Non-Hierarchical Revolution:
Grassroots Politics in the First Palestinian Intifada

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This article seeks to outline the non-hierarchical characteristics of the first intifada, using as examples the decentralised healthcare networks, labour unions, and women's movements which were formed in the years preceding the uprising and provided a structure and backbone to the resistance. Such a focus on three distinct, but interdependent, forces behind the intifada is informed by a belief that each operated primarily on a deliberately horizontal basis of organising, thus highlighting the common motivation that activists felt towards a model of democratised resistance. The article concludes with a discussion of the town of Beit Sahour, where pre-existing networks of solidarity helped to produce a resilient campaign of tax resistance, coordinated by popular committees.

Introduction

The first Palestinian intifada was famously sparked and sustained by a network of popular committees, labour unions, women's organisations, student groups, and various other grassroots organisations that had developed in the years prior to the uprising. 1987 was the year that sporadic resistance coalesced into a national revolutionary uprising, later called *Intifadat al-Hijara* (literally "the uprising of stones"). Studies have focused on the uprising's non-violence, the extraordinary brutality of the Israeli response (exemplified by Yitzhak Rabin's famous "break their bones" directive), the secret Israeli-PLO negotiations that led to the intifada's dissolution, and the Oslo Agreements. Though scholars and observers have noted the deliberately non-hierarchical and decentralised organisational tactics of the intifada,[1] the manner in which the groundwork was laid in order to foster this revolutionary moment deserves further investigation. The techniques discernible from existing histories of the uprising such as a) the distribution of local responsibilities to elected town and village committees b) the involvement of community members in decisions relating to their areas of expertise, and c) the shunning of pyramid structures in favour of rotating and accountable councils, were in fact the result of years of grassroots organising beginning in the 1970s.[2] In his comprehensive study, Joost Hiltermann claims that the organisations which emerged, though individually focused on particular services and requirements of different sectors of Palestinian society, in fact "[went much] further: they … provided the economic, social, and political infrastructure of Palestinian society … an institutional infrastructure of resistance".[3] The networks

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[1] Though Mohammed Bamyeh of the University of Pittsburgh considers these elements to have as yet received scant scholarly attention in English or Arabic: author interview with Mohammed Bamyeh, 2013.

[2] Linda Tabar gives a specific date, 1972, beginning with 'the formation of the voluntary work movement that was established by the communists'. Linda Tabar, 'People's Power: Lessons from the First Intifada'. Rosa Luxemburg Siftung, April 2013, 13. Available at: https://rosaluxemburg.ps/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Linda-Tabar.pdf (accessed 17 February 2021).

[3] Joost Hiltermann, *Behind the Intifada: Labor and Women's Movements in the Occupied Territories* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1991), 13–14.

that made up this infrastructure emerged from a longer heritage of decentralised mobilisation, with the uprising burning as bright as it did due to what Nick Estes calls "accumulations of struggles".[4]

There are two primary aims of this study: 1. To provide a historical context for each section outlined in this research 2. To examine how the intifada emerged as a non-hierarchical revolution against occupation. In particular, this study will address three primary examples of broad-based movements and their histories, namely: the 'alternative healthcare' system, the women's movement, and the labour/trade unionist movement. Drawing upon our findings, this paper will reflect on the village of Beit Sahour as a selected case study to provide an example of ways by which it sustained decentralised resistance activities operate in a given locality.

Brief History of the Intifada

The first intifada was part of a long line of indigenous resistance to settler-colonialism in Palestine, stretching back before the establishment of Israel in 1948.[5] The uprising itself is typically said to have begun on 8 December, 1987, the date that an Israeli settler crashed his truck into cars carrying Palestinian labourers and killed four. Mazin Qumsiyeh however, traces the roots of the intifada earlier, to mass demonstrations of stone-wielding youths brutally suppressed by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in October and November. He suggests that the December date may have been popularised by Israeli media reports which emphasised the possibility that the crash was an accident, thus portraying the Palestinian response (and, by extension, the uprising itself) as an irrational overreaction.[6] However, resistance had been steadily growing in response to worsening economic conditions, further restrictions on freedom of movement and association, and the ongoing crackdown on new nationalist institutions.

The intifada moment would not have been possible without prior organising and the construction of a vibrant civil society, along with methods that allowed for alternative, parallel institutions to proliferate as Israeli military repression intensified. In the absence of the exiled PLO leadership, forced to operate outside Palestine since the group's 1964 establishment, Palestinian communities at home drew upon their tradition of popular resistance, dating back to at least the 1936 Arab Revolt.[7] The attachment to the land and rural agriculture which was emblematic of the Palestinian struggle, came from a cultural memory that emphasised the indigenous connection to land, so often a lodestar of resistance in settler-colonial contexts. Recognising that such colonies are built upon the elimination of the native Palestinians have asserted their existence through defence of the soil, with the violent repression of protests in 1976 against

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[4] Nick Estes, *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (London: Verso, 2019), 258.

[5] For an excellent and extensive treatment, see Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine* (London: Profile, 2020).

[6] Mazin B. Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment* (New York: Pluto Press, 2011), 135.

[7] 'Popular' resistance is used here to distinguish this tactic from armed methods, given the latter is usually carried out by a handful of guerrillas, and the former a more broad-based affair.

expropriation dubbed 'Land Day' and commemorated since.[8] 1978 saw the creation of the first women's committee in Ramallah, while organised labour began to exert power following the examples of movements in neighbouring countries. Medical professionals began to form unions and relief committees, and the growing Palestinian population of Israeli prisons developed networks and transnational connections with other political prisoners worldwide, sending letters of solidarity during hunger strikes and campaigns. The groundwork for the intifada was laid over generations, across (and before) colonial borders.[9]

Contrary to passive or non-overt resistance, the mass revolt took the form of a spontaneous civil insurrection, as demonstrations across Gaza and then the West Bank sprung up overnight and continued through the first three weeks of the intifada. In the following months until March 1988, the uprising became formalised with a recognised coordinating voice – the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU). Popular committees were established to coordinate local action, and networks began to grow at a rapid pace, connecting even isolated villages with activists and avenues of communication. From February to June 1988, Palestinians worked to impede Israeli administration of the occupied Palestinian territories (OPT) through "the (successful) call for police and tax collectors to resign, and the boycott of taxes and Israeli commodities".[10] Subsequently, the internal and external networks of the movement became somewhat more coordinated, culminating in the November 1988 Palestine National Council (PNC) in Algiers and the declaration of Palestinian statehood. In 1989, the Israeli authorities started a program of more intense and far-reaching counter measures, banning popular committees and massively increasing the recruitment of collaborators. Following this, from June 1989 to early 1990, intra-Palestinian violence rocketed as suspected agents were pursued within local communities, leading to a breakdown of the trust within activist networks and the beginning of the dissolution of the popular basis of the uprising. Despite the descent into more violent and exclusionary tactics, the eventual Israeli success in crushing the most robust centres of resistance (such as Beit Sahour's inspirational tax resistance campaign) and the exiled PLO leadership co-opting the uprising's gains in order to negotiate taking over some administrative responsibilities from the Israeli military regime in the OPT, the lessons of mass national mobilisation were plain to see. Salim Tamari, writing in 1990, commented that "the emergence of voluntary social forms … have achieved a substantial democratisation of society [including] political decision making at the community and national levels",[11] which was unique at that point for an uprising of such a scale in the Middle East, and remains a formative moment in revolutionary consciousness in the wider region.[12]

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[8] Patrick Wolfe argues that 'Settler colonialism is inherently eliminationary but not invariably genocidal'. Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', Journal of Genocide Research 8, no. 4 (2006): 387.

[9] Formative moments for Palestinian national consciousness included the unsuccessful 1834 "peasant's revolt"against Egyptian conscription and taxation policies.

[10] Salim Tamari, "The Uprising's Dilemma: Limited Rebellion and Civil Society", *Middle East Report* 164 (May/June 1990): 3.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Tabar, "People's Power".

Historically Situating the Intifada

Social movement theory has catalogued and attempted to analyse what are seen as the field's paradigmatic episodes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Decentralised networks represent a challenge to categorisation, as their amorphous nature and unconventional decision-making techniques evade the theory's orthodox modes of classification. Charles Tilly's view of 'contentious politics' (within which he situates social movements) is described as "interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else's interest, in which governments appear either as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties".[13] The statist assumptions here show, for Polly Pallister-Wilkins, "the limits of social movement theory, [which could be challenged by] an anarchist framework that sees the state not as the site for change but as an agent of domination", asking by way of example: "How does social movement theory analyse the multifactorial nature of power if it remains rooted in a logic of state-based social change?"[14]

Jamie Allinson proposes that we are now witnessing a fifth generation of the study of revolution in historical sociology, focused on the "non-violent change of political regime",[15] where the fourth had represented an agency-focused departure from the perceived rigid structuralism of the third (associated with Theda Skocpol, Misagh Parsa and Joel Beinin).[16] This fifth generation, represented by scholars like Asef Bayat[17] and Donatella Della Porta,[18] seems to offer the most productive avenues with which to situate innovative revolutionary episodes like the intifada. This generation's discussion of revolutions-as-processes – best analysed through a "processual rather than attributional ontology"[19] – allows for an examination of the prefigurative nature of the intifada, with a mass movement engaging in civil action that functioned to both reject and oppose state sovereignty while constructing and applying alternative forms of governance in liberated areas. This research sees the intifada thus, as a culmination of decades of a novel form of resistance to colonialism, best termed as "the non-linear and fragile development of a revolutionary subject and its emancipatory politics", in Brecht De Smet's assessment of Egypt's later anti-hierarchical revolution of 2011.[20]

Worth elaborating upon in analysing this episode is the discipline and sophisticated organisation it must have required of an entire population to maintain tactical coherence

[13] Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008),5.

[14] Polly Pallister-Wilkins, 'Building a new theory in the shell of the old: How anarchism offers an alternative to the limits of social movement theory,' Paper delivered at Anarchist Approaches in Empirical Political Analysis conference (Loughborough University, 4–6 September, 2008).

[15] Jamie Allinson, 'A Fifth Generation of Revolution Theory?', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 32, no.1 (2019): 142–51.

[16] Jack Goldstone, 'Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory', *Annual Review of Political Science* 4 (2001): 139–87.

[17] Asef Bayat, *Revolution without Revolutionaries: Making Sense of the Arab Spring* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).

[18] Donatella Della Porta, *Where did the Revolution Go? Contentious Politics and the Quality of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[19] George Lawson, 'Within and Beyond the "Fourth Generation" of Revolutionary Theory', *Sociological Theory* 34, no.2 (2016): 106–27.

[20] Brecht De Smet, "Theory and its Consequences: A Reply to Joel Beinin", *Jadaliyya*, 5 June 2014. Available at https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/30775/Theory-and-its-Consequences-A-Reply-to-Joel-Beinin (accessed 15 April 2021).

and unity in their mass uprising, suggesting a distinct form of non-hierarchical coordination.

Continuities with prior uprisings were clear and pronounced in collective memory, with veterans of the 1936 revolt still alive at the time, and the lessons for how to sustain a mass strike carried forward with them.[21] Intergenerational knowledge was also shared through the burgeoning university network and popular education initiatives like the *Ashbal* and *Zahraat* (Cubs and Flowers) scout movement – interviews with activists and educators on 'the untold story of the Palestinian Revolution' are now available in an online repository based at the University of Oxford.[22] Scholars have focused on a supposedly novel feature of the intifada in the context of Palestinian history – its lack of an armed component. However, as Souad Dajani points out, Palestinians were not philosophically committed to nonviolence: "the word "pacifism" in Arabic has completely negative connotations, like 'passivity' … but practice has been guided by common sense",[23] and the most distinguishing features of the intifada – liberated zones, strikes and civil disobedience, mass marches and unarmed resistance – had historical antecedents of which participants were fully aware.

In describing the youthful movements that sparked the Arab Spring, Mohammed Bamyeh argues that "many of these perspectives do not use the word "anarchism," but in spirit they express a basic longing for an unimposed, voluntary order and invoke an ideal of social justice. These perspectives we [in the Arab World] have had in abundance, for over a century."[24] Likewise in Palestine, 'travelling theory' (in Edward Said's formulation[25]) can help us interpret events through lenses imported across borders, and often changed in the process. The uprising's spontaneity, confounding the PLO and the analysts who expected activists in Gaza must receive marching orders from Tunis, brings to mind Rosa Luxembourg's prognosis that revolution would occur 'from below' and seemingly without warning, directed by the workers themselves.[26] The development of kinship ties among a self-defined group and the social solidarity that results from this consciousness – a collective unity of purpose that allowed for a diverse society to undertake such a momentous feat of organising as happened in Palestine in 1987 – was perhaps first described in Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah* in 1377.[27] Through such paradigms we can

[21] Ted Swedenburg's definitive study of the politics of Palestinian historical consciousness, *Memories of Revolt*, traces how the peasant revolutionaries of 1936 influenced and impacted the later popular uprising. Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936–1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Fayetteville, AR: Arkansas University Press, 2003).

[22] Karma Nabulsi & Abdel Razzaq al-Takriti, "The Palestinian Revolution", 2016. Available at http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk (accessed 22 February 2021).

[23] Souad Dajani, quoted in Melanie Kaye, "Women and the Intifada," *Off Our Backs* 19:6 (June 1989), 1.

[24] Mohammed Bamyeh, in an interview with Joshua Stephens, "Talking Anarchism and the Arab Uprisings with Mohammed Bamyeh," *Toward Freedom*, 26 February 2013. Available at https://tahriricn.wordpress.com/2013/02/27/talking-anarchism-and-the-arab-uprisings-with-mohammed-bamyeh/ (accessed 15 April 2021).

[25] Edward Said, "Traveling theory", in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

[26] This idea became known as "spontaneism". Rosa Luxembourg, *The Mass Strike, the Political Party, and the Trade Unions* (Detroit, MN: Marxist Educational Society of Detroit, 1925).

[27] Syed Faris Alatas, "A Khaldunian Exemplar for a Historical Sociology for the South", *Current Sociology* 54, no. 3 (2006): 397–411.

recognise, in Palestine and elsewhere, concerted political efforts of this type – with an absence of hierarchy, prominence of local control and local initiatives, and spontaneous mobilisation.

The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Intifada

Despite the strong associations, then as now, of the PLO with the wider Palestinian liberation movement (for obvious reasons), the intifada was "an uprising organised through popular committees and largely in detachment from the PLO leadership, … involving mass demonstrations, general strikes, tax refusal, boycotts of Israeli products, political graffiti and the establishment of underground schools and grassroots mutual aid projects".[28] During the time of the intifada, the PLO was still regarded by most Palestinians as their voice on the world stage. However, in terms of political action within the OPT, many activists began to regard the exile leadership as out of touch with the lived experiences of Palestinians, and increasingly insular and unresponsive to any democratic pressure.[29] Indeed, by virtue of repeated attacks from Israeli special forces, increasingly unsympathetic Arab regimes in Jordan and Lebanon, and communal strife in Beirut and the refugee camps that had been their bases, Arafat's organisation had developed into a small but mobile group. It minimised damage by remaining prepared to relocate operations, but also distrusted those outside its inner circle, developing into a more explicitly hierarchical and Fatah (and Arafat)-centric group. In manoeuvring to centralise power, and in the process distancing itself further from events on the ground, this clique echoed its antecedents in Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husseini and the elite leadership in 1936 (who were equally surprised at the outbreak of popular resistance).[30] Though those surrounding Arafat were not necessarily from the old elite, young activists from the universities saw them as disconnected, authoritarian and corrupt, and sought alternatives in their own methods of resistance.[31] Salim Tamari argues that "populism became the ideology of a new radical and grassroots alternative to the elitist outlook of the [PLO-led] nationalist movement",[32] with the ideas of self-reliance and a certain romanticisation of the agricultural, land-based society forming the new understanding of '*sumud' (steadfastness)*..

According to Mazin Qumsiyeh, a direct contact with the exiled PLO was established from the early stages of the intifada. However, they (usually Khalil Al-Wazir, the Tunis operative with the most extensive contacts within the OPT) were unable to alter

[28] Uri Gordon, "Israeli Anarchism: Statist Dilemmas and the Dynamics of Joint Struggle," *Anarchist Studies* 15, no.1 (2007): 20.

[29] This perception would only strengthen during the subsequent Oslo years, as the PLO morphed into the "national bourgeoisie" leadership about which Frantz Fanon had warned. Nadia Naser-Najjab reports this sentiment among several intifada veterans interviewed about their feelings on the PLO and national leadership in general, in: Naser-Najjab, "Palestinian leadership and the contemporary significance of the First Intifada", *Race & Class* 62, no.2 (2020): 61–79. Available at https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0306396820946294 (accessed 22 February 2021).

[30] Kenneth W. Stein, "The Intifada and the 1936-39 Uprising: A Comparison", *Journal of Palestine Studies* 19, no.4 (Summer 1990): 66.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Salim Tamari in , *Echoes of the Intifada: Regional Repercussions of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict,* ed. Rex Brynen, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 20.

directives from the UNLU if they disagreed, granting the intifada 'leadership' relative independence. Within the territories, "the relationships were more complicated and there was a more democratic, bottom-up approach in operation. This was the key to the success of the *intifada*".[33]

The Popular Committees

The popular committees were primarily tasked with food storage and distribution, guard duty, alternative education, backyard and self-sufficient farming, and health care.[34] They did, however, specialise depending on the requirements in the area. For instance, "there were commercial committees made up of business people who decided on hours of operation … [and] how best to boycott Israeli products",[35] former policemen that organised in Hebron to protect locals from settler attacks, and neighbourhood committees which had "subcommittees for agriculture, first aid training, and so on … [along with] a traffic committee, a social committee (for resolving disputes) and a relief committee".[36] This spontaneity and the resolution to self-organise on the basis of known specialisations were reminiscent of 1936, where worker committees and local councils had spread through both mandatory Palestine and revolutionary Catalonia during their distant, yet comparable insurrectionary moments.

The occupation authorities had a notoriously difficult time cracking down on these committees, as will be explored later. Due to their membership being drawn from all levels of society, it was almost impossible to fully eradicate a popular-based committee through arrests, since replacements quickly emerged for every person imprisoned. One Israeli security officer lamented that the authorities "could not place a soldier next to every Palestinian".[37]

The Alternative Healthcare System

The creation of a sophisticated and widespread healthcare network, functioning alongside and sustaining the intifada, despite massive Israeli repression and attempts to deprive this specific network of resources, is a clear and well-documented example of decentralised and anti-hierarchical praxis. In this section we will examine how a parallel healthcare infrastructure emerged in the early years of the intifada, the challenges it faced from the Israeli forces along with a lack of support from the PLO leadership, and the tactics used to sustain it.

Throughout the twenty years of Israeli occupation that preceded the intifada, various forms of 'official' healthcare infrastructure that had grown in the West Bank and Gaza were affected in different ways. Three systems operated alongside each other: the governmental, up to 1967 supervised by Jordan and Egypt in the West Bank and Gaza respectively, and subsequently decimated by budget cuts and arbitrary restrictions under Israeli control; the United Nations Reliefs and Works Agency (UNRWA)-led health

[33] Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine*, 139.

[34] Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State*, 96.

[35] Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine*, 139–40.

[36] F. Robert Hunter, *The Palestinian Uprising: A War by Other Means* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1991), 137.

[37] Hunter, *The Palestinian Uprising*, 139.

services which were primarily directed towards the refugee population; and the private sector, including charitable institutions. Though the quality of healthcare continued on its upward trajectory throughout 1967–87, it lagged well behind improvements in Israel, and remained inferior to the system in neighbouring Jordan. Despite a level of integration into the Israeli system, and the modernisation of healthcare techniques across the region, Palestinian infant mortality rates indicated a severe disparity in provision. In 1985, Israel had a rate of fourteen deaths per thousand live births, with Jordan's rate at fifty-five and the OPT's reaching seventy.[38] The governmental healthcare system supervised by Egypt and Jordan was particularly under-equipped and vastly underfunded by the Israeli authorities, with the average expenditure in 1986 standing at $30 per person per year, compared with $350 per Israeli citizen.[39] The situation was compounded by the increased levels of violence during the intifada, when almost ten per cent of the Palestinian population was killed or wounded.[40] Hospitals located in the major cities struggled to cope with a massive influx of patients suffering warzone-type injuries, who nevertheless were treated in civilian facilities by medics often untrained in battlefield scenarios. In 1987, 300,000 Palestinians in Hebron were served by just one hospital, and doctors at the Rimal Clinic in Gaza each saw an average of 100 patients a day. Half of the 500 population centres in the West Bank lacked any form of health care centre.[41]

However, as Palestinian medical professionals and community organisers began to recognise the problems of a healthcare system forced to function under occupation, alternative and parallel forms of medical provision began to emerge. In 1979, the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees (UPMRC) was formed by activists drawn from the medical professions and local volunteers. It was the first of large medical unions to be established and was politically close to the small but influential Palestine Communist Party (PCP), associated first with veteran Bashir Barghouti and then the physician Dr. Mustafa Barghouti, later runner-up to Mahmoud Abbas in the 2005 Palestinian presidential election. The existing Medical Relief Committees had been formed specifically as local response teams, aiming to "[reach] people with services instead of people having to reach the services in urban areas",[42] and moreover to act independently of the system of Israeli restrictions and regulations on the official healthcare networks. The UPMRC was staffed almost entirely by volunteers and saw itself as having both a medical and a political mission; the former being to respond to the perceived over-emphasis on curative and hospital-based medicine, by concerning itself with primary

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[38] Andrew Rigby, "Coping with the 'Epidemic of Violence': The Struggle over Health Care in the Intifada" *Journal of Palestine Studies* 20, no.4 (1991): 87.

[39] Meron Benvenisti, *1986 Report: Demographic, Economic, Legal, Social and Political Developments in the West Bank*, (Jerusalem: West Bank Data Base Project, 1986), 17.

[40] Glenn E. Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State: The Incomplete Revolution* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 39.

[41] *An Overview of Health Conditions and Services in the Israeli Occupied Territories* (Jerusalem: Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, August 1987), 12.

[42] A slogan translated from the Arabic, and quoted in Mustafa Barghouti and Rita Giacaman, "The Emergence of an Infrastructure of Resistance: The Case of Health," in Intifada: Palestine at the Crossroads, eds. Jamal Nassar and Roger Heacock. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1990), 80.

health care and preventative medicine,[43] and the latter as building an independent health infrastructure. It sought to operate as a service based on a "refusal to recognise the authority of Israeli law and to accept the hegemony of the authorities",[44] employing a decentralised structure to respond to the needs of the local population. Following this example, other relief committees were launched, the most important of which were each affiliated with the main political forces that were to comprise the Unified Leadership along with the PCP: the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and Fatah. In 1985, the Marxist PFLP and DFLP each set up relief unions,[45] though these merely formalised linkages between separate committees that already existed. A UHWC organiser explained that recruiting relied on personal and professional ties; members would approach doctors working in the mobile clinics and invite those who were "nationalist … humanitarian … and clean – [someone with] a spotless reputation",[46] Medical volunteers were organised on a flexible rota basis, and in the course of conducting village visits, members of the political committees would attempt to cement relationships with local populations, identify areas of need, and work to establish permanent clinics where necessary. The DFLP-connected Women's Action Committee was particularly effective at creating local links. It visited villages to assist with medical issues associated with childbirth, and provided check-up, lectures on family planning, and medicine free of charge.[47]

Decentralising healthcare provision began with taking local health surveys to assess the deficiencies of existing provisions in rural areas, followed by the distribution of educational materials to encourage preventative personal and public healthcare. This new strategy stemmed from a belief that the domination of the medical profession by the "notable class" was a root cause of many rural healthcare problems. In this view, the democratisation of knowledge and involvement of marginalised sectors of society, particularly women and the rural poor, would lead to a population better able to deal with deteriorating conditions under occupation. This program, which began in 1979 and continued through the intifada, is described by Mustafa Barghouti and Rita Giacaman as the 'alternative health movement' in the OPT, which they identify as the third indigenous attempt to formulate a response to worsening healthcare conditions under the Occupation.[48]

The first phase was dominated by the "old medical establishment," whose approach to healthcare was focused on technical advancements in premises and procedures, yet was "divorced from social, economic, and political contexts."[49] It involved advocating

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[43] *Statement of Purpose* (Jerusalem: Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, 1984),1: quoted in Barghouti and Giacaman, "The Emergence of an Infrastructure of Resistance," in Intifada eds. Nassar and Heacock, 79.

[44] Ibid, 79.

[45] The Union of Health Work Committees or UHWC, and the Union of Health Care Committees or UHCC, respectively.

[46] Ahmad Maslamani, interview cited in Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State*, 44.

[47] Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State*, 46.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Barghouti and Giacaman, "The Emergence of an Infrastructure of Resistance," in *Intifada*, eds. Nassar and Heacock, 76.

for an acceptance of the status quo while still attempting to bring about improvements within the Israeli-controlled governmental healthcare system. The political flaws in this approach led to its downfall; reliance on the whims of Israeli military governors led to bureaucratic breakdown and intermittent facility closures, and only a small, wealthy urban sector of Palestinian society benefited. This approach was soon to be eclipsed by the ideas of the 'new elite': individuals who had graduated in the mid-1970s and promoted the notion of a new, progressive approach to healthcare – one which would cater to rural and low-income Palestinians.

This new approach comprised the second phase, characterised by innovative new techniques and organisational methods that were, crucially, independent of the military authorities while still acting within the legal restrictions imposed by the occupying power. *Sumud* formed the ideological basis of this approach, which Ibrahim Dakkak identifies as the primary response championed by nationalists during the mid- to late 1970s.[50] *Sumud* manifested in resolute attachment to the land and the commitment to the maintenance of a society and culture in the face of the hardship of occupation. As such, it advocated the development of independent Palestinian healthcare institutions, which involved struggling with authorities from whom permits for any new medical or health activities had to be sought to establish a Palestinian healthcare infrastructure that did not rely on Israeli funding and oversight. Key elements of this approach included the establishment of the Maqassed Hospital in Jerusalem, run by a charitable society, and the Red Crescent Societies in the West Bank and Gaza, founded in 1968 by Fathi Arafat, brother of Yasser. Curative technical medicine facilities, which were mainly developed in towns and larger urban centres, led to considerable gains, and the overall strategy of "institutional resistance [succeeded in] establish[ing] the complete political hegemony of Palestinian nationalism".[51] However there were also many shortcomings. The Israeli authorities cracked down on any institutional expressions of nationalist, independent sentiment, especially after new Likud Prime Minister Menachem Begin's 'iron fist' policy in 1981 (signified by hardliner Menahem Milson's appointment as Head of the Military Administration for Judea and Samaria). Barghouti outlines several "tremendous and sometimes insurmountable difficulties in [independent healthcare institutions'] exchanges with the authorities", including "denial of permits to expand premises or build new ones, the harassment of individual health professionals ... [and] continual threats of shutdown".[52] These had disastrous consequences during the uprising, where societies in smaller cities such as Tulkarem were arbitrarily closed for 'security reasons', and the authorities successfully pressured hospitals into submitting regular lists of wounded patients' names, with obvious repercussions for those involved.

The realisation of these limitations led to the third phase of the alternative health care system, marked by disengagement from the apparatus of occupation, and "decentralism,

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[50] Ibrahim Dakkak, 'Back to Square One: A Study of the Reemergence of the Palestinian Identity in the West Bank 1967–1980,' in Alexander Schölch, ed., *Palestinians Over the Green Line* (London: Ithaca, 1983), 77.

[51] Salim Tamari, 'What the Uprising Means', *Middle East Report* 152 (May-June 1988), 24–30, 26.

[52] Barghouti and Giacaman, 'The Emergence of an Infrastructure of Resistance,' in Nassar and Heacock, eds., *Intifada*, 78.

volunteerism, and noncompliance with Israeli regulations".[53] Urban young professionals, many of whom were already involved with other grassroots organisations (particularly women's groups, explored in the next section), joined the efforts to provide services and medical expertise to rural areas, develop mobile clinics, and provide the means for primary healthcare provision in previously isolated parts of the country. The focus on volunteers was a conscious attempt to escape the power, and limitations, of money and outside funding that had characterised previous approaches: "activities rest on the voluntary work of [the UPMRC's] members, who, during their holidays, practice medical and health related work in rural areas and refugee camps where the population is denied access to health services".[54] Other explicitly 'decentralising' impulses were also reactions to evidence that the previous (centralised and curative) health sector was seriously deficient in two ways. It proved unable to cope with what Andrew Rigby called the "duality" of health conditions within the OPT – the combination of high disease and infant mortality rates from poor environmental conditions, and the accelerating incidences of modern, "stress-related illnesses" such as hypertension, heart problems, and psychiatric issues, direct results of living under military occupation.[55] To address this deficiency, the new 'alternative medicine' movement helped to develop a much-needed primary health care network, which provided for the majority of the population whose health care requirements were previously unreported and consequently ignored. The second issue with the old system, which this new popular movement also sought to redress, was the political problem of relying on institutions integrated into, and thus subservient to, the Israeli military regime. In response, the infrastructure that developed around the UPMRC and, later, unions brought both a "populist egalitarian dimension previously unknown to Palestinian health care provision" and a "prototype for resistance".[56] They developed as part of an independent, responsive, and sustainable network that derived its legitimacy from a response to the failings of centralised and co-opted elite institutions.

When the intifada broke out, this network of support committees and mobile, clandestine medical 'cells' rapidly expanded operations yet remained outside of the Israeli legal regulations. Robinson reports that, as with "all Palestinian grassroots organisations, the UHCC [the DFLP-affiliated union] neither registered its 26 clinics nor coordinated its activities with Israeli military authorities".[57] The Ramallah health committee was originally tasked with dealing rapidly with those wounded in demonstrations, but became "so well organised that it actually took control of the hospital there", and the IDF was forced to reconquer the building after the hoisting of the Palestinian flag.[58] Similar reclamations of buildings from centralised control famously occurred during

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[53] Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State*, 40.

[54] *Annual Report, 1985* (Jerusalem: Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, April 1986).

[55] Rigby, "Coping with the 'Epidemic of Violence'", 89.

[56] Barghouti and Giacaman, "The Emergence of an Infrastructure of Resistance," in Intifada, eds. Nassar and Heacock, 78.

[57] Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State*, 46.

[58] Hunter, *The Palestinian Uprising*, 140.

Argentina's worker occupations of 2001.[59]

The popular mobilisation of medical activists in the OPT had severe consequences. When the military government was unable to crack down on roaming medical clinics at the individual level, it ramped up various retaliatory methods against the wider population. This amounted in many cases to collective punishment; notably, the use of primary government health infrastructure as leverage, slashing the budget, increasing hospital treatment charges, and closing secondary and tertiary care units. The Israeli government suggested that Palestinians should simply avail themselves of such services in Tel Aviv hospitals, despite the prohibitive costs, and Yitzhak Rabin cited the tax revolt and other resistance activities as the reasons for 'cutbacks,' saying that "the minute our budgetary situation improves, we will return to our past practices".[60] Likewise, the army prevented ambulances from leaving the site of confrontations and regularly conducted incursions into hospitals to arrest patients.[61] These practices led to further pressure on official networks and the increased need for innovation to maintain the informal mobile care units that darted from protest sites to villages under curfew.

An examination of health care trends in 1980s Palestine points to a remarkable model of co-operative, horizontal institution building. Gains were impressive despite the framework of a military occupation that vacillated between steadily repressive (in terms of a litany of arbitrary restrictions on daily life) and systematically violent. Significantly, most of these gains appeared in rural, deprived areas which had suffered both from Israeli land grabs and marginalisation by the Palestinian elite.

Women's Groups in the Intifada
The evolving role of Palestinian women in the years before the intifada was the result of coordinated responses to various pressures, which prominent feminist activist Islah Jad identifies as the threefold oppressions of class, patriarchy, and Occupation.[62] The intifada can be viewed as the culmination of a series of ruptures in Palestinian society, each of which provided inroads and further obstacles for women's liberation, with Eileen Kuttab arguing that in mobilising "all sectors and classes of the Palestinian people… [the intifada] undermined the individualistic and patriarchal nature of society and strengthened its collective, cooperative and democratic values".[63] To contextualise this, we turn to a brief history of women's activism within Palestine and the nationalist movement.

The agricultural Palestinian society which existed prior to the Zionist project was driven in large part by women, with "a consensus [in primary sources] that women worked more than men".[64] However, traditional and patriarchal relations in addition to

[59] Marina Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions: Horizontalism and Autonomy in Argentina* (London: Zed Books, 2012).

[60] Quoted in Tom Segev, 'Report', *Ha'aretz*, 6 January 1989.

[61] Rigby, "Coping with the 'Epidemic of Violence'", 95.

[62] Islah Jad, "From Salons to the Popular Committees: Palestinian Women, 1919–1989," in *Intifada: Palestine at the Crossroads* , eds. Jamal Nassar and Roger Heacock (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1990), 129.

[63] Eileen S. Kuttab, "Palestinian Women in the 'Intifada': Fighting on two fronts", *Arab Studies Quarterly* 15, no.2 (1993): 69.

[64] Jad, "From Salons to the Popular Committees," in *Intifada*, eds. Nassar and Heacock, 126.

laws against female inheritance of land and scant educational opportunities prevented any significant improvement in women's social conditions, particularly in rural areas. The first women's associations were established primarily by middle and upper-class Christian women. The first charitable organisation formed in 1903 in Acre.[65] The birth of the modern Palestinian national movement under the new British mandate government (1920) sparked more civic activity, but this remained the purview of elite Palestinian women, and was further subsumed by the male-driven national movement. The Arab Women's Executive Committee, founded in Jerusalem in 1929 to coordinate the nascent women's movement, was dominated by prominent families like Al-Husayni and Nashashibi. Five of its leaders married members of the Arab Executive Committee, which was the main Palestinian organisation advocating for an end to Jewish immigration and autonomy for Palestine.[66] Though nationalist sentiments within Palestinian society allowed for a level of deviation from traditional gender roles, in the shape of involvement in protest and the establishment of organisations focused on women's status, activists had little true autonomy.[67] Additionally, the lack of involvement from working-class Palestinian women limited any impact on broader social consciousness of patriarchal structures. Women's participation in the 1936–39 revolt was thus minimal, though many new techniques of resistance originated from women's organisations, such as "silent protests, publishing letters in foreign newspapers, direct support of those suffering from the occupation, and prisoner support groups",[68] which would be repeated on an even greater scale fifty years later.

During the early years of renewed guerrilla activity in the refugee camps of Jordan and Lebanon, the PLO-era women's movement – led by the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW), formed following a PLO conference decision in 1965[69] – still failed to connect with wider Palestinian society, and particularly with working-class and rural women. The GUPW did not tackle social issues at all, and its "leadership [consisted] of privileged, socially liberated women".[70] However, this began to change in the early 1970s as the PLO became more genuinely representative, and political organising within the Occupied Territories developed rapidly in response to defeats abroad in Jordan, most notably in the form of the communist-affiliated Palestinian National Front. Voluntary works projects, the first of their kind, allowed men and women to work together (previously an exclusively rural phenomenon), and women "joined all spheres of the resistance ... they were fighters, leaders, workers, activists … [and] the social practices associated with these categories of activism were accompanied by a new sense of

[65] Ellen Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its "New" Women: The Palestinian Women's Movement, 1920–1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 104.

[66] Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its "New" Women*, 148.

[67] Matiel Mogannam, an early leader, remarked that "we wouldn't [send any important memoranda or letters] without having the [male] Executive Committee look it over to see if it was alright" in interview with Julie Peteet and Rosemary Sayigh, cited in Julie Peteet, "Women and the Palestinian Movement: No Going Back?," *MERIP Middle East Report* 138 (1986): 20–4, 20.

[68] Mazin B. Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment* (New York: Pluto Press, 2011), 69.

[69] Jad, "From Salons to the Popular Committees," in *Intifada*, eds. Jamal Nassar and Roger Heacock, 128.

[70] Ibid.

identity and extra-domestic aspirations".[71] The rise of a tertiary education system was a transformative development: nine new undergraduate colleges opened in the mid- to late 1970s in which young women comprised between thirty-five and fifty-five– per cent of the student bodies.[72] The university system was established for the first time in 1972, and the student body started to more closely resemble the larger Palestinian population, with seventy per cent of students coming from refugee camps, villages, and small towns.[73] From the universities spread radical ideas of popular democracy; unions were set up to organise within the student body and the wider community in tandem with other sectors of Palestinian society.

Simultaneously, older elite institutions faced increased attacks from Israeli authorities, which escalated sharply after the election of the hawkish Likud government in 1977. A crackdown on leading activists meant that many organisations were structurally beheaded. Some female leaders of influential charitable groups were either detained at home or imprisoned, leaving their top-down organisations without their decision-making nuclei. The new groups, recognising the ease with which the occupation was able to neutralise the existing hierarchical resistance networks, "elected their leadership democratically and in a decentralised manner. They and the new women's organisations were able to escape some of the effects of the repression".[74] Women were likewise involved in work committees, trade unions, youth movements, and the grassroots 'alternative health care' movement. The new generation of female activists who built the intifada believed that Israel's colonial matrix of power[75] could only be successfully resisted through rejecting any attempts at reform or assimilation into the colonial system, and instead building institutions and power outside it.

On International Women's Day, 8 March 1978, activists created the Women's Work Committee, designed so that politically minded activists who were excluded from organisational roles in existing charitable institutions could participate, with flexible membership conditions, addressing issues like class and social liberation for the first time. Its first project was a 1978 survey of women textile workers in the Ramallah area. This programme – working to improve women's standing within Palestinian society, in addition to participating in the national liberation project – enabled the Women's Work Committee and its successors to develop firm roots in villages, towns, and refugee camps, forming the basis for the coming intifada.[76] A later group, the Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees (PFWAC), affiliated with the DFLP, became the largest

[71] Julie Peteet, "Women and the Palestinian Movement: No Going Back?," in *Women and Power in the Middle East, eds. Suad Joseph and Susan Slymovics,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 137.

[72] Jad, "From Salons to the Popular Committees," in *Intifada*, eds. Nassar and Heacock, 130.

[73] Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State*, 15.

[74] Jad, "From Salons to the Popular Committees," in *Intifada*, eds. Nassar and Heacock, 130–1.

[75] Anibal Quijano defines such a matrix as the "control of economy (land appropriation, exploitation of labor, control of natural resources); control of authority (institution, army); control of gender and sexuality (family, education) and control of subjectivity and knowledge (epistemology, education and formation of subjectivity)." Walter D. Mignolo, "Coloniality of Power and De-colonial Thinking", *Cultural Studies* 21, 2–3 (2007): 156.

[76] Rita Giacaman and Penny Johnson, "Palestinian Women: Breaking Barricades and Building Barriers" in Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising Against Israeli Occupation, eds. Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, (New York: South End Press, 1989), 159.

and most influential women's organisation in the OPT, and was a prime example of the successes that came from combining the feminist and nationalist approaches. This allowed such groups to challenge multiple centres of power and maintain a widespread and democratically accountable executive – just as other grassroots organisations advocated at the time.[77]

The shift in focus from the more traditionally privileged urban women to those in villages and camps was a reflection of the intifada's "focus on the central role of these communities". These women extended their traditional roles as mothers and guardians within the *hamula* clan) networks to the wider community, creating mutual aid networks within villages as the "community [became] the family".[78] The establishment of nurseries, workshops, and cooperatives was accompanied by active encouragement of all women in the area to participate, through "shared decision making, taking decisions by vote, holding elections, deciding on agendas in common,"[79] and other deliberately horizontal practical techniques. An important development was the concept of 'Victory Gardens', or backyard plots where families were encouraged to grow produce and contribute to their local community – without which the residents of the besieged city of Qalqilya would have starved.[80]

During the intifada, shifts in organisational tactics had to develop rapidly as a response to intensified Israeli repression. However, the resilient networks built by the women's movement helped to cement the key role female activists played in the local committees, as well as the space within popular consciousness that had become occupied by the cause of women's liberation. Rita Giacaman and Sahar Khalifa established the Women's Affairs association in 1988 in response to male takeovers of often female-led neighbourhood committees, perceived as attempts to marginalise female contributions to the resistance. Giacaman noted that an emphasis on women as prisoners and martyrs in UNLU discourse was an attempt to downplay what women had done themselves, in favour of speaking about what had been done *to them*.[81] Joseph Massad, discussing the *bayanat* (communiqués), notes that the mentions of women are progressively more traditionally minded, in attempts to reinforce the gender divisions which had prevailed in the cities prior to the 1970s shift – "whereas mothers, sisters, and daughters are described as producing soil of manhood, respect, and dignity, a later communique describes the Palestinian people, conceived in the masculine, as the 'makers of glory, respect, and dignity.[82] As such, women found that they still needed to organise laterally even within the wider resistance movement, to safeguard the gains they had made against reactionary and traditionalist elements within the Unified Leadership. Lateral organisation was perceived as one of the most effective ways to extend the women's movement though wider society, which could only be engaged on the basis of a firm rejection of elite,

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[77] In Foucault's concept of "governmentality", whereby power is exercised at multiple levels upon a subject population, with the direct pressure of the threat of violence to encourage conformity merely the most obvious expression of power.

[78] Giacaman and Johnson, "Palestinian Women," in Intifada, eds. Beinin and Lockman, 160–1.

[79] Jad, "From Salons to the Popular Committees," in Intifada, eds. Nassar and Heacock, 132.

[80] Hunter, *The Palestinian Uprising*, 145.

[81] Miriam Cooke, *Women and the War Story* (London: University of California Press, 1996), 175.

[82] Joseph Massad, *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question* (London, Routledge, 2006), 46.

hierarchical structures reminiscent of the failed charitable organisations of earlier times.

Labour Unions in the Intifada

Palestinian society was late to industrialise and urbanise, and it had to do so under the force of Israeli capital, which was able to draw on the OPT after 1967 as a ready source of cheap labour and a captive market for Israeli products. Certain sectors suffered more from this rapid shift in the fundamentals of the economy than others. Women and the less educated were hit the hardest, the *fellahin* (agricultural peasantry) were left effectively destroyed by the changes, and the situation of refugees was compounded by discrimination within Palestinian society and the difficulty of finding work outside of the camps. Those who could move to the cities did so, creating an urban proletariat that was disenfranchised through a lack of political or civil rights under the Israeli military system, and a lack of workers' rights and protections only afforded to Israeli citizens. Jewish workers were represented by the powerful Histadrut trade union federation, membership of which was closed to migrant workers and most Palestinians.[83] Many of these new city dwellers lived in squalid conditions in the rapidly expanding, hugely underfunded city infrastructures or in makeshift work camps within the 1967 borders.

The new Palestinian working class was thus drawn from many sectors of society, with the politicisation of groups previously excluded from the national movement and the "subsequent emergence of popular organisational structures in rural villages and … the inclusive geographic and social scope of the intifada" when it broke out.[84] Nevertheless, there had been workers' organisation prior to the 1970s mass mobilisations – Joost Hiltermann points out that Palestinian communists had experienced a certain amount of organisational success during previous decades, allowing them to develop methods that would serve as models for later mobilisation.[85] As with the women's movement, a dual focus characterised the nascent mass organising in the 1970s: workers demanded rights from the local and international capitalist class in the classic socialist-trade unionist mode, but also became an integral component of the national struggle against occupation. Such a focus on social and political rights garnered wider appeal among ordinary people, and union membership increased.[86] This dynamic, whereby loci of power were multifaceted and interconnected, necessitated a lateral approach to organising. This avoided the dangers of focusing administrative responsibilities in small committees, lest these activists face arrest and the organisation be left to flounder. Palestinian workers had an active labour history, as the previous generation carried out a six-month general strike during the 1936–9 Arab Revolt. However, the movement waned after this, with elite nationalists directing the struggle in the following decades until the re-alignment of indigenous forces under Israeli occupation.

By the end of the 1970s, the labour movement was at its high point; over 12,000

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[83] David McDowall, *Palestine and Israel: The Uprising and Beyond* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1989), 96.
[84] Erika G. Alin, "Dynamics of the Palestinian Uprising: An Assessment of Causes, Character, and Consequences", *Comparative Politics* 26, no.4 (July 1994): 482.
[85] Hiltermann, *Behind the Intifada*, 56.
[86] Ibid, 57.

Palestinian workers unionised[87] and helped develop a coherent political strategy for utilising the power of labour. Strikes and boycotts, already a powerful tool where it was possible to take advantage of Israeli labour law, continued to play an important role as an increasingly disciplined and politically conscious workforce honed these tactics to great economic effect against the Israeli administration in the OPT during the intifada. The various 'General Federations' in existence during the early 1980s (the major secular Palestinian political forces, which were the four UNLU participants, each had a trade union grouping laying claim to the name) set about educating and training an extensive active cadre of politically conscious union organisers who became "accustomed to working surreptitiously" to avoid detection by Israeli forces.[88] Authorities had underestimated the potential power of the women's movement and certain early forms of popular committee organising, but never appeared to do so with the union movement. Activists suffered severe repression; at least seven labour organisers were deported between 1967 and 1979, and thousands more were detained without trial.[89] The labour movement also increased overt ties with resistance organisations such as the Palestinian National Front (PNF) established in August 1973, with organisers in 1974 already speaking of a "popular rising … in which various mass organisations, including the labour and professional unions, have taken part",[90] going on to mention the wave of strikes and protests.

Though splits in the movement led to organisational problems in the years immediately preceding the intifada, rank and file membership remained high,[91] and the unifying philosophy of primary opposition to occupation was sufficient to maintain effective grassroots activity. Prominent organiser and Secretary-General of the GFTU Adel Ghanem explained that "the danger from the occupation was greater than that from the capitalists … so we wanted to help the national industries because this way we would also protect the workers".[92] In this way a broader alliance was created where a certain amount of cooperation between the unions and Palestinian employers allowed for maintenance of some stability in levels of employment. For example, in order to combat the threat of sudden arbitrary military restrictions targeted at workers, unions received (in addition to members' dues) aid from the 'steadfastness' (*sumud*) fund set up by the Palestinian-Jordanian Joint Committee in 1978, which was in turn used to induce local employers to provide jobs for Palestinians in their area, while the leftist unions agreed to resolve employment disputes peacefully.

Such alliances were necessary, as the limitations of unionising under occupation

[87] George Hazboun and Bassam Al-Salhi, "The Workers' and Trade Union Movement in the Occupied Territories: 1967–1983, Part 4", *Al-Kateb* No. 50 (August 1984), .9–17, 11.

[88] Ibid, 118.

[89] Ibid, 64.

[90] Arabi Awwad and Jiribi Qawwis, "Resistance in the Occupied Territories," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 3, no.4 (Summer 1974), 164–6, 165.

[91] Though accurate figures for union membership numbers in the 1980s do not exist, the estimates given at time ranged between 12–40 percent of the West Bank workforce, with the lower estimates usually due to particular union organisers not recognising membership figures given by rival unions. See Hiltermann, *Behind the Intifada*, 109.

[92] Hiltermann, *Behind the Intifada*, 63.

included withdrawal of permits to work inside Israel (which affected a large proportion of the unskilled workforce, especially in Gaza); denying registration for unions and thus making them 'illegal organisations' (in the 1970s only five unions received registration of the twenty-six that existed, and after 1979 no registrations were granted, despite the sharp growth in the labour movement[93]); charging activists with "membership of an illegal organisation" (anyone arrested doing political work and also known to be active in the labour movement received much harsher sentences[94]); and temporary closures of meeting halls whenever the army knew of a union gathering planned there. These measures were well-established before 1987 and intensified upon the outbreak of the intifada, but Hiltermann reports that "the cumulative effects of such repressive actions [had] been minimal so far as union organisers [were] concerned … [and] it can be argued that repression had backfired, [forcing trade unions] to pursue more informal methods of organising".[95]

In the initial stages of the uprising, members of the organised labour movement were at the forefront of the mass demonstrations that were routinely met with live fire, and fifty per cent of all casualties between December 1987 and October 1988 were workers.[96] Though no formal leadership had yet emerged in the first month, trade unionists were among the earliest to start establishing village popular committees to coordinate other spontaneous resistance activities, with "known village activists from the worker's union[s] and youth groups in particular [comprising the popular committees, and creating] a new formation, born of the uprising".[97] Often unions transformed into workers' councils, and began the task of classifying workers according to their area and the needs of the locality so as to maintain various services targeted by the army.[98] Once the UNLU began to distribute its communiqués in early January, specific references to the 'great Palestinian working class' were frequent, extolling the unique role of strikes in targeting the Israeli economy, and adding that "in this uprising we have nothing to lose but our chains and the oppression and exploitation befalling us".[99] On 1 May, International Workers' Day, the UNLU called on workers to self-organise and to "complete the formation of unified workers' committees and to participate in existing unions".[100] The drive to organise was clear, but the methods advocated bear repeating – workers were instructed to organise themselves according to their local conditions, maximising the potential for mass action

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[93] International Labour Office, "Report on the Situation of Workers of the Occupied Arab Territories," *Report of the Director-General* (Geneva: International Labour Organisation, 1985–90), 34.

[94] Research of military court records commissioned by Al-Haq in 1983. Cited in Hiltermann, *Behind the Intifada*, 107.

[95] Hiltermann, *Behind the Intifada*, 108, 118.

[96] Al-Haq reported that 104 workers were killed in the West Bank during this time, with 101 non-workers killed. Cited in Hiltermann, *Behind the Intifada*, 176.

[97] Penny Johnson, Lee O'Brien, and Joost Hiltermann, "The West Bank Rises Up," in Lockman and Beinin, *Intifada*, 40.

[98] Hiltermann gives the example of volunteer locksmiths fixing merchants' locks that had been smashed by the army. Hiltermann, *Behind the Intifada*, 177.

[99] Communiqué No. 3 (18 January 1988). Cited in *Speaking Stones: Communiqués from the Intifada Underground* eds. Shaul Mishal and Reuben Aharoni, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 61.

[100] Communiqué No. 15 (30 April 1988) and Communiqué No. 19 (8 June 1988). Cited in, *Speaking Stones*, Mishal and Aharoni, 87.

at short notice. As the uprising became more institutionalised and widespread, it was seen as tactically advantageous to devolve authority where possible and allow for local councils to make decisions.

The Israeli forces recognised the danger posed by grassroots committees, correctly assessing that they were "undermining the Israeli government apparatus in the territories [by] establishing an alternative apparatus in its place,"[101] and it outlawed them after Jordan gave up its claim to the West Bank in July 1988, along with stepping up arrests of local activists and attacks on previously banned trade union organisations. To combat this, and the ever-increasing unemployment due to draconian restrictions on freedom of movement and the lack of protection from dismissal for workers with jobs inside Israel, activists "reopened offices closed by the military … [and] operated from other localities, especially at the work sites themselves, sometimes via workers' committees".[102] Collective agreements were made with Palestinian employers to find work for the unemployed, and labour disputes were resolved through informal channels involving mediation between employer and employee, in place of *de jure* Jordanian labour law.

The Case of Beit Sahour

The uprising in Beit Sahour, a town just outside of Bethlehem in the West Bank, is perhaps the best example of the role of popular committees in the intifada. During the uprising's early stages, Beit Sahour became the most organised (while simultaneously the most affluent and educated) centre of resistance in the OPT, sustaining its resistance much longer than elsewhere.

The town was organised within the auspices of the *hamula* structure and was distinguished by principles of individual association and democratic hierarchy. The new social elite, dating from the generation who had graduated from the new universities in the 1970s, and hostile to the static and reactionary landed elite that had dominated Palestinian politics, subscribed to a more egalitarian ideology.[103] The organisational abilities of this new elite benefitted from the community's small size and social cohesion, resulting in fewer sectarian divisions (despite a mixed Muslim-Christian population) and class antagonisms than other parts of Palestine.

The town's residents were active from the beginning of the uprising, forming their first popular committee in December 1987. Many in the area were relatively affluent, and though repression directed at activists had been severe, the municipality had been able to withstand Israeli repressive measures. The community responded to the national directive coming from the UNLU to boycott Israeli produce, possessing enough access to farmland to provide for most local food needs. The first deliberations within the local residents' association surrounded milk shortages, which became a problem during the many curfews imposed by the military authorities. In an attempt to ameliorate these

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[101] *Jerusalem Post*, 19 August 1988.

[102] Hiltermann, *Behind the Intifada*, 189.

[103] Glenn Bowman, "A Death Revisited: Solidarity and Dissonance in a Muslim-Christian Palestinian Community" in *Memory and Violence in the Middle East and North Africa, eds. Ussama Makdisi and Paul A. Silverstein,* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 27–49, 6. Available at https://core.ac.uk/reader/91860 (accessed 11 January 2021).

difficulties and provide further self-sufficiency for the town, the association resolved to purchase eighteen cows and distribute the milk among the community. The success of this initiative raised the ire of the local military commander, ensuing in an extended game of cat and mouse: the IDF attempted to locate and destroy the cows, and the entire community cooperated to hide them. Secret milk distribution continued for four years, with the covert cows becoming famous throughout Palestine, even attracting international media coverage.[104]

The town's model of resistance relied upon existing networks of trust and was driven by egalitarian concepts like *sulh* – an alternative conflict resolution process with a long history in Islamic political thought. A parallel municipal authority, the Sulha Committee, was formed from twenty-two organisations (including clubs, clinics, political factions and so forth), "embod[ying] communal ideals of anticolonial governance".[105] Such committees dealt, variously, with mediation, allocation of relief supplies, organisation of guard duty and security, and the coordination of resistance communities in general.

The IDF continued to focus punitive measures on the town, especially in the form of new taxes tailored to the forms of resistance employed by Beit Sahour: "the glass tax (for broken windows), the stones tax (for damage done by stones), the missile tax (for Gulf War damage), and a general intifada tax, among others."[106] The tax boycott began with a handful of local activists, but by 1989 nearly every resident of the town refused to pay taxes in an effort organised and coordinated by the popular committees. The UNLU issued a communiqué on 5 February, 1988, calling for "no taxation without representation",[107] and other municipalities across the occupied territories embarked on similar tax boycotts with mixed long-term success, but nowhere was the strike quite so robust as in Beit Sahour.

Israel's response was to brutally crush the tax boycott, while the PLO, who remained opposed to the more independent of the grassroots organisations, sought to "quietly undermine the authority of the new elite by allying itself with the notable class".[108] This followed a familiar pattern seen throughout the West Bank and Gaza, where real authority devolved to local political actors, but the resources of both the exiled Fatah leadership and the occupation authorities were used to try to reverse the trend. The town was subjected to an extended siege, but the IDF was eventually forced to withdraw without succeeding in making residents pay taxes.

The failure of the tax boycott to successfully spread elsewhere in Palestine was, among other reasons, due to

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[104] The episode later became the subject of an Oscar-nominated documentary, *The Wanted 18*, which faced censorship from the Israeli Culture Ministry when screened in 2015. Nirit Anderman, "The 18 Cows Scaring Culture Minister Miri Regev", *Ha'aretz*, 2 December 2015. Available at https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/culture/.premium-the-18-cows-that-are-scaring-miri-regev-1.5429219 (accessed 11 January 2021).

[105] Alex Winder, "Anticolonial Uprising and Communal Justice in Twentieth-Century Palestine", *Radical History Review 137* (2020): 75–95.

[106] Virginia Baron, "A Matter of Justice: Tax Resistance in Beit Sahour," *Nonviolent Sanctions: News from the Albert Einstein Institution* 3:4 (Spring/Summer 1992), 1–12, 9.

[107] Communiqué No. 6 (5 February 1988), cited in *Speaking Stones*, Mishal and Aharoni, 64.

[108] Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State*, 67.

> The PLO in Tunis fail[ing] to support Beit Sahour's campaign, as it feared the political consequences of such grassroots initiatives. The devolution of authority during the Intifada to grassroots activists - including PLO cadres - challenged Tunis's ability to control or even significantly influence Palestinian politics in the West Bank and Gaza. That kind of political autonomy was unacceptable to Tunis, and in this regard, it found common cause with Israel.[109]

During the course of the tax boycotts, relations between Arafat and Elias Freij, the long-time mayor of neighbouring Bethlehem (and 'old elite' opponent of the new movement and the intifada in general) began to improve. This signalled that the PLO in Tunis feared its declining role in the West Bank and Gaza, recognising that its power was increasingly wielded by autonomous local activists – often PLO activists – whom it could not control. The PLO's reliance on the more pliant old, notable elite was becoming clearer, and was even more obvious in the post-Oslo period, especially following Arafat's return to Gaza in 1994. Glenn Robinson argues that the social revolution was thus "incomplete": the old elites were never fully removed, and were in fact resurrected by Arafat after the Oslo Accords to serve as the basis of the new, thoroughly hierarchical, Palestinian Administration.[110]

Conclusion

This article has emphasised that the unique and creative *modus operandi* of the popular movement – developed for over fifteen years prior to the actual uprising and both resilient and inclusive enough to sustain everyday resistance against a vastly superior military force – was the defining characteristic of the intifada, constituting a revolutionary tactical paradigm in the OPT which would not be replicated again until after the Oslo period. Paulo Freire defines praxis as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it"[111]: during the intifada, this was undeniably informed by constant avoidance of hierarchical structures which had either failed previously or were easily neutralised by renewed Israeli repression, along with actions that sought to involve as many "ordinary" Palestinians as possible. Whether or not such actions were informed by a "conscious" ideology of decentralisation, either in the minds of individual activists or Durkheim's "collective societal conscience",[112] is much harder to ascertain, but the possibilities were facilitated by generations of activists and their gradually constructed architecture of resistance. Scholarship of and since this period convincingly shows a coherent model of horizontal resistance, with David McDowall summarising:

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[109] Ibid, 88.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum Books, 1993), 33.
[112] Martin Masse, "Durkheim's Collective Conscience," *Mises Daily*, 16 April 2001. Available at http://mises.org/daily/656/ (accessed 11 January 2021).

By the end of 1987 not only had large numbers of people participated in community activities but many others were aware of the model. Furthermore, through the trade unions and the women's committees, the major political organisations were well aware of the potential political importance of the popular movement … [upon the launch of the *intifada* and Israeli repression of it] the community organised itself along the lines the popular movement had already prescribed.[113]

Furthermore, the popular movement had a genuine reach that had not been seen even in Palestine's previous uprisings. Mass participation became possible through the diversity of tactics and the engagement of resistance in all aspects of life, providing sectors of society that had previously been marginalised in the bourgeois elite-led nationalist resistance of the 1930s–1970s with opportunities that extended their traditional roles to encompass resistance. Such examples included the rural mother who helped to organise her village's cooperative childcare rota while under curfew, the factory worker who became part of a union strike committee and liaised with local capitalists to ensure production could resume once the army had withdrawn, or the communist healthcare worker who helped to staff the mobile clinics that treated the wounded after demonstrations. The very concept of leadership in Palestine began to change during the intifada years, as the Unified Leadership itself developed as a response to, rather than an instigator of, 1987's spontaneous mass demonstrations. Throughout the intifada's first year, efforts were made to maintain accountability within the central councils and avoid a centralisation of power, as had been seen in the PLO. Though Fatah had historically thrived on being a movement of groups and cliques rather than a truly unified structure (like Hamas), it was less dominant in steering the intifada than its power within the exile leadership would have suggested. Fatah was crippled by a distant, unresponsive leadership and chain of command, and was usually the last of the four major political groups to set up popular committees and mass-based unions. Even within the OPT, Fatah was seen to be "constituted in large part by nonrevolutionary elements … [and was] a basically conservative movement which reflected the traditional clan politics of Palestinian society".[114] The most successful organisers tended to be those with the most fervent decentralist convictions, as was seen with the small but democratic Palestinian Communist Party's pioneering drive to construct the infrastructure for an alternative to the failing healthcare institutions (Mazin Qumsiyeh reports that they were reluctant to join the Unified Leadership at first as the communists considered the *bayanat* to be "too directive"[115]). The UNLU could only survive because it relied on a constantly rotating membership made up of lower-ranking members of the big parties, so as to minimise damage incurred upon their arrest.

The groundwork for the intifada had been laid by a series of responses to the tribulations of occupation, informed by a common analysis that national liberation was

[113] McDowall, *Palestine and Israel*, 117–88.
[114] Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State*, 13.
[115] Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine*, 138.

a necessary prerequisite for solving existing social problems, and the intifada itself was both a more rigorous test of the institutions created, and a distillation of the philosophy of mass societal engagement in resistance. One can hardly argue that the intifada's regular praxis was uniformly non-hierarchical in character, as the complexities of mass upheaval resulted in various compromises and peculiarities, including the concession made by the radical unions to both dampen their rhetoric of class struggle and relax their demands for workers' rights, aimed at an undoubtedly hierarchical Palestinian managerial class. Nevertheless the degree to which the majority of resistance networks were consistent in their horizontalist approach is remarkable, and it speaks to the sophisticated level of organisation that had laid the groundwork – along with the achievement of a hegemonic narrative of national resistance, where individuals were subject to sufficient societal pressure to participate in this project "for the greater good". However, as these structures broke down and infiltration became more successful, collaboration with the occupation authorities likewise increased. F. Robert Hunter goes as far as to say that the institutionalisation of the intifada "could be seen not just in the structures of popular committees, but in individual and collective behaviour, even in the popular consciousness".[116]

There is much more evidence that could be submitted to make the case for this particular episode's non-hierarchical character. The organisational tactics and collective action of several other groups not mentioned in uprising-era Palestinian society are worthy candidates for inclusion. The support network that built up among the rapidly growing prisoner population, which developed education facilities within the jails, formed committees that organised mass hunger strikes (with 15,000 prisoners participating according to one leading activist[117]), and grew into the human rights organisation Addameer in 1992, is one notable example. Another is the OPT education system itself, which had to develop alternatives as schools and universities were forcibly shut for months at a time, resulting in entire communities being enlisted in activities as varied as childcare, language tuition, and skill sharing.[118] This study merely skims the diverse, complex system of popular organisation that was the first intifada – but even this cursory examination has shown the common values and techniques that underpinned all resistance activities, the heritage of popular resistance in which they were situated, and the lessons that can be learned from commitment to such a praxis.

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[116] Hunter, *The Palestinian Uprising*, 141.

[117] Mary E. King, *A Quiet Revolution: The First Palestinian Intifada and Nonviolent Resistance* (New York: Nation Books, 2009), 118.

[118] Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State*, 109.

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