THE PALESTINIAN MOVEMENT IN TRANSITION: HISTORICAL REVERSALS AND THE UPRISING

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A persistent dynamic dominating Palestinian political discourse since the beginning of the occupation was the unspoken opposition between the liberationist strategy and the territorial search for statehood. During the 1960s and early 1970s, this dynamic was resolved overwhelmingly in favor of the liberationist strategy of the three main guerrilla contingents of the Palestinian movement—Fateh, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). While a gradual shift away from this position was evident in the resolutions of the Palestine National Council (PNC) as of 1974, the mystique and rhetoric of armed struggle continued to dominate through the rest of the decade. During the 1980s, however, this dynamic shifted steadily towards territorialism (the search for sovereignty) as the movement began to anchor itself less in the diaspora and more in the occupied territories.

This shift has had immense consequences for the manner in which the Palestinian movement has articulated its direction over the last decade. The further Palestinian politics has moved from its liberationist-guerrilla dimension, the more it has expressed a political program that reflects the sentiments and needs of concrete social groups rather than a bureaucratic military apparatus. This dynamic has often been described by the popular press as a

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conflict between the "internal forces" and the "external forces," or, more crudely, between the traditional elites of the West Bank and Gaza and the historic leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). There is a kernel of truth to this, but one that must be redefined. In the diaspora, and certainly in the Arab diaspora, Palestinian politics expresses the continued struggle of a *segment* of society to accommodate its survival within the contingencies of Arab politics. In occupied Palestine, however, a social formation has remained intact despite Israeli attempts to fragment it. As a consequence, politics there expresses the battle between real social forces.

The "historical reversals" in the title refer to the progressive demise of the perceptions and strategies that governed the "internal forces" of the Palestinian nationalist movement. They particularly refer to the reversal (through the intervention of organized politics) of assumptions about the deterministic consequences of Israeli control over Palestine. This paper examines the manifestation of this dynamic in the conflict that took place in the occupied territories between two strategies of resistance: the first based on deterministic assumptions about Israeli rule requiring long-range accommodations, and the second based on a more activist nationalism involving popular mobilization, or populism. It suggests that the first, the primary manifestation of which was *steadfastness* (which in turn grew out of a survivalist ideology), was eclipsed not because of its doctrinal shortcomings but because it was challenged on the ground by forces that saw the existing institutions of Palestinian nationalism that espoused it as elitist and nepotistic. At the same time, the rise of populism represented an unintended prelude to an escalation of political confrontations with Israel, culminating in the intifada—a confrontation that in turn has compelled populism to face its own limitations.

Debate over Strategy

The anniversary of two decades of Israeli occupation in June of 1987 was basically a nonevent. There was considerable self-reflection on the part of the Palestinian intellectuals who met in underattended assemblies, and the usual manifestoes were issued. But outside in the real world, it was business as usual. Palestinian resistance was contained—to use the language of the Israeli *gendarmes*—at a "manageable" level, one that could be handled by the several contingents of the Israeli Defence Forces and the Border Police now regularly stationed in the "territories." The Israeli economic recession notwithstanding, Arab workers continued to commute to their construction sites and restaurant kitchens in ever increasing numbers, and a new stratum of middlemen, contractors, and subcontractors on both sides of the green line was profiting from the situation. There was no indication of the brewing storm about to descend at the end of the year.

Two major trends can be delineated in the self-reflection that emerged from the anniversary conferences held locally and abroad (two in Jerusalem; one in Ramallah; another on the campus of Birzeit University; and one at St.

Catherine's College, Oxford). One school of thought emphasized the meaning of Palestinian steadfastness and the proper strategy for its advancement. The second focused on the need to draw the proper lessons from the seeming irreversibility of Israel's mode of control over the territories. Both trends emerged from the determinism mentioned above, and more particularly from the assumption of dependency and socioeconomic subordination to Israeli control. Both were permeated by pessimism: the first, by a political pessimism informed by the inability of the Palestinians (as well as the Arab regimes) to change the prevailing balance of power in the Middle East in the foreseeable future; the second, by a pessimism of structural determinism whereby the conditions of economic and infrastructural dependency created by Israel during the two decades were seen to be historically entrenched.[1]

The first trend can be gleaned from the theme of the most ambitious of these meetings, "Palestinian Development under Prolonged Occupation," held at Oxford University.[2] The "prolonged occupation" in the title obviously subsumed the fixity and endurance of the mechanisms of control established by the Israelis in the West Bank and Gaza. In response the participants suggested a number of *survival strategies* that would help Palestinians cope with the protracted period of struggle necessary to create new favorable conditions for the reversal of Israeli hegemony.[3] But these development strategies were seen as constrained, transient, and *ad hoc* given the nature of Israeli control over the economy and investment policies. Yusif Sayigh expressed this view most succinctly:

> . . . meaningful and far-reaching development cannot be achieved, or even sought, under the conditions of dependency-cum-dispossession. "Dependent development" itself is not possible, since Israel's external-turned-internal colonialism blocks even capitalist transformation, which is claimed to be promoted by mature capitalist industrial countries in their relations with third world countries. Given present constraints, the viability of the economies of the West Bank and Gaza Strip can only be maintained at a low level of economic performance, even assuming the same volume of external financial support. But even this is predicated on the surrender of vital economic, sociocultural, and political desiderata.[4]

Until those political conditions on which this dependency is predicated are transformed, it was argued, Palestinians should devise survival programs that would make life tolerable and leave the fabric of community life intact. Only programs with limited objectives and a reasonable chance of success should be planned.[5]

The second perspective presented at the conferences shared the assumptions of this analysis concerning the impact of Israel's economic and logistic control over the territories, but arrived at radically different political conclusions that in essence advocated a kind of binationalism within the Israeli state. This view, while not generally explicitly formulated, was in fact implicit in much of the pre-intifada literature. It found its clearest and sharpest expression in a paper presented by Sari Nusseibeh at the twentieth anniversary symposium organized by the Jerusalem newspaper *al-Fajr* in June 1987,

in which Nusseibeh mentioned the consequences of Israeli integration as "the most salient feature the occupation has unfolded in the past twenty years."[6] Every aspect of Palestinian daily life has been invested over the years with the consequences of this integration, Nusseibeh argued. Israel should not be seen as a system of control, but also as the totalitarian adaptation of Palestinian life to the conditions of this control in every person's consciousness—or rather, in the Palestinian unconscious:

> Israel is not simply the Knesset. To think this is to be blind to the picture. Israel is . . . the long queues of women standing in front of the post office in Jerusalem to collect their social security . . . it is Zaki el-Mukhtar on Radio One at your service. Israel is the business licenses, the building permits, the identity cards. It is the value added taxes, the income taxes, the television taxes. . . . It is also Dedi Zucker, Meron Benvenisti, Yehuda Litani and Amnon Zichroni commiserating with Palestinians at the National Palace Hotel. Israel is the Tambour [Israeli] paint used to scribble slogans attacking Hanna Siniora on the walls.[7]

It could not have been expressed better. In Nusseibeh's view, the paradox inherent in this new dependency was that it proceeded at the same pace with the heightened articulation of Palestinian self-identity. This intense nationalism was not irreconcilable with the increased assimilation into the Israeli reality, but is seen by Nusseibeh as the appropriate consequence of that integration—"a direct response, at the mental level, to the increased immersion in the system on the behavioral level." But since there was a lack of correspondence between the political consciousness of the Palestinians and their new social reality, one had to give way to the other. Given the nature of Israel's control over the territories and the dispersal of the Palestinian movement after the Lebanese war, it was more likely that the Palestinians would have to accommodate themselves to Israeli hegemony rather than the other way around. Nusseibeh's solution is a restatement of the notion of democratic secularism, and an inversion, of sorts, of Meron Benvenisti's thesis: to overcome the existing system of apartheid Palestinians must struggle not for two states (as was already implicit in the PLO strategy) but for total enfranchisement in the context of a better national Israeli-Palestinian state.[8]

Thus, on the eve of the Palestinian uprising the public debate within the Palestinian movement focused on two trends of political thinking, one explicit, the other implicit. The first stressed steadfastness, a development strategy of survival and communal preservation until political conditions allowed for an external intervention. The second, seeing the conditions of transformation to be irreversible, concluded that the search for sovereignty had to be traded for equality within the Israeli polity.

Yet within the occupied territories new forces were emerging on the ground that were to reshape the nature of this debate dramatically. Within a few months, the uprising—unforeseen by most—imposed a new trajectory on Palestinian political discourse in which the notions of steadfastness, survival strategies, and integration (the keystones of the debate) had to be rede-

fined or abandoned, and an alternative approach, which for the purposes of this analysis I will call populism, became explicit.

Populism versus Steadfastness

Important social transformations had been affecting the West Bank and Gaza during the two decades of Israeli rule. The most salient of these was the emergence of new social groups and classes that had been generated by the political and economic linkages between Israel and the occupied territories. Three of these are of significance in the contradiction between the modes of resistance—steadfastness and the populism—that became apparent with the outbreak of the intifada.

First was a class of urban entrepreneurs who mediated Israeli control over the economy (labor contractors, subcontracting businessmen, and wholesale distributors of Israeli commodities, especially in the food, textile, and building sectors). Second was a class (constituting about 40 percent of the Palestinian labor force) of proletarianized peasants and refugee camp dwellers whose sole (or primary) source of livelihood was employment in the Israeli-Jewish sector. Third was a substantial grouping of unemployed or underemployed university graduates and dropouts, who, unlike previous generations that had benefitted from the oil boom in the Gulf states, could neither migrate nor find gainful employment at home. To these we must add a later, fourth class of energetic entrepreneurs centered on the townships of Nablus, Bayt Sahur, Ramallah, and Hebron who launched a successful campaign in the 1980s to capture the nationalist home market ("buy Palestinian") through the loopholes of Israeli control over markets and labor.[9]

Schematically we can speak of the first and second of these classes as the primary beneficiaries of the territories' integration within the Israeli economy, with the third and fourth constituting the political and social basis (or the intellectual and bourgeois components, respectively) for the revival of Palestinian territorial nationalism in the 1980s. What created the illusion of national unity in response to Israel's strategy of control during the 1970s and the early years of the 1980s was the amorphous ideology of steadfastness (sumud)—the notion that all Palestinians suffer equally under the yoke of occupation, and that therefore they must postpone resolving their internal conflicts until the stage of deliverance.

But sumud has had a murky genealogy in the idiom of the Palestinian national movement. It began as a form of passive resistance to Israeli rule in the early seventies and ended as a form of passive nonresistance (some would say as aggressive nonresistance) following the decision by the Arab states in Baghdad (1978) to aid the "steadfastness" of the West Bank and Gaza to the tune of $150 million annually.[10] The term da'm sumud ahluna fi al-dakhil ("in support of the steadfastness of our people inside") became the official Arab "guilt money" for abandoning the confrontation with Israel. Behind this notion lies the assumption, as Edward Said has noted, that by merely

staying on their land, Palestinians were asserting their nationhood—the *natural* expected behavior from them being flight and exile. Conceptually, steadfastness was best expressed in a series of studies on the manner by which Palestinians adopted survival strategies to accommodate their traditional social and economic institutions to Israeli control. Sharif Kana'na of Birzeit University, for example, discusses how the extended patriarchal family in the Galilee (and by extension in the West Bank) adapted itself to the underclass conditions to which Arab villagers have been subjected.[11] The traditional family, by asserting its conservatism, became a conserving agent and a protector against attempts at manipulation and dismemberment.

In the West Bank, *sumud* also evolved as a form of asserting the traditional virtues of rural society (attachment to the land, the fecundity of Palestinian women, and self-sufficiency).[12] In effect there was something very retrogressive in this attitude. Attachment to the land took the form of an idealistic glorification of peasant society that never existed in reality. Fecundity was expressed as a parallel reaction to the Jewish nationalist obsession with Arab demographic growth ("the procreation road to liberation"). And the search for self-sufficiency became a search for autarky—a perspective that was blind to the present economic realities of Israeli domination and market forces. Even today in the economic literature of the intifada we see the strong impact of this autarkic perspective in the discussion on the revival of the domestic economy.[13]

The Degeneration of Steadfastness

The net effect of this conception of steadfastness was an assertion of traditionalism, both in the cultural domain and in the reinforcement of political hierarchies that had been hegemonic prior to the Israeli rule (notable urban families and rural potentates). This reinforcement unwittingly corresponded to the Israeli onslaught against radical political forces of Palestinian nationalism (elected mayors, activists, trade unionists, and students), which reached a symbolic height after 1981 with the "rule of the *mukhtars*" exemplified in the collaborationist Village Leagues.[14] The failure of that attempt did not weaken the traditional forces it unleashed. On the contrary, traditionalism became a cultural core of Palestinian nationalism. This is indeed a case where conservative national forces played a role in defeating a reactionary (collaborative) political movement.[15]

Traditional steadfastness also engendered a parasitic tendency, one endemic to a number of Mediterranean societies that have experienced large-scale individual migrations. A considerable section of Palestinian society developed an addiction (also witnessed today in Turkey, Egypt, and Lebanon) to remittances from relatives abroad (Europe, America, and the Gulf). This continuously undermined the development of the productive sector within the country, most notably in rural society. More important still, it created the psychological milieu for dependence on external aid and supported a lifestyle that exceeded the actual productive potential of society. In Palestinian soci-

ety these monetary injections affected the lives of a substantial section of the urban population, and (during the 1970s) a growing proportion of villagers.[16]

A study commissioned by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) provides a concrete picture of the sources and dimensions of this dependence. Until 1978 remittances from Palestinians abroad were the chief external source of income available to Palestinians in the occupied territories, amounting to $55 million annually. By the early 1980s those were taken over by *sumud* funds, mostly money transferred by the Palestinian-Jordanian Joint Committee, amounting to an average of $110 million annually during the period 1980-83, or roughly 35 percent of all transfers of funds from abroad (UNRWA aid to refugees excluded).[17]

It was in this period that a polemical conflict over aid appeared between a "developmental" strategy (favored by international agencies and private voluntary organizations) and the strategy of "steadfastness," the latter operationally translated as keeping people on the land.[18] Yet these polemics were in fact deceptive. International aid to the territories in the 1980s was minuscule, and it was no more "developmental" than Arab funds channeled through the Joint Committee.[19]

Sumud money ostensibly was earmarked predominantly for infrastructural activities during the Committee's fertile years (1979-85), with the bulk of its aid going to agriculture, housing, education, and municipal activities.[20] In actual practice, however, the main beneficiaries of these funds were the big landlords of the Jordan Valley, the industrialists, the Jordanian civil service (in the West Bank), and professional groups who received generous housing loans.[21] At their height, *sumud* funds were readily manipulated by the traditional elites now equipped with the nationalist ideology of steadfastness, often with the connivance and active support of the Israeli military government under the guise of backing "moderate elements." The Israeli Civil Administration obviously stood to relieve its own budget with that portion of external aid that was earmarked for infrastructural activities (road building, rural electrification, and the introduction of potable water to villages).[22]

But aside from infrastructural investments, these funds served to buttress a most destructive and parasitic pattern of "economic development." During this period the area witnessed the channeling of several million dollars towards building middle class villas, subsidies to nonproductive industrial firms, and a sizeable amount of handouts in the form of patronage money to nationalist institutions and personalities. The word *sumud* became a term of cynical self-denigration, often used as a mocking reference to the *nouveau riche* recipients of patronage money.[23] Only to the external observer did it retain any positive content of glorification, thus enhancing its irony.

Populism and Factional Realities

It was against this degeneration of the ideology of *sumud* that a populist reaction developed. But populism itself, and the mass organizations to which

it gave rise, had its roots in an earlier illusion within Palestinian society. This can be traced to the period after 1976, when radical groups and social institutions saw their main task as building the nucleus of the future Palestinian state (and society) *as a parallel power to the occupation authority*. This strategy encompassed a wide array of movements and groups, from municipal councils at the top—ready to take power as administrative surrogates of the PLO—to university students and academics who conceived their role as the cadres of a technocratic intelligentsia of the future state. At the core of this movement were the few thousand members of clandestine Palestinian parties who were building mass, quasi-legal, popular groups (labor, student, women's unions, and health groups) to widen their political base. This whole strategy was grounded in the perception of a new balance of power in the Middle East following the October war and preceding the Camp David Accords.

But the collapse of the political illusion about the imminence of statehood did not end the dynamism of populism within the new Palestinian movement. On the contrary, it enhanced the populist movement by stripping it of its naive idealism and through the retinue of political climbers who had joined it with the rise of the political (and financial) fortunes of the PLO. Populism became the ideology of a new radical and grassroots alternative to the elitist outlook of the traditional leadership of the nationalist movement both inside and outside the territories. ("Elitism" is used here in a dual sense: first, in its espousal of a vanguardist organizational structure for its struggle; and second, in the sense that patronage and the adoption of notable personalities as leaders of the national movement became a *modus operandi* for the movement as a whole.) The appearance of the mass organizations (*mu'assasat jamahiriyya*) sponsored in the early 1980s by the leftist groups within the PLO and their embrace of a populist ideology was seen as the necessary antidote to the limitation inherent in the nationalist movement.

Two studies by Lisa Taraki and Joost Hiltermann shed significant light on the nature and structure of these groups.[24] Taraki attributes the spectacular growth of mass organizations within the territories during this period in part to the organizational limitations of clandestine political activity of underground movements in the West Bank and Gaza.[25] The first two years of the 1980s saw the dismantlement of the National Guidance Committee (the "internal" wing of the PLO) and the mass crackdown on activists, trade unionists, and student leaders as a prelude to the invasion of Lebanon and the attempt to liquidate the PLO infrastructure physically. Thus the clandestine movement, as she explains, resorted to widening its political base through extending its network of front organizations. Such organizations would create a semi-legal protective enclave around the movement, while at the same time mobilizing thousands of young people through popular committees— *lijan sha'biyya* (health, volunteer work brigades, women's groups, trade union blocs).

But it would be a mistake to assess the mass organizations as performing a purely protective (or "frontist") function. Their importance lies in carrying the resistance movement to a new critical plateau. They brought into the movement tens of thousands of young people who would have been reluctant to join clandestine organizations. They also incorporated marginalized social groups that, for class reasons, had been left out of the political arena. As a consequence, the new movement, in Taraki's words, "marks the social and political enfranchisement of those sectors that had been traditionally excluded from Palestinian political and institutional life."[26] More significantly, I believe, these groups adopted an ideology of radical populism that was henceforth to challenge the traditional structure and perspective of the Palestinian movement.

What are the main features of this radical populism? At the institutional level, it was—as noted above—the rejection of the elitist and nepotistic character of the traditional nationalist movement, the *raison d'être* of which was *sumud* and survival. In the women's movement it marked a rejection of the charitable and bourgeois orientation of the established women's societies in Palestine. In the student movement, it espoused (although never actually carried out) a democratic critique of the formalistic and degree-based university curriculum. In the labor movement, succinctly analyzed by Joost Hiltermann, it called for organizing and raising the consciousness of the most marginal and neglected of workers—those daily workers of refugee and peasant origin who commute to Israel and who have hitherto been outside the domain of the official trade union movement. Radical populism was *radical* in the sense that it challenged the established contours of political action set by the traditions of the nationalist movement. (It should be added, however, that the radicals too often resorted to traditional forms of patronage when they sought shortcuts in political action.) And it was *populist* in the sense that it *involved* all sectors of the population in its organized political activities rather than making them the *target* of these activities. Ideologically, the marks of populism were evident in the amorphous overarching thrust of the movement and in its lack of a specific class perspective.[27]

Nevertheless, the new movement remained factionalized to the core, with its populism reinforcing at the mass level the same partisan boundaries that typified its parent political groupings. Often the zeal for the recruitment of new members overrode ideological considerations, making it hard for the observer to distinguish the programs of various leftist groups or even the difference between socialist (those who identified with the Palestine Communist party, Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) and nationalist (those allied with Fateh) mass organizations.[28] There was also a tendency, particularly noted among the leftist groups, to deemphasize socially progressive positions that might hamper their recruitment drives in traditional circles. Lisa Taraki notes, for example, that all groups avoided raising the issue of the status of women in the domestic sphere:

> No women's organization has been willing to challenge prevailing legisla-
> tion governing the personal status of women, especially in matters concern-
> ing inheritance rights and divorce. Disputes within families over such
> issues, when they do come to the attention of the committees, are generally
> dealt with on an individual level, and rarely are conflicts in the domestic
> sphere made public.[29]

But when all is said and done, it is difficult to conceive of factionalism
merely as a divisive issue in the national movement, although often there was
bitter debate among its component groups. Factionalism (i.e., organizational
sectarianism) was ultimately the most effective mechanism for the mass mo-
bilization of groups, neighborhoods, and popular committees, especially dur-
ing the uprising, since it created the institutional framework, and made
available to the individual member the proper incentive "to belong" and to
act within a familiar, and exclusive, concrete identity. It also set the parame-
ters for each organization's sphere of influence and political mobility. And it
was this competing network of ideological and organizational factors that cre-
ated the political infrastructure that sustained and propelled the national up-
rising of December 1987.

The Intifada and the Limitations of Populism

There seems to be agreement on the part of the Israeli security establish-
ment, as well as within the Palestinian national movement, that the popular
committees, and the mass organizations that preceded them, provided the
organizational crucible for the uprising.[30] But this agreement did not emerge
without a controversy, most of it centering on the role of spontaneity in guid-
ing the mass action of the intifada. In the first month of the uprising, an
article in *Filastin al-Thawra* (the organ of the central council of the PLO)
declared:

> . . . in no great revolt does the organized side of mass action prevail over the
> spontaneity of the people. Revolutions are not manufactured, and any ca-
> pable leadership (which constitutes the disciplined component of the re-
> volt) is tested severely during these critical watersheds of history. The
> events and new contingencies of the intifada compel the political leader-
> ship to reconsider many of its slogans, forms, and tactics against these new
> realities.[31]

In response, Jamil Hilal, writing in *al-Fikr al-Dimukrati*, accused the edito-
rial writer of underestimating the accumulated organized experiences of the
resistance movement in the territories:

> But the most striking feature of the current popular uprising, which is also
> the greatest modern Palestinian revolt, is that it occurs against the back-
> ground of unprecedented *widescale organizing activity*. The claim that the
> spark that ignited the current uprising had a specific form and occurred at a
> specific time should not lead us to assume that the revolt was a spontane-
> ous act, but that the subjective conditions which made the intifada possible
> were ripe. Whatever delay we witnessed in the organized forces of the
> national movement assuming control of events . . . was because of the ab-
> sence of the *appropriate form of unified organized formation* for the movement

> [since] the elimination of the National Guidance Committee in the eighties
> [by the military government]. The speed by which the Unified National
> Leadership was formed attests to the necessity of this framework as a con-
> dition for the continuity and escalation of the popular revolt . . .[32]

This historical intervention, according to Hilal, would have been impossi-
ble without the mass organizations of the syndicates, women-, youth-, and
labor-committees and their "strike forces."[33] One could of course criticize
Hilal himself for exaggerating the organized element of the intifada to the
exclusion of any element of spontaneity, which was obvious in the first weeks
of the uprising.[34] In addition, one could dispute the conceptual utility of
distinguishing, as if they are opposites, between the "organized" and the
"spontaneous." Every mass movement has exhibited in varying proportions
both a disciplined, "led" component and voluntarist, unplanned tenden-
cies—both being essential features of a popular revolt. Nevertheless, Hilal's
emphasis in this instance is well taken, given the recent tendency to explain
the uprising ahistorically—attributing its origins to such factors as mass frus-
trations, generational conflicts, cultural gaps, and the like—without specific
reference to the structural conditions of the occupied territories.

It is also important to note that the role of popular committees and the
mass organizations that established them is not a conspiratorial view held by
the security establishment but a position acknowledged by the political lead-
ership of the national movement in the occupied territories. Confirmation of
this appears in the pronouncements of five prominent cadres of the clandes-
tine movement who were deported in 1988 for membership in the Unified
National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU).[35] Discussing their experiences
at the nineteenth PNC meeting in Algiers in November 1988, they differed in
assessing the immediate "causes" of the uprising, but there was a consensus
among the five leaders (representing the four major political factions of the
PLO) that the mass committees constituted the institutional foundation upon
which the intifada was built, so that (in the words of deportee Ghassan al-
Masri) "revolt became a patterned activity."[36]

This is not the place to discuss the uprising as a process, nor its immediate
consequences for the occupied territories. Elsewhere I have defined the main
features of the intifada in terms of its negative achievements: namely, that it
has succeeded in undermining (it is premature to speak of *dismantling*) the
apparatus of Israeli political control over the Palestinian population. During
the past two decades of Israeli rule those direct control features rested on the
"unseen" subordination of Palestinian society through the mechanisms of
market, labor, and infrastructure.[37] In effect West Bank and Gazan societies
became ungovernable, thus compelling the Israeli ruling elite to rethink its
attitude towards Palestinian sovereignty. Any attempt to assess this process
in terms of positive achievements (i.e., in terms of actual fixed consequences)
at this historical juncture must remain tentative. That it is difficult to go
further in this assessment can be appreciated by comparing the responses

made in 1988 by five "UNLU leaders" in response to the question: "What in your view is the main accomplishment of the uprising?"[38]

- L.A. (Fateh)   "It has transformed revolt into a daily pattern of life."
- G.M. (Fateh)   "Dismantled military rule, and reconstituted peoples' authori-
                      ty."
- J.Z. (DFLP)   "The construction of a Palestinian society of a new type."
- A.N.A.   "Dismantled the foundation of the occupation authorities (po-
  (DFLP)   lice, municipalities) and replaced them with the nucleus of an
                      alternative power."
- A.Z. (PCP)   "Created the conditions for Jordan's legal and administrative
                      disengagement with the West Bank."

What is striking in these responses is their radically different characteriza-
tion of what constitutes the single most important achievement of the upris-
ing on the eve of its first anniversary. Clearly the difference reflects the
difficulty in capturing the effects of a revolutionary situation in flux. To the
extent that there is consensus, it is a highly idealized and visionary perspec-
tive ("building the embryonic units of future Palestinian society," and "the
replacement of Israeli colonial authority with the people's national author-
ity"). There is, on the other hand, a consensus on the historic role of the
mass organizations and their later manifestations, the popular committees, in
bringing about this revolutionary situation.[39]

The main tasks of the popular committees lie ahead. If serious thought is
to be given to the claims of the movement that it is "building the embryonic
institutions of the future independent state,"[40] then obviously a more con-
crete program of action would be required from the popular committees. The
withholding of taxes, boycott of Israeli products, work stoppages, and the
mass resignations of the police force and tax collectors, are all essential fea-
tures of the process of the withdrawal of Palestinian society from two decades
of dependence on the Israeli colonial state apparatus.[41] The UNLU has ex-
hibited great skill *and flexibility* in coordinating these acts of civil disobedi-
ence among the rural, urban, and refugee segments of the population, and in
translating them into a collective national act of rebellion.

But they all remain acts of *disengagement*. To transform them from a pro-
cess of disobedience to a process of affirmation necessitates the forging of
alternative economic, social, and administrative structures. So far, a great
deal of myth-making has focused on popular neighborhood teaching (includ-
ing the planning of alternative curricula), home gardening, cottage industries,
rural cooperatives, and other arenas of popular organization.[42] But many of
these activities are more indicative of revolutionary *élan* than substantive pro-
grams of social change. These committees succeeded in creating a vast orga-
nizational network, enhancing the communal solidarity of what used to be
segmented and atomized neighborhoods, and mobilized thousands of people
in the ranks of the nationalist movement: that is the quantum dimension of
the intifada. What remains is to narrow the gap between the committees'
radical rhetoric and their declared objectives for revolutionary change.

There is, of course, another possible strategy—one based on a different reading of current Palestinian populism. This would be to regard the popular committees, in conjunction with the political network of the PLO inside the territories, as constituting *not* the embryonic foundations of a new society but the *nascent organs of an alternative power base*. In this perception the historic function of the popular committees, if they are to survive the Israeli onslaught against them, would be confined to performing the negative role defined above: namely to undermine and erode the basis of Israeli colonial rule until the external political conditions are met for the PLO to establish itself as a state power in the occupied territories. In that case a disciplined retreat would compel the decisionmakers in the movement to adjust their revolutionary idiom to this more pragmatic objective.[43]

Such a disciplined retreat is very much in order as the intifada approaches its fourth year—already the longest sustained rebellion in the modern history of the Middle East. The decline in tempo of street warfare and the temporary eclipse of the Palestinian issue from the international agenda during the Gulf crisis will doubtless compel the leadership to make difficult choices on the basis of the two alternative visions suggested here.

NOTES

1. Meron Benvenisti was among the first writers to advance this view. In 1979 he wrote: ". . . the pattern created by Israeli policies and all social, economic, and political community interactions assumed a quasi-permanent nature. . . . [T]he processes set in motion after 1967 are apparently so strong that integration has passed into the point of no return . . ." cf. *The West Bank Data Base Project*, (Jerusalem: West Bank Data Project, 1987), p. 67. However very few commentators, Arab or Israeli, agreed with his political conclusions from this process.
2. Actually the conference was held 3-5 January 1986 at Oxford University in anticipation of the second decade anniversary. The proceedings appeared in George Abed (ed.), *The Palestinian Economy: Studies in Development under Prolonged Occupation*, (London: Routledge, 1988).
3. See Abed (ed.), *The Palestinian Economy*, especially the contributions of Ibrahim Dakkak, Harold Dick, and (for Israeli Arabs) Raja Khalidi.
4. Yusif Sayigh, "The Palestinian Economy Under Occupation," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 15, 4 (Summer, 1986): 46-67. Appeared also in Abed (ed.), *The Palestinian Economy*, pp. 259-286.
5. Sayigh, "The Palestinian Economy Under Occupation," p. 64; see also Ibrahim Dakkak, "Development from Within: A Strategy for Survival," in Abed (ed.), *The Palestinian Economy*.
6. Sari Nusseibeh, "The Continuation of the Status Quo," *al-Fajr* (Jerusalem), 9 August 1987.
7. Nusseibeh, "The Continuation of the Status Quo."
8. The space given here to Nusseibeh's paper is not meant to indicate widespread approval of his views in national circles, but because it presents the sharpest and clearest expression of a political stand that was im-

plicit in much of the pre-intifada literature. On Benvenisti, see note 1 above.
9. We do not have any comprehensive work analyzing the class transformations of the Palestinians under Israeli rule. The reader might benefit from consulting the following works: Jamil Hilal, *The West Bank: Economic and Social Structure*, (Beirut, 1975) [in Arabic]; Pamela Ann Smith, *Palestine and the Palestinians, 1876-1983*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984); Joel Migdal, *Palestinian Society and Politics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); and this writer's "Building other People's Homes: The Palestinian Peasant and Work in Israel," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 2, 1 (1981). On proletarianization, see also M. Semyonov and N. Lewin Epstein, *Hewers of Wood and Drawers of Water*, (New York, 1987).
10. Eventually only a portion of the promised aid actually materialized. For a discussion of this dimension of *sumud* see Samir Abdallah Salih, *Jordanian Economic Policies towards the Occupied Territories*, (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 51-59 [in Arabic].
11. Sharif Kana'na, "Survival Strategies of the Arabs in Israel," *MERIP Reports* 53 (November 1976).
12. The main organ of this assertion was (and continues to be), *Society and Heritage*, the journal of the Palestine Folklore Society in al-Bireh.
13. See for example, "The Thousand Mile Journey Begins with the Domestic Economy," *al-Biader al-Siyasi*, (Jerusalem) 12 November 1988 [in Arabic].
14. See Salim Tamari, "In League with Zion: Israel's Search for a Native Pillar," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 12, 4 (Summer 1983), pp. 41-56.
15. This is not to belittle the role of radical nationalist groups in the defeat of the Leagues, which was substantial, but to point out the cultural role of rural conserva-

tism in resisting Israeli attempts at fostering collaborationist groups.

16. For West Bank and Gaza income generated from emigrant stipends see, UNCTAD, *The Palestinian Financial Sector Under Israeli Occupation*, (New York, 1987), pp. 132-139.

17. UNCTAD, *The Palestinian Financial Sector Under Israeli Occupation*, pp. 155-158.

18. UNCTAD, *The Palestinian Financial Sector Under Israeli Occupation*, p. 147; see also Abed (ed.), *The Palestinian Economy*, pp. 1-12.

19. See A. Qassim, *Funding Sources Development in the Occupied Territories*, (Jerusalem: Arab Thought Forum, 1986).

20. UNCTAD, *The Palestinian Financial Sector Under Israeli Occupation*, pp. 151, 155.

21. Cf. Salih, *Jordanian Economic Policies towards the Occupied Territories*, pp. 51-59.

22. A good critique of this aspect of aid is Meron Benvenisti, *U.S. Government Funded Projects in the West Bank and Gaza*, (Jerusalem: West Bank Data Project, 1984), pp. 14-15.

23. Next to the main road between Ramallah and Nablus there is a hill-top neighborhood known as *Jabal al-Sumud* (The Hill of Steadfastness), mocking the patronage money spent in building a housing cooperative there.

24. Lisa Taraki, "Mass Organizations in the West Bank," in Naseer Aruri (ed.), *Occupation: Israel Over Palestine* (second edition), (Boston, 1989); Joost Hiltermann, *Before the Uprising: The Organization and Mobilization of Palestinian Workers and Women in the Israeli-Occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Santa Cruz, June 1988.

25. Taraki, "Mass Organizations in the West Bank," p. 12.

26. Taraki, "Mass Organizations in the West Bank," p. 32.

27. See Hiltermann, *Before the Uprising*, for the "nationalist" ambiguities of the class perspective of the trade union movement (pp. 336-341); and the class-feminist dilemmas of the women's committees (pp. 469-488).

28. This claim can be substantiated by comparing the programs of the four main women's committees and workers' blocs in Hiltermann's excellent discussion. *Before the Uprising*, pp. 291-326, 469-488. See also Taraki, "Mass Organizations in the West Bank," p. 31. The author notes, however, that there is a tendency on the part of leftist women's groups "to deemphasize the domestic function. This is done primarily through mobilizing women for political activism and creating contexts very removed, both physically and socially from the traditional meeting places of women."

29. Taraki, "Mass Organizations in the West Bank," p. 29—but see note 28 above for a modification.

30. See the crucial analysis made by three Israeli leaders and military commanders: Rabin (Minister of Defence): "Rabin sets his sights on local People's Committees of the areas," *Jerusalem Post*, 8 August 1988, Ihud Barak (Deputy Chief of Staff): "Nothing in the territories will revert to what it was prior to December 1987," *Yediot Ahronot*, 4 December 1988; and Gen-

eral Dan Shomron (Chief of Staff): "Shomron: *Intifada* can't be eradicated," *Jerusalem Post*, 11 January 1989. See also Bashir al-Barghouti's "Year of the *Intifada*: Meanings and Connotations," *al-Ittihad* (special supplement), 9 January 1989.

31. *Filastin al-Thawra* 21 January 1988, p. 25.

32. Jamil Hilal, "The Uprising and the Needed Change," *al-Fikr al-Dimukrati* 3 (July 1988): 6 (emphasis added).

33. Hilal, "The Uprising and the Needed Change," p. 6.

34. The most vivid description of this early spontaneity appeared in a Hebrew article by Makram Makhoul in the Tel Aviv newspaper *Ha'Ir*, "This is not a revolt, it's a war," 18 December 1987; translated and reprinted in *Journal of Palestine Studies* 17, 3 (Spring 1988): pp. 91-99.

35. Bashir al-Bakr, "Five deportees discuss their field experiences," *al-Yawm al-Sabi'* (Paris) 5 December 1988.

36. *al-Yawm al-Sabi'*, 5 December 1988.

37. "What the Uprising Means," *Middle East Report* 152 (May-June 1988): 24-30.

38. Responses are from *al-Yawm al-Sabi'*, 5 December 1988. I have used quotation marks around "UNLU leaders" because this is the term used by the Israeli authorities in justifying (in part) their deportation. In the interview, however, none of them rejected this identification.

39. On 1 July 1988 the Israeli Ministry of Defence declared the popular committees to be illegal and began a series of measures to arrest individuals, and disband groups that were deemed connected to them. General Amram Mitzna announced on Israeli television that "the establishment of popular committees is against the law. Any person who cooperates with these committees will be punished . . . the Civil Administration [i.e., the military government] is the only authority in the administered territories." *Facts Weekly Review* (Jerusalem), 2 July 1988.

40. This reference appeared, in various terminologies, in several communiques of the Unified National Leadership, notably communique 23 (dated 5 August 1988).

41. For details, see Information Committee (Jerusalem), *Toward a State of Independence*, September 1988, pp. 16-19.

42. There is considerable unevenness in the achievements of these committees, obviously. Mention should be made of the considerable success achieved by women's productive cooperatives in several refugee camps (in Gaza) and villages (in the West Bank), especially in marketing processed foods. See *Shu'un Tanmawiyya* [*Development Affairs*, published by the Arab Thought Forum in Jerusalem] 2 (December 1988), a special issue on the women's movement.

43. Since the above was written I have dealt with the internal crisis of the intifada as it affected social groups ["The Revolt of the Petite Bourgeoisie" in *Palestine at the Crossroads*, J. Nasser and R. Heacock, eds. (New York Greenwood Press, 1990)], and the direction of the national movement as a whole ["The Uprising's Dilemma: Limited Rebellion and Civil Society" in *Middle East Report*, nos. 164-65 (August 1990)].