

## The Resilient History of Palestinian Resistance and Its Impact on the Emergence of Converts to Islam in the West

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### Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas sejarah daya tahan perlawanan rakyat Palestina dan dampaknya terhadap kemunculan muallaf di barat, dengan menggunakan metode penelitian sejarah yang mencakup heuristik, kritik sumber, interpretasi, dan historiografi. Penelitian ini memiliki fokus utama yang mencakup perkembangan perlawanan rakyat Palestina, daya tahan yang melahirkan simpati dunia, dan studi kasus Lauren Booth. Konflik Palestina- Israel yang bermula dari diresmikannya deklarasi balfour pada awal abad ke-20, melahirkan berbagai bentuk perlawanan rakyat Palestina, mulai dari Intifadhah sampai Toufan Al-Aqsa, yang mencerminkan ketangguhan luarbiasa, baik secara fisik maupun spiritual. Daya tahan ini kemudian berhasil membangkitkan simpati dunia, termasuk masyarakat Barat yang terinspirasi untuk memeluk agama Islam. Dalam hal ini, seorang jurnalis British bernama Lauren Booth, menjadi salah satunya.

**Kata kunci:** palestina, daya tahan, lauren booth.

### Abstract

*This research examines the history of Palestinian resistance and its impact on the emergence of converts to Islam in the West, using historical research methods that include heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. This research focuses on the development of Palestinian resistance, their resilience that garnered global sympathy, and the case study of Lauren Booth. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which originated from the issuance of the Balfour Declaration in the early 20th century, gave rise to various forms of Palestinian resistance, from the Intifada to Toufan Al-Aqsa, showcasing extraordinary physical and spiritual resilience. This resilience successfully evoked global sympathy, including inspiring Western communities to embrace Islam. Among them was Lauren Booth, a British journalist who converted to Islam.*

**Keywords:** palestine, durability, lauren booth.

### INTRODUCTION

The conflict between Palestine and Israel has deep historical roots. It began with geopolitical fragmentation in the early 20th century, when Zionism a political movement pioneered by Theodor Herzl aiming to seize Palestinian land (Zen Abdurrahman, 2015), found its momentum through the issuance of the Balfour Declaration in 1917. This declaration, issued on November 2, 1917, with the

approval of British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour to Lord Rothschild, President of the British Zionist Federation, stated:

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and

religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country (Zen Abdurrahman, 2015).

The Balfour Declaration marked the beginning of the Zionist movement's efforts to realize a Jewish state through mass migration. Its direct impact was evident on December 11, 1917, when large numbers of Jewish volunteers joined British forces and succeeded in entering Jerusalem—signaling the end of Jewish exile.

These included the 1920-1921 revolts, the 1929 Buraq Uprising, and the 1936 Peasant Uprising. The resistance was a response to policies that allowed massive Jewish migration into Palestine during the British Mandate period (1917-1948) lasted. During this time, Jews were permitted to buy and sell land in Palestine which, during the Ottoman rule, was prohibited from being bought and sold (Zen Abdurrahman, 2015).

These tensions culminated in 1948, when the State of Israel was declared. This event led to the mass exodus of Palestinians, known as the Nakba meaning “catastrophe” a term that refers to the tragedy experienced by the Palestinian people. Jewish forces launched large-scale ethnic cleansing operations aimed at removing indigenous Palestinians and establishing a Jewish nation-state in the region (Nadim N. Rouhana, 2011).

In the following years, the Arab-Israeli wars continued, with both sides fighting for control over Palestinian territory. Amid increasing pressure, the Palestinian people responded with various forms of resistance, from diplomatic organizations such as the PLO, founded on June 2, 1964, to armed resistance groups like Hamas. These resistance efforts were not solely driven by the desire to reclaim land but also reflected a deeper struggle to preserve religious identity, cultural heritage, and nationalism amid an unsupportive global climate.

The Palestinian people's persistence in defending their rights has not only generated international solidarity but also influenced Western audiences who have witnessed the injustices they endure. Their resistance—both physical and spiritual—has become an inspiration to many, to delve deeper into the underlying essence of the Palestinian struggle.

This article does not merely discuss the general history of the Israeli-

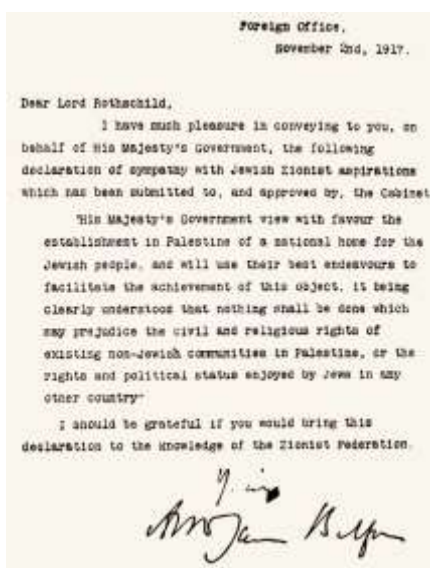


Figure 1. Balfour Declaration

Palestinian conflict; it also offers a new perspective by highlighting Palestinian resilience as a narrative that transcends geographical and ideological boundaries. This resilience has drawn global sympathy and even influenced Western individuals to embrace Islam. This study specifically focuses on the case of Lauren Booth, a British woman who converted to Islam following a spiritual journey in Palestine.

## **METHODS**

This study employs the historical research method, which consists of four stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Nina Herlina, 2020). The first stage is heuristics, which involves the collection of historical sources relevant to the research topic. The sources used in this study are divided into two categories: primary and secondary sources. Primary sources refer to original, unprocessed information obtained and recorded directly by individuals who were involved in or witnessed the historical events. In this study, primary sources include digital archives such as news reports and documentation of Palestinian resistance, interview videos, as well as a book written by Lauren Booth herself. To strengthen the literature, this research also utilizes secondary sources obtained through literature reviews and academic journal articles.

The second stage is source criticism. In this stage, all sources gathered during the heuristic phase are evaluated to ensure their quality. This criticism process is divided into two steps: external and internal criticism. External criticism involves verifying the authenticity of a source. Once a source is confirmed to be authentic, internal criticism is conducted to assess its credibility and accuracy.

The third stage is interpretation. This involves analyzing and synthesizing the facts obtained from various sources. During this phase, the researcher attempts to connect the data collected in the heuristic stage to provide meaning to the historical evidence and to achieve a deeper historical understanding. In this study, interpretation is carried out to connect historical facts with the impact of Palestinian resistance on the rise of converts to Islam in the West.

The final stage is historiography, which refers to the systematic presentation of the research findings. The written form of this study is a historical narrative of the Palestinian people's resistance and resilience, which later contributed to the spread of Islam in the Western world.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The History of Palestinian Resistance: From the Intifada to the Al-Aqsa Flood**

The resistance of the Palestinian people is a long-standing struggle that has become a

symbol of the fight against colonialism and oppression in modern history. One of the key milestones in this history of resistance is the Intifada, a wave of Palestinian uprisings that began on December 9, 1987, in Gaza. This movement continued to expand and spread across various Palestinian territories (Karen Armstrong, 2018).

The Intifada emerged as a response to the seemingly endless Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite numerous efforts, including third-party mediation, these attempts failed to bring about the desired results. When peaceful approaches no longer yielded significant outcomes, the Palestinian people opted for a new method, later known as the Intifada.

The term "Intifada" in Arabic means "shaking off" or "breaking free." Specifically, the direct trigger of this movement was an incident near the Jabalya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, where an Israeli military truck rammed into a group of Palestinians, killing four and injuring seven others (Putri, 2020).

The Intifada marked a new era of mass resistance in Palestine, ending years of prior passivity. Although lacking adequate weaponry, this did not deter the Palestinian people from launching the Intifada movement. Palestinians developed their own forms of resistance one of the most notable being masked youths ambushing Israeli soldiers with a barrage of stones (*The First Intifada*,

2003). It is therefore unsurprising that this period gave rise to the term *athfalul-hijarah* or "children of the stones." This method of stone-throwing resistance holds symbolic significance, drawing inspiration from the heroic story of the Prophet David, who defeated King Goliath using a single stone (Khumairoh & Fadhil, 2019).

The Intifada movement garnered significant international attention. Nevertheless, this form of resistance was no match for the advanced weaponry used by the Israeli military forces. The increasing level of violence from the Israeli side, which responded to the uprising with an iron fist, persisted throughout this phase of the Intifada.

During this period, a new Palestinian resistance movement emerged Harakat al-Muqawwamat al-Islamiyyah, widely known as HAMAS. The ideological roots of HAMAS can be traced back to the 1970s, when it existed as a social Islamic organization. Originally a part of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine, HAMAS transformed into an armed resistance group following a deadly incident involving an Israeli truck that killed several Palestinian civilians. This event galvanized Brotherhood leaders to establish HAMAS officially. The organization was founded on December 13, 1987, by a number of mujahideen, including Syeikh Ahmad Yassin, Dr. Abdel Aziz Al-Rantissi, Muhammad Taaha, Dr. Ibrahim Al-Baruzi, Muhammad Syamah, Abdul Fatah Dakhon,

Isa An-Nasyar, dan Shalah Syahadah (Zen Abdurrahman, 2015).

In the first wave, The First Intifada continued into the early 1990s. During the First Gulf War in 1991, Iraq ceased to be a dominant power in the Middle East, leaving Palestine without a strong ally. In the early 1990s, efforts to achieve peace continued. The process was initiated in Madrid in 1991, eventually leading to secret negotiations in Oslo, Norway (*The First Intifada*, 2003). In 1993, Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin shook hands on the lawn of the White House in Washington, D.C., officially signing the Oslo Peace Accords (Karen Armstrong, 2018).

The Oslo Agreement, signed in 1993, represented a pivotal moment in the trajectory of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It was viewed as the conclusion of the First Intifada and gave hope for the establishment of a Palestinian state under the two-state solution framework. The agreement called for the creation of the Palestinian Authority and the gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and parts of the West Bank.

The Oslo Accords were conceived as a response to the stagnation in bilateral negotiations between Israel and Palestine, previously initiated through the Madrid Conference. This conference functioned as an official diplomatic forum between the conflicting parties, convened by the Spanish government with the support of

the United States and the Soviet Union on October 30, 1991, in Madrid. Participating nations in the conference included Israel, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan (Salman Faridz, 2011).

The Oslo Accords marked a series of peace initiatives aimed at fostering harmonious diplomatic relations between the Arab world and Israel, with particular emphasis on resolving the Palestinian issue (Silpiah et al., 2022). In practice, the Oslo I Accord, signed in Washington in 1993, outlined the transfer of the Gaza Strip and the city of Jericho to Palestinian administration. This was followed by the Oslo II Accord in November 1996, which extended Palestinian control to parts of the West Bank, including the city of Hebron. Oslo III, signed on May 4, 1999, addressed the handover of East Jerusalem, Jewish settlements, and facilitating the return of Palestinian refugees.

Ideally, the Oslo Accords of May 4, 1999, were to culminate in the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. However, this outcome was ultimately rejected by Israel, which perceived the accords not as a genuine pathway to peace, but rather as a new framework for continued conflict.

Throughout its course, multiple peace initiatives were undertaken, including the 1997 Hebron Negotiations, the Wye River I and II Negotiations, the Camp David II Summit, and the Annapolis Conference (Silpiah et al., 2022).

The Oslo Accords, which were initially regarded as a significant breakthrough toward peace between Palestine and Israel, ultimately transformed into a new source of suffering for the Palestinian people. Rather than fostering harmony, the failure to properly implement the accords exacerbated tensions within the region and gave rise to profound disillusionment among the Palestinian population. This widespread dissatisfaction eventually culminated in the eruption of the Second Intifada in 2000, a mass uprising that served as a powerful protest against the inequities and injustices embedded in the Oslo peace process.

One of the key events that sparked the Second Intifada was Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, which was heavily guarded by 1,200 soldiers and police officers (*The Second Intifada*, 2003). This action not only wounded the sensitivities of the Palestinian people but was also seen as a deliberate provocation aimed at exacerbating an already tense situation. In his book *Palestine*, Harun Yahya (2003) explains that Ariel Sharon was globally known for his aggressive policies towards Palestine, including a series of massacres, incitements, and rhetoric that fueled conflict. According to Yahya, this visit was part of a calculated strategy to worsen relations and escalate the conflict (Harun Yahya, 2005).

The Second Intifada continued to fragment the peace process, leading to a sustained escalation of violence between the two nations. This conflict did not subside in 2002 but extended into subsequent years, with notable flare-ups in 2003, 2013, and 2021, culminating in the October 7, 2023, Operation *Thufan Al-Aqsa*, also known as *Operation Al-Aqsa Flood*, which remains ongoing to this day (Umut Uras, 2023).

### **Resilience that Inspires Global Sympathy**

The complex and prolonged conflict between Palestine and Israel has not only impacted the military-political dynamics of the Middle East, but it has also given rise to the extraordinary resilience of the Palestinian people. Their inexhaustible human resources in fighting for their rights demonstrate the remarkable endurance of the Palestinian resistance. Thus, it can be said that Palestine is a nation that has produced generations of fighters with strong, brave mentalities.

The resilience of the Palestinian people in the face of a conflict that has persisted for several decades serves as a remarkable example of social and cultural fortitude in modern history. Despite facing numerous hardships, such as military occupation, economic blockades, mass expulsions, and armed violence, the Palestinian people have managed to preserve their identity and aspirations.

Palestinian children have become both witnesses and active participants in the ongoing conflict that continues to devastate everything in its path. They grow up faster than children anywhere else in the world.

As documented in Budi Santoso's book "*kisah-kisah kekejaman Israel di Palestina*" many Palestinian children, ranging from middle school to high school age, openly express a desire to die as martyrs in battle. In fact, approximately 60% of Palestinian middle and high school students are already aware of and prepared for jihad. Such a mindset and extraordinary courage are undoubtedly shaped by the harsh environment in which they are raised (Budi Santoso, 2011). The book also recounts a story of Gaza children playing soccer in a war zone, surrounded by the remnants of destroyed buildings, amidst the cries and sorrow that linger in the air. Despite these conditions, they are still able to smile and joyfully play with a ball that is no longer intact.

Furthermore, the resilience of the Palestinian people is inseparable from their profound spiritual strength and unwavering faith in God. This deep-rooted belief serves as the foundational pillar that enables them to endure even the most difficult of circumstances. Even in the face of unimaginable suffering, Palestinians continue to display remarkable patience and gratitude.

This extraordinary fortitude has captured international attention and sparked a growing curiosity among Western youth to learn more about Islam. Through the power of social media platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, the steadfastness of the Palestinian people has been documented and widely disseminated, conveying a raw and deeply human narrative to the global community.

An article published on TRT World recounts the story of a Palestinian woman sitting on the ground, holding her lifeless toddler wrapped in a white shroud. Tears stream down her face as she mourns in silence. Yet, what she utters are words of gratitude. Her expression of faith deeply moved millions on social media, sparking not only a wave of humanitarian solidarity in the form of donations, but also inspiring a profound interest in rediscovering Islam (Ayse Betul Aytakin, 2024).

The impact of this phenomenon has been profoundly significant in shaping social change across various parts of the world, particularly in the West. According to data from Morocco World News, the rate of religious conversion to Islam in Europe has surged by 400% since the onset of the Israeli attacks on Gaza. The ongoing conflict in Gaza between Hamas and Israel, which reignited on October 7, 2023, has once again been broadcast widely through social media platforms. Millions of people have witnessed firsthand the

violence that has claimed thousands of Palestinian lives in what has been described as an act of genocide. This exposure has prompted many to revisit the historical and political background of the region. As a result of witnessing the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza, there has been a growing movement to explore Islam, with social media becoming a key medium for such exploration. This trend is further supported by TikTok analytics, which recorded a sharp increase in engagement with the hashtag *#Islam* since early October 2023. During this period, videos tagged with *#Islam* have garnered over 35 billion views globally, with the majority of viewers aged between 18 and 24 years old (*After Seeing the Struggle of Palestinians in Gaza, TikTok Users Are Learning about Islam*, 2023).

### **Lauren Booth, A Spiritual Journey in Palestine**

Lauren Booth is a British journalist, writer, and actress, who is also the sister-in-law of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. She represents a concrete example of how the steadfast resistance of the Palestinian people has influenced religious conversions in the West.

In her book *Finding Peace in the Holy Land*, Booth recounts her first journey to Palestine in 2005, when she traveled to the West Bank to cover the Palestinian elections. At that time, as a Christian, she described her visit as a kind

of pilgrimage, retracing the footsteps of Jesus (Booth, 2018). However, at the end of this trip, she had an unforgettable experience that marked the beginning of her interest in Islam. While shopping, accompanied by a young Palestinian man, she asked him to help her find a copy of the Qur'an in English. When they eventually found the holy book, the young man sincerely refused to accept payment from her, asking only that she not forget Palestine. This selfless gesture left a profound impression on Booth, who at the time admitted to holding negative stereotypes about Palestinian Muslims.



Figure 2. Lauren Booth

Lauren's journey in Ramallah further solidified her perspective on the solidarity of the Palestinian people. While walking in the cold winter without a jacket, she was approached by an elderly hijabi woman who brought her into her modest home and offered her a large coat from her own wardrobe. Despite living in hardship, the Palestinian people exhibited a generosity that Lauren had never encountered elsewhere in the world. In one of her interview videos, Lauren

described how she constantly encountered acts of kindness at every step during her time in Palestine (*Jurnal Ternama Asal Inggris Menemukan Kebenaran! - Perjalan Mualaf Lauren Booth*, 2022).

The most pivotal moment in Lauren's spiritual journey occurred in 2008, when she found herself trapped in Gaza during wartime. Throughout the holy month of Ramadan, she witnessed firsthand how the people of Gaza supported one another and continued to fast despite extreme poverty. This experience became deeply personal when she delivered food to a family living in a refugee shelter. There, she asked a mother why she continued to fast under such difficult conditions. With a gentle smile, the woman replied, "*I fast to remember the poor.*" This simple yet profound answer moved Lauren deeply, as it reflected the extraordinary spiritual depth of Islam embodied by the Palestinian people. That moment became the starting point of Lauren's contemplation about embracing Islam.

Throughout her journey, Lauren observed how, despite enduring harsh realities, the Palestinian people consistently demonstrated a spirit of solidarity, generosity, and unwavering faith. The spiritual awakening she experienced in Palestine opened her eyes to the essence of Islam—far removed from the negative stereotypes perpetuated by the West. In 2010, Lauren made the life-

changing decision to convert to Islam. Her conversion reflects how the resilience of the Palestinian people amidst prolonged conflict can have a far-reaching global impact, touching the hearts of millions around the world.

## CONCLUSION

The history of Palestinian resistance resilience illustrates how their struggle has not only generated local impact but has also served as a global source of inspiration. From the First Intifada to Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, this historical continuum reflects the extraordinary spirit of the Palestinian people in enduring relentless conflict. Through acts of resistance and sacrifice, Palestinians have not only defended their rights, but also conveyed a profound humanitarian message that transcends geopolitical boundaries. They have demonstrated how faith, solidarity, and collective spirit can sustain a people even in the harshest of circumstances. This resilience and unity have evoked global sympathy and strengthened international support for their cause. Moreover, the enduring struggle of the Palestinian people has also left a spiritual impact—as exemplified by the personal journey of Lauren Booth, a Western convert to Islam who discovered the face of Islam through her experience in Palestine.

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