



The Young and the Restless

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Not Here, Not There: A Portrait of the Young Palestinian Generation

by Michael Milshtein

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243 pages [in Hebrew]

Dr. Michael Milshtein's new book, *Not Here, Not There: A Portrait of the Young Palestinian Generation*, whose title is resonant of the name of the excellent and provocative film directed by Maysaloun Hamoud *In Between*, sheds light on a fascinating and challenging time for Palestinian society, which has been in the throes of a deep political crisis since the split between Fatah and Hamas. The title itself hints at the author's main argument, as he sees the younger generation living between a rock and a hard place. This is a generation that dreams of independence and freedom, but finds itself constrained and limited by the old order of the fragmented and patriarchal Palestinian political system and the impasse in the political process with Israel.

Milshtein's book focuses on the changes impacting the younger generation in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip. At times his analysis crosses the Green Line to compare these changes to processes underway in Arab society in Israel.

Beginning with a foreword by Lt. Gen. (ret.) Gadi Eisenkot, the book comprises thirteen chapters that are divided by subject, and while at times they are not arranged chronologically, they give a comprehensive and impressive picture of the elements that affect young Palestinian men and women, while examining changes and placing them in a historical perspective. Milshtein makes good use of sociological literature that deals with the study of intergenerational changes, referencing Karl Mannheim, whose research delves into intergenerational changes as part of class and social change, and Daniel Lerner, who points out the role of the media in creating the intergenerational experience (pp. 18, 68).

The importance of the Palestinian youth in moving the historical pendulum from 1948 to the present day is emphasized throughout the book. The main milestones since 1948 pass like a common thread from the Nakba generation to the revolution generation, which carried the torch of the armed struggle led by the Palestinian armed organizations starting in the mid-1960s. An important and significant intergenerational change was created by the "stones generation" that emerged with the first intifada. Its emergence not only reflected a desire to defy the submissive behavior of its parents after the war in 1967, but also led to a fundamental change in the center of gravity of the Palestinian political system, when the specific weight of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip increased and the areas began to consolidate in a way that created a competing infrastructure with the diaspora for the leadership of the PLO.

Beyond the historical aspect, Milshtein's book is replete with statistical data on the young Palestinian generation, and thereby joins a

host of publications that have appeared in the last decade and examine the image of the young generation in the Middle East, mainly after the outbreak of the Arab Spring. Among them are the historical and important work of Haggai Erlich, who wrote about generations of rebellion (Erlich, 2012), and the work of Ronit Marzan, who studied the struggle of the younger generation in what she called the old patriarchal order after the outbreak of the Arab Spring. Milshtein focuses on the young Palestinian generation that did not take part in the events of the Arab Spring, which largely bypassed Palestinian society. He describes the wave of violence of 2015, which was imprinted in the Israeli consciousness as the “knives intifada,” as a generation-shaping event that was not only an expression of a struggle against Israel but also a challenge to the existing order in the Palestinian political system.

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One of the most notable characteristics of the young Palestinian generation is what Milshtein calls “detachment” (p. 25). If during the events of the Arab Spring there was a sense that young Arabs were taking to the streets demanding, inter alia, to assume responsibility for their lives, in the Palestinian case perhaps one of the most politically formative experiences is the ongoing split between Fatah and Hamas and between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Despite the age of social media, the physical division distances the two parts of the Palestinian Authority one from another and creates a different maturation experience for the young people living on the respective sides of the fence. They not only deal with different regimes, but have also grown into different realities: that of Gaza, which was shaped in the

last decade by the culture of Islamic resistance; and that of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, fighting for its independence while officially recognizing Israel—which was once called by Fatah “a strong but not legendary enemy” (Fatah, 1969)—without being able to come to terms with it.

Another significant realm in shaping the image of the younger generation is the world of higher education. The campus enjoys a particular status in Arab society, and students played a special role in shaping and consolidating the institutions of the Palestinian national movement after the so-called Nakba in 1948 (Zelkovitz, 2015). Students enjoy a pioneering status in Palestinian society and are considered an element that should be an agent of change. The current generation of students consists of young people who grew up after the Oslo process and experienced the second intifada and Operation Defensive Shield as teenagers in the West Bank, as well as five rounds of violence between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. They have grown up in the world of social media and their pace of life is different from that of the generation of the founders of the Palestinian national movement, who operated in the universities of Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Germany in the late 1960s. The position of the student movement has weakened compared to its historical role in the diaspora and as a leader during the first intifada (Hayat, 2000). However, it is still considered the natural reservoir of the future political leadership, and the activists have ties to the military branches of the various armed organizations within it.

Although the age of social media amplifies the voice of the individual and encourages political and violent actions (Chorev, 2019), the strength of the student movement derives from its organizational skills, the collective nature of traditional Palestinian society, and the need to belong that political movements on campus fill for students, some of whom have just arrived from the rural periphery to the academic space in or near the West Bank cities.

In his book, Milshtein makes impressive use of literature and popular culture in order to provide readers with a glimpse into the world of Palestinian youth. In the student aspect, Milshtein gives examples from the captivating novel *Crime in Ramallah* by Abed Yahya, which provides a fascinating picture of everyday life on campus but even more, highlights phenomena on the fringes of society (p. 76). This comes alongside a brave touch on social problems that concern the young generation in the West Bank, who feel a sense of alienation from the old political leadership and seek a place to compose their story in the Palestinian struggle for national (and perhaps even personal) liberation on the way to self-determination.

In this context, Milshtein's analysis of the influence of Western culture on the younger generation is particularly interesting. While the culture of consumerism and the longing for brand names among the younger generation figures prominently on social media, polls show that the majority of young people observe religious customs: 96.2 percent fast during Ramadan and 65 percent even testified that they avoid shaking hands with members of the opposite sex (p. 76). The intensity of the polarization between modernity and tradition is also reflected in the strengthening of political Islam. Terrorist activists among the younger generation are identified with Hamas and Islamic Jihad—although most sport a Western appearance, such as Mohand Halabi, who carried out the stabbing attack in October 2015, and who, before his death, called for the third intifada (Levy, 2015).

In conclusion, Milshtein's book has much value, and contributes to the understanding of the profound changes that Palestinian society is undergoing and to the discourse on the transformations underway in the Palestinian political realm. The book is rich in Arabic sources and statistical data that support the author's claims about the young Palestinian generation being a generation that weathers many tensions, including between modernity

and tradition, and is imbued with deep despair at the political systems that have failed them and the ideologies that have partially collapsed. Readers will be able to derive much information and many insights about the contemporary Palestinian young generation, its attitudes, and its relationship with the past and the painful Palestinian history. Hence the book also leaves questions and doubts about the future and the question of where the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is headed.

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