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From the Editors

Dear Reader,

We are proud to present to you the fifth edition of the Oxford Middle East Review (OMER). OMER was founded in 2016 at St Antony's College, Oxford, by two Middle Eastern Studies students who sought to create an engaging forum for students and aspiring scholars to critically discuss issues pertaining to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. After five years, the journal now counts fifteen team members and received a record number of submissions for this volume.

This year's issue of OMER is unique as it has been developed almost entirely through a long series of lockdowns. It is a testament to both our team of editors and copy editors and all the wonderful submissions we have received that we can deliver yet another thoughtful and stimulating issue, even in such testing times.

This volume's theme is *revolution*, with a capital 'R' or without. We invited scholars from a range of disciplinary backgrounds to interpret this theme creatively. The result is three fascinating research articles and three thought-provoking policy pieces, analysing contemporary and historical revolutionary movements and politics in Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

In anthropology, revolutions have been framed as moments of transition, which involve a loosening of social normativity and the entrance into a stage of liminality. In this new realm, social normativity dissolves and agency is foregrounded, creating new and exciting potentialities. In many ways, the pandemic has propelled the world, including OMER, into this liminal space. Whilst this has, at times, been incredibly difficult, it has also been an incredibly productive stage in OMER's journey. With submissions from Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America, we have expanded our base whilst also cementing other newer aspects of the journal, such as the policy section, first introduced in our previous issue. Whilst liminality offers little certainty and requires considerable flexibility and resilience, it seems clear that OMER, despite the challenges we faced, is growing thanks to the committed support of the fabulous and committed group of students that wants to work for the journal, as well as the inspiring community of academics from around the world who constantly push Middle Eastern Studies to new and exciting frontiers.

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

Jack McGinn

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

[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

[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]

[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

[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

[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,

[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

[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,

[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 Int*i*fada, 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

[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

[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

[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

[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:

[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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From Protest, to Committee, to Consensus:
Co-optation of the 2011 Revolutionary Movement in Yemen

Aylin Junga

The concept of co-optation within social movement theory tracks the ways in which elites manage to influence and alter social movements in a non-violent manner. As a concept, it analyses how institutional actors, and the institutions themselves, can adopt the language and tactics used by spontaneous movements to their own ends. During the 'Arab Spring' protests in 2011, many social movements went through a process of co-optation as revolutionary impulses were slowed or reversed. In the case of Yemen, traditional political actors co-opted protest movements on the street and through the institutional framework of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC). This paper utilises Coy and Hedeen's four-stage model of co-optation to analyse the development of the 2011 protest movement and the transitional period. First-hand interviews with Yemen experts and activists present during the events in question, combined with research of the scholarly literature, provide the foundation for this study. It will argue that Yemen's failed transition period can in part be understood with reference to the co-optation of the revolutionary movement.

"*The amazing thing that took place at that time was that you would find tribes from Marib, you'll find people from Sa'ada, you'll find people from the south… In the yards we felt nothing could divide us, nothing could split us. We had one goal.*"[1]

This year marks the tenth anniversary of widespread and frequent protests in several countries in the Middle East. What was dubbed the "Arab Spring" had led to the ousting of "president for life" Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia by January 2011 and inspired similar protests in Egypt, Libya, Syria and Bahrain. However, in no country were the protests as widespread, persistent and inclusive as in Yemen, where they geographically covered most of the country and included participants from all regions, demographics and social backgrounds. Before Yemen descended into civil war and Operation Decisive Storm was launched by Saudi Arabia and its allies on 26 March 2015, the only republic on the Arabian Peninsula was considered a success story. Amidst the ongoing violence and devastating humanitarian crisis, it is easy to forget that between 2011 and 2014, Yemen seemed to be on a path to reconciliation. The peaceful protests had succeeded in ousting president Ali Abdullah Saleh — who had been in power for over three decades — and initiated Yemen's transitional period. The National Dialogue Conference (NDC),which was part of this transitional period, was a promising opportunity for an unprecedented debate over Yemen's future.

I believe that a reconsideration of this period in Yemen's history is necessary to address overlooked aspects of its political transition. Well-versed scholars have written about the political crisis which Yemen was in, prior to the popular movement forming in 2011. Stephen Day examines the complexities of the newly unified state post-1990 while Susanne Dahlgren analyses Southern grievances and the separatist movement that re-

[1] Bushra Kretschmer, interview by Aylin Junga, October 6, 2020.

emerged in 2007.[2] The difficult task of illuminating the complex history and dynamics of the Huthi conflict in Yemen is undertaken by Marieke Brandt whose detailed analysis of the conflicts' "grassroot dynamics" allow for a better and more accurate understanding of the Huthi's role in Yemen's politics.[3] Laurent Bonnefoy's analysis of Yemeni Salafism contributes to a greater understanding of its embeddedness and grassroots origins in Yemen thus de-emphasising state-centric explanations.[4] Other scholars have examined Yemen's spiral into civil war specifically tracking the government's increased patronage leading to the disenfranchisement of Yemen's population[5] and the economic and resource crisis the country faces.[6] An interesting contribution to understanding the shifting dynamics prior to, during, and following Yemen's 2011 protests was made by Jens Heibacha and Mareike Transfeld in their study of relations between regime and opposition in the authoritarian context of Yemen.[7] Non-state actors in Yemen have also been scrutinised in Sheila Carapico's detailed account of civil society organisations in North and South Yemen and the unified republic.[8] Regarding the social movement that formed in response to these grievances, scholars have mostly focused on its composition and the demands voiced.[9] Building on these scholars' work, it is my aim in this study to examine a distinct dynamic taking place within the framework of the revolutionary movement of 2011: the co-optation of social movements.

Social movement theorists gained a renewed incentive to focus on case studies originating from the Middle East, a region that had previously been neglected. When Gregory Gause asked 'Why Middle East Studies missed the Arab Spring'[10], it made apparent how scholars had previously viewed the region only through the lens of authoritarian resilience and the notion of "'Middle East exceptionalism".[11] This notion stems, in part, from the idea that there is no viable civil society in the Middle East[12]; or

[2] Stephen W. Day, *Regionalism and Rebellion in Yemen: A Troubled National Union,* Cambridge Middle East Studies 37 (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Susanne Dahlgren, "The Snake with a Thousand Heads: The Southern Cause in Yemen," *MERIP* 256, (Fall 2010), accessed October 18, 2020, https://merip.org/2010/09/the-snake-with-a-thousand-heads/.

[3] Marieke Brandt. *Tribes and Politics in Yemen: A History of the Houthi Conflict*. (London: Hurst & Company, 2017).

[4] Laurent Bonnefoy. *Salafism in Yemen: Transnationalism and Religious Identity*. (London: Hurst, 2011).

[5] Isa Blumi, *Chaos in Yemen: Societal Collapse and the New Authoritarianism,* Routledge Advances in Middle East and Islamic Studies (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2010).

[6] Helen Lackner, "Water Scarcity: Why Doesn't It Get the Attention it Deserves" in Helen Lackner, ed., *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition,* SOAS Middle East Issues (London: Saqi, 2014), 161 ff.

[7] Heibach, Jens, and Mareike Transfeld. "Opposition Dynamism Under Authoritarianism: The Case of Yemen, 1994–2011." *Democratization* 25, no. 4 (2018): 597–613.

[8] Sheila Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen: The Political Economy of Activism in Modern Arabia,* Cambridge Middle East Studies 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[9] Sheila Carapico, ed., *Arabia Incognita: Dispatches from Yemen and the Gulf* (Charlottesville, Virginia: Just World Books, 2016).

[10] Gregory F. Gause, "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 4 (2011), https://shibbolethsp.jstor.org/start?entityID=https%3A%2F%2Fidp.soas.ac.uk%2Fentity&dest=https://www.jstor.org/stable/23039608&site=jstor.

[11] Salame Ghassan, *Democracy Without Democrats: The Renewal of Politics in the Arab World* (London: I.B Tauris, 1994).

[12] Francesco Cavatorta, ed., *Civil Society Activism Under Authoritarian Rule: A Comparative Perspective,* Routledge/ECPR Studies in European Political Science (London, New York: Routledge, 2013).

as Sheila Carapico puts it "Arab civil society" is an oxymoron".[13] Thus research on the Middle East is often focused on the functioning of authoritarian regimes and heavily state-centric.[14] Understanding the Arab Spring in a social movement framework emphasises agency and choice as a catalyst for collective action in the context of groups. This is in contrast to structuralist views of Yemen's 2011 protests as merely a response to wider economic factors, as held by Isa Blumi.[15] It also challenges some of the assumptions inherent in "Middle East exceptionalism" which present Islam as the dominant explanatory factor for Muslim behaviour and as somehow distinct from other religions' motivational capability.[16] Building on the important work done by some of the aforementioned scholars in refuting such claims, I will review one of the more neglected cases of the "Arab Spring".

I will focus on proving that political elites co-opted the popular movement that emerged in Yemen in 2011. By appropriating activists' tactics, discourse, and symbols, elite actors utilised the challenge to the political system to pursue their own programmes.

Although still an under-researched field of study, the concept of co-optation of social movements is more relevant than ever as social movements are forming in response to an increase in authoritarian politics and perceived or existing social injustices. technological innovations have not only changed the way we communicate but have made organised collective action easier and shared grievances more visible.[17] I argue that understanding the co-optation process is crucial, especially in authoritarian contexts where the emergence of a social movement is unexpected, and its success evaluated by the degree of coercion and violence the movement faces from the state and vested interests. As I will discuss later, co-optation has mostly been studied in the context of liberal democracies. Yemen presents a new and important opportunity to understand social movement co-optation in a new and relevant context.

In this study, I will not analyse elites' decision to employ co-optation mechanisms, nor the specific outcomes of that process. Instead, I will use a model for co-optation, tracking the process itself. To do so, I will first review the relevant literature on the subject. This will set the foundation for introducing the four-stage model, which I will use to analyse the Yemeni case. Each stage will provide a framework to understand the processes occurring in Yemen.

The Concept of Co-optation

Co-optation is generally agreed within the field of social movement theory (SMT) to have been pioneered by Philip Selznick in his study of the Tennessee Valley Authority's relationship with communal actors and local elites[18] as the "elite strategy of using apparently cooperative practices to absorb those who seek change — to make them work

[13] Carapico, *Civil society in Yemen*, 4.

[14] Heibach; Transfeld, "Opposition Dynamism Under Authoritarianism: The Case of Yemen", 598.

[15] Isa Blumi, *Destroying Yemen: What Chaos in Arabia Tells Us About the World*. (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018), 185f.

[16] Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004); Anne Baylouny "Social Movement Studies and the Middle East," in *Routledge Handbook of Middle East Politics*, (New York: Routledge, 2019).

[17] Victoria Carty, *Social Movements and New Technology*. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2015).

[18] Philip Selznick, *TVA and the Grass Roots: A Study of Politics and Organization*, (New Orleans, Louisiana: Quid Pro Books, 1949).

with elites without giving them any new advantages".[19] It becomes possible through the instigation of a social movement that opposes or challenges existing social or political structures, thus creating Sidney Tarrow's moment of "contentious politics". Subsequent studies have contributed different components to the concept of co-optation. However, at its core, it remains the process of "absorbing new elements into the leadership or policy-determining structure of an organisation as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence."[20] The movement's original character is being altered by elites within the existing social or political environment.[21] How co-optation comes about and what this "change of character" entails, have been significant lines of inquiry for scholars in the field. Selznick proposes that elites may resort to co-optation when their formal authority is called into question and when they lack the consent of the governed that is necessary to maintain power. In this case, they may use coercive measures to ensure the consent of the people.[22] The response to a challenge posed by a social movement and the resulting outcome, which may be a mix of social control, institutionalisation, co-optation, and policy changes,[23] is the main focus of co-optation literature.

To summarise, the concept of co-optation examines a change and broadening in the leadership of a social movement; that there is an adaptive response; and that this change is of consequence for the character, organisation, and goals of the movement. Moreover, while co-optation may target any of these aspects of a social movement — goals, tactics, or discourse — it is a process that might best be understood as a progression of stages, all of which are processes themselves. Therefore, I will briefly lay out the analytical framework I have chosen to understand the process of co-optation in Yemen.

A Stage Model for Co-optation

Drawing on the literature on co-optation I have presented above, Patrick G. Coy and Timothy Hedeen developed a four-stage model of the co-optation process to aid their analysis of the evolution and co-optation of the community mediation movement in the late 1970s in the United States.[24] Bringing about some conceptual coherence "to what is a complicated process of social interaction" and the "multifaceted nature of co-optation" is a further goal of their study.[25] To do so they have determined key parts of the process which they describe as stages. However, stages are not meant to be understood as one-time events or consequences of a particular action.[26] Every stage further consists of multiple steps. These do not necessarily form a linear process as "there are often loop-backs, mutually or unilaterally aborted processes, and both short-term as well as extended periods without significant new developments".[27] The model considers the actions and reaction of both the "challenging movement" and "the state and

[19] Markus Holdo, "Cooptation and Non-Cooptation: Elite Strategies in Response to Social Protest," *Social Movement Studies* 18, no. 4 (2019): 444.
[20] Philip Selznick, "Foundations of the Theory of Organization," *American Sociological Review* 13, no. 1 (1948): 34.
[21] Patrick G. Coy and Timothy Hedeen, "A Stage Model of Social Movement Co-Optation: Community Mediation in the United States," *The Sociological Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (2005): 406.
[22] Selznick, "Foundations of the Theory of Organization," 34.
[23] Coy and Hedeen, "A Stage Model of Social Movement Co-Optation," 406.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Coy and Hedeen, "A Stage Model of Social Movement Co-Optation," 409.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

vested interests", actors that I have previously referred to as elites or co-opting elites.[28]

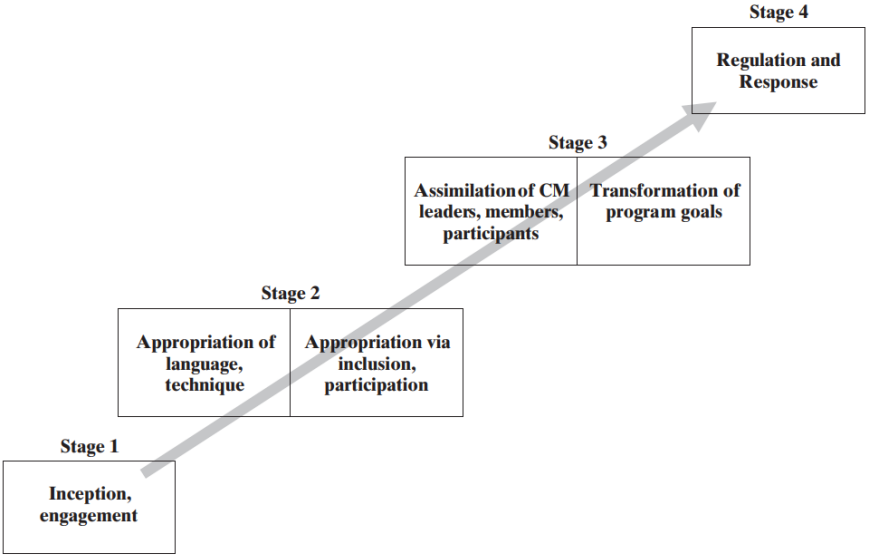

FIGURE 1. A Stage Model of Co-optation.
CM = challenging movement.

Coy and Hedeen aim to make their stage model useful to the analysis of other movements either in whole or in part. However, their observations which are generalised to create a conceptually cohesive model, were made in the cultural context of a liberal democracy — the United States in the 1970s. As stated earlier, the Middle East is generally neglected in social movement research and therefore in the study of co-optation. If a social movement is discussed in an authoritarian context such as Yemen, the government's coercive and violent response often takes precedence over other elite strategies.[29] This failure to consider authoritarian contexts is reflected in some aspects of Coy and Hedeen's model. I will discuss issues that arise specifically in stage four of the model hereafter. However, first I believe it is necessary to address other notable elements of the model. As the social movement arises in response to grievances, elites may try to co-opt it by appropriating the movement's tactics and language or including it in their own organisational structure. Distinguishing between when elites act in such a manner and when their support for a movement is genuine can be problematic. Although Coy and Hedeen specify that the state and/or those vested in the status quo rarely have a detailed plan to co-opt a popular movement step by step[30], questions of intent and agency naturally arise. The distinction between participation and co-optation can be difficult to determine when similar actions stem from different motivations or intentions. If movement members engage with state provided institutions for deliberation, are they being co-opted or willingly participating in a particular setting to achieve their

[28] Ibid.
[29] *International Crisis Group. "Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (II): Yemen Between Reform and Revolution."*, 2011. Accessed October 19, 2020.
[30] Coy and Hedeen, "A Stage Model of Social Movement Co-Optation," 409.

own ends? The stage model helps identify common actions within the notion of co-optation but struggles to clear up ambiguities around the import of those actions.

In the same way that determining actions as co-optation can be difficult, determining which actors are the co-opting elites can be equally challenging. In Yemen, youth organisations of several opposition parties joined the protests at an early stage, seemingly out of genuine support. When their party leadership joined at a later stage to co-opt the movement, as I will argue, youth organisers were made to align with their leadership. In this instance, are party youth organisations those co-opting or those being co-opted?

As mentioned above, the model has not been developed with authoritarian contexts in mind. This becomes especially evident in stage four which explores the state's final response to the movements demands. By codifying the demands of the movement, which have already been amended by co-opting elites, the state and vested interests have the opportunity to regulate them further. Although codification is often among the goals of movements as they want to enact permanent change, the outcome most often includes substantial changes made to the original demands. While this stage is applicable in a context like the United States, Yemen's political instability and lack of security do not allow for the peaceful adoption of legislation as laid out in the model. As I will further discuss in my analysis the unraveling of the transitional process into civil war shows a lack of the institutional stability and democracy associated with stage four. Despite these issues, the model aims at facilitating a greater understanding of the co-optation process by providing a guideline of which processes and dynamics to look out for.[31] There is no singular stage which in and of itself proves co-optation happened. As the model describes a social dynamic, it is flexible and provides a helpful framework even for analysing the revolutionary social movement that formed in Yemen, as I will discuss in my analysis.

Methodology

As previously stated, it is not my aim in this study to prove that the Yemeni case fits the concept of co-optation. Instead, I will utilise Coy and Hedeen's model to better understand the case's specific contextual realities. To do that, I will apply the model to the case study to understand Yemen's 2011 popular movement in this framework and draw new concepts from the case study, as is done when research on a topic is still sparse.[32] To better understand Yemen's unique context, I will draw upon the aforementioned literature.

To build a detailed picture of the process of co-optation, I conducted interviews with activists and experts to gather primary source material. I was able to interview Helen Lackner, a leading academic and expert on Yemen with over four decades of research experience, and Maysaa Shuja Al-deen, a non-resident fellow at the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies. They contributed, above all, to my analysis of the Yemeni context and the way it resembled and differed from other popular movements that were happening in the region at the same time. Helen Lackner, who participated in several working groups in Yemen's NDC, also provided valuable insights for the third section of this paper. For the first and second section, which describe the formation of the protests movements as well as the process of elite co-optation on the ground, I relied on information from activists who were on the ground during the protests in 2011. I reached out to them though various social media channels, after becoming aware of their contributions to Yemen's pro-

[31] Coy and Hedeen, "A Stage Model of Social Movement Co-Optation," 405.

[32] Donatella Della Porta, *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research*, First Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 233.

democracy struggles. This included the Nobel Peace Prize-winning women's activist and journalist Tawakkol Karman, the independent activist and protester Nabil Albaydani, the lawyer and human rights activist Tawfik Alhamidi, and the youth organiser and advisor Bushra Kretschmer. Their insights into the early protest movements were immensely valuable in reconstructing the day-to-day activities of protesters, their motivations, tactics and co-optation strategies employed by elites. I also interviewed Baraa Shiban, a human rights activist who served as a youth representative at the NDC. He was very helpful in understanding the role played by independent youth activists in the Conference.

Most of the interviews were conducted over video call and through the creation of an interview guide which included a consistent set of questions for all interviewees. It allowed me to digress and guide the conversation based on the interactions during the interview. This flexibility of a semi-structured interview is particularly useful in gathering data about the motives of people who participate in social movements, as it provides the "opportunity to discover the respondent's experience and interpretation of reality".[33] Although less useful when the goal is a systematic comparison of the answers, as is often done in structured interviews and surveys, this method is often utilised in social movement research to interpret complex social events, or "investigating research questions or propositions derived from social movement theory"[34]. By asking interviewees to recount their experiences and analyses candidly, I refrained from asking leading questions aimed at receiving a specific answer but rather used the information given to me to build into my analysis. This was done to ensure that the analysis that follows is as free of bias as possible.

Grievances, Identity and Social Movement Formation in Yemen

To understand the formation of the revolutionary movement in 2011, it is important to briefly review the context in which it came about. Yemen is unique in many ways. It is the only republic on the Arabian Peninsula, and the second largest but poorest among its neighbours. One of the oldest irrigation civilisations in the world[35], it has a rich history which in modern times has been marred by colonialism and foreign interference, but also includes civil society action, political resistance and a continuous push for democratisation. The Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) in North Yemen was established after an internationalised revolution in 1962, which overthrew the last Shi'a Zaydi imam[36] of the Mutawakkilite Kingdom which had independently ruled in Yemen since 1918.[37] The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) was a socialist state established in South Yemen after it won independence from Britain in 1967. Before the Unification of the YAR and the PDRY in 1990, there had never been a unified Yemeni state.[38] Both states were governed very differently before their unification, and naturally, unity was fragile from the onset. After only four years, the south of the country, which had previously been the

[33] Bert Klandermans and Suzanne Staggenborg, *Methods of Social Movement Research,* Social Movements, Protest, and Contention v. 16 (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 93.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Gerhard Lichtenhäler, "Customary Conflict Resolution in Times of Extreme Water Stress: A Case Study of a Document from the Northern Highlands of Yemen" in *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition,* ed. Helen Lackner (London: Saqi, 2014), 183.

[36] Yahya b. al-Husayn had established a Zaydi community in 897 CE. Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen: A History of the Houthi Conflict*, 101.

[37] Paul Dresch. *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 3.

[38] Lisa Wedeen. *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen*. (Chicago: University Presses Marketing, 2008), 2.

PDRY, declared secession from the Republic of Yemen. In the unification process, each government had hoped to impose its system on the other. However, the disparity in power favoured the former North Yemen. Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had been president of the YAR since 1978, remained president of the united Yemen, the capital was declared to be Sana'a, and against the hopes of many, the laws of the YAR were extended to the South.[39] From the onset, the Yemeni state struggled with the formation of a national state-centered identity.[40] Although it initially allowed for active civic association, critical public debate, a relatively free press, and a weak but multiparty system, election fraud, increasing accumulation of power by the ruling party, and civil war, changed the democratic conditions.[41] The nationwide protest movements are therefore all the more notable.

The grievances that initially inspired the protests in 2011, namely the poor living standards, the looming economic and humanitarian crisis with oil and water fast running out,[42] and the continually increasing corruption, had led to a significant mass opposition movement active in cities as well as rural areas as early as 2005.[43] Although both the Huthi rebellion — a shia revivalist movement that began in 2004 in the northern governorate of Sa'ada[44] — and the resurfacing of the southern separatist movement in 2007[45] were in part results of the overall neglect of those areas, they were exasperated by targeted politics enacted by the Saleh regime. The government paid little attention to the development and political inclusion of the Sa'ada area while its selective financial and economic patronage of few tribal leaders shifted and distorted the previously functioning tribal order.[46] Forcible retirement of members of the army from the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) had further increased unemployment. Concurrently,the tight patronage system and flourishing corruption led foreign donors to withdraw their assistance on which the government in Yemen depended.[47] Additionally, since 2008 armed Islamist rebel movements with ties to al-Qaeda had increasingly targeted Yemeni security forces throughout the country. While during most of the 1990s, the government and jihadis had entered into a loose agreement of mutual toleration, the second half of the 2000s saw that agreement continually breached. Southern Yemen suffered, in particular, from ongoing violence as well as weekly, sometimes daily, American drone strikes.[48] All in all, Yemenis experienced much hardship, including the many years of globalisation and neoliberal policies that economically deprived many groups within the country.[49] Although peaceful protests continued between 2006 and 2011[50], the situation only worsened. In

[39] Helen Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Autocracy, Neo-Liberalism and the Disintegration of a State* (London: Saqi Books, 2017), 118.

[40] Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen*, 2f.

[41] Ibid. 69 f.

[42] Sarah Phillips, "Foreboding about the Future of Yemen" in *Arabia Incognita: Dispatches from Yemen and the Gulf,* ed. Sheila Carapico (Charlottesville, Virginia: Just World Books, 2016), 160.

[43] Helen Lackner, "The Change Squares of Yemen," in *Civil Resistance in the Arab Spring*, ed. Adam Roberts et al. (Oxford University Press, 2016), 152.

[44] Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen: A History of the Houthi Conflict*, 153ff.

[45] Dahlgren, "The Snake with a Thousand Heads"

[46] Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen: A History of the Houthi Conflict*, 72f.

[47] Phillips, "Foreboding about the Future of Yemen", 161.

[48] Laurent Bonnefoy, "The *Shabab,* Institutionalized Politics and the Islamists in the Yemeni Revolution" in *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition,* ed. Helen Lackner (London: Saqi, 2014), 90f.

[49] Blumi, *Destroying Yemen: What Chaos in Arabia Tells Us About the World*, 170f.

[50] Tawfik Al-Hamidi, interview by Aylin Junga, September 25, 2020.

short, the grievances held by the population were numerous, with Sarah Phillips stating as early as 2006 "it is hard to overstate the urgency of Yemen's situation."[51] The political opportunities for the expression of these grievances, presented themselves by early 2011.

Political opportunities occur when fundamental assumptions of the political order are destabilised. Thus, they allow for the translation of grievances into social action. The unilateral decision by Saleh to postpone parliamentary elections scheduled for 2009, followed by an attempt to change the constitution — for the sixth time — in a way that would allow him to run for an unconstitutional third term in the 2013 presidential elections, further increased tensions with the opposition.[52] Moreover, it caused restlessness in Saleh's ranks. His apparent intention to ordain his son, whom he had already made commander of the nation's Republican Guard,[53] unsettled some of Saleh's former allies, including his former close associate and military leader Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar. Prior to the 2011 protests, Mohsen had been considered Saleh's right-hand man and held a prominent position in Yemen's political landscape as commander of the First Armoured Division. On top of being a distant cousin of Saleh and a member of the Sanhan tribe, Mohsen was part of the Islah party and thought to be Saleh's successor if he were to be killed.[54] Saleh's intention to hand over the presidency to his son further called into question the assumption that the presidency would be won through elections. The shifting alliances within the political elite further created space for political opportunity. Injustices were also rampant. The appropriation of the land of a whole village for the benefit of a sheikh whose poetry Saleh liked, had led to a long-term encampment by those villagers from Ja'ashin in Ibb Governorate in Sana'a.[55] They were soon joined by others, such as the Women Journalists Without Chains, led by Tawakkol Karman who started regularly protesting in Sana'a outside the prime minister's office.[56]

In my interview with Karman, she discussed her motivation to protest:

> Saleh's quest to pass power to his son Ahmed [is] in stark contrast to the republican system sacred to Yemenis, increasingly high level of corruption in state institutions, poor government efficiency, and dishonest dealing with major national security issues like the war on terror and the counter-insurgency policy in Sa'da governorate [necessitated a revolution].[57]

The active participation of women in public protest was remarkable not only due to their significant contribution to the civilian and peaceful nature of the protests[58] but also as it signalled the ties they had been able to forge as civil society actors.[59] As a prelude

[51] Phillips, "Foreboding about the Future of Yemen", 162.
[52] Helen Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Autocracy, Neo-Liberalism and the Disintegration of a State*, 35.
[53] Sheila Carapico, "Yemen Between Revolution and Counter-Terrorism" in *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition,* ed. Helen Lackner (London: Saqi, 2014), 31.
[54] al-Dawsari, N., Nasser, S. (2020) "The Role of 'legitimacy,' Hadi, and the Islah Party". In: Stephen Day & Noel Brehony, eds. Global, Regional, and Local Dynamics in the Yemen Crisis, 212f.
[55] Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis*, 35.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Karman, Tawakkol. Interview by Aylin Junga. December 20, 2020.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Stacey P. Yadav, "Tawakkul Karman as Cause and Effect" in *Arabia Incognita: Dispatches from Yemen and the Gulf,* ed. Sheila Carapico (Charlottesville, Virginia: Just World Books, 2016), 191.

to the inclusivity of the popular movements that kept increasing in size in multiple Yemeni cities, it indicated the collective consciousness that was developing among large parts of the population. "As in Tunisia and Egypt, the experience of a collective, contentious mobilization 'from below' energized a veritable cultural transformation."[60] The collective action was further triggered by the successful ousting of "presidents for life" in Egypt and Tunisia.[61] Common grievances shared with protesters in these countries, such as the frustration with corrupt, ageing regimes "that have fed for decades at the through of US military assistance"[62] further created a sense of collective identity.

Demonstrations in Sana'a grew, and people began organising formally. As Saleh had pre-empted the protesters setting base at Sana'a's Midan al-Tahrir, he filled it with his supporters.[63] Instead, protesters set up tents in the square in front of Sana'a University, renaming it "Midan al-Taghyir" or "change square". Initially, the independent "youth" — a term I will be using to refer to independent members of the popular movement— dominated the protests . However, considering that one remains a part of the "youth" in Yemen until the age of 40, and 80 per cent of the country's population is under the age of 35,[64] the description of the movement as youthful is unsurprising. Individual members of political parties most often their youth organisations, joined the protests early, whereas the oppositional parties' leaderships and influential tribal leaders remained on the side-lines.[65]

Daily, peaceful protests were staged by a highly mobilised but not very organised movement whose main demands revolved around the downfall of the regime, borrowing slogans from Egypt and Tunisia — "Irhal" (leave!) and "al-Sha'ab Yuridh Isqat al-Nizam" (The people want the downfall of the regime).[66] They further demanded the establishment of a "civil state",[67] which is not to be confused with a secular state; it challenges the patronage system which is based on tribal loyalties as well as military ranks. About 75 percent of Yemen's population are tribespeople[68] and thus the protesters were concerned with the divide and rule strategy which the Saleh regime had long utilised along tribal lines.[69] Furthermore, due to Yemen's unique brand of praetorianism, the military had played a significant role in the country's political and institutional culture.[70] Although the protest movement was not shaped by one single ideology, protesters focused on shared grievances, goals, and identities.

To streamline demands and coordinate tactics, protesters organised nationwide youth-coalitions and by the end of March formed the Coordination Council for

[60] Carapico, "Yemen Between Revolution and Counter-Terrorism", 31.
[61] Nabil Albaydani, interview by Aylin Junga, September 22, 2020; Maysaa Shuja Aldeen, interview by Aylin Junga, October 8, 2020; Helen Lackner, interview by Aylin Junga, October 9, 2020.
[62] Carapico, *Arabia Incognita*, 174.
[63] Carapico, "Yemen Between Revolution and Counter-Terrorism", 33.
[64] Lackner, "The Change Squares of Yemen," 154.
[65] *International Crisis Group, "Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (II): Yemen Between Reform and Revolution,"* 2011, accessed October 19, 2020, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/popular-protest-north-africa-and-middle-east-ii-yemen-between-reform-and-revolution, 3.
[66] Carapico, "Yemen Between Revolution and Counter-Terrorism", 33.
[67] Maysaa Shuja Aldeen, interview by Aylin Junga; Baraa Shiban, interview by Aylin Junga, October 12, 2020.
[68] Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis*, 36.
[69] Phillips, "Foreboding about the Future in Yemen", 163; Bushra Kretschmer, interview by Aylin Junga.
[70] Adam C. Seitz, "Ties That Bind and Divide: The 'Arab Spring' and Yemeni Civil-Military Relations" in *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition,* ed. Helen Lackner (London: Saqi, 2014), 50.

Yemeni Revolutionary Youth (CCYRC).[71] By distributing 1000 questionnaires to protesters in the squares, the CCYRC created groups responsible for drafting an official list of demands. The final product included ten demands that covered the removal of the current regime, the establishment of a Presidential Transitional Council, a six-month transitional period, and the establishment of a representative Transitional National Board. Furthermore, the CCYRC demanded solutions for the issues in Sa'ada, and the South — specifically the Huthi rebellion and separatism.[72]

Faced with protests in all major Yemeni cities and beyond, Saleh announced on 2 February that he would cancel the planned amendment to the constitution, postpone parliamentary elections due in April, and increase the salary for military and security personnel by thirty-three percent. He further offered the establishment of a government of national unity and the decrease of centralisation for the benefit of local governance in governorates,[73] a frequent demand among some opposition parties. According to Piven and Cloward, political leadership, specifically when political alignments are unstable or shifting, cannot ignore a challenge to its authority.[74] As mentioned above, Saleh's relationship with the opposition, although never particularly good, had become increasingly tense, and he was facing a falling-out with some of his previous allies. The granting of concessions to remedy some of the immediate grievances, both symbolic — as with the increase in security and military personnel's salary to ensure their loyalty — and tangible, were swiftly followed by violence and oppression.

To summarise, Yemenis had felt the same grievances for almost a decade; however, the political opportunity present due to political realignments, continuous demonstrations and the successful revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, paired with a sense of shared identity, allowed for the creation of Yemen's revolutionary popular movement.

The government initially met increased organisation and the articulation of protester's demands with an attempt to appease them, quickly followed by counter-revolutionary tactics. Opposition parties were mostly represented by their youth leaders in the protests, however, "at the beginning, political parties were not that excited to encourage their members to join".[75] In fact, the party leadership of a coalition consisting of Yemen's main opposition parties, the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP)[76], remained on the side-line and open for dialogue with the government until late February. "At the end, the political parties used the youth as well. So, they have the youth on the ground, but they also are negotiating at the table."[77]

[71] Atiaf Z. Alwazir, "Yemen's Enduring Resistance: Youth Between Politics and Informal Mobilization," *Mediterranean Politics* 21, no. 1 (2016): 173.

[72] The Coordinating Council of the Youth Revolution of Change, "The Declaration of Youth Revolution Demands: Declaration Articles." https://www.facebook.com/CCYRC/photos/a.170147653034903/176541389062196/?type=3&theater.

[73] Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis*, 35.

[74] Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Vintage books, 1979), 28.

[75] Maysaa Shuja Aldeen, interview by Aylin Junga.

[76] A cross-ideological alliance of opposition parties consisting of the the Yemeni Congregation for Reform (al-tajammu' al-yamani li-l-islah, or Islah), the Yemeni Socialist Party (al-hizb al-ishtiraki al-yamani, YSP) – as well as several smaller parties either with a Zaydi revivalist background, like the Party of Truth (hizb al-haqq), or Arab nationalist leanings, like the Nasserist Unionist People's Organisation (al-tanzim al-wahdawi al-sha'bi al-nasiri, NUPO) Heibach; Transfeld, "Opposition Dynamism Under Authoritarianism: The Case of Yemen," 601.

[77] Bushra Kretschmer, interview by Aylin Junga.

Co-optation of Protest Movements on the Ground

By the end of February, the movement had grown considerably. Partly due to the regime's excessive use of violence, tens of thousands demonstrated in at least eight cities on the 18th of February.[78] The JMP and Huthi leaderships both officially joined the movement on the 20th of February encouraging their members' participation. This was followed by further political parties and influential tribal leaders officially siding with the protesters after the government's brutal attack on peaceful protesters on the18th of March,[79] signalling a move into the second stage of the co-optation process.

The killing of fifty peaceful protesters by government forces sparked outrage and "solidified the protests into a nationwide movement"[80] which crossed pre-existing social and political divisions. The aftermath of the massacre saw the largest ever defection from the ruling party and parts of the military. Additionally, the al-Ahmar family, the influential leaders of the Hashed tribal confederation that Saleh himself belonged to, officially broke with the government and joined the movement along with General Ali Mohsen. Their engagement in the protests made visible the elite's attempts at appropriation. Anticipating regime change, established political elites embraced the protesters' reformist rhetoric.[81] The popular movement presented an opportunity for influential parties to shape Yemen's future according to their own vision. The opposition had attempted and failed to reform the political- and electoral systems[82] over the last decade. By April, the conflict was internationalised, with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) attempting to broker a proposal for a peaceful transition of power.[83] Furthermore, the regime's violence towards the protesters, who remained peaceful, made it increasingly difficult for the opposition to remain neutral. Thus, they joined as reformers.

Drawing a distinction between reformist and revolutionary activism is important in understanding the process of co-optation, considering that partisan actors stepped in to organise the formerly independent movement.[84] The possibility of the revolutionary process being appropriated by institutionalised actors[85] could "diminish the scope for change and increased control over the various political and symbolic outcomes of the movements."[86] Karman notes that the joining of the opposition parties, although proving the weakness of the regime, "led to a reshuffling of the cards and slowing of the wave of change, as well as a weakening of the revolution's bargaining position and [emphasised] non-radical solutions. In practice, this meant moving from the idea of getting rid of the regime to rehabilitating it. In other words, the joining did more harm than good."[87]

[78] *International Crisis Group, "Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (II),"* 2011, 3.

[79] *Human Rights Watch, "Yemen: Unpunished Massacre,"* 2013, https://www.hrw.org/video-photos/video/2013/02/12/yemen-unpunished-massacre-0.

[80] Carapico, "Yemen Between Revolution and Counter-Terrorism", 35.

[81] Tobias Thiel, "Governance in Transition: The Dynamics of Yemen's Negotiated Reform Process" in *Yemen and the Search for Stability: Power, Politics and Society after the Arab Spring*, ed. Marie-Christine Heinze (London: I.B Tauris, 2018), 139f.

[82] Zeinab Abdelkarim, Eric Hodachok and Danielle Monaco, "Yemen's Transition: Electoral Challenges and Opportunities for Reform" *CDDRL Working Papers* Vol. 139 (July 2013): 6f.

[83] Abdelkarim, Hodachok and Monaco, "Yemen's Transition", 5.

[84] Yadav, "Tawakkul Karman as Cause and Effect", 190.

[85] Bonnefoy, "The *Shabab*, Institutionalized Politics and the Islamists in the Yemeni Revolution", 88.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Karman, Tawakkol. Interview by Aylin Junga.

Independent actors and people who felt they lacked the necessary organisation particularly feared the joining of Ali Mohsen and his people. They knew it would increase the dominance of the Islah party within the movement[88] as it is the largest and most influential opposition party within the JMP in Sana'a, with an ideology closely resembling the Muslim Brotherhood. From its formation in 1990 to the 2011 protests, the Islah party has oscillated between opposition and support for the GPC guided by what Sarah Phillips identifies as an overarching desire for access to the patronage system rather than strict religious or ideological motivations. Despite its inclusion in the formation of the JMP in 2002, its opposition to the government has always been limited because "its preference was to work within the system for change".[89] As a result of its entanglement in the existing political framework, the Islah party presence in the protests limited formerly open spaces for dialogue and organisation.[90] "Many demonstrators blame the movement's stagnation on the JMP and General Ali Muhsin, who are believed to be collaborating against the youth."[91]

In what follows, I will show that the shift from what was a spontaneous mass movement, to a movement that was dominated by institutional actors[92] had an impact on the tactics, organisation, and demands of protesters. According to stage two of the co-optation model, elites can appropriate a movement in multiple ways. First, by appropriating their terminology, symbols, and tactics, elites are able to redefine their meaning and thus undermine the movement's "subversive and potential and the challenger's status as a platform for critique and protest"[93] or direct it in their favour.

Upon joining the movement, the JMP deployed various protest paraphernalia — "sashes, hats, posters, flyers and more — tinted in gradations of pink"[94] thus attempting to dominate and streamline the protest's symbolic output. The appropriation of ideas utilised in the movement's organisation and tactics further becomes evident when considering the following event, described to me by a member of the CCYRC. On the national day of unity, the CCYRC had planned to go out with Yemeni flags and symbols of the independent protests. However, they were discouraged by JMP parties' leaderships. The next morning, the party's representatives had coordinated their own march with flags — "wanting to market themselves."[95] However, the appropriation of ideas, tactics and symbols is only one step within the second stage of the co-optation process.

Another way for elites to exert control over a social movement is to include movement representatives in their organisational structures. Through 'channelling' the initial movement's leadership or participants into formal organisational structures "the dominant group [is able to] redirect […] substantive challenges to the dominant groups

[88] Maysaa Shuja Aldeen, interview by Aylin Junga; Helen Lackner, interview by Aylin Junga.
[89] Sarah Phillips. *Yemen's Democracy Experiment in Regional Perspective: Patronage and Pluralized Authoritarianism*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 159.
[90] Helen Lackner, interview by Aylin Junga.
[91] Amel Ahmed, "Yemen: Tensions Rise After President's Speech," *Al Jazeera*, accessed October 10, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2011/7/9/yemen-tensions-rise-after-presidents-speech.
[92] Helen Lackner, interview by Aylin Junga.
[93] Holdo, "Cooptation and non-cooptation: elite strategies in response to social protest," 450.
[94] Stacey P. Yadav, "No Pink Slip for Salih: What Yemen's Protests Do (and Do Not) Mean" in *Arabia Incognita: Dispatches from Yemen and the Gulf,* ed. Sheila Carapico (Charlottesville, Virginia: Just World Books, 2016), 173.
[95] Bushra Kretschmer, interview by Aylin Junga.

or systems and toward more modest reforms."[96] This channelling of protesters' anger and energy into "more legitimate and less disruptive forms of political behavior"[97] can be perceived as beneficial by movement participants. The additional, often stronger, administrative structures and higher security measures can be incentives to movements, especially when faced with organised counter-revolutionary violence by the government.[98] Alongside the potential benefits of participation however, there are also costs involved for the challenging movement, which often faces a loss of its relative autonomy, the de-politicisation of issues, and the entrenchment of race and class disadvantages.[99]

The fear of diffusion and demobilisation of the movement in Yemen led to initial resistance of some independent protesters to the joining of political parties.[100] However, soon after their professed allegiance to the revolution, activists close to the Islah party controlled the main speaking platform in Sana'a.[101] They organised life in the sit-ins, enforcing strict segregation between men and women, with the latter being subjected to physical assault by conservative male protesters.[102] Echoing a speech Saleh gave, the Islah's more conservative wing was concerned with the "reputation of the movement".[103] Youth leaders, who had been participating as individuals early on, joined their official party lines, dominated the discourse and reduced the space for others who were not part of it.[104] The "'Islamist' sympathisers ended up imposing this political movement's own agenda and method, largely at the expense of what [independent youth leaders] perceived as the essential characteristics of 'their' revolution: individualism, gender equality, the free exchange of views, tolerance."[105]

> It caused a great political and popular momentum. But in return, it had a negative impact on the free will of revolutionaries and protesters and on their ability to move towards the complete overthrow of the regime. I went through a bitter struggle with those parties and interest groups, as I insisted on the importance for the revolutionary youth to have their independent decision making.[106]

Although street politics were side-lined for the benefit of established party network mobilisation,[107] the independent movement had relied to a certain degree on pre-existing networks and former movements.[108] However, the degree of organisation and

[96] Coy and Hedeen, "A Stage Model of Social Movement Co-Optation," 416.
[97] Piven and Cloward, *Poor people's movements*, 30.
[98] Baraa Shiban, interview by Aylin Junga.
[99] Coy and Hedeen, "A Stage Model of Social Movement Co-Optation," 417.
[100] Nabil Albaydani, interview by Aylin Junga; Maysaa Shuja Aldeen, interview by Aylin Junga; *International Crisis Group, "Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (II)," 2011,*4.
[101] Bonnefoy, "The *Shabab*, Institutionalized Politics and the Islamists in the Yemeni Revolution," 98.
[102] Bushra Kretschmer, interview by Aylin Junga; Bonnefoy, "The *Shabab*, Institutionalized Politics and the Islamists in the Yemeni Revolution," 98; Lackner, Carapico, "Yemen Between Revolution and Counter-Terrorism", 37.
[103] Tawfik Al-Hamidi, interview by Aylin Junga.
[104] Helen Lackner, interview by Aylin Junga.
[105] Bonnefoy, "The *Shabab*, Institutionalized Politics and the Islamists in the Yemeni Revolution," 98.
[106] Tawakkol Karman, interview by Aylin Junga. December 20,2020.
[107] Bonnefoy, "The *Shabab*, Institutionalized Politics and the Islamists in the Yemeni Revolution," 99.
[108] Ibid., 101.

amount of funding the JMP, specifically the Islah, were able to offer, allowed them to exert influence even if the movement did not have to rely on them for basic structures.[109] In fact, the formation of a "Revolutionary Community", which had been coordinated with the help of parties and began competing with the CCYRC, attempted to channel movement members into their organisational structure. They began organising security, food, and logistics in the square. However, they also restricted the openness of discussions by determining speakers and topics for the main stages. Speakers would not openly affiliate with a certain party or organisation, rather they spoke about their ideologies which clearly informed their lectures. Emphasising common ground they spoke to protesters not as party idealogues but simply as fellow protesters.[110]

By including members of the independent youth in this "Revolutionary Community", parties made sure that movement members felt a sense of ownership over the outcomes of discussions and the formulation of demands, even if the eventual outcomes were not, in fact, satisfactory.[111] This, in turn, contributed to their salience control; their ability to influence which demands and issues were considered more relevant over others. The main stage in the Midan al-Taghyir was at the heart of salience control once the movement had become more organised. The committee tasked with coordinating daily programs was accused of essentially being managed by the JMP, specifically the Islah party, resulting in a single ideological voice dominating the discourse. Furthermore, what was said on that stage became the focus of local, regional, and international news. By reportedly banning the distribution of written documents, party affiliates solidified their control over the discourse.[112] Representatives of the Huthis' political wing attempted a similar strategy, if not as well organised. After the 18th of March the level of the discussions and the debates were more circumscribed by the influence of the Islah and the Huthis than before, although there was still some space left for independent discussions on smaller platforms.[113]

In Yemen, party representatives utilised their organisational capacities to control space and discourse; their ideologies dominated the main stages for discussion. The appropriation of protesters' tactics, language and symbols are representative of the co-optation process. Although it may seem beneficial to movement activists to participate in elite organised channels, this often comes at the cost of independence and salience control. "By lecturing people, the parties wanted to control the protesting discourse itself."[114] However, seeking legitimacy, movements may choose to formalise their discourse. Often this is achieved through a notion of institutionalisation.[115]

The NDC and the Institutional Co-optation of Representatives

Such an opportunity for institutionalisation came with the establishment of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC). While Yemeni activists occupied the Midan al-Taghyir for months on end, political parties were involved in negotiating a transition of power through the GCC initiative. As part of those negotiations, JMP representatives relied on

[109] Atiaf Z. Alwazir, *"The Square of Change in Sana'a: An Incubator for Reform," Arab Reform Brief* (Arab Reform Initiative, 2011), https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/the-square-of-change-in-sanaa-an-incubator-for-reform/, 3.

[110] Nabil Albaydani, interview by Aylin Junga.

[111] Coy and Hedeen, "A Stage Model of Social Movement Co-Optation," 418.

[112] Alwazir, "The Square of Change in Sana'a," 5–6.

[113] Helen Lackner, interview by Aylin Junga.

[114] Nabil Albaydani, interview by Aylin Junga.

[115] Coy and Hedeen, "A Stage Model of Social Movement Co-Optation," 419.

their organisational capacities to rent buses, organise security, transport wounded to hospitals, and shape the revolutionary narrative through their media outlets.[116] While independent protesters were not represented, some believed that "the JMP used [the] movement to pressure the regime into negotiations."[117] Although the final draft of the initiative was signed by all on the 21st of April, Saleh initially refused his signature and was only persuaded to sign, after several stalling manoeuvres, on the 23rd of November.[118] The final agreement entailed a transfer of the presidency to vice president Hadi, making him the first Southern-born president to hold power in Sana'a[119], new presidential elections to be called within sixty days, and drafting a new constitution to be approved by referendum.[120] However, against protesters' explicit demands, Saleh and his associates would be immune from persecution. The revolutionary movement aimed at more fundamental change to the political structure, reaching further than just the transfer of power from Saleh to Hadi, leaving the former still in a position of power and influence as the head of the GPC.[121] This reformist approach to the government's political disintegration fuelled protesters and grassroots organisers in their revolutionary movement.[122] According to Baraa Shiban —a youth representative at the NDC — the exclusion of the independent youth from the GCC initiative negotiations was the decisive factor that convinced movement members to join the NDC.[123]

Within the co-optation process, the institutionalisation stage represents the assimilation of movement participants and leaders into an institutional framework provided by the state and vested interests.[124] Essential to this institutional framework is the employment of challenging movement leaders as well as the attempt at reforming movement goals.[125] Due to the limitation of access to it, continued participation in the policy-making body may become a goal in and of itself for movement representatives.[126] As a result, other movement objectives can be subsumed under the goal of ongoing access to these bodies.[127] With regards to youth leaders' decision-making,the desire for access to institutionalised bodies —even if provided by the state — was crucial.

As an institution for conflict resolution, the NDC borrows some important elements of Yemeni customary conflict resolution as "Yemenis have experience in how to engage in dialogue with each other. It is part of the tribal custom. How to solve the problem through dialogue, through compromising."[128] While tribal leaders were traditionally

[116] Bonnefoy, "The *Shabab*, Institutionalized Politics and the Islamists in the Yemeni Revolution," 99.
[117] Ahmed, "Yemen".
[118] Carapico, "Yemen Between Revolution and Counter-Terrorism," 38.
[119] Ginny Hill, *Yemen Endures: Civil War, Saudi Adventurism and the Future of Arabia*, (London: Hurst, 2017), 248.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ginny. *Yemen Endures*, 242.
[122] Yadav, "Tawakkul Karman as Cause and Effect," 190.
[123] Baraa Shiban, interview by Aylin Junga.
[124] Coy and Hedeen, "A Stage Model of Social Movement Co-Optation," 420.
[125] Ibid., 421.
[126] Ibid., 417.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Maysaa Shuja Aldeen, interview by Aylin Junga. October 8, 2020.

responsible for solving problems and disputes within their tribes,[129] tribal communities often resort to a *marqum,* an Arabic word meaning "record" or "register", as was done to resolve resource conflicts peacefully.[130] In Yemen, a document qualifies as *marqum* when all those concerned witness the deliberation process of reaching consensus. It is signed by the people or representatives of the parties, endorsed by a trustee and then kept as a permanent and unchangeable record. It can be used to settle existing conflicts, usually with the help of a mediator or neutral person, or it can help regulate aspects of community life and clarify rights and duties.[131] The NDC attempted to perform a similar function.

The NDC sought to bring together the disparate political forces active in Yemen to resolve some of the core political problems. Working groups on good governance, state-building, military and security affairs, rights and freedoms, development, independent entities, reconciliation and transitional justice, the Southern question and the Huthi rebellion in Sa'ada were meant to be discussed. This process aimed to produce outcomes that lay the Constitutional Drafting Committee's foundation to begin work on developing a new constitutional order for Yemen. However, it is important to note that while the NDC was an effort towards an effective transition, it was not the entire transition process itself. As Helen Lackner emphasises in response to the widespread perception that the NDC was the transition, "this is simply wrong: the NDC was one element of the transition process."[132] So while in this section, I focus on the meetings and representation at the NDC, a wider transitional process was occurring across the country that included the ongoing protests and popular movement tactics referenced above. Nevertheless, the NDC remains a reference point for the transition process and —for the purpose of this study— the culmination of institutionalisation of the social movement in the co-optation process.

Positive aspects of the NDC included the successful exemplification of "indigenous precedents and activism",[133] and a breakthrough of a new political coalition that secured recognition from established political actors.[134] Although it is a highly institutionalised framework that bent towards favouring established political parties, it also provided a new setting for activists' demands to be articulated. To analyse this stage in the co-optation process, it is important to outline the formation of the NDC as an institution. Following that, I will briefly review how youth and civil society actors were hindered, influenced, and co-opted through participation within the NDC. Firstly, it is necessary to acknowledge that the allocation of seats favoured political parties, and those representing independent activists were cherry-picked without proper consideration of their relation to the wider movement.[135]

While the formation of the NDC officially began back in November 2011 with Saleh's signature on the GCC Initiative (mandating a transitional process without an explicit

[129] Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen*, 73.
[130] Gerhard Lichtenhäler, "Customary Conflict Resolution in Times of Extreme Water Stress," 188 ff.
[131] Ibid., 190f.
[132] Lackner, *Yemen in crisis*, 46.
[133] Carapico, "Yemen Between Revolution and Counter-Terrorism," 47.
[134] Helen Lackner, *Yemen's "Peaceful" Transition from Autocracy: Could It Have Succeeded?* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2016), https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/yemens-peaceful-transition-from-autocracy.pdf, 53.
[135] Atiaf Z. Alwazir, "Yemen's Independent Youth and Their Role in the National Dialogue Conference: Triggering a Change in Political Culture," *German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)*, (2013), https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2013C23_wzr.pdf, 4.

design for it),[136] the idea of a National Dialogue Conference predates the 2011 popular movement. Initially conceived as a plan by the government and opposition parties to address Southern separatism and the Huthi issue in the north, it was made to fit demands articulated by protesters as well.[137] To provide a framework for this, Hadi appointed a Liaison Committee in May 2012 whose task was to prepare for the NDC by meeting with groups across the country. The Technical Committee replaced this Liaison Committee in July which inherited the same task from its predecessor but included a more representative membership. In August, the Technical Committee submitted twenty demands on issues relating to the Huthi and Southern movements as well as unresolved problems from Saleh's rule.[138] Although Hadi accepted these, his government's failure to implement demands before the NDC's commencement initially alienated independent groups from the process. Youth and civil society representatives on the Technical Committee resigned in protest, a move which "removed their representation from the NDC when it began."[139] While these actors eventually gained seats at the NDC, this period highlighted their tenuous place within the institution's processes. Seats were allocated to the youth representatives according to "whether they were known to members of the technical committee", a selection process reminiscent of "a gathering of traditional elites."[140] Regardless, the final allocation of the 565 seats included 40 seats for youth and civil society organisations. Women were represented with roughly 30 percent across all sections. Their participation in decision-making bodies had been explicitly mentioned in the GCC Initiative. However, it is important to note that at the NDC most women were expected to vote along party lines, thus limiting their collaboration on women's issues.[141] As the largest number of seats was going to the established parties, the representation of Yemenis not affiliated with parties was comparatively low.[142] By engaging in deliberation and the drafting process, youth representatives sought to overcome the lack of representation.

Central to institutionalisation within the co-optation process is the attempt to transform a challenging movement's demands towards either reformist or de-politicised goals. This is done initially by drawing from and capturing the legitimacy the movement members bring to the institution and later using this perceived legitimacy to undercut revolutionary goals with reformist compromises. Selznick refers to it as sharing responsibility for power and not power itself.[143] The institutional structure of the NDC "channelled grassroots mobilisation into a formalised process" which led youth delegates to feel "traditional political forces [were] trying to ride on their legitimacy."[144] Having caught a "ride" on the legitimacy gained from movement member's participation, partisan actors began to push their demands. For instance, the JMP cast themselves as representatives

[136] Abdelkarim, Hodachok and Monaco, "Yemen's Transition," 8.
[137] Baraa Shiban, interview by Aylin Junga.
[138] Lackner, *Yemen's "peaceful" Transition from Autocracy*, 43.
[139] Maged al-Madhaji, "How Yemen's Post-2011 Transitional Phase Ended in War," *Sana'a Center For Strategic Studies* (2016), http://sanaacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/k2_attachments_how_yemens_post_2011_transitional_phase_ended_in_war_en.pdf, 9–10.
[140] Alwazir, "Yemen's Independent Youth and Their Role in the National Dialogue Conference," 4.
[141] Nadia al-Sakkaf, "Negotiating Women's Empowerment in the NDC" in *Yemen and the Search for Stability: Power, Politics and Society after the Arab Spring*, ed. Marie-Christine Heinze (London: I.B Tauris, 2018),167f.
[142] Abdelkarim, Hodachok and Monaco, "Yemen's Transition," 9; Nabil Albaydani, interview by Aylin Junga.
[143] Selznick, "Foundations of the Theory of Organization," 34.
[144] Alwazir, "Yemen's Independent Youth and Their Role in the National Dialogue Conference," 8.

of the protest movement at the NDC while promoting their agendas. According to al-Madhaji, the JMP "justified this co-optation given how the two groups had worked together during the uprising" but neglected to recognise that "the protesters generally had very different visions for how to resolve Yemen's challenges,"[145] and instead simply pushed their vision for Yemen's future. Through this process of co-optation, the protest movement's legitimacy is repackaged and deployed by institutional actors at the NDC for their own goals, regardless of whether they overlap with movement activists' or not.

While other actors were able to capitalise on the independent representatives to push their own goals, the demands of movement representatives were influenced by their presence in the institution. As mentioned earlier, social movements may choose to formalise their discourse to gain credibility within the institution they are attempting to "successfully" participate in.[146] This process played out among the youth delegates at the NDC as they began to negotiate and gain access to closed-door meetings and traditional political circles. During the meetings, it was noted that "youth delegates have moderated their tone in dealing with political parties,"[147] a salient part of the trade-off of institutional access. Financial support, employment, and invitations to informal social meetings and political events create incentives making access a goal in itself. Regardless, youth representatives engaged in various symbolic acts, such as taking the front row seats at meetings to make themselves seen because they were "constantly confronting the narratives and habits of traditional forces [in service of] demands for equality among all conference participants."[148] Independent representatives became embroiled in struggles with the institution itself.

The continued provision of access and recognition subsumed the political goals that animated the initial protests. This "paradox of collaboration"[149] refers to activists seeking collaboration to achieve political goals, but the more collaboration is sought the less salient political goals become in the face of struggles over access. Furthermore, this influences how the movement is structured as it adapts to the institution to maintain better access. Administrative functions become a larger part of the social movement's organisation and movement leaders' channel oppositional action towards administrative functions defined by the institution.[150] In the case of the NDC, youth delegates tried to make up for their lack of overall representation through their representation at the heads of sub-groups. Utilising their skill with technology, many of them took on the role of drafting sub-groups' recommendations.[151]

To conclude, the NDC's planning and selection process, and the effect institutionalisation had on actors' tone and demands, shaped the actors to fit the institution. Part of this institutional structure worked in favour of independent voices. Due to their representation at the negotiation table, established political actors were forced "to engage in serious debate with these 'young upstarts'".[152] Although the representation of non-party-affiliated Yemenis was overall low, youth delegates were

[145] al-Madhaji, "How Yemen's post-2011 transitional phase ended in war," 8.
[146] Coy and Hedeen, "A Stage Model of Social Movement Co-Optation," 419.
[147] Alwazir, "Yemen's Independent Youth and Their Role in the National Dialogue Conference," 8.
[148] Ibid., 6–7.
[149] Coy and Hedeen, "A Stage Model of Social Movement Co-Optation," 417.
[150] Ibid., 423.
[151] Alwazir, "Yemen's Independent Youth and Their Role in the National Dialogue Conference," 6.
[152] Lackner, *Yemen's "Peaceful" Transition from Autocracy*, 53.

able to contribute to working groups on major political issues. But, as this section has shown, access and representation can be at the cost of meaningful political change. Representatives closely related to the protesters help lend a sense of legitimacy to traditional opposition voices and demands. Moreover, when the legitimacy of social movement representatives was not capitalised on by other actors, they exerted influence over their demands and redirected their efforts towards the challenges of the NDC procedure. Ultimately, the final document contained 1,800 agreed upon outcomes and was expected to provide the foundation for drafting a new constitution. However, persistent unresolved issues relating to federalism, security sector reform, and economic grievances threatened any future constitutional work, and the transition process more generally. These problems contributed to the transitional process's unravelling and the ultimate spiral into civil war that is the focus of the next and final section.

The Breakdown of Yemen and the Stage Model

The final stage of the co-optation model provides a unique challenge to the case of Yemen. Most co-optation models focus on social movements and political institutions in a stable political environment, such as Selznick's analysis of the Tennessee Valley Authority or Staggenborg's study of the Pro-Choice Movement.[153] The final stage of the four-stage co-optation model assumes some form of institutional or political codification into the wider system. By creating administrative rules or enacting laws that will mandate and codify some of the platforms and values of the challenging movement,[154]the challenge to traditional political authority is effectively resolved. These codified gains are subject to the concessions and changes implied by the previous stages of the co-optation model, as well as to the nature of the codification process itself. The extent to which movement activists' original demands are reflected as a result may differ and does not reflect the existence or lack of co-optation. Rather it is the process itself that reveals the elite's reaction to a popular challenge in Yemen's case — revolutionary movement.

As I have stated in earlier stages of this paper, I am seeking to regard Yemen's political context not as an obstacle to the model but as an opportunity to understand processes of co-optation within this specific context. Following the NDC, Yemen's political situation destabilised beyond the point where codification of rules and laws could be enacted. The optimism that sustained many during the transitional period and the possibility the NDC, regardless of its shortcomings, had provided for Yemeni activists, were dashed by the GCC Initiative's eventual collapse and the beginning of the civil war. However, I believe it is important to trace certain symbolic moments in order to identify when and how Yemen's hopeful transition unravelled.

When the NDC completed its outcome document and adjourned at the beginning of 2014, problems facing the average Yemeni remained what they were throughout the process. Living conditions during 2014 continued to deteriorate despite the hopes created for an equitable and fair economy during the 2011 protests. As part of international support for the transition $7.9 billion were pledged to help develop Yemen's economy, but these funds were held up as donors were fearful of corruption

[153] Selznick, *TVA and the grass roots*; Suzanne Staggenborg, "The Consequences of Professionalization and Formalization in the Pro-Choice Movement," *American Sociological Review* 53, no. 4 (1988).
[154] Coy and Hedeen, "A Stage Model of Social Movement Co-Optation," 423.

and weak state capacity to use the money effectively.[155] The worsening situation started to turn Yemenis against the Hadi government as Saleh manoeuvred behind the scenes. Although much of the reform rhetoric included anti-corruption demands, Hadi's transitional government looked rather like a continuation of Saleh's system of patronage than a break with it.[156] In his analysis, Tobias Thiel attributes the failings of Yemen's transition to Hadi's failure to introduce technocratic recruitment for public office and to strengthen the legal and institutional framework. Instead, continued elite patronage, political quotas, and heightened partisanship in the name of stability led to disappointed reform aspirations and an undermining of constitutional provisions, existing laws and institutions.[157] In our interview, human rights activist Tawfik al-Hamidi stressed the weakness of Hadi's government in navigating the challenges of Yemen's transition.[158] While his support was limited to moderate GPC members and the international community[159] and popularity of the transitional government continuously diminished among Yemen's population, the Huthi's were able to tap into rising frustrations further growing their following throughout the transitional period.[160] Since 2012, while their political representatives were participating in the NDC, Huthis had been increasing their power from their base in Sa'ada and expanding into neighbouring areas.[161] While their delegates at the NDC were calling for the equality of all groups and sects as well as for an end of corruption and the patronage system,[162] the Huthi's militia was utilising tribal allies in fierce fights to expand their military control further.[163] Additionally, the NDC allowed them to extend their political influence at the national level.[164] Riding on a wave of discontent among the Yemeni people, the military wing of the Huthi movement, Ansar Allah, took over Yemen's capital Sana'a on 21 September 2014. Symbolically, they occupied the home of the activist and member of the more progressive wing of the Islah party, Tawakkol Karman as well as that of Ali Mohsen.[165] After having participated in the NDC and having agreed to its outcomes, the Huthis now claimed to speak for the Yemeni population at large. As Nabil Albaydani puts it:

> How come [they] came to a Dialogue while having a militia leader who is controlling behind the scenes. It was not a reality. Rather, I am sorry to say, it was a kind of show. A simple show but it is not real. It

[155] Lackner, *Yemen in crisis*, 49.
[156] Thiel, "Governance in Transition", 147
[157] Thiel, "Governance in Transition", 139.
[158] Tawfik Al-Hamidi, interview by Aylin Junga, September 25, 2020.
[159] Thiel, "Governance in Transition", 140.
[160] Brandt,"The Huthi Enigma", 197f.
161 Baraa Shiban, interview by Aylin Junga. Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen*, 339.
162 Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen,* 340.
163 *International Crisis Group. "The Huthis: From Saada to Sanaa." 2014,*Accessed February 21, 2021. https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/huthis-saada-sanaa, 11.
164 Marieke Brandt, "The Huthi Enigma: Ansar Allahand the 'Second Republic'" in *Yemen and the Search for Stability: Power, Politics and Society after the Arab Spring*, ed. Marie-Christine Heinze (London: I.B Tauris, 2018), 174.
165 Stacey P. Yadav and Sheila Carapico, "The Breakdown of the GCC Initiative" in *Arabia Incognita: Dispatches from Yemen and the Gulf,* ed. Sheila Carapico (Charlottesville, Virginia: Just World Books, 2016), 263.

was just talking... and everyone wanted to use that Dialogue for his group or themselves.[166]

The Huthi representatives at the NDC had not been the truly influential ones making decisions for the group at large.[167] Instead, the conference's institutional body and, more importantly, the participation of members of the initial popular movement had lent legitimacy to the Huthis while their military wing continued its advance. Trying to balance different political forces against each other, Hadi oversaw his failing government's fall into the hands of the Huthi-Saleh alliance that had formed. His exclusionist selection of a special committee to draw up plans for a six-region federal system was strongly opposed by both Huthis and Southern separatists who saw the air of inclusion and consensus fading.[168] In one last effort to peacefully negotiate the transitional government, Hadi attempted to salvage the situation by signing the Peace and National Partnership Agreement (PNPA) with Huthi representatives on 21 September. Among other things it called for a technocratic government, the appointment of a new prime minister, an amendment of the national body that was to implement the NDC outcomes, and a reinstatement of subsidies cut in late July in an effort to prevent financial collapse.[169] Although the PNPA was an attempt to help consolidate the Hadi regime, the Huthis secured effective control in Sana'a on the same day. On 17 January 2015, the transitional process received one more blow. As the final product of the Constitutional Drafting Committee was being delivered for approval by the NDC implementation body — which had not been reformed in accordance with the PNPA[170]— the Huthis kidnapped the director of the president's office as he was on his way.[171] Yemen's constitutional future was kidnapped with it. Later in 2015, Hadi fled to Aden, and after that, to Riyadh in the face of the Huthi-Saleh takeover. Finally, the intervention of Saudi Arabia and its allies with the first bombing campaign of Operation Decisive Storm marked the final stage of the unravelling of the conflict in Yemen.[172] By this point, Yemen's hopeful transitional process had become an internationalised civil war.

Whether the codification of the movement's demands would have been successful under different circumstances is impossible to answer. The fact is, several other factors contributed to Yemen's deteriorating political situation. While the Huthi-Saleh alliance's expansion and eventual takeover of Sana'a —in the eyes of some— has completely done away with the legitimacy of the NDC, the process of social movement co-optation can still be traced in Yemen regardless.

Conclusion

War and chaos are sometimes treated in scholarship — and more so in the media — as Yemen's *modus operandi*. The possibility of political change seems to be

166 *Nabil Albaydani, interview by Aylin Junga.*
167 Baraa Shiban, interview by Aylin Junga.
168 Hill, *Yemen Endures*, 264.
169 Thiel, "Governance in Transition", 143.
170 Thiel, "Governance in Transition", 144.
171 Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis*, 51.
172 John M. Willis, "Operation Decisive Storm and the Expanding Counterrevolution" in *Arabia Incognita: Dispatches from Yemen and the Gulf,* ed. Sheila Carapico (Charlottesville, Virginia: Just World Books, 2016), 272.

viewed as constrained to armed rebellion. Although it is important to be aware of the many challenges Yemen faces, collective action, encompassing a vast majority of the country's seemingly divided population, is also a present feature. Social movements and civil action matter. Which is why their co-optation matters.

In this study, I have tried to trace this process of co-optation, which I argue took place in the context of the Yemeni protests in 2011 and the following transitional period. My analysis of the Yemeni case reveals that political elites reacted to the challenge the political system faced by appropriating the movement's tactics, language, and symbols, as well as by integrating its members into elite organised channels. I have shown how party-affiliated activists used resources and networks to organise and thus shape the revolutionary discourse and enact salience control. Furthermore, through the institutionalisation into the NDC, discourse and tactics were channelled into state-provided structures making it harder for revolutionaries to pursue effective change.

Part of this discussion has been an attempt to highlight the importance of Yemen as a case study for the "Arab Spring" movements, redressing the neglect of the Gulf in general — and Yemen in particular — in the literature on social movements in the Middle East. Although I argue that elite co-optation contributed to the redirection of protesters' demands while allowing the elite to gain legitimacy through collaboration with movement participants, I do not claim that this alone explains why the peaceful transition of power and reshaping of Yemeni politics ended in a civil war. If there is one thing that has become even more evident to me during the writing of this paper and the interviews I have conducted, it is just how convoluted the situation is. There are so many contributing factors to how Yemen got here that it would be impossible for me to give them the attention they deserve in the scope of this study. However, by acknowledging the role elite co-optation has played in the 2011 popular movement, two things become clear. First, co-optation processes do occur within the Yemeni context. Elites do not necessarily resort to the coercion of movements, as was the case with the Yemeni government, but they can seek the opportunity to enact reforms according to their own programmes. By repositioning themselves in the context of a popular challenge they can try to gain legitimacy and control the movement's discourse and actions. Second, co-optation, as it occurred during this period of Yemen's political history, influenced and shaped the spontaneous protest movement.

Finally, Yemen's spiral into civil war is often understood to have undone the progress made up to that point. Although the horrors of the war and continuing humanitarian crisis cannot be overstated, the revolutionary movement contributed to challenging many of the preconceptions about Yemeni politics and society. It allowed for the exchange of ideas and the formation of connections between diverse social groups. New discussions and narratives were made possible by the development of a revolutionary moment, and while the realisation of a constitutional future was not achieved, its possible future was articulated.

Yemenis, and the international community, can look back at the popular movement of 2011 and the outcomes of the NDC and find an example on which a future political order can draw. Understanding what occurred during this period can highlight what is possible in the future and what can be done better. Fundamental changes that developed then are present today, and in the words of Nabil Albaydani:

"It was all the leaders who were fake, all the intellectuals at that time were fake and now I think it is really time. This time I think is more important than the past. Because the media, and social media and the network community truly affect and

change people's minds. And they will. I am very optimistic about the future."[173]

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[173] *Nabil Albaydani, interview by Aylin Junga.*

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Syria's Experience with Post-Totalitarianism:
The Need for Havelian Pre-Political Thinking

Marwan Safar Jalani

Syria's experience with the Assad regime sets an unfortunate precedent in authoritarian regimes' ability to survive through violence and repression. However, understanding the regime's survival requires us to search for explanations grounded in the regime's techniques to polarise Syrians and limit their ability to dissent civilly and peacefully. One way to explain the regime's attitude towards dissent is through Havel's theory on post-totalitarianism. The theory sets forth economic, political and philosophical tools through which post-totalitarian regimes control the functions of society. Havel necessitates the establishment of "pre-political thinking" in order for civil dissent to successfully free the country from post-totalitarianism, a type of thinking which, this paper argues, was doomed to fail in Syria. The regime embodies post-totalitarian elements of consumerism, automatism, ideology, and deference to legal facades to gain legitimacy. However, it differs from post-totalitarianism by defining regime elements around the leader's personality cult, the crony capitalists, and a powerful security apparatus, elements that polarise and divide Syrians. This polarisation prevents Syrians from grounding their dissent in a shared experience of repression, which is the basis of pre-political thinking that Havel deems so necessary for confronting post-totalitarianism. This lacunae in pre-political thinking forces Syrians into violence, polarises some of them into extreme nihilist thinking, and prevents them from developing a civil and peaceful dissent, grounded in a shared human experience.

Introduction

In *The Power of the Powerless*, Václav Havel, the last president of Czechoslovakia and the first President of the Czech Republic, coined the term 'post-totalitarian' to describe the systems of the communist Eastern Bloc. The prefix 'post' signifies the system's fundamental difference from the totalitarianism of 'classical dictatorships'. Post-totalitarianism was developed in a major power bloc controlled by the Soviet Union while classical dictatorships are produced locally within geographical constraints.[1] Havel was politically and intellectually active through the communist rule of Czechoslovakia, especially during the invasion of the Warsaw Pact and the suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968. His essay, *The Power of The Powerless*, is known for criticising the influence of communism on the individual, who is forced to live "within a lie".[2] Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, countries in Russia's sphere of influence, like Syria, since the opening of the Soviet naval military base in Tartus in 1971, continued to live in a post-totalitarian state long after. The regime's survival in Syria after the revolution of 2011, at the cost of the survival of the Syrian people motivates this paper to examine factors that contributed to this outcome. Havel's description of the differences between totalitarianism and post-totalitarianism serves as the basis to understand the survival of

[1] Havel, Václav. "The Power of the Powerless." *East European Politics and Societies* 32, no. 2 (May 2018): 356.
[2] Ibid., 361

one of the most securitised regimes in the world.

The first section of this essay analyses the following features of the post-totalitarian system: (1) the foundation of the system on the encounter between dictatorship and consumerism; (2) its dependency on a notion of automatism that sustains the system; (3) ideology that serves as a method of internal communication as well as a way for the people to relate to the outside world; (4) the role of law as an excusatory façade that legitimises the system and regulates people's behaviour, and finally (5) the Havelian notion of dissent to the post-totalitarian system through a) the "pre-political" encounter consisting of the genuine political thought of dissenters of all professions and backgrounds; b) an appeal to the law for civil disobedience and finally c) the creation of "parallel structures" through which genuine human connections based on shared experiences sets forth a notion of "post-democracy" that gradually replaces post-totalitarianism.

The second section recounts a brief historical outline of Bashar Al-Assad's regime until the Syrian revolution of 2011. The section analyses (1) the economic liberalisation under the Assad regime, framed in the logic of the "social market economy"; (2) the Arab nationalist ideology of the regime; (3) the nature of dissent during the era of Bashar Al-Assad and its failures and finally (4) a brief account on the Syrian Revolution of 2011.

The third section applies the Havelian theory of post-totalitarianism to the brief historical account of the Assad regime. By doing so, the section reveals striking similarities between theory and practice, particularly in the following areas: (1) The role of economic liberalisation in constructing an encounter between Syrian society and a consumerist culture (2) the role of ideology in drawing the Syrian people to the regime's sphere of power and in constructing Syrian identity, reasoning, and conscience and (3) in the deference to law as a tool for civil dissent. After highlighting these similarities, this essay argues that Havel's post-totalitarian system sheds light on the reasons for the outbreak of violence in Syria. Nationalist ideology in Syria, centered on the personality cult of Bashar Al-Assad and his family, establishes clearer lines of conflict between the ruler and the ruled than what is proposed in the post-totalitarian system. These lines of conflict polarise Syrians between opposition, pro-regime, and what's known as the 'silent majority.' Given the historical repression of peaceful dissent, Syrian revolutionary actors cannot develop methods for the "pre-political" thinking that Havel deems so necessary for confronting the regime. They are unable to develop Václav Benda's "parallel structures" to confront the post-totalitarian system. Because of these lacunae in dissent, the section concludes with proposing a conception of 'perpendicular structure' through the rise of 'nihilism' which intersects with the Syrian regime's original structures in its demand for terroristic discipline and conformity. Therefore, the regime's nihilistic oppression of dissent denies the Syrian people the ability to perform the Havelian pre-political thinking that grounds them in a shared experience and rejects the regime's total control of society.

Section 1 - Havel's Notion of Totalitarianism

The post-totalitarian system, Havel argues, was built on foundations established by the "historical encounter between dictatorship and the consumer society".[3] This encounter produced a reordering of values that had existed in the Eastern Bloc according to the hierarchy of values present in the consumerist world. As Havel argues:

[3] Ibid., 367.

> Is it not true that the far-reaching adaptability to living a lie and the effortless spread of social auto-totality have some connection with the general unwillingness of consumption-oriented people to sacrifice some material certainties for the sake of their own spiritual and moral integrity? With their willingness to surrender higher values when faced with the trivializing temptations of modern civilization?[4]

Havel's rhetorical questions affirm that "material certainties"[5] in post-totalitarian communist systems – such as consumer goods, jobs and health care – produce an unwillingness to object to the system's infringement on people's moral and spiritual integrity. Citizens' exposure to services that augment their consumerist behavior allow them to prioritise the "temptations of modern civilisation" over their higher integral and moral values. This exposure allows for the transformation from a classical dictatorship to a post-totalitarian system where people "live a lie" and contribute to an "auto-totality" to survive.

The post-totalitarian system maintains itself through demanding acts of automated discipline and conformity from the people. Every undisciplined act could be construed as a denial of the system. Havel defines the essential characteristic of the system to be "introversion, a movement toward being ever more completely and unreservedly itself [the system], which means that the radius of its influence is continually widening as well".[6] Havel gives the example of the greengrocer who displays the sign of "Workers of the World, Unite!" without attending to its meaning. The greengrocer uses the sign to announce his loyalty to the system. By doing so, he becomes an agent of the process that makes the system more *itself,* that is, more post-totalitarian. Since the greengrocer succumbs to the system, he is part of the self-preservation process. Any action that distracts from the goal of self-preservation is a denial of the system. This self-preservation process is subordinated to a higher power of the post-totalitarian system, the power of automatism. The system preserves itself through the totality of actions that the entire population commits every day without conviction. The slogan is part of a "panorama" that creates a general norm for the behavior of individuals.[7] Any deviance from the collective behavior of citizens is considered abnormal.

In this system, people's contribution to automatism measures their level of involvement. The more significant their actions are, the more involved they are in the system. The position of individuals in the hierarchy of power matters only insofar as to define their involvement in the system. As Havel explains, both the lowest individual and the highest individual in the hierarchy are "unfree" and "enslaved".[8] This means that the end goal of the post-totalitarian system is never to preserve power in the hands of one leader or a group of people but rather to generate a "blind automatism" that drives and maintains the regime. This blurs the line of confrontation between the ruler and the ruled and makes everyone responsible for automatism.

Havel defines ideology as a "specious way of relating to the world. It offers

[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., 360.
[7] Ibid., 364.
[8] Ibid., 366.

human beings the illusion of an identity, of dignity, and of morality while making it easier for them to part with them".[9] The slogan of the greengrocer explains this phenomenon. This new picture that he displays to the world gives the illusion that he has dignity, morality and an identity. However, embracing the system's ideology through an unthinking display of the slogan strips him of those very values. Havel clarifies that in an era when human beings constantly face existential uncertainties, ideology offers clean-cut answers about the phenomena that they observe. By accepting ideology, however, humans deprive themselves of the ability to rely on their reason and conscience, and assume responsibility for their actions. This is because ideology is characterised by "the consignment of reason and conscience to a higher authority".[10] Abandoning one's ability to reason places one in a new reality and life that ideology constructs. This is precisely why Havel characterises accepting ideology and hence the status quo it supports, as equivalent to living within a lie.[11]

Havel highlights the function of legality that the post-totalitarian system plays in (1) producing a complex system of norms, statutes and policies that regulate human life and (2), alongside ideology, manipulating the society and the world by giving the impression that justice is taking place. In his analysis of the role of positive law, Havel argues that:

> The entire role of ritual, facades, and excuses appears… in the section [of the legal code] declaring what he [a citizen] may do and what his or her rights are. Here there is truly nothing but "words, words, words." Yet even that part of the code is of immense importance to the system, for it is here that the system establishes its legitimacy as a whole, before its own citizens, before schoolchildren, before the international public, and before history[12]

Havel contends that the legal code in the system operates similarly to ideology. The law provides an excuse for the manipulation of the people as well as a function to establish the legitimacy of the regime. Moreover, the positive legal code, establishing citizens' rights and responsibilities in the constitution and conventions, is an excuse in front of citizens, civil society and the international community. It depicts the regime as a legitimate enforcer of citizens' rights. The *de facto* legal code however, operates differently. The regime, in fact, limits the ability of lawyers to defend their clients, allows security forces to act arbitrarily and disregards the positive legal statutes that enforce citizens' rights.[13]

What Havel calls "dissident movements"[14] operate on two interconnected principles: (1) a "pre-political confrontation" of each person with their own reasoning and (2) an appeal to legality to establish civil disobedience. In post-totalitarianism, the

[9] Ibid., 359.
[10] Ibid., 357.
[11] Ibid., 361.
[12] Ibid., 393.
[13] Ibid., 391-392.
[14] Havel expresses concern regarding the term 'dissident'. He argues that the label 'dissidents', when constrained to politicians, defies the inclusive nature of dissent that should include nonpoliticians like mathematicians, philosophers, physicians, workers and so on. The genuine political thought of those is invaluable to the organized political movements that regulate the later political confrontation with the regime (Havel 1985, 51).

space for independent political thought is limited, prosecuted and considered detached from individuals' everyday concerns . However, as Havel explains, there is still room for "genuine political impulse:"

> If some genuine political impulse emerges from this or that "pre-political" confrontation… then this is frequently due to these isolated generals without an army who, because they have maintained continuity of political thought in the face of difficulties, can at the right moment enrich the new impulse with the fruits of their own political thinking.[15]

Unlike the people who succumb to the system's ideology, the people who can live within the truth are those who maintain the practice of independent political thought. Instead of consigning their reasoning to the automatism of the system, they reason their political reality through processes that precede political confrontation. These processes take many conscious forms, according to Havel, such as developing spiritual and intellectual interests, or an understanding of the basic social needs of an individual or a group of people and their demands to live with dignity.[16] What happens pre-politically informs and enriches the political encounter with the regime. This is because, in a post-totalitarian system, every human act of thinking, expressing, understanding, is a threat to the system. The basis for all the activities of the "new impulse", is the act of living within the truth of pre-politics. At the right time the realities that allows for automatism, such as consumerism and absence of consciousness of one's dignity and basic social demands confront life's real demands. This confrontation occurs only after developing adequate consciousness of one's needs from the system of governance under which one lives. This confrontation generates political movements that base their dissent on legality.[17]

The dissident movements that Havel highlights, such as Charter 77[18], establish dissent based on an appeal to the civil and human rights that the post-totalitarian system pretends to establish. Havel explains that "because the system cannot do without the law… it is compelled to react in some way to such appeals. Demanding that the laws be upheld is thus an act of living within the truth".[19] To resist the post-totalitarian system, one must dissent within the legal code that provides for positive rights. This is Havel's version of civil disobedience.[20] Since the system preserves the rights of citizens in the legal code, demanding that positive law be applied is an act of peaceful dissent: an act of living within the truth, as opposed to living with the lie of ideology. Havel, therefore, contends that violent revolt is inappropriate in the context of post-totalitarianism. This is mainly because, unlike classical dictatorships where the conflict is clearly established between the ruler and the ruled, the lines of conflict in the post-totalitarian system occur

[15] Ibid., 375.
[16] Ibid., 373
[17] Ibid., 388.
[18] An initiative that published a declaration signed by Czechoslovak intellectuals and public figures, urging the government of Czechoslovakia to abide by the human rights principles it signed on in the Helsinki Accords of 1975.
[19] Ibid., 393.
[20] As opposed to Henry David Thoreau's version of civil disobedience based on the refusal to comply with the law.

within each person participating in the automatism of the system.[21] Any violent revolt would fail to gain popularity because it is a confrontation with society itself. In the case of peaceful dissent, activists gain support because they demand that the law be upheld.

Dissent reaches a point of utmost maturity once it is denied access to existing social structures and once it seeks to establish "parallel structures".[22] While inseparable from the notion of dissent, those structures establish parallel means through the arts, social sciences and publications to reach their audiences. They develop a parallel information network, such as "private universities, parallel trade unions, parallel foreign contacts" and a "parallel economy".[23] Those become the rudiment of a "parallel polis", an alternative state. Those structures are a home for the individual self-management, self-discipline and self-control that replace the post-totalitarian state's management, discipline, and control over its subjects.[24] The new polis is the "rudimentary prefiguration" of a "post-democratic" society where workers genuinely participate in the economic decision-making, relationships are established based on common experiences and the act of living within the truth becomes a basis of moral reconstitution.[25]

Section 2 – Bashar Al-Assad's Syria (2000-2010)

The current Syrian regime of Bashar Al-Assad is rooted in the tight relationship between the state and the Ba'ath Party, established during the era of his father Hafez Al-Assad. The government's failure to provide employment for the growing population generated a consensus that privatisation would solve Syria's dilemma. This was especially true during the mid-1980s after the decline of the oil prices, which forced the regime to approach the private sector, carefully liberalising the economy, and establishing stronger patronage and clientelism with a tight group of business owners.[26] By the end of the 1990s, the reforms attracted a cross-class social base consisting of people dependent on subsidies and a section of the urban bourgeoisie that took advantage of the new investment laws.[27] Of particular importance was the new alliance between Hafez Al-Assad's regime and the Damascene and the Aleppine bourgeoisie.[28] The economic failures of the 1980s, largely due to the statist control over the economy, along with the collapse of the Soviet Union, paved the way for a change in the ideological opposition to liberalisation among the elites. The regime welcomed private investors, privatised larger shares of foreign trade, and set up private-public companies. In addition, investment law no.10 of 1991 waived some import duties and taxes and opened the country for the importation of foreign currency outside state channels.[29]

[21] Ibid., 366.

[22] Term coined by Václav Benda, a Czech mathematician, in his essay "The Parallel Polis."

[23] Ibid., 395.

[24] Ibid., 406.

[25] Ibid., 407.

[26] Haddad, The Formation and Development of Economic Networks in Syria: Implications for Economic and Fiscal Reforms, 1986–2000, In Networks of Privilege in the Middle East: the Politics of Economic Reform Revisited (New York:Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 37-76

[27] Raymond Hinnebusch and Tina Zintl, *Syria from Reform to Revolt: Political Economy and International Relations*. (Syracuse University press, 2014), 286.

[28] Hinnebusch, Raymond A. "The political economy of economic liberalization in Syria." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27, no. 3 (1995): 314..

[29] Ibid., 318.

In the 2000s, Bashar inherited both his father's rule and economic policies. However, Bashar's inaugural speech, emphasizing the need for continued economic reform, marked a transition for the regime's social base. While Hafez's dictatorship aimed at expanding the regime's support among both farmers and business elites, Bashar's reforms narrowed the regime's base. Bashar's emphasis on capital accumulation and development favoured the business elite and neglected the peasantry who relied on redistribution measures. An example is the increase of tax deductions for the rich by cutting subsidies for basic goods.

In 2005, Parliament approved Bashar's plan to transition to a social market economy where the government provides social welfare while the private sector invests in development. Bashar's policies however, led to crony capitalism [30] where the president's family relatives, such as his cousin Rami Makhlouf,[31] enjoyed the graces of privatisation while the less connected urban elite and the lower classes were excluded.[32] The Assad-Makhlouf alliance coincided with a swift removal of the party's old guard and their replacement with Bashar's new clientelist networks. This concentrated patronage, corruption, and opportunities in the hands of the family, rather than the wider party.[33] The heavy involvement of the government in the business sector made the country rank 175 on the International Finance Corporation "Doing Business" survey, with over 60% of businesses reporting corruption as a major constraint.[34] The program vaguely defined the balance between the reduction in central planning and privatization. The domestic private sector, faced with high unemployment rates and inflation, failed to provide sufficient wages for the high living costs.[35] Nonetheless, the government pursued trade liberalization plans and enhanced market competition through integrating Syria into the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (Gafta) and signing trade agreements with Syria's neighbors like Iran and Turkey.[36] Abdullah Al-Dardari, deputy prime minister for economic affairs, emphasized in an interview in 2009 that free economic activities enhance people's ability "to take care of themselves," away from state intervention.[37] Damascus University economist, Elias Najmeh, defended those policies as liberalizing consumer and producer choices and at the same time guaranteeing social and worker rights.[38]

Besides packaging economic reforms with an emphasis on the "social" and the "market", the regime advanced a historical Arab nationalist and socialist agenda. The regime framed economic reforms as being in "continuity" with the socialist policies

[30] Crony capitalism is an economic system based on the close relationship between the government officials and business leaders.

[31] Rami Makhlouf is the owner of the telecommunication private company Syriatel.

[32] Ibid., 40.

[33] Hinnebusch, R. Syria: from 'authoritarian upgrading to revolution?. *International Affairs*, *88*(1), 2012, 99.

[34] Diwan, I., Malik, A., & Atiyas, I. *Crony Capitalism in the Middle East: Business and Politics from Liberalization to the Arab Spring* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

[35] Seifan, Samir. "The Social Consequences of Economic Policies in Syria." Lecture at Syrian Economic Society. Feb 9, 2010.

[36] Samer Abboud, "Locating the Social in the Social Market Economy," in Syria from Reform to Revolt, ed R Hinnebusch and Tina Zintl (Syracuse University Press, 2015), 58.

[37] Q&A with Abdullah Al-Dardari cited by Ibid., 59.

[38] Elias Nejmeh, "Al-Siyaasat Al-Maleeah Fi Suryeeah" [Finance Policy in Syria]. Lecture at Syrian Economic Society, Damascus, Syria, 23 Oct 2003.

endorsed during Hafez's era.[39] Historically, ideology in Syria was based on the tactic of blurring the lines between the party, the state, and the people, united against the historical enemy, Israel. This became a pillar for building Arab nationalism in Syria as well as the state-society pact. Moreover, the regime prided itself for preserving religious and ethnic communities' coexistence, especially when compared to overtly sectarian neighboring regimes in Lebanon and Iraq. The regime consistently framed itself as a secular minority protector regime, guarding religious minorities, especially Christians, from Islamist violence. This served as a legitimation tool for the regime in front of the Syrian people and the international community.[40] Thus, any criticism of the regime was depicted as an infringement on Arab nationalism, on resistance against Israel, Syrian national unity, and the very essence of Syrian identity. [41] Until the 2011 uprising, Syrian nationalism emphasised Bashar's role in preserving Syria's stability in the war-torn Middle East.[42] The combination of nationalist and reformist frameworks through which Bashar's regime depicted itself to the people carry "implicit norms and commitments that shape the Syrian state-society relationship in such a way as to draw non-state actors into the *spheres of power* [italics introduced]".[43] The third section addresses the notion of those spheres.

The nature of dissent before the 2011 uprising can be split into two waves: the Damascus Spring (2000 – 2001) and the second wave which featured the signing of the "Damascus Declaration" by various opposition elements and the establishment of the National Salvation Front of exiled former vice president Khaddam, the Muslim Brotherhood, communist, liberal and leftist parties (2003 – 2007).[44] When Bashar spoke about reforms in his inaugural speech, activists started demanding an expansion of civil society, release of political prisoners and freedom of expression.[45] The government ended the Damascus Spring in 2001 when they arrested Member of Parliament, Maamoun Al-Homsi, for demanding "the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, the curtailment of the Mukhabarat [security forces], and the formation of human rights committee in the parliament".[46] In 2004, secular groups joined the Muslim Brotherhood's platform "Political Project for Syria's Future" demanding a "contractual state that respects international conventions for human rights and institutionalize[s] the separation of powers".[47]

[39] Ibid., 54

[40] Yassin al-Haj Saleh, The Impossible Revolution: Making Sense of the Syrian Tragedy (Oxford University Press, 2017).

[41] Sottimano, Auroroa. "Nationalism and Reform under Bashar al-Asad: Reading the "Legitimacy" of the Syrian Regime." *Syria from Reform to Revolt* 1 (2015): 70-71.

[42] The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent sectarian conflict became representative of the undesirable clash between democracy and Ba'athism. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the victory of Hezbollah, backed by Syrian troops in Lebanon, rallied some Syrians behind Bashar as the only Arab leader who preserved the fight against Israel. Finally, Bashar took advantage of the Gaza war in 2009 to differentiate himself from Arab leaders in a speech in the Doha Summit on Gaza where he described a genocide against Palestinians (Ibid., 74 - 75).

[43] Ibid., 84.

[44] Najib Ghadbian, "Contesting Authoritarianism. Opposition Activism Under Bashar al-Assad, 2000–2010," in Syria from Reform to Revolt, ed R Hinnebusch and Tina Zintl (Syracuse University Press, 2015), 91.

[45] They formed the "Friends of Civil Society" and produced the Manifesto of the 99 to advance their agendas.

[46] Ibid., 93.

[47] Ibid., 95.

The failures of dissent in Syria can be attributed to two reasons: the repression by the regime apparatus and the nature of opposition groups. The regime controlled the licensing of civil society fora and human rights organisations. Moreover, security forces penetrated oppositional assemblies, banned certain activists from traveling, and allowed others.[48] The Assad regime used the legal system of show trials of dissidents where charges included "weakening national morale" and "conveying false news that could debilitate the morale of the nation".[49] Additionally, despite the well-developed cross-sectarian nature of the Syrian dissent movements, the opposition suffered a lack of resources[50] and the necessary cohesion undermined by mistrust, regional interests, and sectarian splits).[51]

The uprising of 2011 stemmed from demonstrations expressing the popular frustration with the regime's despotism , the infringement on civil and political liberties, and the increasing alienation of large strata of the Syrian population.[52] It quickly escalated into a complex civil war with regional and international actors, claiming the lives of more than half a million Syrians, and displacing 11 million people. The regime depicted the peaceful protests as a sabotage to Syria's moral foundations and the Syrian identity,[53] and portrayed protestors as terrorists motivated by the West in a conspiracy to undermine the integrity and independence of Syria.[54] After Syrian tanks entered dissent strongholds to suppress demonstrations violently, the Free Syrian Army was established in July 2011 to overthrow the regime.[55] Although most Syrians were aware of the harm that the regime was inflicting upon the country, some were unprepared to support an armed revolution. Sottimano reinvigorates the term "the Silent Majority" to signify the uncertainty that Syrians experienced when faced with the choice to imagine a political alternative. The rise of "Militant Nihilism," to borrow Yassin Al-Haj Saleh's term, of movements like Da'esh[56] and Jabhat Al-Nusra produced a withdrawal from the values of the Syrian revolution and raised fears of foreign encroachment and conspiracies.[57] Sottimano argues that fear of uncertainty colonises Syrian society through the "ingrained habits" and "unspoken norms and authoritarian practice,"

[48] This tactic created a culture of distrust between activists because it gave the impression that some were collaborating with the regime.

[49] Ibid., 104.

[50] The Syrian opposition lacked access to media outlets to support its causes. Besides having its media outlet jammed by the regime, the channels sponsored by the Syrian opposition lacked monetary resources to operate.

[51] Ellen Lust-Okar. "Divided they Rule: The Management and Manipulation of Political Opposition." Comparative Politics (2004): 159-179.

[52] Aurora Sottimano, "Nationalism and Reform under Bashar al-Assad: Reading the "Legitimacy" of the Syrian Regime," in Syria from Reform to Revolt, ed R Hinnebusch and Tina Zintl (Syracuse University Press, 2015), 68.

[53] Ibid., 71.

[54] Ibid., 85.

[55] Joseph Holliday, Syria's Armed Opposition. Institute for the Study of War, 2012.

[56] The defamatory Arabic name for the so-called "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria."

[57] "Miltant Nihilism" is a term coined by the Syrian political thinker and oppositionist, Yassin Al-Haj Saleh, in his book *The Impossible Revolution: Making Sense of the Syrian Tragedy.* He argues that the rise of extreme violence, strict religiosity, and the withdrawal of trust in the world produced a nihilist tendency to reject reality and take shelter in a "reformed" version of Islam to turn to the base (Qaeda in Arabic) of religion through the pursuit of mass executions, torture, massacre, rape and burning people and property (Al- Haj Saleh 2017, 121 – 122).

demanding passive compliance and conformity.[58] Due to the Assadist legal code that had incarcerated Syrians, fear, cynicism and depoliticization of authoritarian practices became part of some Syrians' reason through their new reality.[59]

Section 3: Post-totalitarianism in Syria

The narrative of the importance of enhancing Syria's "integration in the global economy" and adopting "culture of consumption" reinforces Havel's notion of the encounter between society and consumerism in the post-totalitarian system. Reducing trade barriers exposed Syrians to Havel's conception of "material certainties." The abundance of material goods in post-2000 Syria introduced the Syrian people to the value of encountering consumerism. Some marked this transition as "post-populist," alluding to the absence of the welfare programs traditionally associated with populist authoritarianism.[60] The reform, therefore, marked a transition into a new system where society's encounter with consumerism caused people to reevaluate their priorities. The system prioritised modernisation over democratisation, and replaced dignity and rights with the material goods from the outside world. Moreover, through its public image promoted through the "social market economy" analyzed above, the system convinced the people that the promotion of consumption was necessary to catch up with the increasingly globalised world economy. This promotion of consumption lies at the foundation of Havel's post-totalitarianism.

As mentioned in the second section, a blurring of the lines between the party, the people and state institutions helped construct a unified vision of a nationalist Arab Syria. The historical emphasis on Arab nationalism with socialist elements[61] replaces the Syrian people's ability to determine their own reality and identity through which they relate to the world. This is parallel to Havel's notion of ideology explained in the first section. Syrian morality is framed within the displayed identity of the regime: the preservation of "religious and ethnic coexistence" as well as leading the front of Arab resistance against Israel and the West. By rallying behind the regime, Syrians are given an illusion of an Arab nationalist identity that replaces their ability to politically imagine an identity of their own. Moreover, Because of the usage of the penal code to incarcerate and brutalise Syrians during the Assad regime, Syrians become trapped in a political reality full of fear and hesitation. Their ability to reason is hindered by the lack of advanced and inclusive methods of reasoning about one's political surroundings such as laws, constitutions, political and legal institutions, and civil society activities. Those methods are suppressed by a brutalist regime. Instead, Syrians revert to unimaginative methods of relating to the world, like fear and cynicism. Al-Haj Saleh coined the term "the unreason" to refer to those alternative methods of thinking under authoritarianism.[62] Syrians are forced to conform to the discipline the regime imposes. They take shelter in the regime's ability to

[58] Aurora Sottimano, "Nationalism and Reform under Bashar al-Assad: Reading the "Legitimacy" of the Syrian Regime," in Syria from Reform to Revolt, ed R Hinnebusch and Tina Zintl (Syracuse University Press, 2015), 87.

[59] Ibid., 87.

[60] Raymond Hinnebusch, . "Authoritarian Persistence, Democratization Theory and the Middle East: An Overview and Critique." Democratization 13, no. 3 (2006): 374.

[61] To this day, school children in Syria chant "Wihda, Hurriyah, Ishtirakiyah" – "Unity, Freedom, Socialism" every morning when asked by the chant leaders to identify the goals of the Syrian people.

[62] Yassin al-Haj Saleh, The Impossible Revolution: Making Sense of the Syrian Tragedy (Oxford University Press, 2017), 193.

draw them into its sphere of power, producing a Syrian auto-totality, much like the post-totalitarian auto-totality that preserves the system of dictatorship through the social and political acquiescence of every person in the system. Under post-totalitarianism, Syrians become unable to produce new and imaginative political solutions for their reality. They are forced to release this right to develop national consciousness in front of the regime's auto-totality. Instead, they become forced to relate to the world around them through the Arab nationalist ideology that the regime forced upon them.

Despite the failure to attract "the Silent Majority", the dissent movements before the 2011 Syrian revolution displayed elements of Havel's notion of dissent, namely the deference to legality. Notwithstanding intensified regime repression between 2000 and 2010, movements across ideological and sectarian lines, especially the Muslim Brotherhood's "The Political Project for the Future Syria," emphasised the importance of domestic means to advance the equal treatment of citizens under the law and the implementation of ratified human rights conventions. Instead of succumbing to the regime's usage of the law as a repression tool, Syrian dissident movements used the law of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant for Economic, Cultural and Social Rights, both ratified by Syria in 1969. Furthermore, dissent movements requested a repeal of the emergency law that denied Syrian detainees the right to due process. Similarly, the *political* dissent in Czechoslovakia (as opposed to the pre-political discussed below), namely Charter 77, appealed to positive human and civil rights as a tool for civil disobedience.

Despite the similarities between the post-totalitarian system and the regime, a close analysis of Havel's post-totalitarianism reveals a few reasons that could explain Syrians' appeal to violence. First, unlike post-totalitarianism, the Syrian regime is produced locally and its ideology surrounds the cult of the leader. Second, the Syrian dissident movements encountered the absence of two phases of Havel's dissent: the pre-political confrontation and the development of "parallel structures."

As shown in the second section, Bashar Al-Assad's regime ruled Syria between 2000 and 2010 despite narrowing its social base to himself and his close relatives. This means that by 2011, the lines of confrontation between the ruler and the ruled became clearly defined. This reality contrasts Havel's notion of the inappropriateness of violent revolt in post-totalitarianism, where the lines of conflict "run through each person." However, Bashar's personality cult, the power of "crony capitalists," and the superiority of the security apparatus are identifiable features of the ruler. The question is whether Syrians collectively were prepared to confront the reality of the needed struggle against this regime.

Havel's emphasis on the importance of the pre-political confrontation reveals a weakness in Syrian dissent movements: the inability to accumulate genuinely independent political thought, grounded in people's determination to collectively live within truth through thinking about their basic social and spiritual needs, to develop an understanding of how this regime hinders their ability to live freely, and then use this thinking to confront the regime politically later. As highlighted above, Syrian dissent movements lacked the necessary resources and capacity to reach the constituency of the regime among the elites and the masses. This disconnect was largely due to the inability of Syrian dissent to voice a unified agenda when the Syrian uprising was peaceful. This means that the Syrian Revolution lacked the unified and coherent political thought coming from politicians and non-politicians, like artists, social scientists, lawyers and

workers whose role is indispensable for the Havelian political encounter. These elements of dissent were polarised by the regime's repression, ideology, and automatism. The pre-political thought was feared, oppressed after 40 years of totalitarianism. The lack of this pre-political thinking aborted the revolution and produced what I call "the perpendicular structures."

Due to the lack of unified political imagination in the methods of dissent, and through confronting the brutality of the regime's repression, Syrians were unable to produce Benda's "parallel structures," such as parallel publishing houses, magazines, public fora, economy and finally a parallel polis. For Havel, this is an indispensable step to reestablish a genuine human connection between people based on shared experiences. Therefore, the lacuna in political thinking produced deference to alternative, nihilist, and militant structures. The producer of this desperation to non-institutional or legal structures is the regime, channelling people into sectarianism and violent nihilism. Those structures heightened people's desperation to cling to groups, polarised into extremist, violent and already-established institutions like Dae'sh and the Assadist militias, also known as Shabiha. Those structures defer to unimaginable crimes and violations of human rights. However, this "militant nihilism" is familiar to the regime and is *perpendicular* to its structure. The Assadist original structure intersects with those nihilist elements at one point: they both demand conformity from those whom they rule by acts of terror. They both demand discipline through which human conscience is released to a higher, terroristic authority that regulates life's real aims. This unfortunate development in the Syrian uprising deprived Syrians of expressing their national and human consciousness through a shared experience under authoritarianism. It deprived them of their inherent right to dissent civilly and peacefully.

Conclusion

Havelian post-totalitarianism, when applied to the Syrian regime of Bashar Al-Assad, reveals similarities between the theory and practice. First, Bashar's economic liberalization describes a Havelian notion of encounter between society and consumerism. Second, parallel to the post-totalitarian ideology, Arab nationalism functions as a façade replacing Syrian identity, reason, and conscience with the Syrian regime's identity. Third, the nature of dissent during the Bashar Al-Assad era and the post-totalitarian system was based on an appeal to legality to establish human and civil rights. The application of the Havelian theory to Assad's Syria reveals two caveats that limit Syrian dissent. Since ideology in Syria is based on the personality cult of the leader, the lines of conflict between the ruled and the ruler are clearer than in the post-totalitarian system where those lines run through each person who contributes to the post-totalitarian automatism.

Moreover, the inability of Syrian dissent elements to perform the pre-political thinking due to the regime's brutality and suppression and the disconnect between the people and the opposition reveal an inherent flaw in the nature of the political confrontation with the regime. Unfortunately, instead of producing 'parallel structures,' Syria witnessed the development of structures foreign to the values that demonstrators sacrificed their lives for. Although Syria's conflict is far from being captured by domestic factors, the Havelian theory inspires a framework for Syrians to reimagine new ways of civil disobedience through the pre-political thinking based on shared human experiences, and a shared struggle to live in Truth and abandon the regime's automatism.

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Understanding the cause of Iraq's 'October Revolution' during the Adil Abdul-Mahdi administration

Zainab Mehdi

Introduction

In the wake of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the US invested billions of dollars to mould Iraq into the democratic society that the Bush administration envisioned. Without a doubt, the promotion of democracy was forcefully imposed[1] on Iraq and it did not substantially engage with the challenges associated with promoting democracy in post-conflict settings.[2] In contrast to author Robert D. Kaplan's argument that democracy "cannot be imposed overnight anywhere",[3] the Bush administration believed otherwise. In his speech on the 20th Anniversary of The National Endowment for Democracy in 2003, Bush asserted his confidence in democratisation in Iraq by saying that "Iraqi democracy will succeed".[4] The reality of this democratic 'experiment,' however, was quite different. Behind the mask of so-called democracy, Iraq evolved into a kleptocracy, which as this policy paper argues, led to the formation of an ineffective state. This argument further explores the role of Iraq's ineffectiveness as a state in the onset of the 2019 October protests.

This policy paper will first offer a summary of post-2003 Iraq by shedding light on how heightened sectarianism via the *Muhasasa Ta'ifa*, an ethno-sectarian quota system aimed at disseminating cabinet positions in the name of nationhood and stability, has hindered the democratisation process. Using two examples of the overlooked needs of protesters during the Adil Abdul-Mahdi administration in particular, this paper will then demonstrate that state ineffectiveness, deriving from the *Muhasasa*, caused the 2019 protests, also known as the 'October Revolution'. This study focuses on protesters' demands to end foreign intervention in the country and improve basic services in Iraq. In the course of doing so, it will clarify how militias' grip on Iraq undermined the Iraqi government's capability to function as an effective state and thus meet the protesters' needs. Finally, the paper will conclude by considering whether the revolution will succeed under the current administration of Mustafa Al-Kadhimi.

Iraq: Post-2003

Even though post-2003 Iraq notionally underwent democratisation via the US-led

[1] Katerina Dalacoura, "US democracy promotion in the Arab Middle East since 11 September 2001: a critique," *International Affairs* 81, no. 5 (October 2005): 963.

[2] Nicole B. Sedaca and Nicolas Bouchet, *Holding steady? US democracy promotion in a changing world*, (London: Chatham House, 2014) https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/home/chatham/public_html/sites/default/files/170214DemocracyPromotion.pdf.

[3] Robert D. Kaplan, "Barren Ground for Democracy," *The New York Times*, accessed 8 January 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/14/opinion/barren-ground-for-democracy.html.

[4] George W. Bush, "President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and Middle East" (speech, 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, United States Chamber of Commerce, Washington, D.C., November 6, 2003).

invasion and the removal of Saddam Hussein from power, the country still lacks stability. Not only does this show the failure of US-led democratisation, but it also highlights the prescience of Bush's 20th Anniversary speech where despite his optimism, he predicted that the failure of democracy in Iraq would "embolden terrorists around the world, increase dangers to the American people, and extinguish the hopes of millions in the region".[5] By way of example, de-Ba'athification, a post-2003 US policy of removing Ba'ath party members from Iraqi government positions, encouraged unemployed Sunnis who once held professional jobs under Hussein's regime to join in the fight against occupied rule and gain access to a flood of arms and material.[6]

Placing the *Muhasasa Ta'ifa* and democracy promotion under the same umbrella has consistently been problematic. As Adrian Karatnycky argues, "Democracy has been significantly more successful in monoethnic societies than in ethnically divided and multi-ethnic states".[7] He further explains that "in ethnically divided and multi-ethnic societies, political parties tend to form around ethnic allegiances".[8] Quite evidently, this prioritisation serves as a barrier to the success of a country's democratic transition. In the context of Iraq, this prioritisation can be seen via the *Muhasasa*, a system of sectarian apportionment set up after the US-led invasion which has unofficially structured government establishment since 2005. Built around what can best be defined as an elite bargain, the political parties selected to represent the *Muhasasa* were handed over the responsibility of diverting politics away from dispute and moving the country towards steady coexistence. For such a transition to succeed, Stefan Lindemann states that elite bargains must be inclusive, and hence encourage stability.[9] In the case of Iraq, incorporating an inclusive elite bargain into Iraqi politics was going to be difficult because of the exclusionary nature of the *Muhasasa*. According to Lindemann, exclusive bargains, the opposite of inclusive bargains, eliminate a number of crucial politicians and their supporters, cultivating "antagonism and violent conflict."[10] The post-2003 political arrangement created by the US (the *Muhasasa*) produced exactly this outcome. In his words, Toby Dodge argues that the post-2003 settlement was created to dismiss indigenous political elites from government positions.[11] It was thus only inevitable that Iraq's elite bargain fell under the category of exclusive, especially if one bears in mind the sectarian civil war that followed after the *Muhasasa*'s implementation.

As expected, Iraq's consociational system sparked anxiety across Iraq's newly

[5] Bush, "President Bush Discusses Freedom."

[6] Russell Crandall, *America's Dirty Wars: Irregular Warfare from 1776 to the War on Terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 374.

[7] Adrian Karatnycky, "Muslim Countries and the Democracy Gap," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 1 (January 2002): 107.

[8] Karatnycky, "Muslim Countries," 110.

[9] Stefan Lindemann, "Do Inclusive Elite Bargains Matter? A Research Framework for Understanding the Causes of Civil War in Sub-Saharan Africa", Crisis States Discussion Paper 15, Crisis States Research Centre, London School of Economics and Political Science, February 2008, https://www.lse.ac.uk/international-development/Assets/Documents/PDFs/csrc-discussion-papers/dp15-Do-Inclusive-Elite-Bargains-Matter.pdf.

[10] Lindemann, "Do Inclusive Elite Bargains Matter?" 2, 21.

[11] Toby Dodge, *Iraq: From War to a New Authoritarianism* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2012), 41.

emboldened civil society. For instance, there was much discussion on the potential harm that the new political arrangement would do to government proficiency; observers critiqued the part of the *Muhasasa* which allowed council representatives to be selected solely for their party allegiance rather than their professional abilities.[12] Unfortunately, initial anxieties about the system have become all too true today. Since the establishment of the *Muhasasa*, party members have colonized state institutions by taking advantage of access to economic capital, either by rapidly expanding the public sector payroll or stealing public funds.[13]

Against this background of rampant corruption that has destabilized Iraq, the ruling elite within the *Muhasasa* have adopted the following: control over participation, loyalty over merit, and private gains over the public good. In other words, the ruling elite has become too preoccupied with its internal struggles rather than fulfilling its duty of transitioning the country from a dictatorship to a democracy. As a result of this approach to nation building, Iraq has become a kleptocracy and, by consequence, an ineffective state. Commenting on the impact of state ineffectiveness in Iraq, Dodge adds that state institutions have now become fragile and incapable of providing essential government services to the bulk of the Iraqi population.[14]

Today, frustrations over this form of state ineffectiveness can be seen in the ongoing Iraq protests, which first broke out in Baghdad's Tahrir Square on 1 October 2019. Before drawing the link between state ineffectiveness as the cause of the October Revolution, it is important to define state ineffectiveness.

Defining State Ineffectiveness

According to Gizachew Tiruneh, state ineffectiveness refers to the fragility of the state or political leadership in fulfilling the needs and aspirations of the people. In addition, states that are ineffective and constantly susceptible to revolution deny public requests for political transformation and economic welfare and resort to brutality to suppress opposition.[15]

Using these characteristics as a means of measuring state ineffectiveness, Iraq's October Revolution has reflected the Iraqi state's inability to address protesters' demands: improved basic services and an end to corruption and foreign interference. During Adil Abdul-Mahdi's administration, such failures can be best understood via the examples described in the following paragraphs.

Ending *any* and *all* Foreign Meddling in Iraqi Affairs

The chant, "We want a homeland", repeated amongst Iraqi protesters highlighted the melancholic nostalgia for an independent Iraq and the belief that foreign intervention in

[12] Dodge, Iraq: *From War*, 42.
[13] Toby Dodge, "Muhasasa Ta'ifiya and its Others: Domination and Contestation in Iraq's political field," in *Religion, Violence, and the State in Iraq* (POMEPS Studies, 2019), 40-41, https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/POMEPS_Studies_35.1.pdf.
[14] Dodge, "Muhasasa Ta'ifiya and its Others," 38.
[15] Gizachew Tiruneh, "Social Revolutions: Their Causes, Patterns, and Phases," *SAGE Open* 4, no. 3 (September 2014): 8.

Iraq upheld Iraq's image as a failed and weak state.[16]

Focusing particularly on Iranian involvement in Iraq, one of Iran's post-Saddam Hussein policy goals has been to ensure that any subsequent Iraqi administration is frail and beholden to Iranian interests.[17] One means of achieving this goal has been through 'Lebanonisation,' a term that originated in 1983 that describes the process of a country's disintegration into civil war or failed state, thereby leaving a country ungovernable. Iran has been able to sustain this outcome via the expansion and entrenchment of a Hezbollah-like, Iranian-controlled militia, which includes militia groups such as Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH). Through the strength of these militias, Iran's Lebanonization of Iraq enables the "utter paralysis of the political process, which in turn paralyses the wider governance and economic systems of the country".[18]

Hisham al-Hashimi, an Iraqi historian and researcher who has counselled the Iraqi government, conducted the most significant research on militia control thus far. Before his assassination by gunmen on 8 July 2020, al-Hashimi discovered that these Iranian-backed militias "have wrested pervasive control over much of the Iraqi economy: from airport customs, construction projects, oilfields, sewage, water, highways, colleges, public and private property, tourism sites, presidential palaces; to the extortion of restaurants, cafes, cargo trucks, fishermen, farmers, displaced families".[19]

Militias not only control much of Iraq's economy, but they also control much of the country's political and social sectors. This has "prevented the government from enacting and implementing many of the reforms that it promised",[20] said Omar al Nidawi, Programme Manager at the Enabling Peace in Iraq Center, during the first few weeks of the protest outbreaks across Iraq. These circumstances demonstrate how the presence of militias operating outside state control has further aggravated Iraq's state ineffectiveness under the *Muhasasa*. Indeed, as long as the militias continue to weaken the state via its process of Lebanonization, meeting protesters' needs will be challenging. Thus far, the state's inability to undermine Iranian-backed militias has enabled death squads in Baghdad and Basra to discharge snipers on Iraq's rooftops and to use dangerous weapons to target and assassinate Iraqi activists.

The Peaceful Call for Basic Human Rights

Seventeen years after the transformation of Iraqi leadership, Iraqi citizens are deprived

[16] Taif Alkhudary, "'No to America…No to Iran': Iraq's Protest Movement in the Shadow of Geopolitics," *Middle East Centre*, July 2, 2020, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2020/01/20/no-to-americano-to-iran-iraqs-protest-movement-in-the-shadow-of-geopolitics/.

[17] Kenneth M. Pollack, "Prospects for Increased Iranian Influence in Iraq," Brookings, last modified November 15, 2011, https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/prospects-for-increased-iranian-influence-in-iraq/.

[18] Kenneth M. Pollack, "Iraq Situation Report, Part II: Political and Economic Developments," Brookings, last modified March 29, 2016, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/03/29/iraq-situation-report-part-ii-political-and-economic-developments/.

[19] Hassan Hassan, "How Iraq's Top ISIS Scholar Became a Target for Shiite Militias," SyriacPress, last modified October 9, 2020, https://syriacpress.com/blog/2020/10/09/how-iraqs-top-isis-scholar-became-a-target-for-shiite-militias/.

[20] Bilge N. Kotan, "Why Are Iraqis Angry at Iran?," TRT World, last modified October 16, 2019, https://www.trtworld.com/middle-east/why-are-iraqis-angry-at-iran-30527.

of their basic rights, including access to clean and safe drinking water, reliable electricity supply, and guaranteed employment. Focusing on the latter demand in particular, this paper considers J. Mac Skelton and Zmkan Ali Saleem's 2019 report on unemployment in Basra, particularly in the oil sector.[21] As mentioned in the previous section, al-Hashimi noted that amongst several other factors, militias have consolidated their control over Iraq's oil fields in the country's post-2003 political field. Such control has disrupted the recruitment of Iraqis within the sector; Skelton and Saleem found that those with militia or party affiliations gained employment much more easily.[22]

In an attempt to meet citizens' protest demands, particularly regarding employment in the oil sector, the former Minister of Oil Thamir Ghadhban said in 2019 that 3,200 further jobs in the sector would be provided. Those granted employment opportunities included graduates of specialized colleges, various engineering fields, and oil training institutes. Touching on the recruitment of Iraqis within international oil companies in particular, Harry Istepanian, Senior Fellow of Iraq Energy Institute, said that "international oil companies hired some Iraqis but not in thousands. The type of work that international oil companies are doing in Iraq's oil fields is not labour intensive".[23] Despite the hiring process, however, Istepanian added that a key issue still existed within the oil sector: most employment was still decided through either tribal or political groups affiliated with militias.[24] Given these circumstances, militias' sustained grip over job recruitment has and will further complicate governmental efforts to meet Iraqis' need for steady, sustainable employment.

Unless there is persistent and synchronized pressure from Baghdad, this second sign of state ineffectiveness, namely nepotism, is unlikely to change. Additionally, this form of state ineffectiveness will only escalate Iraqis' involvement in protest movements. Although the release of Iraq's new White Paper shows Al-Kadhimi's commitment to meeting the protesters' demands by implementing strategic reforms and creating sustainable job opportunities,[25] the Prime Minister must first complete the ongoing reorganization of Iraq's broken and disintegrated governance system. Upon completion, the Iraqi government may then gradually transcend its current ineffectiveness. Indeed, if Iraq were to become a more effective state, only then would the administration be able to consider successfully undermining the influence of militias, not only within the oil sector but across all other economic and social sectors as well.

Conclusion

The American attempt to democratise Iraq after the toppling of Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime failed in several critical regards. Under the *Muhasasa*, which was imported into the country with the backing of US forces, Iraq saw the intensification of

[21] J. M. Skelton and Zmkan A. Saleem, *The Politics of Unemployment in Basra: Spotlight on the Oil Sector,* (IRIS Policy Report, 2019).

[22] Skelton and Saleem, "*The Politics of Unemployment*."

[23] Harry Istepanian, Email interview, November 24, 2020.

[24] Istepanian, Email interview.

[25] Ali Al-Mawlawi, "Can the White Paper Deliver on Economic Reform?," 1001 Iraqi Thoughts, last modified October 16, 2020, https://1001iraqithoughts.com/2020/10/14/can-the-white-paper-deliver-on-economic-reform/.

sectarian violence and the entrenchment of a ruling elite more concerned with gaining even more wealth than committing to internal cooperation. The persistent internal strife among the *Muhasasa*'s ruling elite in a country now considered to be kleptocratic has played a key role in the Iraqi state's ineffectiveness. This outcome, combined with the growth and strength of militia groups, has resulted in the negligence of Iraqi citizens' needs – among them, the end to foreign intervention in the country as well as the peaceful call for basic human rights – and the onset of the October Revolution in 2019 that continues today.

An important future consideration will be the range of possible outcomes to this new 'revolution' – to what extent will the protesters' demands be met by the current government of Mustafa Al-Kadhimi? Realistically speaking, Iraq's October Revolution will struggle to succeed if Al-Kadhimi does not dismantle the profoundly unpopular *Muhasasa*. Disbanding the *Muhasasa*, however, will be challenging and has already proven to be difficult. For example, before becoming the newly elected Prime Minister of Iraq, Al-Kadhimi backed down on this proposed reform when the Iran-backed Fatah coalition warned that they would reject Al-Kadhimi's candidacy.[26] As a result of Al-Kadhimi's decision to back down, corruption continued to siphon government funds and postpone the much-needed infrastructure plans. These thus led to restrictions with regard to access to the afore-mentioned basic rights of protesters, such as reliable electricity and clean water. Despite efforts to reorganize the system, the success of the revolution will be further complicated by the presence of powerful Iran-backed militias in Iraq. Although the Iraqi forces have been said to be weak and divided by factional infighting[27]; the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), an umbrella organization and a recognized branch of the Iraqi armed forces, comprise one of the most powerful groups in Iraq, including the aforementioned KH and AAH. Despite theoretically being under Al-Kadhimi's command, the PMF have taken advantage of their strength by acting alone as an autonomous leadership, thereby hindering the success of the revolution. If current tactics to control Iranian-backed militias are not pursued, state ineffectiveness will persevere, and by consequence, taint Al-Kadhimi's proposed strategy of reforming Iraq incrementally.

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[26] Nathalie Bussemaker, "Iraq's New Government: What to Know," Council on Foreign Relations, last modified August 11, 2020, https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/iraqs-new-government-what-know.

[27] Pesha Magid, "Islamic State Aims for Comeback Amid Virus-Expedited U.S. Withdrawal," Foreign Policy, last modified April 6, 2020, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/06/iraq-islamic-state-comeback-coronavirus-us-withdrawal/.

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The contentious life of Basij revolutionary politics in poor neighbourhoods of Iran

Ahmad Moradi

Waves of unrest shook Iran in December 2018 and late 2019. Although protests never appeared to attract more than a few thousand protesters, the radical chants and geographic dispersal of the recent unrest were unprecedented in the history of the Islamic Republic. In a rapid escalation of the turmoil, the initial demands for economic relief took on a more radicalised, political tone against the regime, resonating with both frustrated youth and destitute working-class people across the country. In addition to economic and political grievances, Iran's effort to 'export' its revolution across the Middle East was also causing internal backlash: the dominant chant among protesters was "no Gaza, no Lebanon, my life for Iran." Almost a decade after the 2009 uprisings, when this chant was first used, protesters objected explicitly to the channelling of scarce resources to distant conflicts at the expense of Iranians' economic well-being.

Not only were these protests unprecedented in scale, occurring nation-wide in over a hundred cities, but new urban areas—particularly low-income neighbourhoods—became hotbeds of revolt. Widely circulated images of demonstrations in these neighbourhoods revealed the level of discontent that runs deep among the urban poor. The street showdowns between protesters and plain-clothed militiamen of the Basij, which comprises part of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, not only illustrated the new demography of the protests, but also pointed to the paradoxes of revolutionary politics in Iran. How should one confront the poor in the name of the Revolution, when the poor are supposed to be the 'true heirs of the Revolution'?[1] To find an answer, we should investigate the contemporary dilemmas and contradictions of Basij revolutionary politics in poor urban settings, where both the poor and the so-called revolutionaries who confronted them had the same complaints about internal politics and economic mismanagement. Formed in 1979 as a paramilitary force to protect the Revolution, the Basij may not share protesters' critical views on Iran's regional ambitions. However, its members no doubt join the poor in harshly criticising the state for failing to deliver on its revolutionary promises to the poor in the face of a free-falling economy and glaring economic inequality.

Method

I conducted research with the Basij[2] in several low-income neighbourhoods on the peripheries of Tehran, as well as two small towns in the northeast and south of Iran. My research investigated the way in which the Basij relies on its vast networks and resources to deliver infrastructural, cultural, and social services to the poor. More specifically I

[1] A reference to Khomeini's saying about the poor

[2] I carried out over fourteen months of fieldwork between 2015 and 2016, which built on three months of fieldwork in 2013, and was updated with four months of follow up research in summer and fall of 2019.

wanted to understand how members of the Basij, institutionally and individually, strive to uphold the revolutionary promise of social justice for the poor, while 'persuading' them that the revolution is still relevant to their life. My main research sites were:

a. The Basij of Neighbourhoods, the smallest operational units which serve as both structures of social control and places designed to recruit and train revolutionary forces;
b. The Basij of Construction, which is active in delivering infrastructural services to the rural areas and informal settlements in cities;
c. Mosques where I could follow centrally planned and locally executed cultural activities such as film screenings, programmes for the youth, religious or political gatherings and, in the period of 2015–2016, the intermittent recruitment of Iranian and Afghan fighters to Syria

I conducted over eighty informal interviews with different members of the Basij from all walks of life. They ranged from men who actively participated in the Revolution and war in the 1980s to men, aged twenty-five to forty years, who were university-educated residents of the poor neighbourhoods, described aptly by Asef Bayat as "middle class poor".[3]

Observing on-the-ground administration of the Basij programmes, everyday dilemmas and ongoing negotiations of the Basij alongside locals in low-income neighbourhoods, enabled me to realise the internal paradox of the Basij. This was the inevitable paradox that revolutionaries typically faced, as they ventured into keep a balance between revolutionary zeal and obdurate state bureaucracy.

Confronted with failures of statecraft, the Basij is caught between supporting the regime as a whole (*nizam*)[4] and contesting the state[5] that administers it. This position seems highly contradictory. However, it becomes less divergent when we consider the following: although the commitment of the Basij to the Revolution relies on authoritative doctrinal training, this does not prevent them from expressing their dissatisfaction towards the ways Iranian authorities institutionalise and administer revolutionary ideals. The Basij thus occupies an ambiguous yet special position, simultaneously placed within and outside the state, enabling the Basij to act as the state while maintaining a critical distance from it. Such an ambiguous position is challenging, and makes the Basij's revolutionary politics rife with tensions and conflicts. Through analysis of these tensions in the following two examples, I show how the Basij's effort at maintaining the

[3] Asef Bayat, "Plebeians of the Arab Spring," *Current Anthropology* 56, no. S11 (2015). https://doi.org/10.1086/681523.

[4] *Nizam* refers to the statehood of the Islamic Republic. *Nizam* appears frequently in the daily conversation of the Basijis, for instance, 'protecting the *nizam* is our priority' or 'I am ready to give up my life for the *nizam*'. In this sense, *nizam* is perceived as ideal by Basijis and no one is permitted to question its legitimacy.

[5] The state, an assemblage of elected and non-elected governing bodies, is responsible to effectively administer and translate particular sets of revolutionary ideals of *nizam* into concrete practices. I distinguish between *nizam* and the state, in order to show Basijis do not dispute the legitimacy of *nizam* (i.e. the regime or the Islamic Republic of Iran), but the legitimacy of those who currently 'run' (parts of) it, who can sometimes be portrayed as 'unworthy' of their political position.

Revolution is intricately linked to perpetual contestation of the state that administers and governs the Revolution. Such perpetual contentions are not close to being resolved in low-income neighbourhoods, where the Basij and the poor meet.

The Basij of Construction

Similar to the experience of many revolutionary movements of the twentieth century, Iran's Revolution was built on developmental promises to marginalised populations.[6] Numerous institutions and organisations were shaped around this promise after the Revolution, which later became a conglomerate of quasi-private financial institutions.[7] [8] One such organisation that started off as a revolutionary institution and later became involved in massive economic enterprises is the Basij of Construction.[9] Ever since its formation, one key activity of the Basij of Construction has been to encourage and organise its members to volunteer in provisioning infrastructural services to the poor. These services range from building schools in border towns and villages to fixing the ceiling of a house in one of the many satellite towns of Tehran characterised by informal settlements, overpopulation, and lack of amenities. Supervised directly by the Revolutionary Guards, the Basij of Construction organises regular week-long trips, known as 'jihadi trips,' to designated areas.[10] Basiji volunteers are usually selected from high school or university students, many of whom come from extremely poor families. I accompanied different groups of Basiji volunteers in ten short trips at the North East border of Iran and on the peripheries of Tehran.

Basijis often justified their participation in jihadi trips by claiming it was part of their revolutionary duty to help the poor, which politicians often shrug off. Basiji volunteering is usually oriented towards spaces where the state has failed to deliver services, particularly infrastructural ones. 'I'm sure none of the authorities have ever stepped foot in here, was a sentence that I often heard from Basijis when they encountered scenes of rural and urban destitution.

The immediate castigation of authorities by Basijis should be viewed in a broader

[6] See: Ervand Abrahamian, Iran between Two Revolutions (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1982); Donald L Donham, Marxist Modern: an Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Lisa Rofel, Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China after Socialism (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999); Stephen Kotkin, Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Marina Gold, People and State in Socialist Cuba: Ideas and Practices of Revolution (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Alice Wilson, Sovereignty in Exile: a Saharan Liberation Movement Governs (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

[7] Kevan Harris, A Social Revolution: Politics and the Welfare State in Iran (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017).

[8] Kevan Harris, "Lineages of the Iranian Welfare State: Dual Institutionalism and Social Policy in the Islamic Republic of Iran." *Social Policy & Administration* 44, no. 6 (2010): 727–45. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9515.2010.00740.x.

[9] Eric Lob, Iran's Reconstruction Jihad: Rural Development and Regime Consolidation after 1979 (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[10] To choose a location, jihadi groups need to consult the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee, which was formed in the early years of the Revolution to alleviate poverty in rural and urban areas (Harris 2012, 136). The Relief Committee provides each jihadi group with a chart that categorises Iranian cities and villages on the scale of 1 to 9, with 9 indicating the most deprived areas. Jihadi groups often selected locations which fall between 7 to 9.

context. As the Basijis moved to poorer areas to address the grievances of the poor, who supposedly comprise the base of the Islamic Republic's supporters, they advanced a strong discourse—the inadequacy of the state. By delivering infrastructural services to the poor, Basijis imitate and enact state practices. Such state-like practices, however, are rooted in the Basijis' profound suspicion that the state can fulfil its duty to cater to the needs of the citizens.

The act of highlighting state inadequacy while duplicating its practices can be traced back to a particular history that has led the Basij to oscillate between being inside and outside of the state. This is a special positioning that creates a space in which the jihadi practices of the Basij can pertain to both state presence and neglect. Since the 1979 Revolution, so-called revolutionaries has firmly believed that a firm that they should work outside or alongside state bodies. This is due to the state being an institution that is either not yet consolidated (in the case of the early years of the revolution) or too large and slow to adequately serve the poor.

This uneasy position vis-à-vis the state was a common topic in my ethnographic observations. It became particularly visible when locals asked volunteers for help with their unfinished homes, broken ceilings, or construction around their homes. It was clear that all their grievances could not be redressed by the jihadi group. Yet, Basijis' reaction to the needy community was a combination of compassion towards the condition of the poor and critique of the state for its shortcomings. Discussions among the Basijis who had to decide if they were able to help people with their requests would always turn towards the injustice engendered by corrupt politicians: 'we should send the politicians to live in exile here and directly respond to these requests, instead of staying in their luxury houses in the North of Tehran was a common argument.

Insofar as jihadi projects of the Basij are designed to render the *nizam* desirable in the eyes of the public, in most cases, they orient Basijis towards highlighting the failure of the state to deliver its promises. Basijis go to great lengths to encourage and enforce justice as a collective ethos and embrace it as an essential component of revolution and democratic citizenship. Witnessing visible discrepancies between expectations and the existing reality, Basijis' notion of justice provides a ground for contesting and questioning the state. It was in this context that the jihadi infrastructural projects became avenues for Basijis and the locals to exchange views on politicians, unfulfilled revolutionary promises, and the concerning direction toward which the country is going. A significant locus for these interactions was the Basij of Neighbourhoods, which I witnessed first-hand as part of my field research.

The Basij of Neighbourhoods

Since the immediate years after the Revolution, almost all urban neighbourhoods in Iran have hosted a paramilitary base of the Basij. Known as the Basij of Neighbourhoods, they were one of the first undertakings of the revolutionaries after taking control of cities in 1979. They envisioned the units to be central in policing the urban social order. In addition to acting as 'revolutionary bulwarks' against any security threats arising in each neighbourhood, Basij bases in the neighbourhoods played an active role in mobilising

and recruiting volunteers during the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988). In the post-war years, the Basij maintained its presence in these neighbourhoods and its bases continued to serve as spaces for cultural, political, and military training.

Whereas paramilitary forces usually consolidate their power in the absence of a functioning state and police,[11] [12] the Basij has, since its formation, operated closely with state institutions in security provision, for which a special quota is designated in the annual national budget. Nonetheless, operations of the Basij are not restricted to the provision of security, as they have gradually become a massive network of institutions involved in administrative tasks. The Basij of Neighbourhoods is inevitably part of this bureaucratic network.

The sheer number of Basij bases in neighbourhoods and the extension of their interventions have given the Basij a prominent role in regulating collective life at the neighbourhood level. Such a role is substantially reinforced by the distinctive technologies of control they employ, an example of which are the hierarchies of membership. In every Basij base in the country there is an office responsible for membership. Once registered, one can become a regular Basiji. However, if one's intention is to benefit from the loans, a reduction in months of military service, and jobs that are associated with the role there are special trainings that need to be completed. These trainings last almost six months, provided one has already completed the pedagogical courses on the Islamic teachings and Revolution. Otherwise, this process can take years and often ends in failure. Therefore, one of the main tasks of the Basij bases is to keep a record of its members' activities.

A constant demand of those visiting the Basij cadre is to upgrade their membership, as a prerequisite to sorting out their pending requests for bank loans and other related benefits. The staff of the Basij base often articulated a sense of responsibility for their bureaucratic roles. They acted as gatekeepers of revolutionary and Islamic ideology that residents of neighbourhoods failed to learn as part of the courses offered at the Basij bases. At the same time, they also expressed their deep dissatisfaction at how the Basij had become institutionalised. More often than not, it was the Basij cadres who would start complaining about elite members of the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij who were unaware of rampant social problems in poor neighbourhoods. It was quite common to come across discussions which changed course swiftly to the topics of corrupt politicians and failed bureaucracy.

More than a top-down and stringent mechanism of social control, hierarchies of membership became grounds upon which both residents of poor neighbourhoods and the Basij reinstated the foundational revolutionary promises to the poor. It was an inherently critical stance and a poignant reminder of a revolution whose leader, "belonged to the disinherited (*mostazafān*) and the barefooted (*paberehnegan*), and

11 Jennifer Burrell, "In and Out of Rights: Security, Migration, and Human Rights Talk in Postwar Guatemala," *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (2010): 90–115, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1935-4940.2010.01064.x.

12 Mirco Göpfert, "Security in Niamey: an Anthropological Perspective on Policing and an Act of Terrorism in Niger," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 50, no. 1 (2012): 53–74, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022278x11000607.

promised large scale redistribution of income and wealth."[13]

Given this dynamic space of negotiation, I observed that, while the Basij of Neighbourhoods continued to exert their power over the residents, the members of the Basij increasingly appeared to locals as low-level state functionaries who were there to redress local grievances, but constantly failed to do so. In this context, the Basij's everyday dilemmas and practices are grossly misunderstood if they are seen as merely veiled submissive attempts to uphold the status quo and the established political structure. By assuming revolutionary orientations, the Basijis with whom I worked promoted the overarching ideological aims of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Yet it was precisely their loyalty that precluded them from ignoring the state's shortcomings and inconsistencies.

Conclusion

The general imaginary of the Basij has been limited to spectacular scenes in which they clash with protestors, or when they perform acts of vandalism. This dominant image leaves little space to see the ordinary life of the Basij; a key feature of which has been operating in tandem with general discontent in poor neighbourhoods. While the Basijis' efforts consistently support the overall structure of the political system in their basic orientation, in practice, they invariably appear to contest the state. Arguably, the Basij's efforts entail the remobilisation of the revolutionary notions, with social justice as a focal point. Understanding social justice as the eroding of class differences and the prioritisation of the needs of the poor, the Basijis inevitably take a critical stance towards the authorities whose administration has generated glaring social inequalities. In this social landscape, the Basij's revolutionary politics has an inherent political paradox: those who feel loyal to the political system are motivated, precisely *because* of that loyalty, to criticise governance and statecraft that they perceive to be falling short of revolutionary promises to the poor. Awareness of this paradox allows us to see the 'contested' nature of loyalty to the regime in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the contentious life of the Basij's revolutionary politics in poor neighbourhoods of Iran.

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[13] Djavad Salehi-Isfahani, "Poverty, Inequality, and Populist Politics in Iran," *The Journal of Economic Inequality* 7, no. 1 (2008): 6, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10888-007-9071-y.

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Gendering the Revolution: Analysing Women's Role in Sudan's Revolutionary Transition

Miriam Aitken

Introduction

The 2019 Sudanese Revolution highlighted women's role in bringing down Omar al-Bashir's authoritarian regime that had ruled Sudan for thirty years. Historically, women – as actors, bodies, and symbols – have been central to the construction and control of political regimes and, equally, to their deconstruction through protest and revolutionary change.[1] Research on the role of women in Sudan's 2019 revolution reveals their importance in driving the protest movement. Scholars have highlighted both women's empowerment through their central roles as protestors on the streets and as leaders of civil society organisations.[2] Moreover, they have underlined the gendered violence women experienced throughout the revolution.[3] While the continuation of Bashir-era power structures in Sudan's economy and military raises the question of whether the uprising constitutes a political 'revolution', this paper deploys this term for two reasons. Firstly, the protestors claimed the label of 'revolution', and secondly, the spread of protests across geographic and cultural divides can be understood as part of a societal revolution in the previously deeply divided country. This article shows the different ways in which men and women experienced the revolution, by analysing gender politics in Bashir's Sudan and women's role in the Sudanese revolution and beyond, and argues that, for women, the revolution is incomplete.

Gendering Revolution: Theoretical Background

Women have a history of participating in revolutionary struggles which are often gendered and contested, circumscribing 'acceptable' roles for men and women. Feminised roles, such as distributing food and medicine are depoliticised and seen as natural extensions of women's domestic responsibilities, while the contribution of feminised work in the private sphere is rendered invisible. Assigning women particular 'respectable' roles in revolution is tied to discourses associating women and their bodies with national honour. This relationship has been highlighted by feminist scholarship that emphasises how gendered discourses of women, as societal and biological reproducers of culture, have been central to the construction of the nation. Yuval-Davis argues that women's cultural and biological reproductive work – raising children, transmitting cultural values, and preserving collective memories – creates, perpetuates, and sets the boundaries of a nation.[4] In Sudan, the construction of female bodies as symbols of the

[1] Nadje Al-Ali, "Gendering the Arab Spring," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication,* 5 (2012): 26-31.

[2] Nagwan Soliman, "Sudan Spring: Lessons from Sudanese Women Revolutionaries," *Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security*, 11.04.2020, https://giwps.georgetown.edu/sudan-spring-lessons-from-sudanese-women-revolutionaries/.

Sydney Young, "The Women's Revolution: Female Activism in Sudan," *Harvard International Review*, 25.05.2020, https://hir.harvard.edu/the-womens-revolution-female-activism-in-sudan/.

[3] Sarah Nugdalla, "The Revolution Continues: Sudanese Women's Activism," in *Gender, Protest and Political Change in Africa,* ed. Okech, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

[4] Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation* (London: Sage, 1997), 14.

nation has roots beyond the Bashir-era; throughout Sudan's history, women have been cast as the "keepers of culture".[5] During the colonial period, women's dress was used as a symbol of resistance to British as well as Western standards, casting women as the embodiment of authentic Sudanese culture.[6]

As nationalist revolutions seek to reorganise the state and reconstruct national identity, they formulate a vision of an ideal society, often entailing the politicisation of gender relations, with women becoming markers of societal ideals and political goals.[7] Scholars have commented upon the hegemonic role of the patriarchy in shaping the projected future of revolutionary movements. So-called 'women's issues', such as sexual and gender-based violence, are often postponed in favour of the movement's collective goals which prioritise issues of men's power.[8] In the 2019 Sudanese revolution, the marginalisation of women's voices in the transition process has highlighted the risk of patriarchal frameworks dominating the construction of the post-revolutionary state.

Authoritarianism and Gendered Repression in Bashir's Sudan

The street protest and military coup that led to Bashir's ousting on 11 April 2019 put a provisional end to his authoritarian rule. Bashir's power grab was accompanied by a systematic 'civilisation' of state institutions and Sudanese society in the name of Islam. What was known as *al-mashru al-hadari,* the 'civilisation project',[9] had decidedly gendered outcomes that negatively affected women.[10] *Shari'a* law had been in place since 1983, and it formed the basis of Bashir's Islamisation project.[11] However, the regime's discourse of Islamic law and its interpretation of religious provisions were arguably less about religious doctrine than about Bashir's political objectives of consolidating power and expanding the state apparatus. At the heart of the accompanying comprehensive Islamisation of public life were gender-specific laws mixing criminal and moral prohibitions in the name of public order.[12] The 1998 Khartoum Public Order Act policed clothing, appearance and behaviour in the public sphere, enforcing strict gender segregation in public spaces and transportation, prohibiting women from 'religiously or morally indecent' singing and dancing in front of men in public and at home.[13] While the law targeted both male and female behaviour, for example, by prohibiting alcohol consumption, it disproportionately affected women,[14] particularly those from ethnic and

[5] Sondra Hale, *Gender Politics in Sudan: Islamism, Socialism and the State* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1996), 77.
[6] Hale, *Gender Politics in Sudan,* 107.
[7] Valentine Moghadam, "Revolution, Religion, and Gender Politics: Iran and Afghanistan Compared," *Journal of Women's History,* 10(4) (1999): 178.
[8] Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (London: University of California Press, 2014), 111.
[9] Sudan Democracy First Group, "Sudan's Islamist Regime: The Rise and Fall of the 'Civilisation Project'," 10.07.2014, https://democracyfirstgroup.org/sudans-islamist-regime-the-rise-and-fall-of-the-civilization-project/.
[10] Nugdalla, "The Revolution Continues," 108.
[11] SIHA & REDRESS, "Criminalisation of Women in Sudan: A need for Fundamental Reform," (Kampala: SIHA Network, 2017): 5, https://redress.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/report-Final.pdf.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Khartoum Public Order Act 1998, Art.7(b)(d), Art.9, Art.20, http://www.pclrs.com/Khartoum_Public_Order_Act_1998.pdf.
[14] Asma Abdel Halim, "Gendered Justice: Women and the Application of Penal Laws in the Sudan," in *Criminal Law Reform and Transitional Justice,* ed. Lutz Oette (London: Routledge, 2016), 238.

religious minorities.[15] Beyond legitimising the state's intrusion into the private sphere, the law created a distinctly masculine public space in which women's presence was only tolerated if their behaviour and bodies conformed to specific standards of 'decency.' Women's clothing was controlled by banning trousers, and employers in hair salons were obliged to verify women's 'good reputation' before hiring them.[16] The policing of women's behaviour and appearance in the name of public morality and state-building points to the construction of female bodies as symbols of the Islamicised Sudanese nation.

Despite women's marginalisation under Bashir, women's movements flourished.[17] Strict registration requirements for NGOs and restrictions on political parties severely shrank Sudan's civic space.[18] Nevertheless, women's movements formed, initially as neighbourhood solidarity networks which then developed into various civil society organisations that tackled issues of legal inequality, rape laws, and the Public Order Act.[19] Indeed, women's movements constitute the most active part of Sudan's civil society, despite targeted harassment and repression of female activists. [20]

A Women's Revolution: Gender Politics in the 2019 Sudanese Revolution

Women played a key role in the Sudanese revolution since its inception in December 2018.[21] The protests, triggered by deteriorating economic conditions, were driven by youth; women, in particular, formed the majority of protestors in the streets.[22] Given their exclusion from the public sphere, female presence in this masculine space became a revolutionary act in itself. As the protests spread and became more formalised, the Forces of Freedom and Change alliance (FFC) emerged as a broad coalition of civil society actors, including the notable No to Oppression against Women Initiative and Women of Sudanese Civil and Political Groups (MANSAM).[23]

The attention given to women by the movement and the regime reflects their symbolic association with the revolution and the new Sudan.[24] This is captured by the omnipresent and powerful symbol of 'Kandaka', the title given to women protestors, referring to the term used for the queens and queen mothers of the Nubian kingdom of Kush.[25] Translated as 'strong woman',[26] and coupled with the widespread wearing of the traditional white *toub,* a garment worn by Sudanese women activists in the 1940s-50s,

[15] SIHA, "Gender Briefing Sudan," (Kampala: SIHA Network): 6-7, https://sihanet.org/gender-briefing-sudan/.
[16] Khartoum Public Order Act 1998, Art.16(a).
[17] Akram Abdel Gayoum Abbas, "The Gendering of Spaces and Institutions of Islamic Sovereignty in Contemporary Sudan," *The Arab Studies Journal,* 23(1) (2015): 359.
[18] Nugdalla, "The Revolution Continues," 112.
[19] Abbas, "The Gendering of Spaces and Institutions," 362-363.
[20] Sondra Hale, "Sudanese Feminists, civil society, and the Islamist military," *Open Democracy*, 12.02.2015, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/sudanese-feminists-civil-society-and-islamist-military/.
[21] Soliman, "Sudan Spring: Lessons from Sudanese Women Revolutionaries."
[22] Young, "The Women's Revolution."
[23] Tønnessen and al-Nagar, "Patriarchy, Politics and Women's Activism."
[24] Nugdalla, "The Revolution Continues," 108.
[25] Miriam Engeler, Elena Braghieri and Samira Manzur, "From White Teyab to Pink Kandakat: Gender and the 2018-2019 Sudanese Revolution," *Journal of Public and International Affairs,* Princeton University, https://jpia.princeton.edu/news/white-teyab-pink-kandakat-gender-and-2018-2019-sudanese-revolution.
[26] Ibid.

the term celebrated women's agency and their historical legacy of power.[27] The symbol, however, has also been criticised for reflecting a single romanticised facet of women's activism steeped in the history of northern and central Sudan.[28]

Showing a similar casting of women as symbols, the state used targeted gender-based violence to discredit the protest movement; hospitals in Khartoum reported at least seventy cases of rape in the aftermath of the brutal crackdown on the main protest site on 3 June 2019.[29] The regime's message to its security forces was clear: "Break the girls, because if you break the girls, you break the men."[30] The violation of women's bodies was used strategically to dishonour female protestors and to break the spirit of the revolution. Women, however, not only experienced violence from the state security forces, but also from other protestors. This reflects the pervasive misogyny throughout Sudanese society and complicates the movement's narrative of honouring women protestors, eroding the friend versus enemy dichotomy in women's experience of the protests.

Unequal Transition

On 17 August, a power-sharing arrangement between civilians and the military who had taken over in April 2019 was established under the Sovereign Council with the signing of the Constitutional Declaration.[31] Despite the declaration's aims to repeal the public order laws and guarantee forty percent female representation in Sudan's legislative assembly, women have been largely marginalised in the transition processes.[32] While women made up two of the eleven members of the Sovereign Council, women were excluded from critical meetings leading up to the signing of the power-sharing agreement.[33] The sidelining of women in transition processes has been a common feature of post-conflict and post-revolutionary settings. Often, transition processes are all-male; where they are not, women are only invited to the negotiating table as token guests. [34] Despite women's centrality to revolution, patriarchal structures prevent them from taking a full and meaningful part in shaping the society they fought for.

Conclusion

Women and gender relations have been central to the Sudanese revolution, with the gendered repression of Bashir's dictatorship providing a major incentive for revolt. The Sudanese experience has shown that despite praise over women's role in bringing down the Bashir regime, revolution remains a gendered experience. As actors, symbols, and

[27] Shirin Jaafari, "Here's the story behind the iconic image of the Sudanese woman in white," *The World,* 10.04.2019, https://www.pri.org/stories/2019-04-10/heres-story-behind-iconic-image-sudanese-woman-white.

[28] Nesrine Malik, "She's an icon of Sudan's revolution. But the woman in white obscures vital truths," *The Guardian,* 24.04.2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/apr/24/icon-sudan-revolution-woman-in-white.

[29] Leela Jacinto, "Sudanese activists seek justice for mass rapes after militia 'breaks the girls'," *France 24,* 21.06.2019, https://www.france24.com/en/20190619-sudan-rape-reports-militia-protest-justice.

[30] Nima Elbagir et al., "They tried to use rape to silence women protestors. It didn't work," *CNN*, 17.05.2019, https://edition.cnn.com/2019/05/17/africa/sudan-protests-asequals-intl/index.html.

[31] ICG, "Safeguarding Sudan's Revolution" *Crisis Group Africa Report N°281*, 21.10.2019, https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/281-safeguarding-sudans-revolution_0.pdf.

[32] Tønnessen and al-Nagar, "Patriarchy, Politics and Women's Activism."

[33] Young, "The Women's Revolution."

[34] Cynthia Enloe, *The Big Push* (Oxford: Myriad Editions, 2017), 47.

bodies, women have been celebrated, but also marginalised and violated. Regardless of their central role in the revolution, they continue to face exclusion from decision-making roles in Sudan's transition process. The notion of a 'post-revolutionary' transition is, in itself, reflective of a male-centric perspective. While major steps have been made, such as the legislative banning of female genital mutilation, necessary societal change can only happen if women and their voices are meaningfully included.[35] As such, women's activism in Sudan continues to flourish, showing the strength and tenacity of women protestors in Sudan who refuse to acquiesce until a true revolution is realised.[36]

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[35] Prachi Vidwans, "Why Sudan's Ban on Female Genital Mutilation Isn't Enough to Protect Its Girls," *World Politics Review*, 03.08.2020, https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/28963/in-sudan-fgm-ban-isn-t-enough-to-protect-girls.

[36] Tønnessen and al-Nagar, "Patriarchy, Politics and Women's Activism."

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