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978-1-107-00702-4 - Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement

Wendy Pearlman

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## Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement

Why do some national movements use violent protest and others nonviolent protest? Wendy Pearlman shows that much of the answer lies inside movements themselves. Nonviolent protest requires coordination and restraint, which only a cohesive movement can provide. When, by contrast, a movement is fragmented, factional competition generates new incentives for violence and authority structures are too weak to constrain escalation. Pearlman reveals these patterns across nearly one hundred years in the Palestinian national movement, with comparisons to South Africa and Northern Ireland. To those who ask why there is no Palestinian Gandhi, Pearlman demonstrates that nonviolence is not simply a matter of leadership. Nor is violence attributable only to religion, emotions, or stark instrumentality. Instead, a movement's organizational structure mediates the strategies that it employs. By taking readers on a journey from civil disobedience to suicide bombings, this book offers fresh insight into the dynamics of conflict and mobilization.

Wendy Pearlman is the Crown Junior Chair in Middle East Studies and Assistant Professor of Political Science at Northwestern University. She graduated magna cum laude with a B.A. in history from Brown University and earned her Ph.D. in government at Harvard University, where she was the Karl Deutsch Fellow. Pearlman is the author of *Occupied Voices: Stories of Everyday Life from the Second Intifada*. She has published articles in *International Security* and *Journal of Palestine Studies*, chapters in several edited volumes, and commentaries in the *Washington Post*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Boston Globe*, and *Philadelphia Inquirer*, among other newspapers. Pearlman was a Fulbright Scholar in Spain, a Junior Peace Fellow at the United States Institute of Peace, and a postdoctoral Fellow at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. She was the winner of the 2011 Deborah Gerner Grant for Professional Development.

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*Northwestern University*



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*To my parents*

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## Preface

The inspiration for this research stemmed from my experiences living in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv for a total of more than three years between January 2000 and August 2008. I was already hooked on Middle East politics before that journey began, as I had lived in Morocco and studied Arabic for five years. Yet my first trip to Israel and the Palestinian territories captured my heart and mind in a new way. At the turn of the millennium I did a tour of Israel and then spent five months in the West Bank, where I studied at Birzeit University and worked at a local organization. The following summer I lived and worked in the Gaza Strip. During the years that followed, I returned every chance I got. When afar, I monitored day-to-day events with what became an unhealthy addiction to the news. People often asked me what my Jewish family thought about their daughter giving so much attention to the Palestinian situation. I would explain that my grandmother's only regret was that I had been a more interesting person before I became an "all Israel–Palestine all the time" channel.

Three months into the second Intifada, I conducted interviews with about two dozen Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These were published in 2003 as the book *Occupied Voices: Stories of Everyday Life from the Second Intifada*. I undertook that project both to help myself understand the experiences of ordinary people enduring a terrible conflict and to bring their voices to a larger audience. As I gave book talks around the United States, however, I found that discussions repeatedly ended with the same query. Over and over, people said that they were moved by the personal stories but had trouble understanding why Palestinians carried out violence against Israelis. Even those who supported Palestinians' quest for statehood were perplexed. "Don't Palestinians see that suicide bombings only undermine sympathy for their cause?" people asked. "Why don't they use nonviolence instead? Where is the Palestinian Gandhi?"

The answers at my disposal fell short. I knew from my study of history that Palestinians *had* used nonviolent as well as violent protest, but I lacked a convincing explanation of why they had done so to different extents at different

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times. My conversations in the West Bank and Gaza had shown me why many people believed that protest was necessary and justified. Yet this did not account for why protest took certain forms. By then I was a doctoral student in political science, so I turned to scholarly theories of rebellion and insurgency for answers. Influential studies attributed political violence to factors ranging from manipulative elites to religious fundamentalism to cold calculations of costs and benefits. Though these were often validated by cross-national statistical tests, they misrepresented or oversimplified what I had seen on the ground. Furthermore, they had more to say about how conflict escalates to bloodshed than about the circumstances under which it remains unarmed.

I made this question the topic of my dissertation. My motivation was to satisfy my own desire for understanding and to contribute to others' understanding as well. Knowing that any viable explanation of violent or nonviolent protest should account for ebbs and flows in both, I extended the scope of my research to cover the history of the Palestinian national movement. I studied Hebrew to increase my appreciation of the Israeli experience, as well as methodologies of quantitative and qualitative research to bring greater rigor to my analysis. I also returned to live in Israel and the Palestinian territories from June 2004 through August 2006 to carry out field and archival research.

I strove to bring diverse forms of evidence to bear upon my question. My analysis of Mandate Palestine drew on original material from the Israel State Archives, namely the collections of Chief Secretary's Office Papers, Palestine Government Arab Documents, and George Antonius Papers. I scrutinized the reports of the official commissions of inquiry into the disturbances of 1921, 1929, and 1936, the British high commissioner's monthly reports, periodic reviews, and telegrams, and the writings of district commissioners detailing events in the areas of Palestine under their purview. I also made use of memoirs of Palestinians and Arabs involved in nationalist activity at the time.

For later eras, I incorporated other materials. I consulted the wealth of primary documents collected and published by the Institute of Palestine Studies in English and Arabic. I used press reportage, some obtained from the press archive at Tel Aviv University's Moshe Dayan Center. I examined quantitative data from the statistics kept by B'Tselem (the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights), the ICT-Merari terrorist incidents database of the Institute for Counter-Terrorism at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya, Israel, and a comprehensive database on violent events compiled by Mohammed Hafez of the Naval Postgraduate School. I also scrutinized more than a decade of public opinion polls conducted by three Palestinian research institutes: the Palestine Center for Survey Research, the Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre, and the former Center for Palestine Research and Studies. In addition, I relied upon more than three dozen human rights and investigatory reports authored by Israeli, Palestinian, and international organizations. I gained appreciation for the primary data contained in such on-the-ground documents when I helped translate them during my own internships in two Palestinian human rights groups, the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights in

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Ramallah and the al-Mezan Center for Human Rights based in the Jabalya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip.

Finally, my twenty-six months in Israel and the Palestinian territories built on my previous experience and enabled me to continue to hone my understanding of both peoples by living among them. I observed interactions, developed lifelong relationships, absorbed daily media in two languages, and paid attention to the political talk that is the sound track of life on both sides of the Green Line. I had countless informal conversations with Israelis and Palestinians about the conflict and conducted forty-eight formal interviews, six of which were in the Gaza Strip (between July and August 2005), four in Israel (June–August 2006), and thirty-eight in the West Bank (June–August 2006, January 2007, August 2008). I carried out interviews in either Arabic or English, and tape-recorded, transcribed, and translated nearly all of them. In the interest of taking the strictest precautions to protect human subjects from any kind of harm or discomfort, I have not identified interviewees by name. I have, however, helped readers situate their comments by briefly indicating their occupation or affiliation, as well as the place and date of the interview.

I could not have carried out this project without the help of many people. My dissertation benefited immeasurably from my advisers, Jorge Domínguez, Devesh Kapur, Roger Owen, and Stephen Rosen. I thank each of them for challenging my project in a different way. Their combined abilities to pierce through my often murky ideas taught me not only how to think and write, but also how to teach. I learned no less from wonderful graduate school classmates. In them I have been fortunate to find a community of scholars and friends for the long haul.

I am indebted to several institutions that funded my research. My fieldwork was made possible by a United States Institute of Peace “Peace Fellows” Dissertation Fellowship and a grant from the Palestinian–American Research Center. A Harvard University–Hebrew University Graduate Fellowship and Foreign Language and Area Studies Award enabled me to study Hebrew and other topics for twelve months at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. A Starr Foundation Fellowship at the Center for Arabic Studies Abroad provided for twelve months of advanced Arabic training at the American University in Cairo. I was able to get a start on revising my dissertation as a postdoctoral fellow at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the John F. Kennedy School of Government. There I learned tremendously from top-notch scholars of conflict, both experienced and up-and-coming. They gave me invaluable feedback on my work and inspired me through exposure to their own.

Now an assistant professor at Northwestern University, I am fortunate to have benefited from the tremendous generosity of the Crown family and its dedication to Middle East studies, as well as from Weinberg College’s support for junior faculty. I could not imagine colleagues better than those whom I have found in the Department of Political Science. I thank them all. A vibrant working group of faculty studying the Middle East and North Africa has provided the icing on the cake of a terrific intellectual home.



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Over the years, I have presented various pieces of this research at Northwestern, Harvard, the University of Chicago, and the Northeast Middle East Politics Workshop, among other conferences. I am appreciative of all who shared their time and thoughts with me in those forums. The deepest gratitude goes to those who read chapters or sometimes much more of the manuscript-in-preparation: Nathan Brown, Rex Brynen, William Gamson, Jeff Goodwin, Ylana Miller, Aldon Morris, Rosemary Sayigh, Yezid Sayigh, Charles Smith, Hendrik Spruyt, Salim Tamari, Mark Tessler, Mary Ann Weston, and the late Gil Friedman. I am indebted to their generous giving of expert knowledge and fantastic insight. I can only hope that my revisions do some justice to the acumen of their suggestions. I am also very grateful to those who offered counsel in navigating the path from dissertation to published book, especially Jamie Druckman, Dennis Chong, Devesh Kapur, Dan Galvin, Ben Page, Jim Mahoney, Monika Nalepa, Jillian Schwedler, and Victor Shih.

Innumerable people assisted my field research in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Israel. Their kindness continually humbled me, and I regret terribly that I cannot honor them all by name. I am especially grateful to Aboud and Rodaina Abdullah and family, Bradley Brigham and Ghaith Omari, Ali Jarbawi, the Jarrar family, Laura Junka, Lucy Mair, the Muna family, Charmaine Seitz, Jamila and Yasaar Shrafi and family, Ghada Snounu and family, Issam Younnis, and my incredible neighbors in the old city of Jerusalem. I lack the words to express my particular debts to Iman Ashur, Jehan Jarrar, Suzanne Jarrar, and Alberto Spektorowski.

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My father, Michael Pearlman, has showed an unparalleled knack for lifting my spirits, often by reminding me not to take myself too seriously. My mother, Lois Pearlman, passed before I began postgraduate studies. Yet her example of compassion, creativity, and courage lit my every step and always will. It is to them that I dedicate this book.

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## Acronyms

AE	Arab Executive
AHC	Arab Higher Committee
ALF	Arab Liberation Front
AMB	al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade
ANC	African National Congress
ANM	Arab Nationalist Movement
AOLP	Action Organization for the Liberation of Palestine
BSO	Black September Organization
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (formerly PDFLP)
EC	Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization
IRA	Irish Republican Army
LNM	Lebanese National Movement
MCA	Muslim–Christian Association
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation)
NGC	National Guidance Committee
NICRA	Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association
NIFHC	National and Islamic Forces Higher Committee
PA	Palestinian Authority
PAC	Pan-Africanist Congress
PDFLP	Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (later DFLP)
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PFLP-GC	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command
PLA	Palestine Liberation Army
PLC	Palestinian Legislative Council
PLF	Palestinian Liberation Front
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PNC	Palestinian National Council

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*Acronyms*

PNF	Palestinian National Front
PPSF	Palestinian Popular Struggle Front
PRCs	Popular Resistance Committees
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
SMC	Supreme Muslim Council
UDF	United Democratic Front
UNLU	United National Leadership of the Uprising
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East