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Palestina – Uma biografia: Cem anos de guerra e resistência.

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The review of Rashid Khalidi's first Portuguese edition of "The Hundred Years War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017," from May 2022, gains particular relevance in 2024 amidst the tragedy that struck the Gaza Strip following the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023.

Originally published in 2020 in the United States, the book was titled in Portugal "Palestina – Uma biografia: Cem anos de guerra e resistência". This work represents Khalidi's eighth dedicated to the Middle East, framing the events in Palestine over a century within a global and historical context, emphasizing resistance against dispossession and media concealment. Drawing on archival research, personal experiences, and accessible materials, Khalidi aims to elucidate these realities clearly.

In the year Portugal commemorates the 50th anniversary of the Carnation Revolution, which ended over four decades of dictatorship and led to the independence of Portuguese colonies, Khalidi offers an evaluation of his work to "Portuguese readers, conscious of their country's colonial past" (p. 17).

The biography discussed in the book intertwines with the author's own life. Rashid Khalidi, born in New York in 1948 to a prominent Palestinian family, integrates personal recollections into the narrative, which includes his family's experiences. This familial heritage extends to his academic career, where Khalidi holds the Edward Said Professorship in Arab Studies at Columbia University, continuing Said's Palestinian-American legacy.

Rather than a comprehensive study of Palestinian history, Khalidi focuses on six pivotal moments, termed "declarations of war", highlighting the

colonial nature of century-long conflicts and the influence of external powers (p. 35). Adopting a personal narrative style, Khalidi begins by introducing his great-great-uncle, Yusuf Diya al-Din Pasha al-Khalidi, an educated Ottoman official and Jerusalem's mayor. In 1899, Yusuf wrote to Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, cautioning against native resistance to colonization and pleading, "in the name of God, leave Palestine in peace" (p. 24). Herzl responded promptly, prioritizing Jewish immigration benefits over local interests, a justification mirrored by other empires, as Edward Said elucidates in his seminal work on post-colonial studies: "they all claim to be different, with a mission to enlighten, civilize, impose order and democracy, resorting to force only reluctantly (...) despite clear evidence of destruction, desolation, and death inflicted by the latest 'mission civilisatrice'" (Said, 2003, p. 17).

In analysing this book, several key points emerge. The author aims to present the Palestinian perspective on the conflict with Israel, often referred to by Said as "permission to narrate" (p. 159). Concurrently, the book critiques Palestinian actions over the past century. Emphasizing the importance of media portrayal for both Palestinians and Israelis, and the effectiveness of their communication strategies, Khalidi identifies three recurring themes: failure, error, and naivety among Palestinians. Khalidi repeatedly highlights Palestinian leaders' limited understanding of US policy and the critical need to secure American public support. Despite efforts by Palestinian-American scholars to persuade leaders to prioritize shaping American public opinion, these efforts were largely unsuccessful (p. 162, 167). Even after the 1982 war in Lebanon, leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) remained uninformed about US policies (p. 227) and failed to execute comprehensive public relations campaigns akin to those of Israeli officials (p. 228).

Khalidi describes these issues as "vestiges of naive faith" (p. 228). The PLO's simplistic view of American government and decision-making structures led it to believe it could attain recognition from the US government, misunderstanding the close alignment between American and Israeli policies. These misperceptions contributed to the PLO's failure to effectively engage American public opinion and its unawareness of American indifference, even disdain, for its interests and goals (p. 229).

Khalidi not only critiques the naivety of Palestinian leaders but also questions the integrity of the US as a mediator (p. 233). He argues that the PLO's diplomatic strategy fatally erred in believing the United States could act as a neutral intermediary (p. 316). During the 1991 Madrid talks, neither Khalidi nor other members of the Palestinian delegation were aware of Henry Kissinger's 1975 commitment to Yitzhak Rabin to avoid presenting peace proposals that Israel did not approve (p. 230, 240, 243). Instead of capitalizing on the success of the First Intifada, the PLO became ensnared in a process that prolonged Israeli occupation and colonization (p. 232). Additionally, Arafat's failure to oppose Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait undermined the PLO's position in these negotiations (p. 236).

The terms "failure" and "error" also resurface as Khalidi discusses the rejection of the proposal for an Interim Palestinian Authority in 1992 (p. 249) and the historical mistake of the Oslo Accords for the Palestinian people, partly attributable to the incompetence of Palestinian emissaries and "Arafat's willingness to sign inadequate agreements" (p. 254, 255). Nonetheless, Khalidi posits that Palestinian leaders were so desperate to escape isolation in Tunisia that they would have "repeated the same errors in negotiations" (p. 241).

The media sometimes favoured Palestinians, such as during the Lebanon War in 1982 and the First Intifada, briefly reversing the "David versus Goliath" image (p. 219). However, the author critiques biased or insufficient media coverage, citing the First Intifada's casualty ratio of eight to one, often overlooked in American media (p. 222). During the Second Intifada, worsening conditions went largely unreported, surprising observers when Palestinians demonstrated their disillusionment in September 2000 (p. 265). Another pivotal moment was the failure of the 2000 Camp David summit, revealing the futility of both PLO diplomacy and Hamas violence in reclaiming Palestinian authority (p. 267, 272).

The imagery of suicide bombings during the Second Intifada further tarnished the Palestinian image, noted as strategically counterproductive (p. 273, 274). The author highlights Palestinian misperceptions about Israeli identity and society, and the erroneous belief that such attacks could destabilize Israeli

cohesion, ignoring Zionist nation-building efforts over a century (p. 309, 273, 274). Media coverage of the Second Intifada, similar to the First, obscured the disproportionate casualties (43:1) and the use of the Dahiya doctrine (named after a suburb in southern Lebanon) in the 2014 Gaza offensive, which caused widespread casualties but received minimal attention in mainstream American media (p. 280, 281, 284). These disparities underscore the debate over whether certain actions constitute war crimes, particularly indiscriminate attacks on civilians (p. 285). Despite media coverage, criticism of Israel has grown among younger, progressive Americans since the 2014 bombings.

Drawing parallels to 2024 is unavoidable. In the preface to the Portuguese edition, Khalidi references post-2017 events. In May 2021, “the world witnessed yet another outbreak of extreme violence in Palestine and Israel (...), including attempts by Israeli settlers to occupy several Palestinian homes” (p. 15). These attacks continued through 2021 and early 2022, with Gaza remaining “blocked and besieged since 2008” (p. 15). The author highlights a notable shift in public response due to unified reactions to images from Palestine, disseminated via social and “even” mainstream media, resonating globally, especially among young people (p. 16). By 2024, demonstrations for a permanent ceasefire and “Free Palestine” had spread across US universities, Europe, and Portugal. Khalidi’s use of “even” suggests dissatisfaction with mainstream media narratives, raising questions about analysing media coverage post-October 7, 2023, and the role of social media in disseminating Palestinians’ narratives amid Israeli restrictions on international media in Gaza.

We are also tempted to draw parallels between Israel’s post-October 7 war strategy and the Dahiya Doctrine used in Lebanon in 1982 and Gaza in 2014. Israel’s opposition to a Palestinian State since 1991 (p. 238) also persists in 2024. During the Obama administration, justifying fierce Gaza attacks as responses to terrorist missile launches against Israeli civilians (p. 296) echoes in 2024.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict’s fundamentally colonial nature cannot ignore two distinct peoples in Palestine. It has evolved from colonial to national conflict, necessitating mutual acceptance based on absolute equality of rights, including national rights. “There is no sustainable solution aside

from the unthinkable idea of extermination or expulsion of one people by another” (p. 310).

While not groundbreaking for Israeli-Arab conflict historians, Khalidi’s work significantly contributes to Arab Studies, offering a clear political and diplomatic timeline with a personal perspective. It amplifies Palestinian voices while critiquing their shortcomings, presenting the author’s outlook on the future. Despite being written pre-October 7th, Khalidi demonstrates profound insights, urging readers to reflect on current events within a century-long context.

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