



THE BIRTH OF THE ARAB CITIZEN
AND THE CHANGING MIDDLE EAST

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ISIS leaders have made it clear that they intend to redraw the map of the Muslim world and create a new caliphate out of conquered Syrian and Iraqi territory. In addition, Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, militia elements in Libya, and some of the Afghan Taliban have joined Islamic State. Meanwhile massacres of minorities and Shiites who refuse to convert to hard-line Sunni Islam has caused havoc in those areas conquered by ISIS. The US finally intervened with air strikes against these radical elements in August 2014 under the pretext of saving minority communities of Yazidis and Christians. The Obama administration also began bombing ISIS strongholds in Syria, after the Assad regime in August 2014 welcomed foreign intervention to weaken and destroy the radicals.

The Iraqi army, trained and equipped by the US, continues to melt away, leaving behind sophisticated military equipment ISIS confiscates as it has expanded its control of territory. Some Iraqi Sunni officers and troops who fought in Saddam Hussein's army have joined forces with ISIS, as have many tribal Sunni Iraqis, who were marginalized by the Shiite-dominated government of Nouri al-Maliki in Baghdad. An open question remained whether a new Iraqi government formed in late August and early September 2014 could ally with Sunni fighters and tribesmen to turn back ISIS and rule in the name of a large coalition. Their use of Shiite militias at the end of May 2015 to substitute for crumbling military forces can only antagonize sectarian cleavages and cause greater problems over the long run.

The non-al-Qaeda Syrian opposition concluded that the presence of those extremists could only strengthen their enemies in the region, including Israel and the Assad regime. The latter used the terrorism card to sow confusion among its Western opponents. A pattern emerged demonstrating that the Syrian government, in its massive bombing campaigns against civilians, did not attack known al-Qaeda bases in the north of Syria, and reports flowed that Damascus was indirectly purchasing petroleum from ISIS elements that controlled some Syrian oil wells.

Russia has pushed Assad to negotiate a ceasefire in the war, but did not nudge him into relinquishing power, a demand of the united opposition.⁶ As we went to press, a resolution of the Syrian crisis seemed as elusive as ever.

Other MENA countries face their own immediate problems. Libya, for example, has succumbed to warlordism, adding further to the country's chronic statelessness. A danger exists that Libya could implode and, if lucky, be reconstituted as four separate states, representing remnants of Ottoman provinces in pre-European colonial times. Bahrain, under Saudi military occupation, has been locked down. In Yemen, weakened by regionalism and tribalism, Shiite Houthi rebels, backed by Iran, and military forces loyal

to the country's former president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, initiated a civil war. The Saudis, as defenders of Sunni orthodoxy and fearful of Yemen's civil war spreading to the Arabian Peninsula, initiated an air campaign to strike what some commentators believe are Iranian-backed Houthi targets. Tunisia, meanwhile, despite its remarkable achievement of forging a new liberal constitution by consensus, faces major economic difficulties. Women everywhere in the region face increased restrictions on their liberty of action and by intensified male chauvinism.

THE NEED FOR A LONG VIEW APPROACH

Recall that history is filled with revolution and counterrevolution. In nineteenth-century Europe, Napoleon I, Metternich, Bismarck, all were counterrevolutionaries. Ultimately, however, upheavals, including two monumental twentieth-century wars, created a strong democratic movement throughout Europe, and economic growth markedly improved the lives of millions of people, while the unshackling of capitalism created pervasive poverty besides untold riches.

On the whole, the world is certainly a better place because of the French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions, although people living through them and immediately afterward could not have imagined what would emerge in their wake. It took time to appreciate fully the legacies of these and other revolutions, giving the long *durée* approach to history special meaning for all mass revolts and upheavals. In other words, we cannot judge outcomes of such mass movements in terms of immediate results, but rather we have to view their long-term outcomes. What has developed in the immediate wake of the Arab revolts, does not necessarily define what the final outcome will be.⁷

A new category of Arab citizen is emerging, mostly fearless in defending her or his rights.⁸ Even when intimidated by some of the new forces released by the revolts, such as revitalized Salafists in multiple guises, and in some countries armed bands taking the law into their own hands, or political parties and militaries rooted in the past, the proliferation of new civil society associations and of a new freedom of thought and expression, especially among young people, gives some hope that all is not lost and that a new, better society may come into being throughout the region over time. This will not happen immediately or automatically by itself, but rather those who cherish universal rights, transparency, the limitation of corruption, and widened opportunities will have to keep their guard up, organize fearlessly, and not give up hope that their actions can help change their world for the better. Past struggles elsewhere demonstrate that expanding rights and opportunities entails constant struggle that must go on continuously, often in the face of fearful opposition.

This chapter examines the symbolic interactions between Palestinian social and political movements and Arab protest movements. It also seeks to show the influence of the Arab revolts on the reconfiguration of social movements in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and their transnational connections. Likewise it examines political and social issues, different modes of mobilization, and symbolic practices by Palestinian activists. While some might argue that these youth groups' views are the result of old parties and ideologies of political organizations, their actions, this study demonstrates, are independent of any direct political affiliations with specific parties, while they maintain a presence within the resistance movement. The chapter deals primarily with the Palestinian youth movements, whether Islamist or leftist, providing a new political map in the form of new political movements and their associations, especially as a result of the mobilizations of 2011 and 2012. It begins with a brief historical analysis of the role these movements played in Palestinian society, examining first the conditions of their emergence and then their sociological context. It then explores the dominant groups of actors within these organizations, and how they behaved. In doing so, it shows the novel modes of communication used, especially in the new virtual media, to influence public opinion. Finally, the author explores the literature produced by these movements, including leaflets and flyers, which elucidates their political aims, visions, and demands. The information presented here is based on direct observation or testimonies of participants in the new movements. The author relies on interviews with activists, as well as on direct observations.¹ [Eds: Meanwhile, as war raged in Gaza in summer 2014, US Secretary of State John Kerry embarked on a mission to get the Israelis and Hamas to reach at least a truce—a far more modest goal than those he had at the end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014 as he sought then to entice the Palestinians and Israelis to enter into negotiations for a peace settlement, a process that had failed many times before. While the Israelis announced that they succeeded at destroying tunnels from Gaza into Israel, they responded with overwhelming force to Hamas's firing of rockets into Israel amid Hamas's insistence that Israel lift its blockade of Gaza. As for the broader peace process—which Kerry had focused on starting more than six months earlier, shuttling between Israel and the Palestinian territories trying to narrow the differences between the protagonists—the main sticking points continued to be Israel's building additions to its settlements in Palestinian territory and continued pressures from Palestinians not to give up the Right of Return of Refugees to their homeland. With such intractable issues on the table, Kerry's efforts at that point failed to bear fruit, and Hamas's enhanced prominence ensuing from the Gaza war seemed likely to further complicate any such negotiations in the near future.]

CHAPTER 6
PROTESTERS OF THE
PALESTINIAN YOUTH SOCIAL MOVEMENT
ABAHER EL-SAKKA

INTRODUCTION

In Palestine, the phenomenal expansion of the number of advocacy groups is a response to the political situation we are living under. This expansion has resulted in a simultaneous double transformation, transnational and internal. Palestinian militant social mobilization against colonialism has a very old history, beginning even before the creation of Israel. In the struggle that ensued after the British conquered Palestine, Palestinians organized a six-month strike in 1936. Today, many of my interviewees are facing either directly or indirectly the danger of Israeli settlements impinging on their existence.

The youth involvement in Palestine is based on a culture of significant interest in the political. Youth groups form and are influenced by politics, impacting on their identity formation, which is an important part of their socialization process. This process influences them politically as well as culturally. The political socialization of young Palestinians leads some to claim that these youth activists are ideological and nationalistically influenced. They are already in conflicts and identify with social groups. One youth movement from the past, *al-shabāb*—“youth”—were the main players in the First Intifada (1987–1993). (These *al-shabāb* should not be confused with the Somalia-based *al-shabāb*, or Al-Shabaab.—Eds.) Many of my interviewees² knew about it and see it as a model to follow. Abir³, one of the interviewees, said that “the model for our current actions is the First Intifada.” Indeed, during the First Intifada, the central aim of the Palestinian uprising was to organize civil disobedience, in the form of a fight for Palestinian nationalism. Furthermore, the formation of committees for organizing volunteers led to new and different events, such as sweeping the streets, helping farmers harvest olives, and teaching kids reading and writing when schools were closed. “Citizen initiatives” of this nature, mainly social and political, often relied on charitable, educational, and religious networks found in clinics and schools. Their actions included organizing general strikes or demonstrations.

Another example of these initiatives was the establishment of committees of “Youth for Social Action,” which organized self-help activities and cultural events ranging from teaching farmers how to make jam to taking care of the needy. Cultural events were celebrated on important dates, such as the passing of the Balfour Declaration on November 2, 1917. Young people justified their

actions by referring to notions such as “civic consciousness” and the ideology of *sumud* (resilience), as well as “passive resistance” characterized by various survival strategies, all of which have now been emulated by the new youth groups. We found that young people have within their collective imagination mythical notions about how they represent this prior period.

THE CRISIS OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

The Palestinian national movement is now at a crucial moment in its history. The failure of the Oslo Accords (signed on September 13, 1993), the upheavals in the region, and the realities of Palestine being divided into smaller enclaves are factors that have culminated in the current crisis. Deficiencies include a failure of socioeconomic policies of the Palestinian Authority (henceforth PA), clientelism and corruption, its inability to meet the needs of the Palestinian population, as well as an increase in the numbers of Israeli settlements in the territories. This is all paralleled by the view that the PA has achieved nothing. One can argue that nothing in the realities of occupation has changed to show a positive light to Palestinians during a period of twenty years of negotiations with Israel. The signing of the Oslo Accords and the establishment of a Palestinian autonomous authority, in a small part of Palestine, was perceived at the time as the creation of a “new state,” the “State of Palestine.” Even if it was not independent, this “imagined” state might have been sufficient to satisfy the desire of the Palestinians to live with at least a semblance of “normality.” But the Oslo Accords ended in an open conflict. Moreover, the current Palestine no longer corresponds to the one described by the Oslo Accords, whose achievements many Palestinians thus see as illusory: symbolic independence, the right to use national symbols, and a symbolic right of return. This sense of crisis, and everything surrounding it, led many of my interviewees to criticize what they see as the reduction of the “Palestinian state” to a new form of symbol, so that we are now the owners of a “state symbol that is the state itself.” All these factors explain the profound crisis of the national project, which in turn manifests itself in weak public participation, lack of vision, a general sense of paralysis, rising consumerism, life in a bubble where one imagines a lack of direct occupation, internal divisions, passivity, lack of confidence in politicians and in the resistance alike, and witnessing the PA’s growing authoritarianism toward its opponents. Also, many ex-activists harbor intense bitterness stemming from painful experiences including severe punishment (such as imprisonment, torture, injury, loss of family members, and destruction of houses by the Israelis)—suffering that was, in the end, used by politicians to mobilize for party gains or political purposes. The consequently negative image of political power has given rise to these new activists who are either

independent or to opposition voices within the political parties to which they belong. Most of the interviewees are members of political parties or identify themselves as supporters of one party or another even though not members. As Aghsan³ explained:

We do not rely on political parties. Our aim is to form an independent political group. It is our new way of practicing politics, and in leading the fight. We stand as an opposition to the methods of the Palestinian authorities that we see as based on trading for 20 years. So we blame the political leaders of all parties for their inability to lead the fight. We are members of political parties, ex-prisoners. ... Our common goal is to fight in two directions. On the one hand, fight against the social and economic policy of the Palestinian Authority, and on the other hand, lead the fight against [Israeli] colonialism. We're here to fill a void in the struggle and lay the foundations for a new national project. We provide unity for small groups formed by individual initiatives and so we started to think about how we can take action.

This statement shows the growing social discontent operating in the background of an oppressive colonization, and it also shows a crisis affecting the Palestinian political parties' mobilization of the youth. Likewise, it points at the effect of that discontent within the Palestinian project itself.

THE NEW PALESTINIAN PROTEST MOVEMENT

This study concerns itself with all forms of protest movements. While the Palestinian population can be said to be generally overpoliticized, whether we are speaking of Palestinians in the Palestinian territories or those in the diaspora, their national targets are clear.

The fall of the Tunisian regime energized the new Palestinian protest movement, with young Palestinians forming an "independent youth movement" and focusing on the cause of national reunification. Indeed, Palestinian society has for seven years been divided into those people living in the Gaza Strip and those on the West Bank. Two political forces—the Palestinian Authority under Fatah in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza—have divided the control of our territories.

The new youthful protesters form a constellation of varied initiatives and heterogeneous structures. The party divisions are due to diverse factors relating to general discontent as well as opposition to local policies. The leaders of this new movement I have studied are mostly from the middle class and therefore have formed a somewhat cosmopolitan environment that has even led to their being viewed as "Westernized." Skilled in communications, they produce slogans in Arabic and English. The activists of these social movements are new actors on the political scene. Many of them are young and

well-educated, which serves them in their leadership roles. They are politicized and refer to nationalist and social frameworks to defend their actions. Leaders of these movements interact with each other within networks, and have excellent organizational skills. Their leadership talents and achievements have secured them the trust that they enjoy among the members of the movement. They have gained the moral authority and legitimacy to lead. These traits are reinforced through social relationships that have developed between the participants in the struggle. They are strengthened through the shared experience of collective actions, even by their failed experiences. The events of May 15, 2012, which I will discuss below, contributed to their aura of success. These youth have, through their leadership of new organizations, increased their social and symbolic status. Their socialization within these movements produces systems of rules—what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls a deeply differentiated *habitus*, or mindset that generates certain practices and dispositions.⁴ They have gained recognition and legitimacy through their leadership of strikes, the boycott of Israeli goods, and civil or other actions of disobedience. However, there may be a downside to such activity, for engaging in a movement, especially for those younger activists with little experience and coming from a poor political culture, gives them a kind of political affiliation that can be manipulated to serve the pursuit of personal interests.

THE INFLUENCE OF OTHER MODELS OF ARAB PROTESTERS

All began with the spark triggered from the Arab street in 2011. A small group of young people decided to stage a solidarity march on March 15, 2011. As Fadi said:

Once the “Arab Spring” began, these revolutions gave us life (a breath and a pulse) to start our job. Finally our Arab roots were awakened! We began to be interested in establishing contacts with our Arab brothers. Our goal was to popularize the resistance; to call for the boycott [of Israeli goods and institutions], to open again the door for the election of the Palestinian National Council, and to restore strength to the Palestinian cause, all to be done by a call for a return to the Arab cause.⁵

Névine agreed with this and almost said the same:

I’ve never been an activist, but when the events in Tunisia began, they inspired me. I was hooked on following the events and I followed the info hour by hour and we made t-shirts signed with slogans like “we are all Tunisians, we are all Egyptians.” Other friends made t-shirts on which they wrote “thank you Tunisia, Egypt thank you.” There is a slogan dear to my heart, “Finally, we are proud to be Arabs.”⁶

Sabih's words echo the same emotions: "The revolution in the Arab world was the spark of my involvement in the youth movement. Suddenly, I resembled my Arab colleagues. I experienced that because I was born in Tunisia, so I have personal affinities with them. I then took to the streets with a lot of pride."⁷ As another interviewee told me, "I started to get involved as the Arab Spring began; I participated to support the Tunisian and Egyptian people."⁸ Huria said, "Before the Arab revolutions, I had no sense of Arab nationalism, but when the events started, I read more and more about Egypt and Tunisia. As for demonstrating, this was the first time in my life that I find myself face to face with the Palestinian police who were forbidding me from confronting the soldiers of the colonizing state."⁹

From this perspective, the spark was Tunisia. As the Tunisian revolt got underway, Palestinian students took to the streets waving slogans such as "Thank you Tunis." This movement was concentrated mainly in two cities, Ramallah and Gaza, where many Palestinians spontaneously expressed their support for the Tunisian revolt, quickly causing violent or physical confrontations with the police.

Indeed, the Palestinian leadership forged close links with the Tunisian government and with the Tunisian state bureaucracy during the fifteen years that top PLO figures spent living in Tunis and its suburbs. Fadi told me, "In the early demonstrations, Palestinian security services confiscated the Tunisian flag." Several other witnesses confirmed his testimony in describing the repressive methods of the security apparatus and paramilitary forces, which, they said, outnumbered the participants in the events. Moreover, the Palestinian police banned demonstrations in Ramallah; to enforce a guideline that was so often used by Yasir Arafat: "We should not intervene in Arab affairs."

As Housam explained, "I was ordered by the Palestinian security services to close my blog and my website. They threatened me with jail if I participated in the protest outside the Egyptian embassy in Ramallah. We went down the street and there were people who were demonstrating in support of Mubarak (most likely members of the civil security service and other people whom they had rallied as participants)."¹⁰

On March 15, the two ruling parties (Hamas and Fatah), aiming to quell the momentum of support for the movement, sent members of their security organs and other officials to attend the event—not to infiltrate, but instead to divide the group through physical, but nonviolent, means. They worked their way through the crowd, pushing the core of those representing the movement toward the outside. They also led demonstrators to shout a single slogan: "It's the end of the internal Palestinian division." At the same time, they pushed away the militants who carried other banners, which called for the return of

the PLO as a political representative of all Palestinians and demanded the election of a new Palestinian National Council that was supposed to meet the expectations of all the Palestinian people and not just those living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Palestinians are especially prone to mobilize around May 15, which marks the creation of Israel in 1948 (the Nakba)¹¹, and June 10, the date marking the Arab defeat in the Six Day War in 1967. Both dates played a fundamental role in the establishment of modern Palestinian identity and both thus have importance in the construction of collective memory, especially for the Palestinians living in the diaspora. They have consequently become reference points in the history of modern Palestine. One can also argue that it was 1948 that shaped modern Palestinian national consciousness. Today, the Palestinian collective memory is composed of all the elements that enable the past to be recreated in the present.¹² The function of collective memory can be seen in two factors: it allows the cohesion and integration of past and present, and ensures the continuity of the past into the present. These can be formed by processes such as manipulation, invention, selective forgetting, and memory repression, as well as the shaping of images, symbols, and even practices in the interests of a group.¹³ All this fits the past of a group to its present needs, as it ensures social cohesion and contributes to the process of national identity formation. This memory is based on the diffusion of collective images of the past and their transformation into collective memory and incorporated into our culture¹⁴. There are sequences of behavior that take on ceremonial or ritual significance that also play a role in shaping and strengthening identity formation. These include ceremonies in the form of political liturgies, which occur during national holidays or official commemorations. Such celebrations and commemorations stand as important moments in social life. They seem essential to the promotion of group cohesion and the dissemination of its values and the core elements of its ideology. These festive commemorations, both in the past as in the present, have already marked their social space. Some dates, like that of May 15, are well known and are used to pass on the national image of identity, as well as emphasize all the political and cultural questions that are important to the Palestinian people.

With all of this in mind, the question of fixing a date for a mobilization becomes extremely significant, so for these activists, the choice of a “date” is a way to respond to the policies of the PA. By marking their difference with the PA, we see here emerging what Arno Mayer called the “duty of memory” as a form of “ownership of the past.” He writes, “And we were able to circumvent this vision of the Palestinian Authority and we decided to commemorate the Nakba. This is our way of speaking back to the PA; we speak in actions and not

in words, and we do so by confronting the soldiers of the occupation. Thus, we do all what we are not supposed to do, we are not silent.”¹⁵

Ultimately, only by *not* interfering in the new Palestinian movement in support of the Arab revolts could the PA avoid provoking the same revolts among Palestinians. It did this while displaying an officially neutral position with regard to the Arab uprisings. This can be seen in Hamas’s mixed stance in Gaza. While favoring the Tunisian revolt, Hamas awaited the outcome of events in Egypt. Hamas officials remained silent until the fall of Mubarak. The PA, knowing that this was an important movement in Palestinian society, decided to reattach the youth movement to its side to regain public support. By sending some members of its security forces into the streets dressed as civilians, it hoped to be a mobilizing force for its own agenda. These newly minted civilians had ready-made slogans, demanding an end to Palestinian division—a play on a popular sentiment. Its task was, on the one hand, to reinforce this division, and counter other demonstrations by being present and by trying to derail the movement by other means. The dealings of such a PA-made group is explained in the words of another one of our interviewees: “During the youth movement march in support of the Arab revolts, the youth belonging to the security service harassed girls or beat up Palestinian activists and arrested others.” He also commented, “In Gaza, youth were assaulted in a repressive manner by Hamas’s security services.” Through its security apparatus, the state’s tentacles are now being felt in almost all sectors.

REOCCUPATION OF PUBLIC SPACE

In Palestinian society, the anticolonial struggle has laid the foundation for a culture of social mobilization that was organized to appropriate public space. There is also a tradition of signing petitions. However, unlike neighboring Arab peoples, Palestinians have long voiced their views in public. But now, for the first time, they were directly challenging the Palestinian authorities. In what seems like one voice and might thus be quoted as such, my interviewees said, “In the past, we were as angry and as full of disagreements as we are now. And even if we wanted to react, the circumstances were not suitable to act. Now it is time to speak.” Another interviewee, Mūhib, told me that young people started shouting, “Get out of your homes and demand your rights. Speak up; do not let freedom pass you by.”¹⁶ They were motivated by the Arab unifying slogan, “The people want the fall of the regime”—modified by the Palestinian movements to “the people want the end of divisions.” This slogan was immediately taken to the streets and met with approval, but demonstrators added others, such as, “When the people decide to live, then the chains of slavery are broken.” Mūhib noted, “This is what we sang in our school time and time again.” In this way,

Palestinian streets became “contaminated” with the spirit of revolt flowing through the Arab world.

Indeed, activists accused the Palestinian Authority of holding a double public discourse that has always worked in two directions or was addressed to two audiences. The first audience is the international community—the ostensible aim being to establish a “peace” process, apply “international law,” and, hopefully, create an internationally recognized independent state. The second audience is the Palestinian people—voters, exiles, refugees, combatants, and, by now, citizens of the PA who do not always agree with the diplomatic policy the PA pursues. Indeed, such groups have asserted their independence from the Authority’s wishes by managing to organize raids on the Kalandia military roadblocks (near Ramallah) and against the Israeli settlements of Betil. In doing so they have sent a message to the PA that they are in no mood to commemorate the Nakba without mobilizing against the occupation forces, without confronting the Israeli army.

On May 15, Palestinian activists called on their colleagues in the diaspora to come down to the Arab-Israeli borders of Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt. Only two fronts responded. They did so by meeting at the borders of Lebanon and, to a lesser extent, Syria. In Egypt, the authorities have not allowed local activists to support the Palestinian movement’s calls, and in Jordan the government suppressed thousands of people seeking to gather at the border to meet the Palestinian activists. However, at the Lebanese border many Lebanese and Palestinians crossed the borders into Israel, causing several casualties among them but strengthening the Palestinian resistance movement. By walking on foot past a border Israel has for more than sixty-five years maintained as impossible to cross, they not only demonstrated their defiance but also undermined Israeli supremacy. The activists in this group regarded this crossing as their first victory, especially since they were able to represent the different components of the Palestinian people as one community, whether in the diaspora or not. In this action some Palestinians were killed in northern Israel by Israeli forces, while a large number of Palestinian refugees—who had been mobilized to reestablish and maintain continuity with their lost, previously inaccessible territory—managed to reach Jaffa and Haifa, where they visited the homes of their fathers and their grandfathers. Many of my interviewees insist that these actions nullified the security logic of Israeli colonization, because for sixty years these border areas were considered impenetrable military zones, protected by mines. In this episode of nonviolent civil disobedience, the Israeli military could not prevent Palestinian youths from realizing their symbolic return to their land. These actions gave all Palestinian youth movements a huge boost in struggling for their cause.

In contrast with this achievement, the Palestinian Authority wanted Palestinian young people to commemorate the Nakba in the scope of a well-organized gathering on Al-Manara Square in Ramallah. Such a legalistic approach has contributed to what the youth see as the PA's gradual abandonment of the principle of the right of return. Many, then, took to the streets to remind the PA and others that the generational transmission of memory is still manifested at such festivals—that that they will not abandon the right of refugees to return.

It is partly through such “nonviolent” mobilizations that Palestinian youth have expressed their disagreement with the PA's position not only on the issue of the right of return but also many other issues. The right of return for Palestinian refugees is based on UN Resolution 194, and the aspiration to “return” is a fundamental issue within Palestinian society. By focusing on the future of the land and its people, Palestinian officials and negotiators effectively marginalize the status of those in the diaspora. This becomes a major identity question for more than four million people, the majority of whom still have refugee status. For a significant number of my interlocutors the right of return is seen to be guaranteed by international law, and for them this is not a negotiable issue. As I have already mentioned, the negative image of the political leadership is one of the main factors behind the commitment of these “new” militants, who ironically view the PA as just another Arab regime.

Following the success of these events, the Palestinian protest movement has consistently mobilized youth to speak in all areas. Much popular solidarity has formed around these young people, who began their new actions as a protest against the official dismissal of a campaign to boycott Israeli products, and their rejection of the PA's attempts to normalize relations with Israel. When the PA acts to normalize relations with the colonialists, they are bringing to the public space a rhetorical discourse that legitimizes their actions—all of which these youth are trying to counter in action and in words.

This youth movement has expanded to form small groups, anticolonial opposition groups, and groups focused on opposing the policies of the PA. In response, the PA has created a dependent movement called *Yalla Ninhal-ihtilal*, a group calling for “an end to the Israeli occupation.” The PA was concerned about these actions by the Palestinian youth as well as the public's discontent with the rise in claims by Israel that it has the exclusive right to use certain roads.

Palestinian youth activists have borrowed forms of collective action from social movements elsewhere. As Fadi said, “With groups of Palestinian and international activists, we boarded buses used only by settlers in the West

Bank. We carried banners reading, ‘End the Colonial State’ and ‘End Racism.’ Our model derived from the US civil rights struggle of Black Americans against racial politics, but we also borrowed examples from the legacy of South Africans’ fight against racism.”

It should be noted that at present these movements are not major political actors or movers on the political scene, because of the low number of people coming to their events. Small turnouts are due to an atmosphere of mistrust among fellow Palestinians and the general sense of crisis. However, these movements continue to organize events such as a demonstration on March 21, 2013, against the visit of Barack Obama, accusing him of neglecting Palestinian rights and against his pro-Israeli policies, but also against US policies around the world as well.

The protesters in these youth movements in 2011 had different demands and views from those who mobilized the protests of 2012. The following section seeks to better demonstrate the differences between the two years.

PROTESTERS’ MOBILITY 2012

Thousands of people took to the streets to protest against the socioeconomic policy of Salam Fayad, the former Palestinian prime minister, who was looked upon favorably by the international community because of his liberal economic policies. Those demonstrators leading the protests consisted of drivers of public service taxis; they were dubbed “Fordists” after the Fords they typically drove. They were joined by a significant number of other Palestinians, many of whom were at the forefront of other protests—against the sudden increase in the cost of living (higher gas, water, and electricity prices), for example. Rising fuel costs had an immediate negative impact on household incomes. The protesters’s key slogan was “Block the Movement” (of traffic). This was indeed a radical slogan that led to the physical blocking of roads and by the refusal of taxi drivers to carry passengers. These movements are, of course, part of the growing discontent against the policies of the PA, but are also linked to the conflict between the former Palestinian prime minister and certain segments of Fatah. Overwhelmed by the “spontaneous” demonstrations and other independent actions, such as those organized by different labor unions and politicians, Fatah finally bowed to public pressure, and the PA decided to make some changes in its economic policies. Unlike the movements of 2011, those of 2012 were organized by political parties, some related to the fragmentation of Fatah, but also to the various centers of power within the PA. There is, therefore, a potential for the future formation of new associations for public action.

NEW MODES OF COLLECTIVE ACTION, THE NEW VILLAGES: THE CASES OF BAB AL-SHAMS, AL-KARAMA, AND AHFAD YÜNIS

Before engaging in these movements, several activists already belonged to popular committees. They were involved in nongovernmental organizations of Palestinian and international “peace advocacy organizations” all working to promote the fight for freedom in Palestine and the end of the Israeli occupation. These groups and organizations advocate methods of nonviolent resistance and direct action to confront and challenge the Israeli occupation forces and policies. One of the founders, Abu Rahma¹⁷, spoke to me about their ambitions: “[We have to] broaden participation in popular resistance to the Israeli settlers, expand the boycott against the colonial state, etc.” He fought for his own village: “Our village is the smallest of the Ramallah region. The army has confiscated 58% of its land. We are in contact with all the activists, most of whom are in jail, and we have lost martyrs.” Activists have long been involved in resistance, as Abu Rahma explains: “I was already active during the first Intifada in response to the decision of the Israeli government to construct structures in the center of our village.” Indeed, these villages to the west of Ramallah—Bilin, Nailin, and Nabi Saleh—have become both “direct resistance locations” for Palestinians and international symbols of unarmed resistance to the Israeli occupation. Festivals, conferences, and other events are held regularly with the plight of these places in focus—not least, demonstrations organized every Friday by activists. As Abu Rahma explained:

At the beginning we started to demonstrate every day, and then we decided to do so only every Friday. Creative and new ways of action have attracted the attention of activists around the world, first of all because the participants use innovative nonviolent methods. We worked hard to find imaginative ways of resistance that are in accord with our peaceful views. Following this success, we decided to conduct several creative actions.

The Israeli army marked some trees in the village to cut down in the next few days. So we gathered fifty-five people in the morning and we contacted the international press. We then found chains and padlocks, tied fifty-five people firmly to each tree for cutting. This meant that the Israeli operation could not be realized. This act of resistance has been very successful. On a global scale, we were named the “Palestinian Gandhis.” On a different occasion we decided to go together, stood narrowly in an iron container, while extending our heads and our hands, which were attached by chains. We were dressed as Navii, the movie character in *Avatar*. On another occasion, we built a large prison, and we put it on the juncture of a road, blocking Israeli bulldozers. The prisoners—that is to say, “we”—carried crosses on our backs just like Christ. We had animals and plants with us in this mock prison. Symbolically, we aimed to represent the entire life of the Palestinians enclosed between four walls of a

jail cell. At a previous demonstration, a great pianist named Jacob Elfer came to play for us while soldiers posed nearby for action. Another time, a Swedish religious choir came to sing in front of Israeli settlers.

These activists along, with other Palestinian militant groups, have sought to develop new forms of action that highlight the threat to villages that comes with Israel's moves to confiscate Palestinian land. The first in the EI area, they called Bab al-shams (The Gate of the Sun). These activists have experience struggling against land confiscation in various villages. Following the success of this movement, they replicated their actions and coordinated all activities. A small group met frequently to decide on modes of action

We decided on midnight with a lot of discretion: It is a secret plan, so nobody was to know about it before the act took place. To keep it secret and mobilize people we announced an activity in Jericho that we named "summer camp." We gathered the signatures of a hundred people (all dedicated activists). We decided on the day of departure that is on the day a snowstorm was supposed to arrive, to go there. Each group of activists led a bus. They then informed the participants about their intentions to create a new Palestinian village called Bab al-shams. ... Once we arrived, we set up tents. There were 150 people at the site along with media groups and the international press.¹⁸

At the same time, during the establishment of the camp, Palestinian lawyers filed requests to freeze the "the military order to confiscate village land" in Israel's high court. Activity at this village lasted three days, all during a snowstorm. The Israeli army blocked all roads leading there to deprive the militants of their livelihoods and reinforcements. This event marks a turning point in the popular Palestinian movement because all politicians supported their efforts. Other steps followed, as Maher explained:

We built a new village, and called it Burqin. In it we celebrated a marriage of two activists. We had the marriage performed by an Imam. The village did not survive for more than four hours, because the Israeli army landed its helicopters on it. As for the marriage ceremony, it lasted only two hours. The following week, we built a new village, which we called al-Hfad Yūnis, which means the grandchildren of Yūnis (which in turn is named after the hero of the novel *Bab al shams*).¹⁹

Support groups from around the world also aided the movement, with many forming on the Internet. A large media campaign got underway, all to show global solidarity with this popular approach; consuls at foreign missions took part, as did representatives of European countries. Meanwhile Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu ordered the army to evacuate these villages by force, and that did occur, with Israeli soldiers arresting all of the protesters

and injured and beat up a large number of them. This action was one means by which to decolonize villages and demonstrate the identity of these places as part of historic Palestine. The struggle around the reaffirmation of the old names of Palestinian villages unveils the reality that colonialism seeks to hide by destroying real places and their memory. Such actions reaffirm the existence of prior communities, which have been made to disappear and which the colonizers are attempting to erase from the map and remembrance. The activists' attempt at naming and establishing new village realities is a way to preserve, in the event of a peace agreement with Israel, the principle of law, but also to nullify, even if symbolically, the impact of exile and to affirm the Palestinian people's will to resist.

THE VIOLENCE OF NONVIOLENT DISCOURSE

While these nonviolent activities attracted criticism, they also received popular support and were celebrated by many Palestinians. These actions bridged the gap between Fatah and Hamas, since these parties have come to appear to many Palestinians as two quasi monopolies that exclude other political forces. Secondly, these actions of the youth highlight the PA's nonconfrontational policies and its lack of a resistance strategy. Third, the recovery movement actually may have strengthened those who sought to take advantage of the youth movement, trying to use this mobilization for its own political purposes and enhance its own popular legitimacy. We have therefore seen politicians station themselves in front of cameras during these events to increase their visibility and untarnish their images. Fourth, they tried to channel and create their own institutions around the actions of these militant groups. Indeed, former Palestinian Prime Minister Fayad Salaam formed a committee to manage these villages, as the authority did in the past when the PA established a Ministry of the Wall in response to Israel erecting a concrete, electric-gated wall separating itself from the Palestinians.

Such political responses have sought to tame the activists by offering them new political careers. By doing this, the PA has attempted to integrate the activists into the dominant party (Fatah) giving them a "career in activism" in the sense argued for by Olivier Fillieule.²⁰ Palestine is an example of one of the last bastions of colonialism conforming to patterns explained in binary fashion by Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon in the 1950s.²¹

Apart from some NGOs funded by western governments and organizations, most of these citizens' initiatives do not have access to international funding or to foundation grants. However, European and other international institutions have contributed to the development of Palestinian social movements by encouraging what they regard as legitimate, nonviolent resistance and

the sharing of their experience within global networks. “Pacifist” approaches that have consequently become more popular among some Palestinian activists are based on models developed not only by Mahatma Gandhi in India but also in the “dominant world” by such leaders as Martin Luther King, Jr. Many activists have assumed a universal discourse that speaks of such values as freedom, equality, social justice, change, democracy, and civic consciousness.

Many Palestinians, however, harbor a deep sense of distrust as regards perceived outside influence and “lessons to follow” in their resistance to the colonial power, Israel. The economic resources of the foreign institutions, together with their ability to manage information within global communication systems has, however, allowed them to establish considerable authority over some aspects of Palestinian social movements. In addition, the nonviolent actions that have resulted have forced the Israelis to respond to the resistance in ways ostensibly less violent but still decidedly oppressive. Israeli military forces have, indeed, adopted new repressive measures at every Friday demonstration—such as spraying Palestinian activists and the villages they are in with waste water, water contaminated with petrochemicals or other pollutants, or dyed water. The mobilization of this technology of “power,” which Michel Foucault termed “biopolitics,”²² targets the Palestinians’ very right to life and their integrity, which is the primary object of colonial biopolitics.

Although “nonviolent” resistance does seem to be gaining acceptance in Palestine, old forms of armed struggle still remain strong. The use of violence is still considered by many to be a legitimate source of resistance in the colonial context, since violence is a major component of the colonizer-colonized relationship. Colonizers dominate the colonized with violence and are fought back with the same methods, as Frantz Fanon explained in an Algerian revolutionary context against French colonialism. Moreover, Palestinian activists often avoid using the term “peaceful” and prefer to it the term “popular” instead, as shown in Abu Rahma’s response:

It is not because we participate in the popular resistance that we are fighting against the army, but I chose my own method of struggle and others can make their own choices. In fact, for me, some people try to use excuses that lack any sense of logic to avoid participating in any of the initiatives taken to mobilize in favor of the current struggle.

The same is expressed by Abir when she says: “I’m not against all forms of resistance, including armed resistance, but armed struggle is fomented by small groups, while the popular struggle is a form of struggle that is extended to all social groups and allows all to participate. On the personal level, I think the popular struggle is complementary to the armed struggle.”

A VIRTUAL WORLD AS A TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL BODY

In the words of another interviewee, Nidal²³:

We are mobilizing activists from around the world—including jurists, lawyers, artists, writers, and politicians. These friends of ours represent various political orientations—left, green, socialist, and communist—and lobbies, from human rights to environmentalism. They conduct regular activities on the ground in the Palestinian territories. Their nonviolent direct action campaigns have slogans such as “Do not respect curfews” and “Do not follow Israeli orders decreeing civilian areas.” These campaigns involve providing humanitarian assistance and seeking to maintain a presence during Israeli raids and assaults. International peace activists are a boon for the Palestinians by their presence as witnesses to both our daily humiliation and the injustice of the Israeli occupation. They also provide practical, logistical, and legal information and aid.

Young Palestinian activists have meanwhile increasingly used social networks, employing the Internet, text messaging, Twitter, and more to mobilize and to influence public opinion. Various websites have become debate forums. More generally, new technologies have facilitated mass mobilization that censorship has otherwise circumvented. But such efforts do not always succeed, as Fadi explained:

At the beginning of the protests, the Palestinian security services confiscated the Tunisian flag. The “virtual control” arm of the PA’s Preventive Security Service interrogated me for four hours. An officer told me at that time that the Arab uprising was an Iranian plot against the Arab world. At the end of the discussion, he asked me to delete a Facebook page calling on support for the Arab people’s revolt.

The majority of interviewees deemed alternative information networks to be the most valuable of all—including local activists’ newspapers, flyers, electronic petitions, collaborative websites, and blogs, many of them with transnational reach. These networks have also conducted their own actions and cyberattacks; on April 7, 2013, for example, they supported international hackers depicted in black masks and Palestinian *keffiyeh* who acted to “defend the Palestinian cause”—namely, by attacking Israeli government and individual websites to paralyze them or to bombard them with information and pictures of Palestinian political prisoners, images of torture committed by the Israeli army, or messages accusing Israel of war crimes. Other social networks have served as a collective database for the visual memory of the resistance. Activists have recorded all events of significance to their cause, thus providing photographs and videos aplenty to news outlets. In doing so they

aim to counter the effects on international public opinion of information they perceive as disseminated by Israel and international news agencies and dominated by the pro-Israel US lobby. Via Twitter and blogs in particular, activists have recorded the arrests and expulsions of Palestinians. However, some of my interviewees believe that online engagement is less efficient than traditional methods, such as being on “the Palestinian street.”

CONCLUSIONS

The Palestinian youth movements have been forming and expanding for some time now, but the years 2011 and 2012 in particular saw them achieve unprecedented publicity by resisting not only the occupation but also the PA—the latter realm of action including anticorruption campaigns and protests against the PA’s economic policies and negotiation strategies. Although these movements have begun to draw a large sector of the youth—and in turn seen the creation of a wide range of social networks—they have been unable to rally large numbers of Palestinians. Perceived by many as elitist, they lack the authority to lead the masses.

NOTES

- 1 This chapter is based on field research done in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 2012–2013, in the course of which few but long interviews were conducted with several activists. The interviewees, who are quoted in the text, were either unaffiliated social activists or members of Palestinian revolutionary groups, popular resistance movements, or independent youth movements. Their selection took into account variables such as gender, age, religion, socioprofessional category, sociogeographic origin, political/ideological orientation, and involvement in various organizations. Some of the interviewees did not want to be named while others gave permission to use their names in this chapter. The former group will be referred to with pseudonyms.
- 2 Activist from Nazareth, possessing a master’s degree in political journalism
- 3 Aghsan, a thirty-year-old activist who graduated from Birzeit University and is a founder of this movement
4. Pierre Bourdieu, *Raisons pratiques: sur la théorie de l’action*, Paris: Seuil, 1994, p. 114.
- 5 Twenty-three-year-old student from al-Bireh, working toward a masters degree in human rights
- 6 Student in journalism at al-Quds University
- 7 Activist in the movement, twenty-six years old, from Nablus
- 8 Activist with a master’s degree in journalism, from Jerusalem
- 9 Student of sociology, Birzeit University
- 10 One of the founders of the youth movement in Bethlehem
- 11 On May 15, 1948, 800,000 Palestinians were expelled from their land and

property and became refugees. Palestinians annually commemorate the anniversary, which they call the Nakba (from the Arabic word for "catastrophe"). A total of 550 cities and towns were lost, of which 417 were totally or partially destroyed by Israel.

- 12 Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, New York: Harper & Row, 1980.
- 13 Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*, Paris: Gallimard, 1992, p. 19.
- 14 Abaher El Sakka, "The Palestinian Collective Memory Formation of a Plural Identity Based on the Memory of Founding Events" in C. Suaud, P. Guibert, and G. Moreau (eds.), *Time*, Nantes: MSH Guépin / Cens, 2001, pp. 45–57.
- 15 Arno Mayer, "Les pièges du souvenir," *Esprit*, juillet 1993: 45–59.
- 16 A founding member of the youth movement in Ramallah; also a former Fatah member and an ex-prisoner of Israel
- 17 Abu Rahma, who has been honored for his human rights work and who holds a master's degree in Arabic studies from Birzeit University, is from Belin.
- 18 Many Palestinians have read *Bab al-shams* (The Gate of the Sun), a novel published in 1998 by the well-known Lebanese writer Elias Khoury, which tells the epic story of the Palestinians who have lived as refugees in Lebanon since the *Nakba* in 1948. Subtly evoking the ideas of memory, truth, and testimony, the book has been made into a film by Egyptian director Yūsry Nasrallah.
- 19 One of the founders of the youth movement, this twenty-three-year-old lives in the Kalandia refugee camp in the West Bank.
- 20 Olivier Fillieule, "Propositions pour une analyse processuelle de l'engagement individuel," *Revue française de science politique*, 2001, 1–2, vol. 51: 201.
- 21 Albert Memmi *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1991 (published originally in French in 1957) and Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*, Paris, Gallimard, 1961 (published in English in 1963 as *The Wretched of the Earth*).
- 22 Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997, pp. 242–244.
- 23 A twenty-seven-year-old teacher and a leftist, this interviewee lives in the al Almari refugee camp in Ramallah.

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Yalla Ninihi Alihtilal (We'll End the Occupation)