



Uprising and Violence in Palestine | Interview with Dr. Shir Hever

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Zain Raza (ZR): Thank you guys for tuning in today and welcome to another episode of The Source. I'm your host, Zain Raza. Today we'll be talking to independent journalist, economist and author Shir Hever. Shir is also the military model coordinator of the Boycott National Committee of the BDS Movement. Shir, thank you so much for your time today.

Dr. Shir Hever (SH): Thank you very much for having me.

ZR: You're welcome. There's an uprising going on in the West Bank. The German media is not providing a detailed analysis on why it's happening, can you just start off with what is happening in the West Bank currently?

SH: The uprising is very widespread and it is a bit surprising that it's happening in the West Bank specifically because a lot of attention has been given to Gaza and the Palestinians living inside Israel. And what's happening now in the West Bank is mostly focussed on the city of Jenin, but it quickly spread to Nablus and to the Shu'fat refugee camp in East Jerusalem. So these are very highly populated areas and all three of these cities actually are also refugee camps. So that's also a very important thing to remember. Since March, the Israeli military has launched a very strong repression campaign trying to stop the Palestinian resistance; to crush it with extreme violence. There were more Palestinians killed this year, even though the year is not over yet, than in the last eight years. Right now, we're talking about 130 people who are killed in the West Bank by Israeli forces, many of them children and this is still going on.

ZR: And can you talk about the causes? What is driving so much discontent in the West Bank?

SH: Well, I think a lot of it is the fact that Jenin is serving as a symbol of resistance for Palestinians and it gives them some hope. They are very much upset with the way that the Palestinian Authority has managed things with Israel. Especially when Palestinian prisoners escaped from the Gilboa prison- and they were from Janine and they escaped to Jenin- and then the Palestinian Authority tried to help the Israeli forces to recapture them. Eventually, they were recaptured. But all trust and support for the Palestinian Authority has collapsed. Jenin has become sort of an autonomous part of the West Bank. And with the Palestinian Authority simply afraid and unwilling to do anything, to take control of the city, the Israeli forces marched in with very brutal violence. The Palestinians are not giving up. And that's why the protest is spreading. And because Palestinians, of course, don't want to live under Israeli occupation. They don't want to live in a situation of apartheid. They want to have their freedom and they are going to get it. And, of course, there are many different ways of getting it. And there is a debate amongst Palestinians whether the best way to do this is by non-violent, by peaceful means, such as through the Boycott Movement against Israel. Other forces are calling for armed struggle and a new group has emerged now in the West Bank. It's called The Lion's Den. And this group is not affiliated with any of the political parties. It started in Nablus, but it's spreading as well to other parts of the West Bank. The Israeli military assassinated the head of this group, and by doing so they made the group even stronger, as it often happens. And this group, on the one hand, is certainly armed and is using armed struggle against the Israeli occupation forces. But at the same time, they are calling for a strike. They are also calling for civil disobedience with Palestinians against occupation. So this is a form of non-violent resistance. So it remains to be seen which of the two sides would be more powerful.

ZR: Would you compare this to the intifada that has happened in the past? Has that risen to that level that one can characterise it as that, or do you think there's still some ways to go until we can define it as such?

SH: Well, it's not so easy to say what exactly is the border, at which point you call it an intifada. Intifada is a word in Arabic, which means shaking off. Shaking off the occupation, this is the whole point. And the first intifada, which started in 1987 and the second intifada, which started in October 2000, were not the same kind of resistance. They were not based on the same political ideology and the same means of trying to achieve freedom. But what both of them have in common is that they failed, sadly. The Israeli occupation continued and the apartheid system continues. And also they represent a certain generation's coming of age ceremony of trying to prove that they did their best to achieve freedom. The first intifada started 20 years after Israel conquered the Palestinian territory of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. So you had a young generation of people who were born under occupation, who were critical of their own parents. How could you let this happen? How could you bring us up in this condition of occupation? And they want to try to break free. And the Israeli military crushed that uprising with brutality. 20 years later, there was another generation of young Palestinians, and that's what we saw with the second intifada, which also said our parents

failed to liberate us from occupation, but we are going to try our best and we are going to succeed where they have failed. And unfortunately, once again, the Israeli military used even more force by the way. The second intifada was crushed with a lot more Palestinian deaths, a lot more Palestinian permanent injuries, and a tremendous harm to the Palestinian economy, uprooting of 300,000 olive trees. So that was the second intifada. And now we are 20 years later again. So now we're talking about another generation. This is the third generation of Palestinians who were born under military occupation, who have never tasted freedom and nevertheless are not condemned to live under these conditions.

ZR: Can you talk about the response by the Israeli political establishment as well as the military? How has it gone about the situation?

SH: This, I think, is very interesting. Because while the Palestinians have a lot of experience in fighting against the Israeli occupation, the Israelis seem to have no memory at all of what happened last year. And this is a very interesting colonial phenomenon, where you have a colonial power, which again and again is surprised by the Palestinian uprising. One of the most senior Israeli journalists, Nahum Barnea, just recently published this report and said, I just don't understand it. We have the best intelligence in the world. We have such a powerful army. How can we not put an end to the Palestinian uprising? And this is a kind of blindness where he's simply unable to understand why the Palestinians want to be free. For him, Palestinians are not subjects, are not human beings. So it's only a matter of technical arrangements trying to take them under control as if they were animals in a cage. And, of course, they are not. And we're now very close to the Israeli elections. Ahead of the elections all of the different parties, whether they call themselves left or right or centre, it doesn't matter, they're all supporting the occupation. They're all supporting the apartheid. These are all the Zionist parties. And these are the parties that are very much afraid that any kind of actual, meaningful policy to try to negotiate with Palestinians, to offer some concessions, to calm down some of the anger and the justified anger amongst Palestinians will be perceived as lack of patriotism, as weakness in the face of the Palestinian uprising. So everyone is supporting a hard line approach. The hardline approach has failed before and it continues to fail again. And it came to the point where the Israeli military itself is now out of control. And that's something that's very important to understand. The Israeli soldiers are under the impression that they can do whatever they want. And the current commander in chief of the Israeli military- I believe Aviv Kochavi- when he assumed power, he said, we are going to be a more deadly army. And that was an act of pandering to the soldiers, telling the soldiers, you can shoot whoever you want and nobody will be held accountable. And as you remember, in May, Israeli sharp shooters assassinated Shireen Abu-Akleh, well-known Palestinian journalist who was reporting for Al-Jazeera, in Jenin, by the way, the city we were talking about. And the Israeli government is under a lot of pressure to investigate this because this was an unlawful killing. It was clearly a war crime. But the Israeli government refuses to reveal the name of the soldier and refuses to open an investigation simply because they know that the military is out of control. And if they start holding soldiers accountable, there will be

an uprising within the Israeli military. So in order to keep the peace within the Israeli military, they now allow the Israeli military to become a sort of militia, a group of death gangs going around in the West Bank and shooting at will. They're killing children, they're killing defenceless people and no one is held accountable. No investigations are open.

ZR: The spiral of violence, it seems, continues to escalate. And I'm not just talking about this current event, but if you take account of the whole context of this conflict, it seems that the same script plays over and over again. What are the conditions, in your opinion, that are not reported about as much as it should be in the Western media? The underlying conditions that you think are driving this and what solutions should be pursued to quell discontent and violence and escalation of the situation going forward?

SH: Well, I think what we're seeing in terms of the conditions is a deteriorating colonial power; an apartheid state with a generation of Israelis who are no longer willing to pay the price for what it means to create this apartheid system and maintain the apartheid system. So they want to have everything handed out to them. They want to be the lords of the land, but they're not really willing to put their lives at risk and they're not really willing to pay an economic price for this. And because of this, they're in a state of collapse. The Israeli government depends on the Palestinian Authority to do its dirty job for it. And the Palestinian Authority, maybe there are some forces within the Palestine Authority who are willing to do the dirty job for the Israelis, but that doesn't mean that they can do it. And the common soldier or the common police officer in the cities of Jenin, in Nablus and elsewhere, they just don't want to be part of the occupation. I'm talking about the Palestinian soldiers and Palestinian police officers. They don't want to be part of the occupation. They are very unhappy with the orders that they're getting. And the Palestinian government is realising that they have to change the orders; or maybe just dismantle the Palestinian Authority. But if we're talking about solutions, let's talk about the intifada unity of last year in May. Where for the first time, Palestinians from all over, which means not just from the West Bank, but also from the Gaza Strip and also from within Israel had a united day of strike. And this moment of unity, which succeeded, struck a lot of fear at the Israelis. The Israeli government's main policy against the Palestinians is divide and conquer. Different groups are set against each other. But the Fatah party and the Hamas party just signed the reconciliation agreement in Nigeria. Maybe it has no significance because many such agreements have been signed in the past, but nevertheless, this is an important moment for that agreement to be signed. Because they're sending a message that they're simply not interested right now in factional bickering amongst themselves, when the real issue is the Palestinian nation's right for self-determination and rights to live in freedom and in equality. And under these conditions, the Israelis are facing a very difficult problem. I think one of the main issues that are going to decide this is the war in Ukraine. Because right now, NATO countries, the West is very much taking a position of its support for Ukraine against the Russian invasion. But the hypocrisy screams to have it. Because, of course, the Russian occupation of certain parts of Ukraine, which is now ongoing for eight months or almost eight months, is, of course, illegal. And it's,

of course, morally depraved. But compared to the occupation of Israeli forces of the Palestinian territory, which is ongoing for more than five decades, and the apartheid reality, which is ongoing for more than seven decades, how can you then justify supporting Ukraine and talking about the right of Ukraine to defend themselves when Palestinians don't have the right to defend themselves? And I see a lot of Israeli journalists, a lot of Israeli politicians, which are terrified because they realise that as soon as the war in Ukraine will be over one way or another, the same arguments that have been used to support Ukraine are going to be used to support Palestine. Which is one of the reasons that the Israeli government is refusing to support Ukraine as well, because they're trying to take a neutral position. They want this war to go on forever.

ZR: We are seeing, as you mentioned, Ukraine. The hypocrisy in its full form, whether we look at Iran, where people are standing up, and how the West is supporting these movements- in my opinion, rightfully so. But nevertheless, we see hypocrisy when we compare it with, for example, regions like Saudi Arabia, where the human rights situation is much worse and the situation, particularly for women, is much worse as compared to Iran and of course, the situation in Israel and Palestine. Do you think there will be any change from within? Or do you think external forces like the United States, Germany, the European Union have to play their part within all of this?

SH: Well, what do you mean from within? You mean from within Israeli society?

ZR: From Israeli or Palestinian society. Like Israeli civil society- we've seen B'Tselem come out with reports of apartheid. We've seen some positive movements within the Israeli society, but I'm also talking about the Palestinian society. If they can together with the Israeli civil society bring about change? Or do you think it would require external forces?

SH: Well, first of all, the Palestinian society is changing and there is a lively political debate amongst Palestinians. Palestinians have a very deep and clear analysis of the political situation simply because they have to; to survive. But Israelis, as a rule, do not. The Israeli civil society is very weak. And no, I do not expect the Israeli civil society or Israeli politics to change from within, but I do think that it will change. I do think that right now it might sound like science fiction, but very quickly, a vast majority of the Israeli public are going to say we oppose Israeli apartheid, we are in favour of equal rights for everyone and the right of return of Palestinians. But they're going to say this after the occupation and the apartheid will fall. This is how it works. And this is how it works everywhere. And also in South Africa, only after apartheid collapsed the white population of South Africa started saying we were always against apartheid. Of course. And that's how it happens. And yes, I do think that external international pressure is important. But the external international pressure in itself is not what is going to be the game changer or what is going to make or break the Israeli policy. What it does, however, is give Palestinians hope that they have options. And if the world abandons Palestinians and says you're on your own, nobody will help you, this is actually what the

Hamas party is saying: We are on our own in the world. Nobody will help us. We have to fight, and that's our only option. Well, the other factions amongst Palestinians and mainly the Palestinian civil society organisations that are now appealing to the International Criminal Court, to civil society organisations around the world, also to the Israeli civil society- you mentioned B'Tselem, absolutely- but everyone who is willing to stand in solidarity to support the BDS movement - Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel- those acts of solidarity give Palestinians hope that they will be able to achieve freedom and equality by a liberal democratic means which respect human rights and which not use violence. And this is not just because Palestinians really are nice people and don't want to use the violence- that's, of course, part of it- but the more important issue is that achieving freedom with violence carries a very heavy cost. A very heavy cost. If we look at how Algeria won its freedom from France by using a lot of violence; maybe in retrospect, a lot of people would say this violence was justified against the colonial occupying power. But what happened to Algeria when it became free?! It became a very authoritarian, embittered, unequal country, patriarchal and has a lot of internal problems which are still unsolved today. But countries that took a more peaceful path towards liberation, like South Africa and like India as well- they still have their own problems, of course, but it's a much, much better solution than for Algeria.

ZR: Shir Hever, independent economist, journalist and author, thank you so much for joining us today.

SH: Thank you Zain.

ZR: And thank you guys for tuning in. If you want to watch part two, don't forget to subscribe to our YouTube channel. And if we want us to continue with our independent, non-profit journalism, make sure to donate. I'm your host Zain Raza, see you guys next time.

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