¹⁷ Interestingly, Darwish has been widely translated into French and Kanafani into German already in the 1980s and 1990s. Kanafani is one of the few Arab writers whose entire oeuvre is available in German (Fischer 1995: 7-10).

¹⁸ In later years, the outbreak of the First Intifada (Palestinian Uprising, 1987-1993) when images of soldiers beating Palestinian youths for stone throwing flickered across screens worldwide. With the Oslo Peace Process between Israel and the PLO, the signing of the Oslo Accords (1993, 1995) and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority as an interim self-governing body, the world came to learn about the Palestinian plight.

armed struggle, however, while moving Palestinians more into the centre of international attention, was not particularly effective in gaining the support of this audience.

In the period explored, the Palestinian focus was on the violent struggle and on portraying an image of fight, pride, and prowess. Paradigmatic for this was Yasser Arafat's UN appearance on November 13, 1974. Speaking to support the establishment of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, a platform for Palestinian political claims at the UN, he was the first representative of an entity other than a state to address the General Assembly. His performance was striking: clad in a military uniform, wearing a pistol holster on his hip, he visually emphasized his credentials as a fighter for his people's liberation. In this speech, Arafat, called himself the "leader of the Palestinian revolution" (Arafat 1974). Presenting himself as a 'revolutionary,' he called up images of Che Guevara and others and explicitly refused to be framed as a 'terrorist.' Indeed, he turned the label around at the Israelis: "Those who call us terrorists wish to prevent world public opinion from discovering the truth about us and from seeing the justice on our faces. They seek to bide the terrorism and tyranny of their acts, and our own posture of self-defence" (Arafat 1974). Though pointing to the significance of words in this context, his performance, at least visually, nonetheless played into the David vs. Goliath symbolism not just *Exodus* had established for Israel. While the UNGA rostrum certainly provided visibility, the fighter performance might not have been quite what Westerners were looking for, once again highlighting how Sayegh's suit-clad presentations and his subtle and academic delineating of history made him an essential figure in a then small-scale non-violent Palestinian resistance.

Pointing to the challenges of intercultural communication involved in the Israeli/Palestinian international battle of narratives, Susan Abulhawa, a successful American-

Among the issues that continue to have powerful effects are the status of the territories occupied by Israel in 1967, and the unresolved status of now 5 million refugees, many of whom still live in refugee camps.

Palestinian writer recently said in an interview: “It was natural that the first story be that of the conquerors, because they were mostly from Europe and spoke in the languages and nuances of western cultures. They also told the story that the West wanted to hear. It was easier to hear a story of a land without a people. It was a romantic happy ending” (Snajie 2012).¹⁹ It is at this juncture that historical analogies and the apartheid trope, in particular, play a role: they speak in “the languages and nuances of western cultures.” With the rise of the Black consciousness movement and the anti-apartheid movement of the 1970s and 1980s, knowledge spread about the suffering this specific racist ideology engendered, making the boycott of South Africa a widely supported cause in the West. This status of a loaded term which can rally whole communities then offered the power for apartheid to be waged as a cultural shorthand within the international battle over narratives as an element of the Palestinian struggle for the homeland.

In “History as Social Memory,” Peter Burke theorizes about the human tendency to explain the present, and especially its challenges, by trying to find a ‘fit’ – that is, a historical analogy. He argues that we do this to integrate new experiences into known frameworks, as history seems to provide coherent patterns (1989). In the case explored in this article, this is true insofar as one particular challenge of Palestinian lives under Israeli rule is the lack of distinctive terms to capture what these experiences look like, whether in the occupied West Bank, Gaza under siege, stateless Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, or the situation of Palestinians with Israeli citizenship. Words like ‘occupation’ do not necessarily tell the whole story of what is going on or are not illustrative enough. Therefore, the known example – apartheid – is employed to express that which was hitherto unheard or at least not heard in the

¹⁹ Abulhawa is part of a recent wave of contemporary Palestinian diaspora writing in English. While so far, only Abulhawa’s sweeping historical novel of Palestine *Mornings in Jenin* (2010) has become a bestseller translated into 27 languages, the range of writing which all engages with the Palestinian homeland in different, generation-influenced ways, is starting to shape the perception of Palestine internationally (Fischer 2019).

same way as when a cultural shorthand allows the uninitiated to draw on previous knowledge available in their cultural archive.

But more important for the word-waging formation of the Palestinian struggle is that the term apartheid is harnessed for its emotive power. Given the context of contested narratives and the wooing of international support, the Palestinian story (just like the Israeli one) needs telling in a way that resonates with an audience and guides listeners' interpretations. This means that the apartheid analogy in the Palestinian context functions on several levels, not only historically as an analogy offering a conceptual "screen"²⁰ through which Israel might be viewed and decoded, but also politically as it allows being heard, aims to influence and shape opinions, and can create a reaction.

To return to Fayez Sayegh's engagement for Palestine at the U.N. and in other public discourses, at first sight, it seems that the battles he fought by highlighting racism and apartheid structures were unsuccessful. Indeed, Keith Feldman argues that human rights discourses were soon used to overwrite Sayegh's analysis of Zionism through the racial segregation framework. At the UNGA Feldman identifies an "American expertise" on race issues and discussions of "a nebulous Soviet threat or a viral anti-Semitism," as the culprits for eroding Palestinian racial critiques (2015: 18). However, even considering this counter to Sayegh's efforts, and the fact that so far, the political situation is not resolved, his (and others') early attempts to bring the apartheid analogy in circulation show results today.

Such effects show that the non-violent Palestinian struggle – which in this specific formation means battling with words – is an element of the collective effort that should not be underestimated. Internally, in Arabic, a different story might be going on concerning terms employed, but Palestinian discourses in English that use apartheid as a prism – be it in position papers to the United Nations or the various PLO factions' massive outputs of

²⁰ In this use of the term screen I rely on Marita Sturken's conceptualization of 'the screen' in memory processes, which she uses in *Tangled Memories*. It can function both as a "surface that is projected upon" and as "an object that hides something from view, that shelters and protects" (1997: 44.)

explanatory publications – were always intended for international consumption. The battle of narratives becomes possible because the situation in Israel/Palestine does not have one clear cut and agreed on descriptor: Interpretation is the name of the game. Vice versa, the purpose-led political battle is one of the fora in which new meanings are constructed and cemented for terms like apartheid as they move transnationally and between different historico-political contexts.

Epilogue

Today, as Palestinian peace and coexistence activists speak internationally, the BDS movement keeps gaining strength, and Christian religious leaders have made a well-received public call for international support with the Kairos Palestine document based on Palestinian Liberation Theology, non-violent efforts have become increasingly more mainstream in the international perception of the conflict. Internally, however, the Palestinian struggle has always also had a prominent non-violent component, encapsulated in the concept of *sumud*, commonly translated as steadfastness or perseverance. Raja Shehadeh, a Ramallah-based lawyer, human rights activist, and writer explores the concept in his memoir *The Third Way* (1982) as an intentional way of life in which every act is informed by a refusal to accept the status quo of occupation and of losing more land. Sumud has a double meaning, not only is it spatial, an ideology of staying on Palestinian land, drawn from a deep sense of belonging to it – individually and collectively –, it also stands for a political strategy of non-violently resisting the occupation. However, as can be seen in the examples listed at the beginning of this epilogue, especially in recent years, the unarmed popular struggle has increased tremendously (Carpenter 2018). This shift within Palestinian society, where the Second Intifada had caused endless bloodshed and where violence continues, especially in besieged Gaza, is mirrored by the activists, politicians, and even in the news media's increased use of loaded historical analogies.

Today, the term apartheid for Israeli policy and reality can be found in many arenas – from placards at demonstrations against the occupation to UN resolutions – highlighting how much traction the term has when it comes to Israel/Palestine. Also, while it might seem that using such terms is primarily an attempt to get attention while simultaneously placing Israel in a bad light, it is also a way to disseminate knowledge along with a narrative built on a particular experience and understanding of the world.

Last but not least, the spread of the term shows that the Palestinian non-violent struggle, which in the 1960s and 1970s was almost invisible internationally, whether the Palestinian leadership was choosing that stance or not, always existed. But does this increase mean that this non-violent strategy is working? On the ground, the situation in Palestinian areas has been getting worse despite of Oslo and all other peace initiatives, but it is working in one particular field: International awareness is on the increase. People might not be fully informed about what is going on but a word like apartheid that calls up known situations that were rejected by much of the world does cause reactions – whether they involve the accusation of war crimes, an interest in learning more or questioning long-held beliefs, or supporting BDS – depends on the political stance of the beholder.

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