

**THE PALESTINIAN STUDENT MOVEMENT 1948-1982:
A STUDY OF POPULAR ORGANISATION AND
TRANSNATIONAL MOBILISATION**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the question of how non-state actors impact regional and international systems dominated by states. It does so by analysing the Palestinian transnational student movement between 1948 and 1982. It argues that in different phases of Palestinian history, Palestinian student movements played a crucial role in reorganising their scattered society transnationally, establishing and sustaining mechanisms and practices of popular mobilation and internationalising their struggle. In doing so, they contributed to the emergence of the Palestinian movement as a recognised actor able to impact regional and international systems dominated by states. Building on post-colonial approaches to IR and particularly on Gramsci's theory of *organicité*, this study defines the transnational Palestinian student movement as an anti-colonial organic vanguard of the Palestinian people. Students were a vanguard as they led Palestinian political reorganisation, creating unions often recognised as representative bodies of their people in the context of exile, statelessness and absence of national institutions. This role of "engine" was made possible by the "organic relation" between students and the people: students were an expression of their own society and voiced its anti-colonial ambitions. The study analyses Palestinian student mobilisation in Cairo, Beirut and Amman in the aftermath of the *Nakba* (catastrophe) in 1948. It explores the emergence of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) as the first transnational popular organisation able to voice Palestinian demands at the international level. It analyses GUPS role in the national movement before and after the establishment of the PLO. Methodologically this study draws on archival research and particularly oral history, relying on 76 interviews with former members and leaders of the Palestinians student movement. The thesis contributes to IR theories by providing an exhaustive study of the role of non-state actors in state-centered systems such as the Middle East, analysing the specific role of the people.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

This thesis refers to the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* transliteration system for Arabic terms but without diacritical marks and using ‘ to represent the letter ع. However, for terms with a well-established English transliteration differing from the IJMES system the common English transliteration is preferred (for example ‘Fateh’ rather than Fath). Interviewees names are reported as transliterated by the interviewees or otherwise follow the IJMES system.

ABBREVIATIONS

AHC	Arab Higher Committee
APG	All Palestine Government
AUB	American University of Beirut
CJS	Conference of Jordanian Students
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
FEANF	Fédération des Etudiants d'Afrique Noire en France
FLN	Front de Libération Nationale
GUAS	General Union of Arab Students
GUJS	General Union of Jordanian Students
GUPS	General Union of Palestinian Students
GUPW	General Union of Palestinian Women
ISC	International Student Conference
IUS	International Union of Students
JNM	Jordanian National Movement
MAN	Movement of Arab Nationalists
NFLP	National Front for the Liberation of Palestine
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PFLP-GC	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General Command
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PNC	Palestinian National Council
PRM	Palestinian Resistance Movement
PSU	Palestinian Student Union

UAR	United Arab Republic
UGEMA	Union Générale des Étudiants Musulmans d'Algérie
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
WAY	World Assembly of Youth

INTRODUCTION

1. The Transnational Mobilisation of Palestinian Refugees and its Significance for International Relations

The role of transnational non-state actors in influencing and shaping global politics has received increasing attention in International Relations (IR) in recent years. This growing interest emerged out of new engagement with previously overlooked influential political and social actors operating beyond the traditional domain of the state. The discipline has made progress towards a more comprehensive exploration of transnational actors. However, current IR research foci remain largely confined to the study of the role of transnational movement as Diasporas, or networks of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) within an international system dominated by state actors.¹ What is fundamentally lacking in IR studies is a thorough understanding of the role of transnational movements, not simply as extensions of state-politics abroad, but as fundamental political actors in their own rights in regional systems dominated by states.² This thesis seeks to remedy this significant gap in the existing literature by investigating the mechanisms by which a stateless refugee population has created its own representative structures and emerged as a recognised player in an international order dominated by state actors. The focus here is on a case study of Palestinian refugees with specific reference to the role of their student movements in shaping their political mobilisation.

There are three factors that render the Palestinian case particularly worthy of examination from the perspective of transnational non-state politics: its immense (yet often overlooked) scale, its historic persistence and its political significance.

¹Daphné Josselin and William Wallace, *Non-State Actors in World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001). Bas Arts, *Non-State Actors in International Relations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

²Marianna Charountaki, "State and Non-State Interactions in International Relations: an Alternative Theoretical Outlook," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 4 (2018), 528-542.

Palestinians consider themselves, with considerable historical justification, as the world's largest group of refugees. An organisation campaigning for their right of return describes them as "the largest and longest suffering group of refugees in the world."³ Another Palestinian NGO asserts that Palestinians "constitute the largest and longest-standing unresolved case of refugees and displaced persons" in the world and estimates that at the end of 2018 roughly 8.7 million (66.7 per cent) of the total estimated global Palestinian population of 13.05 million had been forcibly displaced, many on multiple occasions.⁴ However, most Palestinian refugees are not included in statistics produced by the United Nations. This is an historic anomaly because the *Nakba* preceded the creation of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). UNHCR's mandate does not extend to the great majority of Palestinian refugees because the 1951 UN Refugee Convention excluded assistance to those already receiving aid from other UN agencies – in the case of Palestine, the earlier-established UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).⁵ A consequence has been the persistent under-enumeration of displaced Palestinians or denial of their existence.⁶ Within the Arab world, they constitute a majority in Jordan⁷ and a significant minority in Syria, Lebanon, and all seven Gulf states. Furthermore, they have a considerable presence in Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, Tunisia and Algeria. Large Palestinian communities also exist in South America, achieving notable political and economic influence in

³ Al Awda the Palestine Right of Return Coalition. <https://al-awda.org/learn-more/faqs-about-palestinian-refugees/> (accessed 01/02/2020).

⁴ BADIL Resource Centre for Palestinians Refugee and Residency Rights. *Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons* (2019), 22 <https://badil.org/en/publication/press-releases/90-2019/5013-pr-en-231019-55.html> (accessed 01/02/2020).

⁵ The very title of the agency established in the aftermath of the *Nakba* – The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East – has, many would argue, served to perpetuate the denial of the peoplehood of Palestinians. The title reflected the inclusion of a statistically insignificant number of non-Arab residents of Palestine – including Jews, Greeks and Armenians – who also fled during the *Nakba*. For decades the terminology often applied by the international community – in particular "Near East Refugees" – obfuscated the identity of those who had been displaced.

⁶ As an example, in 2019 World Vision, one of the world's largest aid agencies, produced a list of the seven largest groups of refugees by country of origin which makes no mention of Palestinians. See: *Forced to flee: Top countries refugees are coming from*. <https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/forced-to-flee-top-countries-refugees-coming-from> (accessed 01/02/2020).

⁷ Joseph, Massad, *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2001).

some countries, especially Chile. Less influential, but comparably large communities exist in North America and Europe.

In addition to the scale and spread of the Palestinian refugee population across *al-shatat* (the diaspora)⁸ a further feature that renders its politics especially significant for IR is its historic persistence. Still ongoing after more than seven decades, the Palestinian refugee crisis is among the most long-lasting in the world. Palestine thus provides an extended timeframe for examining whether refugees can become effective actors in the international order. Moreover, it has clear significance for world politics, reflected in the amount of time, resources, and attention allocated to this issue by the international community. Indeed, in the words of a UN publication “no issue has engaged the attention of the international community over the past half century as much as what is known as the ‘Question of Palestine.’”⁹ Almost half of all country-specific resolutions passed by the UN Security Council or General Assembly have concerned Palestine.¹⁰ Israel consistently has led the list of Member States in violation of UN resolutions.¹¹

The Palestinian case offers a plethora of angles from which to consider the mechanisms by which refugee peoples mobilise to achieve representation within the international system. Although divided by regional and global boundaries, Palestinian refugees have historically organised themselves in numerous political, sectoral, and national structures, including parties and movements, women’s groups, camp committees, unions and professional associations. In their totality, these structures constitute and are represented in the Palestine National Council (PNC),

⁸ The term *shatat* (loosely translated as diaspora) refers to Palestinians in exile. I agree with Karma Nabulsi that “Neither the use of the term diaspora, nor that of ‘refugees’ is sufficient to capture the totality of the current Palestinian dispersal, and the different legal statuses recognized under international law... In defining it thus, one could undermine the various existing legal, political and civic statuses of the several million Palestinians who live outside historic Palestine” Karma Nabulsi, “Justice as the Way Forward” in Jamil Hilal ed. *Where Now for Palestine? The Demise of the Two State Solution*, (Zed Press, 2007), 251.

⁹United Nations. *The Question of Palestine and the United Nations* (New York: United Nations, 2008).

¹⁰ Further confirmation of the centrality of the Palestine Question in international affairs is that in 2018 the United Nations issued 27 condemnations of particular countries and 21 of them were against Israel. *TRT World* <https://www.trtworld.com/middle-east/in-2018-israel-became-the-most-condemned-nation-at-the-un-22899> (accessed 01/02/2020)

¹¹ *Ibid.*

which is the highest representative structure of the Palestinian people, and the legislative body of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Since 1974, the PLO has been internationally recognised as the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people” by the UN and its member states, holding a Permanent Observer seat at the United Nations,¹² and member status of the Arab League and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.¹³

Through the PLO, Palestinians have achieved international recognition as a people, a status confirmed by the existence of such international bodies as the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, established in 1975 by UN General Assembly Resolution 3376 so as “to recommend a program of implementation to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights to self-determination without external interference, national independence and sovereignty; and to return to their homes and property from which they had been displaced.”¹⁴

Besides achieving recognition of peoplehood and a major presence within the UN, the Palestinian people have established extensive diplomatic representation. They have founded embassies or de-facto embassies in every continent of the globe. This successful presence on the international stage is quite remarkable for any dispersed refugee population and shows the extent to which the Palestinian case can illustrate how refugee peoples can achieve representation in the absence of a state.

¹² The General Assembly resolution 67/19 on 29 November 2012 changed the status of Palestine from non-member observer entity to non-member observer state in the United Nations, following the application by Palestine for full UN membership in 2011. The change of status comes “without prejudice to the acquired rights, privileges and role of the Palestine Liberation Organization in the United Nations as the representative of the Palestinian people, in accordance with the relevant resolutions and practice.” United Nations, “Status of Palestine in the UN - Non-Member Observer State Status – Sec Gen Report - Question of Palestine,” United Nations, 2013. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-182149/> (accessed 20/09/2020).

¹³For an overview of PLO structures, their history, dynamics and development see Jamal Nassar, *The Palestine Liberation Organization: From Armed Struggle to the Declaration of Independence* (New York: Praeger, 1991).

¹⁴UNGA 3376. <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/UNISPAL.NSF/0/B5B4720B8192FDE3852560DE004F3C47> (accessed 02/01/2020).

2. Thesis Focus, Questions and Argument

Taking the scale, persistence, and significance of Palestinian transnational political mobilisation as its point of departure, this thesis examines how stateless people manage to impact regional and international systems dominated by states. Focusing on one arena of Palestinian transnational mobilisation, it explores how Palestinian student movements scattered throughout the world managed to organise and sustain a national liberation movement, one that acted on international and regional levels as a sovereign body representative of an entire nation in exile.

In particular, two critical periods of Palestinian political history will be explored, firstly during the absence of a national movement in the pre-PLO years (1948-1964) and then the period of highly organised national coordination under the umbrella of the PLO (1964-1982). The timeframe for this thesis terminates in 1982, the year of the forced withdrawal of the PLO from Lebanon and the beginning of a new chapter in the protracted Palestinian struggle for nationhood.

This study will ask two central and interrelated questions: 1) how did Palestinian transnational student movements overcome the geographic fragmentation and lack of representation of their people in order to create and sustain a national movement? 2) To what extent did Palestinian transnational student movements influence the national movement in developing its political platform and strategies?

This thesis argues that transnational Palestinian student movements in different periods of Palestinian history played a crucial role in reorganising their scattered society, articulating the political revolutionary discourse of the Palestinian struggle, and establishing and sustaining mechanisms and practices of popular mobilisation and political reorganisation. In doing so, they enabled the Palestinian people's political ambitions to be voiced and make an impact in a regional system dominated by states. Building on post-colonial interpretative paradigms of IR, this thesis advances the argument that Palestinian students were able to be both domestic and international players as they assumed the role of what this thesis identifies as "the anti-colonial organic

vanguard” for a society geographically and politically fragmented. This thesis suggests that the organic relation which organised student groups have had with the scattered Palestinian people – of the kind characterised by Antonio Gramsci as *organicità* (organicity) – along with the anti-colonial framework that characterised Palestinian student discourse, allowed students to play a fundamental role overcoming the political vacuum imposed by statelessness. They succeeded in establishing important mechanisms of political engagement and popular mobilisation which eventually came to influence politics at macro levels.

The focus on the role of student movements in the establishment and development of Palestinian representation can be understood in the context of Afro-Asian movements for national liberation. These movements historically benefited enormously from the contribution of student activism in the quest for political transformation and independence.¹⁵ This is particularly true in the Palestinian case: student movements have been the place *par excellence* where Palestinians have been educated and trained to assume responsibility for the implementation of their political, economic, social, civic and legal rights.¹⁶ Indeed, as this thesis aims to demonstrate, student mobilisation often functioned as the training ground for national Palestinian representation. Crucial moments of the Palestinian national struggle were characterised by the leadership role played by students.¹⁷ The General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) was the first Palestinian popular organisation established in the post-*Nakba* period. Its foundation was the successful outcome of Palestinian student activism throughout the 1950s, and GUPS represented the first successful attempt to reorganise and revive Palestinian social and political structures transnationally. Even more important, in a time of national annihilation and political void, GUPS could boast broad

¹⁵See for example Mark Boren, *Student Resistance: A History of the Unruly Subject* (London: Routledge, 2001).

¹⁶See Glenn Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State: the Incomplete Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

¹⁷See Nadine Picaudou, *Le Mouvement National Palestinien. Genèse et Structures*. (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1989) and Robinson *Building a Palestinian State*.

support amongst Palestinians, since it was the first popular organisation to articulate and advance the political ambitions of the entire nation in both regional and international arenas.

3. Statelessness

The condition of statelessness of the Palestinian people is the point of departure for this study. The thesis investigates the mechanisms by which a stateless refugee population has created its own representative structures, emerging as a recognised player in an international order dominated by state actors. In particular, it analyses the contribution of the Palestinian student movements to the emergence and development of this national movement, in order to understand how the limits of statelessness and the consequent lack of political institutions have been overcome. Student movements will be demonstrated to have played a crucial role in the establishment and development of transnational networks, parties and movements, able to voice their people's positions, principles and ambitions.

Understanding the exceptional condition of statelessness and its implications for the Palestinian people is a fundamental prerequisite upon which the argument of this research will develop. It is therefore necessary to introduce the concept of statelessness and outline what it entails for Palestinians. The condition of "statelessness" refers to the formal and legal lack of nationality,¹⁸ often generated by discriminatory policies of states towards individuals or minority groups. Nationality is a fundamental human right that ensures individuals and communities receive other fundamental rights – whether to education, medical care, work, property ownership, mobility or state protection – as well as political rights and full participation in society.¹⁹ The lack of nationality, therefore, prevents individuals from participation in a world composed of nation states. Statelessness means "not having even the right to have rights."²⁰ As Lex Takkenberg, a senior

¹⁸UNHCR, *Statelessness: An Analytical Framework for Prevention, Reduction and Protection* (Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2008).

¹⁹Abbas Shibliak, "Stateless Palestinians" *Forced Migration Review*, 26, 3 (December, 2006), 8.

²⁰*Ibid.* 9.

UNRWA manager, has pointed out, it is the condition of statelessness that has been exceptionally significant for Palestinians. Statelessness has not only shaped their experience as individuals but also collectively as a whole nation.²¹ Statelessness is the result of the attempt to eradicate Palestine from the map, both as a political entity and a basis of nationality, so as to replace the Palestinian indigenous population with an exclusively Jewish majority and to deny the continued existence of a very protracted refugee crisis.²²

In May 1948, when the state of Israel was officially established, the majority of the Palestinian population had to face a new reality. There were no longer the full citizens of Palestine they had been under the British Mandate or under Ottoman rule which preceded it. Instead, they became refugees, stateless, dispersed in neighbouring Arab countries and subject to the political and economic control of hosting countries.²³ The impact of statelessness on refugee communities (notably Palestinians) within host societies has been acknowledged by several scholars.²⁴ Impoverished, marginalised and deprived of political rights, “they constitute the major destabilizing factor in the Middle East.”²⁵ Brand has pointed out that the:

lack of a sovereign territorial base means that the fate of Palestinian efforts toward political mobilisation and nation-building are, to a far greater degree than those of state actors, inextricably tied, not only to developments in one or two countries, but to conflicts and contradictions throughout the region as a whole.²⁶

Examining the student movement can help us understand how Palestinians managed to overcome such limitations to achieve national political mobilisation, and how they operated transnationally to build a national liberation movement that acted on the international and regional levels as the sovereign-representative body of the whole nation in exile.

²¹Lex Takkenberg, *The Status of Palestinian Refugees in International Law*, (New York: Clarendon Press, 1998).

²²Shiblak, "Stateless Palestinians", 8.

²³Laurie Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab world: Institution Building and the Search for State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 8.

²⁴For scholarships on Palestinian refugees in Arab countries, see for example: Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab world*; Rosemary Sayigh, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Books, 1979); Pamela Ann Smith, "The Palestinian Diaspora, 1948-1985," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 15,3 (April, 1986), 90-108.

²⁵ Shiblak, "Stateless Palestinians", 8.

²⁶Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab world*, 6.

4. Transnationalism

The literature on transnationalism focuses on sub-state actors, “individuals and groups who mobilize domestic and international resources and opportunities to advance claims on behalf of external actors, against external opponents, or in favour of goals they hold in common with transnational allies.”²⁷ As such the literature on transnationalism has referred to the “international activities of non-governmental actors” for some time.²⁸ Transnational activities and networks have been heavily associated with economic relations, in particular the role of transnational corporations in international affairs, while the literature focuses mainly on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) mobilising around humanitarian, political and economic issues.

Most recently, studies on transnational forces have expanded their interest beyond NGOs to pay more attention to the class of non-state actors who act transnationally to influence domestic and international politics.²⁹ These works focus mainly on transnational ethnic actors, Diasporas and religious networks. Recent valuable studies on Tamil, Zimbabwean and Kurdish communities in exile³⁰ have highlighted the “nexus of domestic and transnational politics by demonstrating how actors form ethnic networks and utilise transnational opportunities to pursue political goals”³¹ in the host-state as well as in the home-state. In these studies, Diasporas are defined as communities residing abroad but politically and culturally tied to the homeland where the majority of their people live. By focusing on the ability of transnational ethnic groups and networks to impact the domestic and international politics of the home-state, these scholarly works leave a gap in the study

²⁷Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 184.

²⁸Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, ‘Transgovernmental Relations and International Organizations’, *World Politics*, 27, 1(October 1974), 41.

²⁹See for example Sarah Wayland, ‘Ethnonationalist Networks and Transnational Opportunities: The Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora’ in *Review of International Studies*, 30, 3 (July 2004), 405-426.

³⁰See for example Martin Van Bruinessen, *Transnational Aspects of the Kurdish question. Working paper* (Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, Florence, 2000); Eva Østergaard-Nielsen ‘The Politics of Migrants’ Transnational Political Practices’ in *International Migration Review*, 37,3, (Fall 2003), 760-786; Robin Patterson, ‘Transnationalism: Diaspora-Homeland Development’ in *Social Forces*, 84,4 (June 2006), 1891-1907.

³¹Wayland Sarah, ‘Ethnonationalist’, 405.

of transnational actors that is the subject of this thesis: the case of a whole nation in exile, stateless and displaced throughout the world.

The specificity of Palestinian transnationalism has been addressed mainly from an anthropological standpoint: Stein and Swedenburg have provided a relevant analysis of the meaning of transnationalism, breaking with the dominant literature that understands it as a “celebratory narrative of politics and social forms situated “beyond the nation state.””³² Stein and Swedenburg argue that there is a “continuing importance and re-emergence of the nation-state as an ideological-political form in the midst of globalising processes—a tension that is particularly acute in the case of Palestinians and their struggle for liberation, the still-unrealized aim of which remains the nation state.”³³ This conceptual re-formulation accounts for the uniqueness of the transnational dimension of Palestinian identity. But while this dimension has been acknowledged in sociological anthropological and cultural studies, the political relevance of “Palestinian transnationalism” has so far been overlooked.

In the Palestinian political context, transnationalism has profound implications: whereas for Diasporas, cross-border political activism is a way to organise and mobilise in order to support the politics of the home-country, in the Palestinian case transnationalism is a constitutive element of the representative institutions themselves. The absence of a home-state, the geographical dispersion of the majority of a people and lack of political institutions, international protection or recognition have required the organisation of forms of political representation that can act, both internationally and regionally, as sovereign-representative bodies.

The transnational character of the Palestinian movement is fundamental for expressing the national ambitions of the scattered people. In this sense, we can talk about a Palestinian “transnational nationalism”: a struggle for national liberation and self-determination that is fought

³² Rebecca Stein and Ted Swedenburg, “Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 33, no. 4 (2004), 5-20, 9.

³³ *Ibid.* 11.

through transnational strategies and structures, in transnational space.³⁴ While recent studies have often underlined the national-transnational relation in the strategies of contemporary social movements, suggesting that the national element is often translated into transnational practices, in the Palestinian case this relation works on the opposite trajectory: transnational strategies are necessary to pursue national ambitions.³⁵

Despite this crucial attribute, the transnational character of the Palestinian representative movement has been understudied, thus leaving an important gap in the analysis of the history of Palestinian and Arab international politics.

Recent scholarship on International Relations of the Middle East has primarily analysed the political role of Palestinian refugees in the region through the prism of a state-centred and traditional framework.³⁶ These studies focus on the policies of Arab states towards the Palestinian national movement, and Palestinian refugees within their borders, and do not address the critical impact of Palestinian policies on the regional system.³⁷ This is not to suggest that IR has not recognised the significance of the Palestinian case. Indeed IR texts, written from various perspectives, demonstrate its centrality to regional and global politics. For instance, a classic realist book such as Steven Walt's *The Origins of Alliances* has over twenty pages accounting for the political role of Palestinians, substantially more space than that dedicated to several prominent Middle Eastern states. Similarly, Michael Barnett's social constructivist work, *Dialogues in Arab Politics*, has more than forty pages detailing the impact of the Palestinian national movement

³⁴ For the concept of transnational nationalism in the Palestinian case see Riva Kastoryano, "Vers Un Nationalisme Transnational," *Revue Française De Science Politique* 56, no. 4 (2006), 533.

³⁵ Lamia Radi, "La Crise De La Territorialisation Du Nationalisme Diasporique Palestinien : Une Gouvernance Transnationale Inachevée," in *Nationalismes En Mutation En Mediterranee Orientale*, ed. Alain Dieckhoff (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2002) 197-225. See also Howard Lune, "Transnational Nationalism: Strategic Action Fields and the Organization of the Fenian Movement," *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, (2015), 1-35.

³⁶ For an analysis of PLO politics as a non-state actor see: Mohamed Selim, "The Survival of a Nonstate Actor: The Foreign Policy of the Palestine Liberation Organization," in *The Foreign Policies of Arab States*, Baghat Korany and Ali Hillal Dessouki (eds.) (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984). This work remains isolated in the available literature.

³⁷ See for instance Louise Fawcett (ed.) *International Relations of the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and Tareq Y. Ismael (ed.), *The International Relations of the Middle East in the 21st Century: Patterns of Continuity and Change* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

within the Middle East.³⁸ Yet Palestine is discussed without an emphasis upon its people, their institutions, and their subjective role building transnational networks and shaping regional politics.

Scholars have stressed the importance of emphasising socio-political dynamics and people's subjective contribution in the analysis of non-Western power dynamics, arguing that in order to understand the non-Western approach to IR, different perspectives should be taken into consideration. Puchala points out that:

States, for example, are not very important in non-Western thinking about world affairs, but, 'forces', 'movements', 'parties', 'peoples', 'cultures', and 'civilizations' are. Most states in the non-Western world are looked upon as creatures of colonialism, culturally artificial and therefore appropriately downgraded.³⁹

Similarly, Wilmer has highlighted how non-Western studies of IR tend to minimise state-to-state interactions, while emphasising the kinds of interplay that arise from the activities of transnational social and ideological movements.⁴⁰ In this sense, Palestinian political dynamics represent an exceptional case study, but IR studies have not yet provided an analysis of the Palestinian people in its transnational dimension and its subjective influence in regional politics.

This thesis aims to fill this lacuna by analysing how Palestinian student movements have organised transnationally in order to build and sustain a national movement that has played a critical political role in a regional system dominated by states.

5. Scholarship on Student Movements and National Liberation Struggles

Although students' involvement in strikes, demonstrations and uprisings goes back to the establishment of universities, it was only in the second half of the 19th century, with the emergence of independence and anti-colonial movements, that student activism became the "engine" of social

³⁸Michael Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

³⁹Donald Puchala "Some Non-Western Perspectives on International Relations" *Journal of Peace Research*, 34, 2, (1997), 129.

⁴⁰Franke Wilmer, *The Indigenous Voice in World Politics* (New York: SAGE, 1993).

and political changes.⁴¹ Analysis of the genesis, vision and ideology of transnational Palestinian student movements draws upon the precise historical context within which they developed. The vibrant and growing literature on anti-colonialism, national liberation movements⁴² and the student contribution to the liberation struggle⁴³ are all important frameworks that will be drawn upon, and relate directly to better understanding student mobilisation in the Arab region in the decades following its emergence in the 1950s.

Notable examples that display parallels with the Palestinian case include student involvement in the *Front de Libération Nationale* in Algeria⁴⁴ and student activism in the various protracted phases of the South African struggle against apartheid.⁴⁵

The available literature on Palestinian nationalism and the Palestinian resistance movement, and the creation and history of the parties and the PLO,⁴⁶ represent a fundamental point of departure for this study.

⁴¹ See for example Boren, *Student Resistance*; David F. Burg, *Encyclopedia of Student and Youth Movements* (New York: Facts on File, 2005).

⁴²For scholarship on anti-colonialism and national liberation movements, see for example: Fanon, *Wretched*; Franz Fanon, *Towards the African Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1964); Franz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove Press, 1965); Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2007); Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Paris: Editions Presence Africaine, 1955); Amilcar Cabral, *National Liberation and Culture*, speech delivered on February 20, 1970 as part of the Eduardo Mondlane Memorial Lecture Series at Syracuse University in Syracuse, New York, under the auspices of The Program of Eastern African Studies, translated from the French by Maureen Webster; Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Vintage books; 1993); Jean Berque and Suha Sabbah Jean Berque, "The Pen and the Sword" in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 15, 2 (1986):109-118; Frank Fu redi, *Colonial Wars and the Politics of Third World Nationalism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994); Norman Miller and Aya Roderick (eds), *National Liberation : Revolution in the Third World* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1971); Nigel Harris. *National Liberation* (London: Penguin, 1992); Richard Gibson, *African Liberation Movements: Contemporary Struggles against White Minority Rule* (London; New York: Published for the Institute of Race Relations by Oxford University Press, 1972); Salim Tamari, "Limited Rebellion and Civil Society: The Uprising's Dilemma" in *Middle East Report*, No. 164/165, May-August, 1990: 4-8; J. Bowyer Bell, *On Revolt: Strategies of National Liberation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

⁴³See for example Boren, *Student resistance*, Philip Altbach (ed.), *Student Political Activism: An International Reference Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1989); Burg, David F., *Encyclopedia of Student and Youth Movements; The Role of African Student Movements in the Political and Social Evolution of Africa from 1900-1975* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1994).

⁴⁴For scholarship on the Algerian liberation struggle and student participation therein, see: Guy Pervillé *Les Etudiants Algériens de l'Université Française 1880-1962*. (Alger: Casbah Editions, 1997);Clement Moore and Arlie Hochschild, "Student Unions in North African Politics," *Daedalus*, 97, 1, (1968), 21-50; Bancel Nicolas, Denis Daniel Fates Youssef (sous la direction de) *De l'Indochine à l'Algérie: la jeunesse en mouvements des deux côtés du miroir colonial, 1940-1962* (Paris:La Découverte, 2003).

⁴⁵For scholarship on the South African struggle and student participation therein, see, *inter alia*, : Badat, Saleem, *Black Student Politics, Higher Education and Apartheid, from SASO to SANSCO, 1968-1990* (London: Routledge/Falmer, 2002); Monique Marks, *Young Warriors: Youth Politics, Identity and Violence in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001).

It should be noted, however, that literature on Palestinian history has too long been disciplined by fields of study which restrict the authentic self-determined expressions of Palestinian history, identity and aspirations. Such has been the case in both scholarship and teaching on Palestine, both within the Arab region and in academia in the West. This is not to say that there has not been academic engagement with Palestinian voices and narratives. Works such as those by Rosemary Sayigh (1979 and 1994) represent an important development in scholarship on Palestinians as central subjects of history.⁴⁷ However, these developments have emerged mainly in the field of anthropology while political and IR attention to people's agency is still minimal. However, just as Palestinian students in the early 1950's understood the importance of a dialogical relationship between theory and practice, today Palestinian scholars and thinkers are creating vibrant pedagogical projects which can yield new methods and therefore possibilities for intellectual engagement with Palestinian history. An example is *The Palestine Revolution*, an academic project to attempt to liberate Palestinian history

from the hagiographic concerns of the present. It seeks to restore an appreciation of the central role of popular voices and practices, and offer an internally balanced, diverse and non-partisan content on the subject of the Palestinian revolution. It seeks to do this in a way that does not privilege some participants while sidelining others. It attempts to combine dominant state narratives with less-known marginalised voices and accounts.⁴⁸

The *Palestine Revolution* project offers online learning resources on the genealogy and development of the Palestinian revolution from the time of the *Nakba* in 1948 to the PLO's forced departure from Beirut in 1982. The platform provides a curriculum that is fully based on primary sources, not only documents of the period, but also interviews and accounts of the people who

⁴⁶See for example Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: the Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Ibrahim Abu Lughod (ed.) *The Transformation of Palestine*. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1987); Samih K. Farsoun, *Palestine and the Palestinians: A Social and Political History* (Oxford : Westview, 2006); Baruch Kimmerling, Joel Samuel Migdal, *The Palestinian People: A History* (London: Harvard University Press 2003); Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-1999* (New York : Vintage Books 2001); Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006); Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).

⁴⁷ Rosemary Sayigh, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries: A People's History* (London: Zed Press, 1979); Rosemary Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies: The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon* (London: Zed, 1994).

⁴⁸Karma Nabulsi, and Abdel RazzaqTakriti, eds., *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016, <http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/teach>

made the movement and its history. In doing so, *The Palestine Revolution* project offers a space for sound and rigorous attention to revolutionary history, context, actors and conditions while creatively offering a pedagogical opportunity to revisit these epochs so as to understand the depths of the Palestinian experience more broadly. Its section on cadres presents an important set of reflections by Palestinian militants, recalling how their political engagement began amid the intellectual and political training grounds and the range of experiences which the student movement provided. *The Palestine Revolution* project indicates the importance of engaging Palestinian intellectual and political history by looking at knowledge that “is centered on the Palestinian people themselves, rather than on the great powers, regional states, and the impersonal international and structural forces that had intervened so pervasively in their lives.”⁴⁹ Projects such as *The Palestine Revolution* offer a pedagogical opportunity to revisit such history and to draw out lessons instructive for critical knowledge-production on Palestine, one which centres Palestinian peoples’ testimonies. This methodological approach is fundamental for this study as it allows analysing the Palestinian student movement as an active subject of its own history. It also emphasises the role of ordinary people in the making of the struggle and, therefore, the impact of their collective agency on regional and international politics.

Several scholars have elaborated on the role of education among Palestinians – in particular among Palestinian refugees⁵⁰ – and have analysed the political contribution of Palestinian students. Yet the students’ pivotal role in developing a national political strategy in the absence of a national movement has not been sufficiently evaluated within a transnational framework. With the establishment of universities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the 1970s, scholars focused on students’ political activities in the occupied territories, paying scant attention to the Palestinian student movements in *al-shatat*, and their transnational dimension.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ See for example Abu Lughod Ibrahim “Educating a Community in Exile” in *Journal of Palestine Studies* 2, N. 3 (spring 1973), 94-111; Sayigh, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries*.

Most exhaustive assessments of the Palestinian student movements are available mainly in Arabic. In particular, Imad Ghiyatha has presented an extensive analysis of Palestinian student movements in the Arab world and in the Occupied West Bank and Gaza.⁵¹ Sharif Hussein has offered a detailed and precise documentation of GUPS activities in the International Union of Students between 1959 and 1964. The work of Muhannad Mustafa and the book edited by Majdi al-Malki both provide rich analyses of student activism in historical Palestine.⁵² Yet neither addresses the strategies of mobilisation of Palestinian students in relation to the national movement.

There has been relatively little analysis in English of the experience of Palestinian students and their contributions to the national movement. For long, the available works remained those of Brand, Le Pottier and Erlich. Brand presented a detailed analysis of GUPS establishment and development in Egypt, Kuwait and Jordan, and its activities and relations with the local authorities. Le Pottier and Erlich discussed Palestinian student activism in the broader examination of student activities at the American University of Beirut and in Egyptian universities.⁵³ These works focus on Palestinian activism within the broader dynamics of student mobilisation in host countries without emphasis on their relevance to Palestinian transnational strategies. More recently, Ido Zerkovitz has provided a detailed study of GUPS political life from its establishment until the second (Al Aqsa) *intifada* (2000-2005). However, his analysis does not account for the students' role in establishing political movements before the establishment of GUPS. While it traces the political development of the Union, it does not provide a systematic analysis of its *modus operandi*.⁵⁴

⁵¹Imad Ghiyatha, *Al-Haraka al-Tulabiyya al-Filastiniyya al-Mumarasa wa al-Fa'aliyya* ('The Palestinian Student Movement: Practice and Efficacy') (Ramallah: Muwatin, 2000).

⁵²Majdi al-Malki, (ed.), *Al-Haraka al-Tulabiyya al-Filastiniyya wa Mahamat al-Marhala: Tajarab wa-Ara'a* ('The Palestinian Student Movement and the Tasks of the Current Period: Experiences and Perspectives') (Ramallah: Muwatin, 2000); Muhannad Mustafa, *Al-Haraka al-Tulabiyya al-Arabiyya al-Filastiniyya* ('The Arab Palestinian Student Movement') (Um al-Fahm: The Contemporary Studies Centre – Iqra' Association, 2002).

⁵³Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab world*; G  lle Le Pottier, "Student Activism on the Eve of the Lebanese Civil War" (Masters dissertation, University of Oxford, 2000); Hagai Erlich *Students and University in Twentieth Century Egyptian Politics* (London: Frank Cass, 1989).

⁵⁴ Ido Zerkovitz, *Students and Resistance in Palestine: Books, Guns and Politics* (S.l.: Routledge, 2019).

A closer and more constructive examination of Palestinian student politics is provided by Francesca Burke.⁵⁵ Her thesis is the first attempt to study Palestinian student activism through a comparative frame that allows identification of commonalities and diversities in student strategies in different locations. Burke frames her analysis within social movement and collective actions theories. She focuses on repertoires, discourses and responses to power-holders' repression of Palestinian students in universities inside Israel, in the West Bank and in the UK, providing a comparative analysis of them. Burke's work is the first systematic approach to Palestinian student politics that emphasises student agency. *Student of Resistance: Palestinian Student Mobilization at Home and in Exile* fills an important gap in Palestinian literature, addressing the political relevance of students, a sector that has played a fundamental role in the national struggle.⁵⁶

My study intends to develop even further Burke's pioneering work. Her analysis is mainly concerned with Palestinian student activism between the 1970s and 2000, years characterised by the rise of the PLO as a major player at the regional and international levels. The analysis of the previous decades, the post-*Nakba* period, characterised by the lack of national institutions, is not addressed in Burke's research. By providing an analysis of Palestinian student politics in the aftermath of the *Nakba* my study seeks to offer a more complete assessment of the role of the student movement as a transnational body. It explores its contribution to national politics, articulating further on their agency –and their role in building national institutions, while expressing the collective ambitions of their people transnationally during different moments of Palestine's turbulent political history. This thesis draws on available scholarship on how historically students have contributed to national liberation struggles. It adds to it by comparing the dynamics of student mobilisation in the critical periods when there was an absence of a national

⁵⁵ Francesca Burke, "Student of Resistance: Palestinian Student Mobilization at Home and in Exile" (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2011).

⁵⁶ An in depth analysis of Burke work is provided in Chapter 1.

movement (the pre-PLO years) with those in subsequent periods of highly organised national coordination (the PLO years).

6. Contribution to International Relations

By investigating the transnational nature of Palestinian political involvement and its impact on a state-centered regional system, this research seeks to contribute in three different areas of scholarship a) post-colonial analysis of International Relations; b) student movements and national liberation struggles; and c) Palestinian and Middle Eastern politics.

The thesis will provide a more exhaustive study of the role of non-state actors in state-centered systems such as the Middle East within a post-colonial perspective, analysing the specific role of the people. It will look at the role of subalterns⁵⁷ in challenging the unbalanced power relation of colonialism. Moreover, this thesis will further expand upon IR theories on transnational forces. By investigating the transnational dimension of Palestinian student activism, this research will introduce a new actor in the study of transnationalism: an entire stateless nation which organises its national representative structures in exile.

The thesis will add insights to the growing literature on student movements and national liberation struggles. It provides a study of student activism at two different critical stages, analysing the achievements and lessons of the student movement across a substantial period of time.

Finally, this study contributes to literature on Palestinian and Arab politics by offering an historical account of people's contribution to regional politics.

7. Case Studies

In order to answer the question of how transnational Palestinian student movements mobilise to overcome the lack of representation and build and sustain the national movement, this

⁵⁷ A seminal term in post-colonial studies, coined by Antonio Gramsci, it describes the forms in which subjected peoples are excluded from power. It will be further elaborated on it in Chapter 1 and 2.

research explores how student unions functioned as Palestinian representatives in the absence of an effective national body during the 1950s. It suggests that their structures were autonomous but internally centralised. The thesis further investigates the Palestinian student movement in the era of the PLO, when it operated as an internal arena of mobilisation and a generator of solidarity at the international level. GUPS was located within the national movement and its organisational hierarchy.

The study of the two models, along with an analysis of dynamics at the domestic and international levels during each different period, will allow an assessment of the influence of student mobilisation on the development of national movement strategies, and therefore its impact on the regional system.

For the first model, the thesis examines the nature and political role of local Palestinian student unions and societies established and developed in Cairo, Beirut and Amman. These unions are of particular significance as they were treated by the Palestinian population, as well as by national leaders of those countries, as representative bodies of the Palestinian refugees, and not simply student organisations.

The thesis will next detail the creation of General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) in 1959, the transformation of its role in the first half of the 1960s and the relevance of its contribution to the national movement during what is described by Palestinian analysts as “the golden age” of the resistance movement in the late 1960s and 1970s. The history of the institution of GUPS is essential to the thesis, as it is intrinsically tied to the development of the national movement itself. If GUPS maintained a representative function since its formation in 1959 up to the establishment of the PLO in 1964, its nature shifted in the second half of the 1960s into an internal arena of mobilisation (from within which the various Palestinian movements would recruit, and in which cadres would often receive their earliest political education). It also played the role of

an international solidarity-generating structure that could promote the national cause in the absence of Palestinian embassies or missions.

8. Methodology

This study draws upon overlapping research methods and approaches. The analysis of the history of Palestinian student movements relies on an extensive body of primary materials as well as secondary sources. Primary sources include archival documents, the original publications of Palestinian youth groups (such as magazines, communiqués and posters), internal charters and minutes. In order to collect this material I have consulted the archives of the Institute of Palestine Studies in Beirut, the archive of the American University of Beirut, the National Archive in Cairo and the International Union of Students Collection at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. Existing primary sources such as minutes of the meetings, publications or posters of the Palestinian Unions in the 1950s are less readily available. Material from subsequent periods is more easily accessible. Rich and detailed memoirs and autobiographies of the protagonists of the Palestinian student movements in the 1950s and subsequent years have provided vital information and have buttressed the substantial interviews I have conducted in the course of researching this thesis. The written material has been complemented by semi-structured interviews with leading members of the Palestinian national movement and with key participants of previous transnational Palestinian student movements. Drawing on advanced oral history methodologies, interviews have been based on the “life history approach” and have focused on the student unions’ relationship with national movements, political leaders in the host-countries and the local Palestinian community.⁵⁸ Information has also been gathered regarding political coordination with Palestinian student movements in other countries. Most of the interviews were conducted over 15 months spent doing

⁵⁸The methodology selected draws on various works in oral history. These include Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990); Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991) and Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

fieldwork in the Middle East while other informants were subsequently contacted. My long-term residence in the region has facilitated the collection of primary and secondary material, in particular Arabic sources. Above all, it has allowed me to establish lengthy and inspiring discussions with crucial protagonists of Palestinian and Arab political history. I have conducted over eighty interviews on the Palestinian student movements between 1948 and 1982 and have met several Palestinians who initiated the first Palestinian student associations and movements and who remain leaders of the Palestinian national movement. Many informants were leading members and ex-members of the main Palestinian parties, as well as key members of the Palestinian National Council (the parliament) and the PLO Executive Council (its cabinet). The interviewees have been contacted by using “snowballing” as a method of selection: I approached them equipped with a recommendation from another activist or scholar.⁵⁹ Being introduced by other Palestinian leaders and militants has guaranteed a high level of trust and willingness to be interviewed from most of the participants. These interviews took place in Amman, Damascus, Beirut, Cairo, Tunis and Rome, and on a few occasions via Skype. A large number of the former leaders of the Palestinian student movements live now in the West Bank and interviews were also scheduled in Jerusalem, Ramallah and other Palestinian cities. However, I was denied entry to the Palestinian Occupied territories. While this substantially limited my fieldwork, I was still able to interview many of the informants living in the West Bank. Being based in Amman has allowed me to schedule meetings during their travels in and out of Palestine. The interviews have been recorded, transcribed and translated from Arabic. The content of the interviews has been assessed in light of the limitations inherent in the methodology of oral history. For, details can be forgotten, dates or events can be misplaced, biases from the interviewees (and from the interviewer) can affect the interpretation or emphasis of particular accounts. In order to address these limitations, a triangulation of data

⁵⁹For a brief outline of the advantages and disadvantages of using “snowballing”, see Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 184-5.

sources have been used as a method of verification, comparing the information provided in interviews with other written primary sources (where available), with other interviews and with secondary material.

The primary material collected through interviews and archival research has been complemented by an in-depth study of secondary sources. Scholarship on Palestinian politics has constituted the point of departure for a consistent study of Palestinian history. However, the literature I have referred to draws not only on the fields of IR and politics, but also on aspects of anthropology and sociology.

9. Thesis Structure

The thesis is sub-divided into seven chapters. Chapter One and Two aim to introduce the role of student and youth movements in liberation struggles in order to provide a detailed theoretical framework for the study of Palestinian student movements' contributions to the national liberation movement. The following chapters (three to seven) are organised on a chronological basis, with each chapter covering the political engagement of Palestinian student movements and their impact on the national, regional and international level in key periods of Palestinian history.

Chapter One positions the study of Palestinian transnational student movements within IR theories. It identifies the theoretical paradigms that can help frame the analysis of the Palestinian student movement as a non-state actor in a colonial context. Additionally, it seeks to highlight the conceptual gaps present in the current IR literature on student movements. It is suggested that post-colonial theories offers a valuable theoretical framework for this study. Further, the chapter introduces theories of social movements arguing that the post-colonial lens provides a useful methodological tool for this study.

Chapter Two sets out the theoretical framework for approaching the analysis of the Palestinian transnational student movement. It argues that Palestinian transnational student

movement is best characterised as an anti-colonial organic vanguard. This conceptualisation builds on three theoretical approaches: Marxist-Leninist theories on student revolutionary powers, Gramsci's notion of "organic relation" as articulated in his theorisation of "organic intellectuals" and post-colonial studies on social movements with particular reference to Fanon thought. The chapter provides a new lens for analysing student politics in the specific context of colonisation and statelessness.

Chapter Three is the first of five empirical chapters that focus on different phases of Palestinian politics. It examines the nature and political role of the Palestinian student union in Cairo, during the 1950s. This and subsequent chapters focus on five themes of student unions' work: political background, organisational structure; armed struggle; public mobilisation activities and diplomatic activities aimed at international actors, as well as Palestinian political leaders and institutions.

Chapter Four examines the experience of Palestinian student mobilisation in Beirut and Amman during the 1950s. It argues that, like in Egypt, Palestinian students in Lebanon and Jordan acted as a vanguard organically tied to their constituencies, articulating their discourse and strategies within a revolutionary framework rooted in anti-colonial principles.

Chapter Five details the establishment of the General Union of Palestinian Students in 1959. GUPS was the first Palestinian popular organisation established transnationally. The chapter looks at the socio-political processes and transformations that influenced the Union and it then examines its political background, organisational structure, commitment to armed struggle, public mobilisation and diplomatic actions. GUPS exhibited the characteristics of a political vanguard because of the way it was able to play a representative role at regional and international levels in the absence of national institutions able to represent their people, while building an organic relationship with the broader constituency of displaced Palestinians.

Chapter Six analyses GUPS' political development and activism following the establishment of the PLO in 1964 until 1969 when the Organisation radically changed and became a more direct expression of the will of the Palestinian masses. The establishment of the PLO in 1964 inaugurated a new era of institutional reorganisation. GUPS had to readjust its role in light of the changed political environment and define its relations with the PLO as well as with the new emerging popular movements that had their roots in student activism in the 1950s. This chapter, focuses on four themes: GUPS political background, armed struggle, mobilisation strategies and diplomatic actions.

Finally, Chapter Seven analyses GUPS' political developments, strategies and discourses during the "golden age" of the Palestinian revolution that is, between 1969, when the PLO shifted into a revolutionary movement rooted among its people and 1982, when the Organisation's forced departure from Lebanon initiated a crisis of strategies and political legitimacy.⁶⁰ The chapter indicates how GUPS maintained a role of anti-colonial organic vanguard even while operating within the PLO structure: not only did the Union maintain its organic relation with the masses, voicing people's will within the PLO, but it also integrated into the Organisation's structure, providing it with a fundamental space for political education and training.

⁶⁰ Jamil Hilal "PLO Institutions: The Challenge Ahead," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1, (1993), 46-60.

1 CHAPTER ONE:

STUDENT MOVEMENTS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Introduction

Student movements are defined as social movements composed either predominantly or totally of students, specifically tertiary students.⁶¹ Since the establishment of universities, students have played a central role in forging social and political change. They have been prominent in strikes, uprisings, revolts and other forms of democratic and collective action. Student protests date back to the town and gown battles in such ancient universities as Bologna, Paris, Oxford and Cambridge, when students, aware of their collective power, began demanding better treatment from local townspeople and improved studying and living conditions.⁶² Ever since, student movements have impacted social, cultural and political dynamics to various degrees, depending on the periods and places in which they developed.

It is only in the modern era, with an increase in the number of universities and the consequent development of a larger “critical mass of students,”⁶³ that students have emerged as crucial political actors. They played a prominent role in the 1848 revolts in Berlin, Paris, and Vienna, and throughout the 20th century student activists transformed the politics of countries across the globe. Student movements “have often played major roles in bringing about successful revolutions by providing leadership, ideology, and organizational networks.”⁶⁴ Revolutionary leaders such as Antonio Gramsci (Italy), Fidel Castro (Cuba), Frantz Fanon (Algeria), Rosa

⁶¹ Christopher Rootes, “Student movements,” *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, (April 2012): 473-74. An additional definition of a student movement is “a relatively organized effort on the part of a large number of students to either bring about or prevent change in any one of the following: policies, institutional personnel, social structure (institutions), or cultural aspects of society involving either institutionalized or non-institutionalized collective actions or both simultaneously”. See Jungyun Gill and James DeFronzo, “A Comparative Framework for the analysis of International Student Movements,” *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest*, 8,3 (2009) 203.

⁶² Boren, *Student Resistance*, 8-9.

⁶³Rootes, “Student movements,” 473-74.

⁶⁴Gill and DeFronzo, “A Comparative Framework,” 204.

Luxemburg (Germany), Carlos Fonseca (Nicaragua), Sun Yat-sen and Mao Tse Tung (China), Ho Chi Minh (Vietnam), Chris Hani (South Africa), Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Sékou Touré (Guinea) and Yassir Arafat (Palestine), either adopted or started to formulate revolutionary ideologies through involvement in student movements. This very often led them to international student spaces that were conducive to forging close ties with other revolutionaries around the world.⁶⁵

While sociologists and political scientists have always acknowledged the contribution of students at specific political moments throughout the modernisation process of Third World countries,⁶⁶ more consistent academic interest and focus on students as political actors only developed in the 1960s when student revolts disrupted the industrialised societies of the West. The international scale and political significance of 1960s student movements has drawn the attention of social and political scientists, sociologists and IR theorists. IR scholars became interested in understanding how student and broader social movements – as non-state actors – could impact international power politics. Halliday noted:

within modern International Relations, the literature also began with the recognition, in the 1960s and 1970s, of the role of non-state entities in influencing foreign policy and transnational, as distinct from international, relations.⁶⁷

He highlighted how an in-depth understanding of social dynamics is fundamental to a solid analysis of IR, arguing that “a realistic political sociology of contemporary domestic and international society is a prerequisite for a coherent normative critique of the international system.”⁶⁸

In this sense, it should be noticed how in recent years new efforts have been made in this direction especially in relation to the Middle East. The 2011 Arab revolutions have not only demonstrated the limits of IR theories and their structural approaches in understanding and

⁶⁵Gill and DeFronzo, “A Comparative Framework”, 204.

⁶⁶ Francesca Burke, “Student of Resistance”, 19.

⁶⁷ Fred Halliday, “The Romance of Non-state Actors,” in *Non-state Actors in World Politics*, eds. Daphné Josselin and William Wallace (London: Palgrave, 2001), 29.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 29.

explaining momentuous social changes, their causes and effects beyond domestic or comparative politics analysis: they have also awoken a new interest for the region, its political dynamics and the complexities that characterised them.⁶⁹

The Arab revolutions have made clear for IR scholars that a new analytical framework is needed, a framework able to take into consideration the impact of Middle Eastern transformations on the international system as well as the relevance of international dynamics for the developments at the national and regional levels. New academic initiatives –such as the POMEPS studies projects⁷⁰ have emerged in an effort to elaborate a more critical approach to the analysis of the region within IR, realising that more space was needed for voices from within the region and more attention was required for the many factors that shape politics on the ground. Scholars have emphasised the need of a “new type of IR theory emerging from Middle East studies and the specific experience of the Arab uprisings” and the relevance of identity, sectarianism, transnational ideologies as well as political economy dynamics in understanding the international relations of the region.⁷¹ In this context, more consistent attention has been paid to non-state actors, too.

However, analysis of the role and impact of non-state actors on world politics has focused on social movements and transnational networks, often showing preference for the study of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), religious networks and diasporas. IR scholars have not consistently explored how student movements can affect international power politics. They have generally focused on the national specificities of student movements rather than their international relevance.

⁶⁹ See Mark Katz, “The International Relations of the Arab Spring,” *Middle East Policy* 21, no. 2 (2014): pp. 76-84 and Daniel Ritter, *The Iron Cage of Liberalism International Politics and Unarmed Revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁷⁰ POMEPS has promoted workshop such as “From Mobilization to Counter-Revolution: The Arab Spring in Comparative Perspective,” held at the University of Oxford on May 3-4, 2016 and publications such as POMEPS Studies. *International Relations Theory and a Changing Middle East*. (Washington, DC: Project on Middle East Political Science, 2015) POMEPS Studies *Transnational Diffusion and Cooperation in the Middle East*. (Washington, DC: Project on Middle East Political Science, 2016)

⁷¹ Marc Lynch, Curtis R. Ryan, “The Arab Uprisings and International Relations Theory” *Political Symposium* (July 2017)

The aims of this chapter are twofold. It seeks to position this thesis within IR theories, identifying the conceptual paradigms that can help frame the analysis of the Palestinian student movement as a non-state actor in a colonial context. Additionally, it seeks to highlight the theoretical and conceptual gaps present in the current IR literature on student movements, laying the foundation for the conceptual framework of the thesis presented in Chapter Two.

I contend that post-colonial theories offers a valuable theoretical framework for this study and I introduce the most relevant thoughts in the field of postcolonial studies for the analysis with which I am concerned, namely, Gramsci and Fanon theorisations.

Next, social movements theories and their application to the study of the Palestinian student movement will be presented. I then introduce post-colonial approaches to social movements, arguing that the post-colonial lens provides a useful methodological tool to guide the analysis in this thesis. Finally, I offer an overview of the literature available on student movements in sociological studies to provide an understanding of how the study of student movements has been approached.

1.1 Non-state Actors in IR

Student movements have been studied within the broad field of non-state actors and social movements. Although non-state actors have always been present in world politics, scholarship has been relatively silent on their presence and influence, focusing instead on national states. Only in recent decades has increasing attention been paid to non-state actors and their impact on international political dynamics.

It was with the rise in the early 1990s of social constructivism as a new theory to understand world politics that IR scholars began to address more consistently and systematically the potential of human agency in shaping International Relations.⁷² Social constructivism framed international

⁷² Steve Smith, Patricia Owens and John Baylis, "Introduction," in *The Globalization of World Politics: an Introduction to International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 1-15, 5.

relations as historically and socially contingent, rather than the inevitable and necessary consequences of either human nature or world system dynamics.⁷³ Constructivism problematises the core assumption of mainstream IR⁷⁴ that the state is the main actor in world politics. It challenges also the conceptualisation of the state as a unitary actor, whose actions and behaviour are primarily shaped by survival concerns, given the interactions with other states. Instead, it posits a social international relations domain, featuring a relational, inter-subjective, and not necessarily state-centric, picture. In this fashion, various actors engaged in shaping world politics – such as diasporas and religious networks and, in our case, social movements and student movements – may be identified as relevant actors.⁷⁵

Indeed, the central premise of social constructivist analysis is the co-constitutive relation of agency and structure. As Klotz and Lynch summarised:

Constructivists stress that both structural continuities and processes of change are based on agency. Agency, in turn, is influenced by social, spatial, and historical context. Rather than granting ontological priority to either structure or agency, constructivists view both as ‘mutually constituted.’⁷⁶

The emphasis on the social constructed nature of the state and the international system has influenced constructivists’ growing attention to non-state actors. The relevance of NGOs, transnational social movements, advocacy networks, religious groups as well as multinational corporations in shaping world political dynamics has spawned new approaches, not only in IR but also in such disciplines as history and anthropology. These approaches permit focus on non-state actors as constructed entities, “shaped by the social milieu in which they live.”⁷⁷

In this sense, constructivism is a philosophy which can find a proper theoretical location when its spotlight is turned to issues of social mobilisation and their relation to international

⁷³ Robert Jackson and George Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 162-177.

⁷⁴ Namely (Neo)Realism and (Neo)Liberalism

⁷⁵ Jackson and Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations*, 229.

⁷⁶ Audie Klotz and Cecelia Lynch, *Strategies for Research in Constructivist International Relations* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 3.

⁷⁷ Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "TAKING STOCK: The Constructivist Research Program in International Relations and Comparative Politics," *Annual Review of Political Science* 4, no. 1 (2001), 394.

politics, change and considerations about the condition of post-coloniality. In other words, the dynamics of social mobilisation in a colonial context may find in a constructivist approach a useful set of propositions to formulate specific and relevant theoretical explanations for the case in hand.

However, while constructivism provides such valuable theoretical scaffolding for analysing the agential impact on structure (and vice versa), it remains fundamentally silent about the precise content of either agency or structure. In other words, constructivism does not provide a cogent theory of politics. It tells us how power may operate, but it says nothing about what kind of power is being talked about. For this purpose, I shall turn to post-colonial theory.⁷⁸

Post-colonial theory allows us precisely to account for the condition of the Palestinian people and their engagement in global politics. Approaching the study of the Palestinian student movement's role in the national struggle for liberation through the postcolonial framework also serves to contribute to the decolonisation of the field of International Relations itself, challenging the Western-centric narratives and approaches that have dominated it.⁷⁹ Seth warns that postcolonial theory should not be understood as an attempt to develop a non-Western IR for:

a non-Western IR would still be IR; it would mobilize the concepts and categories of IR (state, national interest, sovereignty and the like) but now from the viewpoint of the poor and weak nations of the world, or of the emergent but not yet hegemonic powers.⁸⁰

Postcolonialism in its broader approach to modern scientific thoughts aims at challenging the universality of those categories at the epistemological ontological and historical levels.⁸¹ In this sense, postcolonial theories aim to decolonise the production of knowledge within and beyond the field of IR.

⁷⁸ Ling has argued for a more comprehensive approach to IR, one able to build on both Social Constructivism – as a social theory– and Post-Colonialism – as a political theory. See L. H. M. Ling, *Postcolonial International Relations Conquest and Desire between Asia and the West* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002).

⁷⁹ See for example Branwen Gruffydd Jones, ed., *Decolonizing International Relations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

⁸⁰ Sanjay Seth, "Postcolonial Theory & International Relations: a Critical Introduction," in *Postcolonial Theory & International Relations: a Critical Introduction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 1-13, 2.

⁸¹ Jan Wilkens, "Postcolonialism in International Relations," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.101>.

It should be noted that while IR scholars have recently eliminated the hyphen from the word post-colonialism, I opt to keep it. I refer to post-colonialism as the field concerned with colonial discourse and power dynamics. Postcolonialism (without the hyphen) indicates a focus on present history that maintains continuities and discontinuities with colonialism. As Sylvester has explained, post-colonialism (with the hyphen) refers “to the analysis of colonialism and anti-colonialism. ‘Postcolonial’ is used to indicate a turn since the 1990s towards analysing the current era of IR as a postcolonial era.”⁸²

Therefore, I approach post-colonialism not in its chronological meaning (after the colonial period), but, rather, in its methodological and theoretical approach to the study of subalterns in a colonial context.

The following section will elaborate on the relevance of post-colonial theories for this study focusing on two pillars, Gramsci’s theorisation of subalterns and Fanon’s anti-colonial philosophising.

1.2 The Post-colonial Lens: An Approach to the Palestinian Student Movement

It has been argued that Zionist colonisation of the land and ethnic cleansing of the indigenous population should be understood and analysed within the paradigm of settler colonialism.⁸³ While recently settler colonial studies have emerged as a critical interpretative framework of IR, post-colonial theories offer the most suitable approach for fully appreciating the impact of the Palestinian student movement on international politics. Settler colonialism provides a lens for approaching Palestinian history. For settler colonial studies have the merit to identify the

⁸²Christine Sylvester, "Post-colonialism," in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, ed. John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 185. See also Anne McClintock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term "Post-Colonialism"," *Social Text*, no. 31/32 (1992). I agree with McClintock when she argues: “the term "post-colonialism" is, in many cases, prematurely celebratory. Ireland may, at a pinch, be "post-colonial," but for the inhabitants of British-occupied Northern Ireland, not to mention the Palestinian inhabitants of the Israeli Occupied Territories and the West Bank, there may be nothing "post" about colonialism at all.” 87.

⁸³See, for example, Fayez Sayegh, "Zionist Colonialism in Palestine (1965)," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012), doi:10.1080/2201473x.2012.10648833; Omar Jabary Salamanca et al., "Past Is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012), doi:10.1080/2201473x.2012.10648823; Lorenzo Veracini, *Israel and Settler Society* (London: Pluto Press, 2006).

power relations and the “specific mode of domination in Israel\Palestine,” based on the elimination of the native rather than dynamics of exploitation typical of traditional colonialism.⁸⁴ However, the settler colonial approach to IR builds on the premise that settler colonialism is constitutive of contemporary international politics because it is at the foundation of many of today’s First World nation-states.⁸⁵ The focus, therefore, is on settler power and the settler narrative.⁸⁶ The perspective and voice of the native, the indigenous, in the particular power relation that colonialism enacts, remains overlooked. In this sense, post-colonialism and its emphasis on the voice of subalterns provides a more suitable framework for the present analysis.⁸⁷

Rather than studying the settler-colonial project and its ideological and systemic tools of implementation, post-colonial studies allow for a more rigorous engagement with the viewpoint of colonialism’s subjects, those whom Edward Said called its “victims.”⁸⁸ Like other critical theories, post-colonialism does not consider nation-states as the only or even the main actors in the world system. For it criticises the reification of the state and insists on the need for a study of “international relations from below.”⁸⁹ Post-colonialism understands the state as “one of many sites of politics” and emphasises the “ways ordinary people can be involved in and shape transnational flows of knowledge, identity, culture and imagination.”⁹⁰

Post-colonialism’s contribution to IR is thus crucial as it questions the traditional understanding of hierarchies in the international system. It puts the historical relation of power

⁸⁴Lorenzo Veracini, "What Can Settler Colonial Studies Offer to an Interpretation of the Conflict in Israel-Palestine?" *Settler Colonial Studies* 5, no. 3 (2015).

⁸⁵Bruno Cornellier and Michael R. Griffiths, "Globalizing Unsettlement: An Introduction," *Settler Colonial Studies* 6, no. 4 (2016).

⁸⁶Alissa Macoun and Elizabeth Strakosch, "The Ethical Demands of Settler Colonial Theory," *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, no. 3-04 (2013); Rana Barakat, "Writing/righting Palestine Studies: Settler Colonialism, Indigenous Sovereignty and Resisting the Ghost(s) of History," *Settler Colonial Studies*, (2017).

⁸⁷ On the concept of subalterns in post-colonial theories see, for example, Stephen Morton, *Gayatri Spivak: Ethics, Subalternity and the Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008). David Ludden, *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning, and the Globalisation of South Asia* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005). Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: an Historical Introduction* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2016).

⁸⁸ Edward W. Said, "Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims," *Social Text*, no. 1 (1979), 7.

⁸⁹For an elaboration on “international relations from below” and postcolonial reference to it, see David L. Blaney and Naeem Inayatullah, "International Relations from Below," in *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, ed. Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (Oxford (United Kingdom): Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁹⁰Sylvester, "Post-colonialism", 185.

between coloniser and colonised at the core of the analysis of world politics⁹¹ and builds on the work on colonialism and resistance of anti-colonial intellectuals such as Frantz Fanon, and ground-breaking theories on the relation between the West and the Orient such as Edward Said's Orientalism.⁹²

1.2.1 Gramsci in Post-colonial Theories

Post-colonial analysis of power relations has famously taken inspiration from Antonio Gramsci's concepts of "subalterns" and "hegemony." The influence of the Italian philosopher's theorisation was key to the emergence of a specific strand of post-colonial theories, known as subaltern studies.⁹³ Subalternity, as theorised by Gramsci and incorporated and developed into post-colonial studies, becomes here particularly relevant. Not only does it investigate the specific dynamic of subordination within which Palestinian students operated, but it also posits and inscribes within the Palestinian students' movement a counter-hegemonic praxis that is poised to subvert subalternity. In this sense, Gramsci's work represents a fundamental point of departure for the analysis of Palestinian student politics.

It should be noted that Gramsci's political thought was introduced to the field of IR independently of postcolonial studies. The use of concepts such as historical materialism, hegemony – especially as rearticulated by Robert Cox – favoured the development of new strands of Marxist and other critical theories of IR.⁹⁴ However, it is only recently that within the postcolonial framework more attention has been paid to Gramsci's concepts of subalterns and

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 195.

⁹²Frantz Fanon is considered a prominent contributor of Post-colonial studies. Particularly relevant are his two books: Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask* (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Frantz Fanon, *Wretched*. Edward Said's Orientalism is considered the foundational text of Post-colonial studies. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004). Said's work represent a central reference of post-colonialism. See also: Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage Digital, 2014).

⁹³ Gramsci's influence on post-colonial study was exemplified by R. Guha's establishment of the Subaltern Studies Group in India in the early 1980s. See also for example Timothy Brennan, "Antonio Gramsci and Postcolonial Theory: 'Southernism,'" *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 10, no. 2 (2001), 143-187.

⁹⁴ Stephen Hobden and Richard Wyn Jones, "Marxist Theories of International Relations," in *The Globalization of World Politics*, ed. John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 141-155, 148-150.

counter-hegemonic practices.⁹⁵ Marcus Green warns about a narrow interpretation of Gramsci's work, particularly with regard to his articulation of the subalterns, within postcolonial studies. He argues that while the relevance of Gramsci's insights is constantly accredited by pioneer scholars of subaltern studies such as Guha and the South Asian Subaltern Study group⁹⁶, there is a "widespread misconception" of his concept of subalternity. Green explains that Gramsci's use of the term subalterns in his *Prisoner Notebooks* has been interpreted as a synonym of proletariat used to escape prison censorship. This narrow interpretation derives from a superficial engagement with Gramsci that only addresses him as an adherent to orthodox Marxist. This take eludes a more pertinent analysis of his texts. Without downplaying Gramsci's Marxism, for, indeed, he remained a committed Marxist throughout his life, Green suggests that

this misconception limits and confines Gramsci's conception of subalternity to strictly class terms and fails to consider the theoretical foundation and radical implications of his original conception. Due to the censorship thesis, subaltern studies scholars limit Gramsci's expansive conception of subalternity. In this sense, subaltern studies opened Gramsci to a new reading that highlighted the importance of the subaltern in his work, but then closed off its own reading by misinterpreting the meaning of the 'subaltern' in his writings.⁹⁷

This interpretation neglects the relevance and centrality of the concept of subalternity in Gramscian theorisation of the philosophy of praxis.⁹⁸ By doing so, it fails to grasp and understand the dynamics of domination in its various forms as were adumbrated and articulated in Gramsci's thought.⁹⁹

It is true that Gramsci never provided a clear definition of subalternity. But it is clear that he used the concept beyond the narrow meaning of proletariat, as he understood subalternity within

⁹⁵ Wilkens, "Postcolonialism in International Relations."

⁹⁶ See above, footnote 90.

⁹⁷ Marcus E Green, "Rethinking the Subaltern and the Question of Censorship in Gramsci's Prison Notebooks," *Postcolonial Studies* 14, no. 4 (2011): pp. 387-404, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2011.641913.388>

⁹⁸ By Philosophy of praxis Gramsci means the union of thought and action. Ramaioli explains Gramsci's thought: "Life is thought (philosophy) and action (politics): it is thinking combined with and expressed by doing, that is a 'philosophy of praxis.' There are then two main corollaries. First, insofar as history is the unfolding of life and lives, the philosophy of praxis is history itself. Second, any history - and thus any life - is inherently political:10 the philosophy of praxis implies that any life experience is imbued within politics." Massimo, Ramaioli. "Contentious Politics in the Arab Middle East: Jordanian Salafism and the Social Appropriation of Tradition" (2017). *Dissertations - ALL*. 778. 66-67.

⁹⁹ Green, "Rethinking the Subaltern", 393.

a given historical context. He sought to examine “the ways in which relations of class, race, gender, religion, nationalism, and colonialism interact with conditions of subordination”.¹⁰⁰ For Gramsci, subalterns were all those social groups that were marginalised and oppressed. The specificity of each different condition of subalternity is shaped by the historical context and the social, political and cultural conditions that characterise it.

Gramsci, however, is not merely concerned with the analysis of subalternity. Inherent in his thought is the pairing of forms of subordinations and modes of dominations with an attendant logic of resistance and subverting of those dynamics. Gramsci ends up configuring a revolutionary project of radical transformation of power dynamics. Such a project is predicated on the emergence of a critical consciousness that would favour the rise of a new historic bloc able to revolutionise the dynamic of subordination. By historic bloc Gramsci refers to the union of social forces – the institutions, social relations, ideas through which the ruling class produces and reproduces hegemony. The task to forge a new historic bloc relies mainly on organic intellectuals – the constructor[s], organizer[s], and permanent persuader[s]¹⁰¹ who are able to articulate the interests of the class from which they stem from and to wage battles to disseminate this world-view within diverse civil societies. Organic intellectuals have a fundamental role in the creation of the collective will and the elaboration of the critical pedagogy required for subverting the relation of domination. This thesis builds on Gramsci’s concept of organic intellectuals and highlights the relevance of the organic relations between Palestinian students and the broader society. The following chapter will elaborate further on Gramsci’s contribution to this study.

Despite the limitations outlined above, an understanding of Gramscian analysis, post-colonial attention to subalternity and its efforts to build a bottom-up analysis of power relations offers a privileged lens for the analysis of the Palestinian experience.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 394.

¹⁰¹ Antonio Gramsci, Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (NY: International Publishers, 2014), 5.

1.2.2 Fanon's Anti-colonialism in Postcolonial Studies

Along with Gramsci, Fanon's contribution to post-colonial studies provides an important reference for the analysis of Palestinian student anti-colonial politics. Arguably, Fanon is the most influential anti-colonial intellectual. In his two major works, *Black Skin White Mask* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, he outlines the core of his analysis on colonialism and anti-colonial practices. As also when interpreting Gramsci, Fanon's thought should be analysed in light of the historical context and circumstances that shaped his life. Fanon was profoundly shaped by his own condition as a colonial subject in Martinique and the racist background against which colonial role was maintained. His later engagement with the Algerian anti-colonial movement and the struggle for liberation strongly contributed to his theorisation of decolonisation.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon wrote:

Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the "thing" which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself.¹⁰²

Fanon understood decolonisation as a violent process and considered the use of violence as a "cleansing force"¹⁰³ that would allow the colonised to re-create a new man able to overthrow the colonial power: violence is a central tool through which the oppressed build and achieve national consciousness.¹⁰⁴ This does not mean, however, that Fanon understood violence as a political end in itself. Violence both needs to be understood in context and in more complex terms through its exploring effects on the psyche and the possibilities of interrupting cycles of violence and counterviolence.¹⁰⁵ Gibson points out that "while he [Fanon] recognized the psychological and symbolical importance of anticolonial violence in the context of the exponential imbalance of

¹⁰² Fanon, *The Wretched*, 36-37.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁰⁴ Sylvester, "Post-colonialism", 187.

¹⁰⁵ Andrea Cassatella, "Psychic Life as Border Theatrics: On Frantz Fanon's Psychiatric Writings", *Dolce Stil Criollo*, Vol. 4 (2020) 272-307.

colonial violence, he indicated that violence was also a *problematic*.¹⁰⁶ Fanon was concerned with “social transformation towards a radically humanist society” and the elaboration of a philosophy of liberation.¹⁰⁷ While Fanon’s theorisation of violence remains a fundamental component of his thought on decolonisation and revolutionary liberation, attracting support but also criticism from fellow intellectuals,¹⁰⁸ his work develops much further. Fanon suggests that colonial power is based on and sustained by force, repression and violence. He argued that colonial rule “is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native.”¹⁰⁹ This violence derives from the racialised views that the coloniser has about the colonised subjects.

Active resistance to the violence of colonialism was the colonised’s first step towards self-discovery, an act that remained within the manichean framework of colonialism and reproduces its same violence. Anti-colonial violence is the expression of the colonised’s internalisation of the colonisers’ dehumanisation of themselves. It is the anger of the oppressed that finds its way to be expressed. Fanon points out that this dynamic enacts a cyclical mechanism where violence engenders counterviolence.¹¹⁰ During decolonisation “the problem, Fanon argued, was to take control of this anger, to explain it and to channel it. This channelling demanded a new kind of intellectual work and political education.”¹¹¹ Fanon argues that, in order to participate in the struggle for liberation, the colonised need to unite in a spontaneous rebellion based on commitment to national liberation. There must be an initial phase of mobilisation and assertion of national solidarity. Forging a national consciousness is, therefore, key to achieving liberation. However, Fanon did not understand national consciousness as an end in itself. For, national consciousness

¹⁰⁶ Nigel C. Gibson, *Fanon: the Postcolonial Imagination* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity, 2003), 11.

¹⁰⁷ Nigel C. Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: from Steve Biko to Abahlali BaseMjondolo* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), x

¹⁰⁸ The most articulated criticism of Fanon’s concept of violence came from Hannah Arendt. She criticised the assumption that violence would lead to the creation of a new more humanitarian global order led by the Third World as well as Fanon’s association of violence with life and creativity. Patricia Owens, *Between War and Politics: International Relations and the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 21-22.

¹⁰⁹ Fanon, *The Wretched*, 38.

¹¹⁰ Gibson, *Fanon*, 17.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

was not the goal but the ground upon which a new humanity could be constructed.¹¹² Gibson pointed out that “Fanon claimed that the end of colonialism would be truly expressed with the reformation and recreation of a vibrant national culture which had its basis on revolutionary transformation rather than ethnic identity, with a future constructed by all who wanted to play a positive part.”¹¹³ In this context, Ali highlights the similarities between Gramsci and Fanon. He emphasises how the elaboration of counter-hegemonic discourse and strategies are necessary in anti-colonial struggles. He explains that, according to Fanon, in order to overthrow the colonial dynamic:

subaltern hegemonic project must nevertheless be forged in order to be able to maintain the long battle that is necessary. The anticolonial struggle is won “not because there are no more enemies left to kill, but quite simply because the enemy, for various reasons, will come to realize that his interest lies in ending the struggle and in recognizing the sovereignty of the colonized people” (Fanon 1968, 141). [...] And when Fanon speaks of “violence,” he is referring to the liberation struggle as a whole, never underplaying its sociopolitical aspects, to which the military aspects must be subordinated.¹¹⁴

As I will argue in the following chapter, violence was, beyond doubt, a most instrumental tool to end domination over the colonised. However, it was not the only strategy that Fanon envisaged and, above all, it was not separated from the complex process of decolonisation he outlined.

Fanon did not understand decolonisation within a nationalist framework. He criticised the bourgeois nationalism that was, for him, the expression of the interests of the bourgeoisie that aimed at preserving the privileges and hierarchies that it had obtained. Fanon opposes to this nationalism “another would-be hegemonic form of national consciousness— a liberationist, anti-imperialist, nationalist internationalism, represented in the Algerian arena by the radical

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹⁴ Noaman G. Ali, “Reading Gramsci through Fanon: Hegemony before Dominance in Revolutionary Theory,” *Rethinking Marxism* 27, no. 2 (2015): pp. 241-257, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08935696.2015.1007793>.

anticolonial resistance movement.”¹¹⁵ It is this radical national consciousness that is at the basis of Fanon’s understanding of decolonisation as a revolutionary transformation, not only of the colonial structure but also of the capitalist system globally. This new form of national consciousness “is the only thing that will give us an international dimension... [I]t is national liberation which leads the nation to play its part on the stage of history. It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows. (1968:247–8) ”¹¹⁶

Fanon’s theorisation on anti-colonialism and strategies of liberation provide an important framework for analysis of Palestinian students’ political engagement, their discourses and practices of mobilisation to achieve liberation.

This study of the Palestinian student movement seeks to uncover the central role of the people in the making of politics, particularly the politics of resistance in the specific context of colonisation. It explores the strategies and outcome of the mobilisation of a subaltern society that has faced dispersion, refugeehood, statelessness, lack of recognition and lack of international protection and which has had to reorganise politically, through armed struggle as well as popular mobilisation, to overcome the unbalanced power relations characterising colonialism. In doing so, they emerged as a relevant player in regional and global politics.

The next section introduces theories of social movements and their relevance for the analysis of Palestinian student transnational activism.

1.3 Students and Social Movements Theories: the Analysis of the Palestinian Case

“There is only one kind of revolution that the revolutionary students really achieved in ‘68, but they achieved it well, and this was the revolution in the social sciences.” So stated French sociologist Michel Crozier in his analysis of Alain Touraine’s contribution to social movement

¹¹⁵ Neil Lazarus, "Disavowing Decolonization. Fanon, Nationalism, and the Question of Representation in Postcolonial Theory," in *Frantz Fanon Critical Perspectives*, ed. Anthony Alessandrini (London: Routledge, 2005), 162.

¹¹⁶Fanon, quoted in Lazarus "Disavowing Decolonization", 169.

theories.¹¹⁷ Crozier underlines the student movements' crucial impact on social science studies, arguing that 1960s student activism "acted as a catalyst for new theoretical beginnings, redefining the categories and paradigms that had hitherto been used to analyse society".¹¹⁸

While a systematic theorisation on student's role in bringing about radical transformations has yet to be articulated, student movements and more generally, social movements and collective action, have been analysed within the broader theoretical framework of "contentious politics."¹¹⁹ This draws on Charles Tilly's definition of collective action as "people acting together in pursuit of common interests,"¹²⁰ and his defining of contentious politics as "when ordinary people [...] join forces in confrontation with elites, authorities and opponents."¹²¹ Tarrow points out that:

collective action becomes contentious when it is used by people who lack regular access to institutions, that act in the name of new or unaccepted claims, and behave in ways that fundamentally challenge other authorities.¹²²

On the basis of these definitions, Sidney Tarrow considers contention to be at the core of social movements, as it is the only recourse for ordinary people to confront better equipped and powerful opponents (primarily the state). This framework allows social movements to be seen as "collective challenges based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities."¹²³ These empirical properties have been outlined in works that focus on the student revolts and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. They oppose the previous negative idea of collective action as expressions of extremism, violence and deprivation.¹²⁴

¹¹⁷Michel Crozier, "Alain Touraine: A Pioneer in the New French Sociology." in *Alain Touraine*, edited by J. Clark and Mario Diani. (London: Falmer Press, 1996), 15 quoted in Sarah Waters, "Situating Movements Historically: May 1968, Alain Touraine, and New Social Movements Theory," *Mobilization: The International Quarterly* 13,1 (2008), 65.

¹¹⁸Crozier, "Alain Touraine: A Pioneer in the New French Sociology." in Waters, "Situating Movements Historically", 25.

¹¹⁹Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3.

¹²⁰Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Manila: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1978), 7.

¹²¹Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 3.

¹²²*Ibid.*, 3.

¹²³*Ibid.*, 4.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*

In her *Students of Resistance*, Burke urges analysing Palestinian student movements through the framework of social movement and contentious politics theories. Building on theories of collective actions that focus on the “resources – material, human, cognitive, technical, and organisational - that movements deployed in order to expand, reward participants, and gain a stake in the political system,”¹²⁵ Burke takes as her point of departure Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow’s theorisation of *repertoires*, and David Snow and Robert Benford’s notion of *framing* but modifies their models to apply them to the Palestinian case. Burke’s understanding of repertoires is not limited to contentious gathering and actions but include “quite” contentions – actions that might not be as visible as other repertoires but that help students advance their claims. She defines framings as discursive repertoires and focuses on the “agency and choice-making of challenging contenders.”¹²⁶ Burke’s analysis is concerned with the agency of the students, the actions they utilise to advance their claims and the reasons why they select them. She suggests that a comparative analysis of Palestinian political activism can help understanding of the political contribution of students, identifying the way in which the claims and the strategies they implement are shaped by the specific environment in which students operate. *Students of Resistance* therefore presents an analysis of Palestinian students over three decades in three different locations: this comparative approach highlights similarities and differences in students’ political engagement in the different locations.¹²⁷ For her comparative analysis Burke provides a modified model of sovereignty, arguing that the specific condition of Palestinian students have required them to confront, challenge or deal with multiple sovereignties, rather than a single power-holder as is usually assumed in contentious politics theories.¹²⁸ This more articulated framework allows Burke

¹²⁵Marc Edelman, “Social Movements: Changing Paradigms and Forms of Politics,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2001), 288.

¹²⁶ Burke, “Students of Resistance”

¹²⁷ The University of Haifa in Israel, the University of Bir Zeit in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in the UK.

¹²⁸ While theories of contentious politics consider the state the main power-holder that movements confront, Burke argues that the particular condition of Palestinian students as sector of a society under colonisation and in exile,

to identify a large set of strategies (repertoires) and discourses (framing) employed by students and show that students are a “sector capable of operating under conditions of severe repression, adept at adapting their tactics to the behaviour of power-holders, and sophisticated in their use of beneficial frames to appeal to their target audiences.”¹²⁹ This scholarship fills an important gap in the literature on Palestinian student politics, highlighting the positive contribution of social movements and contentious politics theories to the analysis of student movements, even in the context of colonisation. However, while this approach successfully shows similarities and differences in student strategies, it cannot fully account for the uniformity of the Palestinian student politics in the anti-colonial struggle. This structural analysis does not fully grasp the influence of the revolutionary culture, international ideologies and regional political developments on the making of student politics at the transnational level. Similarly, the impact of transnational student activism fostering the emergence of Palestinian revolutionary parties and movements, as well as its impact on domestic and international dynamics, cannot be sufficiently addressed. While building on Burke’s work, this study takes a different approach to the analysis of Palestinian student movements, opting for a theoretical lens that can fully account for the colonial context – and the way it shapes socio-cultural political life at domestic, regional and international levels, one which emphasises the relevance of student collective agency transnationally.

1.3 The Relevance of Context: Post-colonial Social Movements

Social movements in the context of colonisation and decolonisation have been mainly analysed within area studies to uncover socio-political dynamics in specific regions. More consistent attention has been paid to social movements and their role in postcolonial (without the hyphen) societies.¹³⁰ These have focused on protests in states that have achieved formal

requires on them to confront two power-holder at least in the case of palestinian stidents in the west bank and those in the UK. In the Occupied Territories students confront the Palestinian Authority as well as the Israeli Occupation forces, in the UK students contront the local power-holder but also the Israeli authorities.

¹²⁹ Burke, “Student of Resistance,” 343.

¹³⁰See Section 1.3 of this chapter.

independence but which are still impacted by the previous relation of dominance by the former coloniser. Most interest in postcolonial social movements has focused on people's response to neo-colonial dynamics. Motta and Nilsen explain that the postcolonial is understood:

as a 'field of force' (Thompson, 1978; Roseberry, 1994) that came into being with the advent of decolonization of the global South, in which dominant and subaltern groups are engaged in conflictual encounters over the forms, directions and meanings of development, and, crucially, which is simultaneously constitutive of and constituted by the dynamics of these struggles.¹³¹

Anti-colonial mobilisation is addressed as the historical political process that has shaped postcolonial social movements' contemporary practices and visions.¹³²

The focus on the postcolonial has helped to identify the limits of Western-centric theories, particularly their inability to account for the complexity of socio-political and cultural mechanisms that inform collective actions and contentious politics in non-Western societies. This is particularly true for studies on popular mobilisation in the Arab world. In this regard, Bayat has argued that:

in contrast to the "exceptionalist" tendency, there are those often "local" scholars in the Middle East who tend uncritically to deploy conventional models and concepts to the social realities of their societies, without acknowledging sufficiently that these models hold different historical genealogies, and may thus offer little help to explain the intricate texture and dynamics of change and resistance in this part of the world.¹³³

Scholars have addressed the analysis of popular movements in the Middle East, acknowledging the complexity of socio-political and economic factors that the structural approach of Western theories have missed. The Arab Spring and the urge to explain current developments in the region have reinvigorated a multidisciplinary analysis of contentious politics. Recent literature has stressed not

¹³¹Sara C. Motta and Alf Gunvald Nilsen, *Social Movements in the Global South: Dispossession, Development and Resistance* (Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3.

¹³²Nilsen has argued that popular resistance in the global South resulted from two main trajectories of protest that had their roots in the decolonisation process: "On the one hand, the emergence of new social movements and a resurgent Third World radicalism in the 1960s and 1970s; on the other hand, the eruption of popular resistance to neo-liberal restructuring in the 1980s." Alf Nilsen, "Postcolonial Social Movements," in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 932.

¹³³Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Cairo: American Univ. in Cairo Press, 2010), 4. Bayat goes so far as to challenge conventional understanding of social movements in the Arab region, drawing attention to forms of "pressure from below" which he calls the "quite encroachment of the ordinary": "a silent, patient, protracted, and pervasive advancement of ordinary people on the propertied and powerful in order to survive hardships and better their lives." Asef Bayat, *Street Politics: Poor People's Movements in Iran* (New York: Columbia University Press 1998), 7.

only the neo-colonial dynamics that led to popular revolts, but also the complexity of political social and cultural mechanisms that underlie the uprisings.¹³⁴ This body of work acknowledges the colonial past and its present implications for the dynamics of contention.¹³⁵

While these theoretical developments are important contributions to the study of contentious politics in the Middle East it is not the intent here to provide an in-depth discussion of them.

What is important is to note that the colonial context has been a constant reference for any critical study of popular mobilisation and has been recognised as an important, if not fundamental, factor in shaping political and social life in the Arab region. This applies even more to the Palestinian case. The Palestinian student movement emerged as a reaction to the *Nakba* (“catastrophe” of 1948) and the socio-political fragmentation it brought about.¹³⁶ The condition of colonisation and statelessness, therefore, shaped the genealogy and history of Palestinian student activism. The persistence of the colonial framework makes anti-colonial and decolonisation scholarship a fundamental theoretical reference for the analysis of popular movements. Boudreau warns that “in assessing decolonization and contention, the analyst must often adjust key conceptual tools to capture new ranges of variation.”¹³⁷ He specifies that the colonial context requires us:

to consider concepts that have been generally central to the analysis of social movements – political opportunity structures, repertoires of contention, mobilizing structures, and

¹³⁴ For an extensive study of social movements in the Middle East challenging the “neo-Orientalist” and modernist understanding of popular mobilisation in the region, see John Chalcraft, “Popular Movements In the Middle East And North Africa,” in *The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective* ed. Stefan Berger and Holger Nehring (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 225-265. For recent scholarships, see also: Gilbert Achcar, *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising* (London: Saqi, 2013); Joel Beinin and Frederic Vairel, *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013) and Charles Tripp, *The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹³⁵ In this regard, scholars such as Dabashi have argued that the Arab Spring marks the end of postcoloniality as “these revolutionary uprisings are postideological, meaning they are no longer fighting according to terms dictated by their condition of coloniality, codenamed ‘postcolonial’.” Hamid Dabashi, *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 11.

¹³⁶ Chapter 3 provides an in-depth discussion of the *Nakba*.

¹³⁷ Vince Boudreau, “Decolonization and Social Movements,” in *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013), 169.

collective action frames – in a new light. In colonial and decolonizing contexts, these concepts often unfold in relationship to distinct empirical realities.¹³⁸

I concur with Boudreau. This study of the Palestinian student movement is grounded in the methodological framework that emphasises the relevance of the colonial setting in influencing the emergence and development of such movements. The *modus operandi* of Palestinian students, their international strategies as well as transnational organising can be fully understood only if analysed in the context of colonisation and resultant statelessness.

A central contribution towards this is provided by Fanon's thoughts and theorisation of anti-colonial practices.

1.3.1 Fanon and Anti-colonial Movements

Gibson has pointed out that in the analysis of anti-colonial and decolonisation movements Fanon's thought and his rationality of the revolt provide a relevant framework of analysis and are "especially alive in intentional spaces where decolonization and liberation are linked with everyday questions of movement democracy and organization."¹³⁹

In *Fanonian Practices*, Gibson emphasised that Fanon's anticolonial practices are grounded in his philosophy of liberation. Like Gramsci, Fanon consider praxis, the union of thoughts and actions, as fundamental for the elaboration of a revolutionary, counter-hegemonic process of liberation:

In the vortex of mass movements against colonialism, Fanon argued that it was important to develop new concepts. These concepts, he believed, would emerge not from secluded contemplations on philosophy, but through reflections on, and engagements with, 'real' movements of those excluded, marginalised and disenfranchised masses, namely the damned of the earth, struggling for social change. In other words, new concepts emerge by shifting the very ground upon which reason is constructed.¹⁴⁰

Knowledge and action are, therefore, intrinsically connected: without an ideology of liberation that guides the struggle, the struggle will never be successful and liberation cannot be

¹³⁸Boudreau, "Decolonization and Social Movements", 169.

¹³⁹Nigel C. Gibson, "The Specter of Fanon: the Student Movements and the Rationality of Revolt in South Africa," *Social Identities* 23, no. 5 (2016): pp. 579-599, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2016.1219123>.

¹⁴⁰ Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa*, xi.

truly achieved. Yet, Fanon argues, this knowledge, this ideological framework, cannot be imposed on people. It cannot simply be a theoretical elaboration that is given, brought to the people by their leaders, imposed on the masses from above. The Martinican intellectual was convinced of the “indispensability of radically democratic participation. [...]. In anticolonial struggle, people, through fighting, made themselves subjects of their own history, seizing responsibility for its present and future.”¹⁴¹

Hallward has pointed to the centrality of the concept of “people’s will” in Fanon’s theorisation of cultural and political emancipation, liberation and anti-colonial strategies. The struggle is the expression of the will of the people: decolonisation is only achieved when the masses participate in it, when they manifest their will.

Hallward points out that the “people’s will” of Fanon is the general will

that Rousseau and the Jacobins put at the divisive centre of modern politics. It is the practice that, after Hegel and Marx, Lenin confirmed as the central element of modern revolutionary experience. It is the practice that Fanon’s own revolutionary contemporaries (Mao, Castro, Che Guevara, Giap, Mandela) preserved as their guiding frame of reference.¹⁴²

Fanon argues that the constitution of a general will begins with an initial moment of voluntary association and commitment to national liberation and an initial phase of “spontaneous” and enthusiastic assertion of national solidarity and emancipatory revolt. “In undertaking this onward march, the people legislates, finds itself, and wills itself to sovereignty.”¹⁴³ In fact, Fanon is convinced that for oppressed or colonised people, “affirmation of the category of the people is inseparable from participation in their will to self-emancipation.”¹⁴⁴ For, it is participation in struggle which unites its participants and thus constitutes them as *a* people.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, vi.

¹⁴²Peter Hallward, “Fanon and Political Will” in *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 7, 1, (2011). For Fidel Castro’s famous declaration of having “fought with Rousseau’s *Social Contract* in the pocket” see Paolo Alatri, *Introduzione a Gian Giacomo Rousseau*, (Torino: UTET, 1970) 46; Lucio Colletti, *Ideologia e società*, (Roma: Laterza, 1969) 196.

¹⁴³Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched*, 132-133.

¹⁴⁴Hallward, “Fanon”.

Fanon understood democracy as “the rule of the people and not the rule of experts.” He conceived it as a daily practice rather than just the participation in elections.¹⁴⁵ The capacity to assemble and to form voluntary and cohesive associations is the crucial distinctive feature of any account of political will and, therefore, is at the basis of revolutionary movements strategies: “the masses should be able to meet together, discuss, propose, and receive directions.”¹⁴⁶ The role of leaders and organisers is that of facilitating and clarifying the decision-making process, not themselves taking decisions. Fanon asserted that “to hold a responsible position in an underdeveloped country is to know that in the end everything depends on the education of the masses.” To educate the masses politically, for Fanon is simply “to try, relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that everything depends on them.”¹⁴⁷

While Fanon was convinced of the importance of a people’s participation in the armed opposition to colonial power, he did not understand violent resistance as the only strategy to which the movement should commit. At the basis of the anti-colonial movement there must be an all-encompassing mobilisation of the masses. Gibson suggests that it is their participation, the expression of the collective agency of the people, that makes them protagonists of history: “Fanon posits organization as an *organism* that is created by the movements and their intellectuals who, he argues, are ‘living inside of History.’ History here understood as the *making of history* by those excluded from History.”¹⁴⁸

Popular participation is key to anti-colonial struggle:

The mobilization of the masses, when it arises out of the war of liberation, introduces into each man’s consciousness the ideas of a common cause, of a national destiny, and of a collective history’ (WE, 93). Forged in struggle, the new nation comes to enjoy a properly ‘monolithic’ degree of national unity (AR, 62).¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Gibson, “The Specter of Fanon”.

¹⁴⁶ Fanon, *Wretched*, 195.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 197. See in this context also Amilcar Cabral, *National Liberation and Culture*, Eduardo Mondlane Memorial Lecture Series at Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York. 1970.

<http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/cabralnlac.html>

¹⁴⁸ Gibson, “The Specter of Fanon”.

¹⁴⁹ Fanon quoted in Hallward, “Fanon”.

However, as pointed out in the previous section, Fanon understood national liberation as a first step towards a radical internationalism. His analysis of decolonisation insists on the revolutionary role of the masses, popular revolts and collective protests in the Third World in order to sustain a counter-hegemonic praxis even after formal liberation is achieved so as to prevent the reproduction of an unbalanced relation in which the leaders and ruling classes of the newly independent, postcolonial state aim to preserve their own privileges and interests. In this sense, the revolutionary impact of anti-colonial and decolonisation movements, characterised by the democratic participation of the people, the mobilisation of the masses and the elimination “of hierarchical political relationships between elites and masses” goes beyond the postcolonial nation-state and allows the development of a new internationalism that challenges the inequalities typical of the capitalist system.¹⁵⁰

Fanonian anti-colonial and decolonisation movements are expressions of people’s will and are based on the active democratic participation of the masses. At their basis is a national consciousness that guides their practices and sustains their internationalism. Fanon’s anti-colonial movements are “movements that developed and expressed and enforced the will of the people.”¹⁵¹ The relevance of this anti-colonial framework in the analysis of the Palestinian case will be further elaborated in Chapter Two.

The following sections address the specific role of students in the emergence of national movements.

1.4 Student Movements: Literature Overview

During the 1960s, intellectuals and scholars paid great attention to student movements, focusing mainly on the motivations, ideologies and social backgrounds of students who engaged in political activism. This generated a significant and rich body of literature most of it concerned with

¹⁵⁰ Anuja Bose, “Frantz Fanon and the Politicization of the Third World as a Collective Subject,” *Interventions* 21, no. 5 (July 2019): pp. 671-689, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801x.2019.1585925>.

¹⁵¹ Gibson, “The Specter of Fanon”.

particular events and student experiences in specific countries. Yet to emerge in the literature are theoretical generalisations and widely accepted theoretical perspectives that address student movements as a general political phenomena and assess their impact on international political dynamics.¹⁵²

1.4.1 Character and Significance of Student Activism

Some scholars have attempted to provide general theories that account for the sociological dynamics at the basis of student activism. In *The Conflict of Generations*, Feuer suggests that what distinguishes student movements from other social movements is the combination of “youthful love” and “conflict of generations” that inspire their collective action. Feuer defines a student movement as a:

combination of students inspired by aims which they try to explicate in a political ideology, and moved by an ideological rebellion in which there is always disillusionment with, and rejection of, values of the older generation; moreover, the members of a student movement have the conviction that their generation has a special historical mission to fulfil where the older generation, other elites, and other classes, have failed.¹⁵³

However, Feuer argues, students alone cannot accomplish their aims, needing a “carrier” movement of major proportion such as peasants, workers or national or anti-colonial activists. Students add a new element to the strategies of the carrier movement, that of emotion, in particular the emotion that derives from the “conflict of generations” and which may deflect in irrational directions.¹⁵⁴ Feuer is very critical of the role of student movements in bringing about social transformations, pointing out that several changes have happened historically without student support. He goes so far as to argue student contributions can often be identified with violent and irrational practices.

¹⁵²Philip Altbach, ed., *Student Politics: Perspectives for the Eighties* (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1981) 4.

¹⁵³ Lewis Feuer, *The Conflict of Generations: The Character and Significance of Student Movements* (New York: Basic Books Publishing, 1969).

¹⁵⁴Feurer, *The Conflict of Generations*, 8.

Several sociologists and theorists have assimilated and further developed the “conflict of generations” theory.¹⁵⁵ Altbach has underlined the criticisms that this approach raises. It has been pointed out that Feuer’s theory fails to account for student dynamics in a sufficient number of national experiences.¹⁵⁶ Flacks has argued that the conflict of generations theory cannot account for protests in 1960s USA. To support his argument, he provided an in-depth analysis of the social, political and cultural background of the generation involved in the revolts. Flacks highlighted how most students came from middle-class families, in which parents constantly expressed a critical and sceptical attitude towards the dominant culture. According to Flacks, therefore, American student activists did not protest against a system that represented – and was the outcome of – their parents’ values, but, instead, pushed for radical changes inspired by what they had learned from their families.¹⁵⁷

DeFronzo suggests a different explanation for the crucial involvement of students in revolutions and revolutionary movements. He refers to the theory of “youth idealism”, arguing that “when children turn their new deductive capability onto moral generalities internalised at an earlier period of life, they tend to develop expectations that turn out to be in conflict with aspects of social reality.”¹⁵⁸

This process generates a sense of frustration that develops into the conviction that the system needs to be changed. The social circumstances of university student life, namely, the lack of financial responsibility and diminished parental supervision, combined with a natural predisposition to support radical ideologies that advocate for revolutionary changes, favour student

¹⁵⁵ See, for example, Philip Altbach and Robert Laufer, *The New Pilgrim’s Youth Protests in Transition* (New York: McKay, 1972).

¹⁵⁶ Altbach, ed., *Student Politics*, 4.

¹⁵⁷ Richard Flacks, “Social and Cultural Meanings of Student Revolt: Some Informal Comparative Observations,” *Social Problems* 17,3 (1970), 346.

¹⁵⁸ Gill and DeFronzo, “A Comparative Framework,” 205.

political activism.¹⁵⁹ Alleberck argues that a “supposedly inherent youthful rebelliousness”¹⁶⁰ should not *per se* be considered a determinant of student political involvement. He posits that it is the freedom from occupational and family constraints that facilitates the formation of student movements aimed at pursuing moral ideals.

Authors such as Altbach and Lipset have examined student movements in Western as well as Third World countries.¹⁶¹ In *Students in Revolt*, they attempt to provide an exhaustive comparative analysis of several variables in student movement formation and *modus operandi* in Europe and the USA, as well as in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The collection of essays provides an interesting insight into the role of universities in different societies, the social backgrounds of the students and the strategies employed.

However, Altbach and Lipset highlight the impossibility of a general theory of student movements. In *Student Politics Perspectives for the Eighties*, Altbach analyses student activism in Third World countries and highlights the differences in the character, significance, role and scope of student movements in non-Western countries. The empirical observations that he provides confirm the distinct nature and development of student movements in Western in contrast with Third World nations, and the impossibility of theorising a general framework able to incorporate so many different factors and experiences. However, other prominent scholars such as Frank Pinner, Gill and DeFronzo do attempt to provide broad categories for identifying student movements, with analysis and highlighting of common general traits.

Pinner suggests a categorisation of student organisations to help in facilitating the analysis of multiple and diverse experiences. His focus is on the relation between the student movement and the authority, i.e. the institutions that govern the society. In his analysis of Western student

¹⁵⁹ James DeFronzo, “Revolution in the twentieth century,” in *Focus on Sociology A Book of Sociological Readings*, eds. Arnold Olson and Sushil Usman (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 1970), 323.

¹⁶⁰This definition of Alleberck argument is mentioned in Gill and DeFronzo, “A Comparative Framework”, 205.

¹⁶¹See Seymour Lipset and Philip Altbach, eds., *Students in Revolt* (Boston: Beacon, 1970); Altbach, ed., *Student Politics*; Seymour Lipset, “University students and politics in underdeveloped countries,” *Minerva* 3, 1 (1964), 15-54.

movements, Pinner identifies two categories: 1) transgressive groups, which are primarily directed against the authority structure of their society; and 2) traditional groups, which socialise their members into their role as conventional.¹⁶²

Belden Fields has sought to explain the fundamental role of student activism in the 1968 revolts in France, suggesting new classification of student organisations. Using the goal of the organisation as a criterion, he identifies three different types:

- 1) The student-oriented organisation, which “looks in” upon the life of the students in academic and spiritual contexts. It is apolitical and focuses mainly on education-related issues;
- 2) The environment-oriented organisation, which “looks out” at the political and social environment and can be local, national or international;
- 3) The student- and environment-oriented organisation which both “looks in” at the educational and cultural problems of the students and “looks out” at the political and social environment.¹⁶³

More recently, Gill and DeFronzo have attempted to develop a more comprehensive typology for classifying student movements. They suggest a categorisation into four main types, according to their goals and cultural and structural dimensions:

- 1) In “reform student movements” students do not want to radically change institutions and culture, but aim at “influencing institutional policies or replacing personnel” and/or advocating new emphases on or interpretations of “existing cultural values”;
- 2) Within “structural revolutionary student movements” they are more radical, aiming at “changing one or more major social institutions, such as the political system or economic system, rather than just focusing on institutional policies”;
- 3) “Identity radicalism movements” are those in which students aim primarily at rejecting “given identities, ways of thinking, values, and discursive practices” which they perceive as being superimposed;
- 4) “Social revolutionary movements”, the most radical type, involve students aiming” at replacing both major social institutions, such as the political system (and often the economic system), and also much of the culture of the society.”¹⁶⁴

With few exceptions, little attention has been given to the development of international student activism in the years following the “great 1960s.” In general, scholarly interest in student

¹⁶² Frank Pinner, “Western European Student Movements Through Changing Times,” in *Students in Revolt*, eds. Lipset and Altbach, 62-64.

¹⁶³ Belden Fields, *Student Politics in France* (New York: New York Basic Books Inc. Publishers, 1970), 4-7.

¹⁶⁴ Gill and DeFronzo, “A Comparative Framework,” 209-214.

movements has waned due to a sharp decline of student activism in industrialised countries since the 1970s. Altbach attributes social, economic, psychological, demographic and political considerations to this decline in Western countries.¹⁶⁵ Among other factors, he identifies changes in external political realities as “perhaps the most important” reason. Elbaum further illustrates how the international political transformations of the 1970s made it hard to organise and mobilise student and mass movements transnationally.¹⁶⁶ Altbach also argues that the feeling of failure for not having achieved real social change and revolution is another important explanation for diminished student political involvement. Nevertheless, he points out that the awareness of not being able to truly bring about the desired radical transformation led to a radicalisation of tactics and ideologies and the emergence of underground movements such as the Weathermen in the USA, the Baader-Meinhof Rote Armee Fraktion in Germany, the Brigade Rosse in Italy and the Red Army in Japan, to name but a few.¹⁶⁷ While these movements were the direct outcome of student radicalism, their radicalism also alienated some students from political involvement as students became afraid of being associated with radical and often underground groups.

While these theories on the character and significance of student movements offer an important and valid framework, they can tell us very little about the impact of student movements on global politics. By focusing on the sociological and psychological facilitators of student activism they offer answers to why students engage in political activities and what conducive social conditions are required for student movements to emerge. While detailed and exhaustive arguments have been provided to answer these fundamental questions, these theories cannot explain how student movements affect world politics. Thus they cannot fully account for the fundamental contribution of Palestinian student movements to the emergence and development of a national liberation

¹⁶⁵Altbach, ed., *Student Politics*, 8-11.

¹⁶⁶Max Elbaum, “What Legacy from the Radical Internationalism of 1968?” *Radical History Review* 82, (2002) 37-64.

¹⁶⁷See, for example: Giovanni Statera, “Student Politics in Italy: From Utopia to Terrorism,” *Higher Education* 8,6 *Student Activism* (1979), 657-67.

movement able to impact on a regional system dominated by states. Furthermore, the sociology-oriented approach leaves little space for further political analysis and argumentation.

1.4.2 Relevance for Palestine of Student Engagement in Anti-colonial Struggle

Altbach points out that Third World's student movements have been more effective than those in industrialised societies in bringing about revolutionary transformations. Very often, students in Latin America, Asia and Africa have been responsible for overthrowing governments. Unlike in Western countries, "students in the Third World are a consistent, important, and even a legitimate part of the political equation."¹⁶⁸ Altbach went to suggest that students are often considered "spokespersons for a broader population" and a "conscience of their society" which can organise and mobilise larger sectors of society.¹⁶⁹

Scholars such as Levy and Lipset have highlighted how the internal conditions of Third World countries can affect the organisation of student movements and even alter their scope.¹⁷⁰ Altbach identified six main reasons for the different and stronger influence of student political activism in Third World countries. He argues that:

- 1) Student movements in Third World nations can shape politics more easily because these countries often lack strong established political institutions typical of industrialised countries;
- 2) University students in Third World countries are an elite, and are aware of their special status; this historical sense of *elitism* and the related advantages favour student activism;
- 3) Universities in Third World countries are usually located in capital cities, allowing students to more easily access the centres of power;
- 4) Only a few countries in the Third World have effectively functioning democratic systems; this factor, along with the low literacy rate and poor communication infrastructure, drive students to emerge as spokespersons of the society;
- 5) The majority of the students come from urban elite backgrounds, and through their families have access to powerful segments of society;

¹⁶⁸ Altbach, ed., *Student Politics*, 5.

¹⁶⁹ Philip Altbach, ed., *Student Political Activism*, 14.

¹⁷⁰ See David Levy, "Student Politics in Contemporary Latin America," in *Student Politics*, ed. Altbach; Philip Altbach and Seymour Lipset, "University students and politics in underdeveloped countries," in *Students in Revolt*, Lipset and Altbach, eds.

- 6) These students have been involved in national liberation movements and are therefore a recognised political actor.¹⁷¹

In particular, the central role of student movements in national liberation struggles has been frequently acknowledged. While the literature on the topic is not exhaustive, the studies available account for student contributions in articulating anti-colonial and anti-imperialist discourses, shaping strategies for liberation and cultural emancipation.¹⁷² In his analysis of Asian student movements, Altbach has pointed out that while student activism in India was not fundamental to the development of strategies and discourses for the liberation movement, in most other Asian countries students formulated the relationship between nationalism and the struggle for liberation.¹⁷³ In Indonesia, students acted as a catalyst for mobilising the masses and translated their disillusionment with the Dutch into concrete practice, playing a pivotal role in the nationalist movement. The student contribution was crucial in reviving the indigenous culture and predominant language, as well as for establishing contacts and ties with other student and political movements from all over the world.¹⁷⁴ As in Indonesia, students in Vietnam were fundamental to the struggle for liberation against French colonisation, to the extent that Ho Chi Minh engaged in political activism and resistance in his early years as a student and while recruiting other students.¹⁷⁵ Altbach has also underlined the importance of student activism in Burma. Burmese youth studying in the West have played a fundamental role in the ideological and political agitations in their respective locations since the 1920s. Nearly all the early civilian elite of independent Burma received their political training in a student movement. The engagement of

¹⁷¹ Altbach, ed., *Student Politics*, 6-7.

¹⁷² See, for example, Anirban Barnejee, *Students and Radical Change*, (Burdwan: University of Burdwan, 2003); Dip Kapoor, ed., *Education, decolonization and development: Perspectives from Asia, Africa and the Americas*, (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2009); Leo Zeilig, *Revolt and Protest Student Politics Activism in Sub-Saharan Africa*. (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007); William John Hanna, *University Students and African Politics* (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1975).

¹⁷³ Philip Altbach, "Student Movement in Historical Perspective: the Asian Case," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 1, no. 1 (1970), 74-84.

¹⁷⁴ Harsja W. Bachtiar, "Indonesia," in *Students and Politics in Developing Countries*, ed. Donald Emmerson (New York: Praeger, 1968), 181.

¹⁷⁵ Pierre Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Burmese students is mirrored across Asia for: “in practically no Asian nation did a student movement develop wholly independent from or in opposition to radical or nationalist movements”¹⁷⁶

Although the analysis of Asian student movements is extremely valuable, it occurred earlier than in the case of Palestine where students only started to reorganise in the early 1950s. By that time, most Asian countries had already achieved liberation, and many students were by now demanding radical change in their newly independent societies, disillusioned with leaders they accused of selling out the revolutionary potential of the movement in exchange for stability.¹⁷⁷

More contemporaneous with the case of Palestine are the general trends of African student activism in the national liberation struggles of the 1950s. The political international context in which the Palestinian student movement emerged after *al-Nakba* was characterised by anti-colonial struggles unfolding throughout the African continent. It should be noted that some of the peculiarities that Altbach underlines in his analysis of Asian student movements also have some validity in the African experience. Each continent and country has its specificity, and historical and political context, all of which influence the formation and development of its student movement.

That being said, there are some general hypotheses suggested by analysts of student activism which are valid in most Asian and African cases. First, students were among the first sectors of colonised societies to be drawn to prevailing ideas of radicalism and nationalism and to introduce and disseminate these modern ideologies in their own society. In particular, students were convinced that national independence and cultural integrity would lead to political, social and economic development. Second, the “encounter” with radical ideologies and with nationalism was facilitated by increased enrolment in universities in European metropolises. Asian and African youth discovered nationalism and communism, read radical literature, began to articulate their

¹⁷⁶ Altbach, “Student Movements”, 78.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 78.

revolutionary political discourses, organised the first groups and movements, and established contact with other radical students.¹⁷⁸

The history of African student movements confirms that, especially after World War II, when students' ideologies and strategies became more developed, students acted as the "most effective agency of anti-colonialism."¹⁷⁹ Throughout the 1920s, student groups and organisations existing in various African countries and in major European cities such as Paris and London focused their efforts on student living conditions. It was only in the early 1950s that a significant number of African student associations, unions and groups concerned with national and international political matters emerged. In those years, "African student movements underwent a revolutionary change in terms of numbers, territory, typology and ideology."¹⁸⁰ While the 1935 Italian occupation of Ethiopia remains a watershed event that laid the foundations for the emergence of nationalism in Africa, the radicalisation of student goals and strategies was favoured by the international political transformations of the 1950s.¹⁸¹ New Cold War dynamics, the emergence of socialism as an alternative to Western imperialism, the advent of the Popular Front in France, the emancipation of colonised countries in Asia, the Arab revolution in Egypt, the Afro-Asian conferences in Bandung and Cairo, the defeat of the French in Vietnam, nationalisation of the Suez Canal, Algeria and Cameroon's armed resistance against French colonialism, and the independence of Ghana and Guinea are but a few of the international political events that contributed to the radical shift in African students' political vision during the 1950s.¹⁸²

Students' ideological radicalisation, combined with an increase in the number of universities in African colonies and of African students enrolled in European universities, favoured

¹⁷⁸ Altbach, "Student Movement", 78; A. Sow, "African students in the national liberation revolution," in *The role of African student movements in the political and social evolution of Africa from 1900-1975* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1994), 27-32.

¹⁷⁹ Henry J. Benda, "Non-Western Intelligentsias as Political Elites," in *Political Change in Underdeveloped Countries*, ed. John Kautsky (New York: Wiley, 1962), 237.

¹⁸⁰ Sow, "African students", 13.

¹⁸¹ Hanna, *University Students and African Politics*; also: Mokhtar Ayachi, *Histoire d'une Ecole de Cadres L'Union Generale Ses Etudiants De Tunisie au cours des années 50/60* (Tunis: Université de la Manouba, 2003).

¹⁸² Sow, "African students", 27.

the establishment of associations and unions. In Francophone Africa, especially North Africa, there was a proliferation of student movements with a clear political vision based on liberation from French colonialism, cultural emancipation and opposition to any form of neo-colonialism and imperialism.¹⁸³ Most of the movements that emerged in the 1950s also invoked religion as a fundamental characteristic that defined the identity of the group.¹⁸⁴ Even more numerous were the movements established in Europe. In the UK, Kwame Nkrumah, wanting to disseminate the idea of Pan-Africanism, formed the Council of African Organizations (CAO) in 1958 to unify all the African student unions in the UK into one single association and set a strategy for liberation and African unity.¹⁸⁵

The largest number of African student movements was established in France. At the beginning of the 1950s, there were 14 student groups in France, representing almost all of the countries of French-colonised West, Central and Equatorial Africa and the Maghreb.¹⁸⁶ In 1950, the *Fédération des Etudiants d'Afrique Noire en France* (FEANF) was established and became the most important and active movement of African students in France as well as in Africa. The FEANF played a key role in the development of African students' political vision and strategies, achieved by grouping together most of the student associations and organisations in France and

¹⁸³ Moore and Hochschild, "Student Unions in North African Politics," 21-23.

¹⁸⁴ There are several important student movements in Africa. In Tunisia, the Comité de la Voix de l'Étudiant Zaytounien (CVEZ) was formed in 1949, changing its name to the Voix de l'Étudiant Musulman de Tunisie (VEMT) in 1955, and the authorities set up the Union Générale des Étudiants de Tunisie (UGET) in 1952. In Algeria, the Union Générale des Étudiants Musulmans Algériens (UGEMA) was established in 1955. In Dakar, several movements were established, including the Association Générale des Étudiants de Dakar (AGED) in 1950, which became the Union Générale des Étudiants d'Afrique Occidentale (UGEAO) in 1956, and the Association Générale des Étudiants Français en Afrique Noire (AGEFAN), which was founded by French students in reaction to the formation of UGEAO. The Association Musulmane des Étudiants d'Afrique Noire (AMEAN) and the Association Musulmane des Étudiants Africains (AMEA) were both formed in 1953 to defend the interests of Muslim students and oppose the colonial regime's favouritism of the "Christian religion and its members". See Hanna, *University Students*; Sow, "African Students."

¹⁸⁵ For Ghanaian student movements and the role of Nkrumah, see: David Finlay, "Students and Politics in Ghana," in *Students in Revolt*, eds. Lipset and Altbach, 380-402.

¹⁸⁶ The Union des Étudiants Algériens de Paris (UEAP) was established in 1953 and the Union Générale des Étudiants Musulmans Algériens (UGEMA) in 1955.

providing students in France and in Africa with constant cultural and political input. FEANF action was articulated on three different levels: social, cultural and political.¹⁸⁷

African students supported the struggle for liberation “by the revolutionary struggle of the mass of the people”¹⁸⁸ and promoted Pan-Africanism among their people in Africa, as well as in France and in all the international spaces available to them. The FEANF had strong relationships with other African student organisations in Europe, in particular with the *Association des Etudiants d’Afrique Orientale et Centrale* (ECSA) and the West Africa Student Unions (WASU), both based in London. FEANF was a member of the International Union of Students (IUS) and also established relations with the International Students Conference (ISC).¹⁸⁹ Its involvement in international groups and organisations, and in particular its strong relationship with IUS, were essential for gaining prestige and establishing contacts with other student movements to coordinate strategies. The international dimension of African student activism was a fundamental aspect of their political vision and discourse, and they were convinced that:

their continent and the rest of the struggling world were one and indivisible. They discussed all the great issues of the time, intervening everywhere and denying no attitude required by their open-handed approach, their genuine internationalism and their exacting and vigilant conscience as militants: in other words, their perception of their historical mission and responsibilities.¹⁹⁰

It is in the political field that the legacies of African student movements are most relevant. They contributed to the dissemination of radical ideologies through publications that were fundamental in demystifying the colonial system, informing people of the struggle of the African people and of events in other contemporary revolutionary movements. The influence of intellectuals such as Aime Cesaire, Frantz Fanon and Cheikh Anta Diop were evident in the approach of most African student newspapers and magazines. They believed that to achieve

¹⁸⁷ On FEANF’s origins, history, activities and vision, see: Charles Diane, *Les Grandes Heures De La F.E.A.N.F.* (Paris: Edition Chaka, 1990); Amady Dieng, *Les Premiers Pas de la Fédération des Etudiants d’Afrique Noire en France (FEANF) (1950-1955): de l’Union Française à Bandoung* (Paris: L’Hamattan, 2003).

¹⁸⁸ Sow, “African students,” 29.

¹⁸⁹ Diane, *Les Grandes Heures*, 130-31.

¹⁹⁰ Sow, “African students”, 30.

national liberation, colonised people should recreate and re-appropriate the national culture and history that colonialism has systematically destroyed.¹⁹¹ The newspapers also focused on other liberation struggles in the world; they informed their public about the struggle in Vietnam and saw Indonesian independence as a point of reference for a successful decolonisation struggle. Apartheid in South Africa and the Algerian War were constantly discussed in the Black student press of the 1950s. The struggle of the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) was championed, while the brutal practices and torture by French colonial authorities were exposed, highlighting contradictions in French politics: on the one hand, the “so-called universal humanism” and on the other, “economic interests, exploitation and torture.”¹⁹² Even secular newspapers such as the *Etudiant del l’Afrique Noire*, while reporting on the Algerian struggle for independence, highlighted theories of Muslim students as they were articulated by the *Union Générale des Étudiants Musulmans d’Algérie* (UGEMA). Profound ideological differences could be voiced and discussed among the ranks of African anti-colonial student movements without reducing the importance of supporting the struggle.¹⁹³

As the next chapters will argue, Palestinian students benefited enormously from the example set by other anti-colonial movements and developed their revolutionary strategies and discourse with the support of other student unions. In particular, during the 1950s and 1960s, the Algerian struggle was a fundamental point of reference for the Palestinian students. Many young Palestinians underlined the decisive role of the Algerian struggle in inspiring a consistent vision of resistance. The Algerian battle against French settler colonialism was the crucial issue around which, in the post-*Nakba* years, Palestinian students could mobilise, discuss anti-colonial principles

¹⁹¹ In 1950, *l’Etudiant Anticolonialiste* published excerpts of Césaire’s *Discourse sur le colonialisme* that denounces the cultural destruction, economic exploitation and disarticulation of society in Africa. See B. Kotchy, “The cultural dimensions of FEANF,” in *The role of African student movements*, 103-105.

¹⁹² Bancel and Dévisse, “The black student press”, in *The role of African student movements*, 197.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 197.

and ideologies, and start to contextualise Palestine within an international anti-imperialist frame.¹⁹⁴ Palestinians in the late 1950s identified with Algerians and built solid relations over the years with the General Union of Muslim Student of Algeria as well as with the Algerian liberation movement. Palestinians and Algerians always felt they were fighting the same struggle: Algerian victory was also received by Palestinians as their own victory.

Moreover, as in the Palestinian student movement, the Algerian movement developed, and often coordinated its strategies from outside the homeland, first in France, and then from exile. Despite being banned in Algeria, and therefore having to operate externally, the student movement played an important role in disseminating the revolutionary principles of the independence struggle and revolt against colonialism, not only among the Algerian people but also among students from other oppressed groups and colonised countries. In this regard, Algerian as well as Palestinian students benefited from transnational contacts and political exchanges that had been made available by a new international student space.

Conclusion

The chapter has provided an overview of IR theories on non-state actors and social movement studies, and more specifically, on student movements, particularly anti-colonial.

It has introduced post-colonial theories of IR and it has argued that post-colonial studies represent a fundamental lens for the analysis of the colonial context in which the Palestinian student movement emerged and operated.

The chapter has introduced Burke's pioneering analysis of Palestinian student activism within the framework of social movements and contentious politics theories. While Burke's work remain a first successful examination of Palestinian student strategies of mobilisation, this thesis develops it further by focusing on the role of the student movement at the transnational level and

¹⁹⁴ Abu Iyad (Salah Khalaf) and Eric Rouleau, *My Home, My Land: A Narrative of the Palestinian Struggle* (New York: Times Books, 1981), 23.

within the broader dynamics of the anti-colonial struggle. The chapter has therefore introduced postcolonial studies of social movements, with particular reference to Fanon thought, arguing that the analysis of decolonisation and contentious politics provides a useful lens for understanding the anti-colonial character of the Palestinian student movement.

Having framed this study within the broader field of IR and theories on social movements, the chapter has reviewed literature on student movements. While these theories represent the cornerstone for any analysis of the student role and contribution to radical changes in societies, they cannot adequately explain the Palestinian student experience. Taking these theorisations as a point of departure, Chapter Two will introduce a conceptual framework able to account for the peculiarities of Palestinian transnational student mobilisation, its contribution to the national movement and its impact on the regional system in different historical periods.

2 CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUALISING THE PALESTINIAN EXPERIENCE: STUDENTS AS ANTI-COLONIAL ORGANIC VANGUARD

Introduction

This thesis addresses the question of how non-state actors impact the international system by investigating the role of the Palestinian transnational student movement within the Arab region and internationally. This chapter sets out the theoretical framework for approaching the analysis of the Palestinian transnational student movement.

The thesis demonstrates how the Palestinian transnational student movement is best characterised as an anti-colonial organic vanguard, a conceptualisation which encompasses the main traits of the student experience and which provides a framework relating both to the historical context and to the power relations that characterise Palestinian society. I argue that the Palestinian transnational student movement has had two interconnected impacts on global politics. At the domestic level they have acted as the engine of social mobilisation. At the transnational level, students have coordinated their work in cross-border networks, internationalised their political claims and built solidarity with other revolutionary movements. Palestinian students were able to be both domestic and international players as they emerged and acted as the anti-colonial organic vanguard for a society geographically and politically fragmented and dispersed by the *Nakba*.

Three theoretical approaches are combined: Marxist-Leninist theories on student revolutionary powers, Gramsci's notion of "organic relation" as articulated in his theorisation of "organic intellectuals" and post-colonial studies on social movements. By doing so, I provide a new lens for analysing student politics in the specific context of colonisation and statelessness.

Existing theories on student activism and student revolutionary power, particularly Leninist-Maoist articulation of students as a vanguard, provide the starting point of analysis for this thesis. However, this thesis contends that these theories cannot adequately explain the role and contribution of Palestinian transnational student mobilisation to national politics. I suggest that these theories cannot grasp the particular relation between the students and their broader society in the context of colonisation and exile.

By referring both to Gramsci's notion of *organicità* and the anti-colonial discourses and strategies of the Palestinian student movement, this study offers a three-faceted analytical prism, stressing the central role of students in the struggle, the relevance of the historical political context and the direct relation with the broader Palestinian society. I submit that it is this particular setting that has allowed students to impact global politics by intervening in domestic and international political dynamics.

Theorising students as an anti-colonial organic vanguard also allows explanation of the relation between the student movement and the national movement. This is a particularly important aspect for the study of the Palestinian case. Palestinian student unions' role changed over time: in the aftermath of the *Nakba*, they functioned as Palestinian representatives in the absence of an effective national body. However, following the establishment of the PLO, the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) operated under the umbrella of the national movement and student spaces became an internal arena of mobilisation and generator of solidarity at the international level. This shift in the vanguard role of GUPS can be understood and explained through considering both the impact of the colonial context on strategies of mobilisation and structures of political representation as well as the organic relation between the students and their broader society in a context of exile, geographical dispersion and political fragmentation.

The chapter is divided into two main sections, first examining theories on the revolutionary power of students, then elaborating on them to present the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis.

2.1 Theories on the Revolutionary Power of Student Movements

In *Student Resistance*, Boren provides a chronological global history of student movements, suggesting that “student resistance is a continually occurring, vital and global social phenomenon.”¹⁹⁵ He argues that since the birth of universities, student revolts have influenced the political history of several countries by catalysing educational reform, transforming national political structures and even spurring coup d’états.¹⁹⁶ Boren suggests that resistance to oppression is the central element in the history of student movements, whereby “student actions arise from conflicts between competing forces in complex systems of power, whether those forces are explicitly political or whether they are ideological, physical, economic, sexual or generational.”¹⁹⁷ He points out that the success of the actions depends on the students’ ability to mobilise the masses and exert sufficient public pressure on their opponents.¹⁹⁸ Other theorists have emphasised the crucial linkage between student movements and the masses. Altbach and Lipset¹⁹⁹ point out that the major contribution has come from leftist theorists, those willing to recognise, and often sympathetic with, the political role of students, while other social groups have not always been able to support or push for radical social change.

There are two main approaches to the revolutionary role of students, Leninist-Maoist and New Left. They share two major points: they both agree on Marx’s theorisation of social conflict and the necessity to revolutionise and subvert its unbalanced power relations. However, unlike Marx’s theory, both contend that students can play a fundamental role in sparking a revolution. While the Leninist-Maoist analysis of social dynamics draws directly from Marx’s political analysis, with the proletariat playing a major role in the revolution, New Left theory suggests that the social conflict of post-industrial society cannot be understood as a class struggle in which the

¹⁹⁵ Boren, *Student Resistance*, 3.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁹⁹ Lipset and Altbach, eds., *Students in Revolt*, xvi.

proletariat lead a radical change. For, the revolution's leading role is played by intellectuals and students.

This substantial difference between the Leninist-Maoist and New Left approaches impacts understanding of students' roles in global politics. While highlighting the vanguard role of students in instigating mass mobilisation within their own societies neither Lenin nor Mao envisage any relevant contribution of student movements to the internationalisation of revolution. On the contrary, the New Left approach emphasises the transnational dimension of student activism.

A more detailed analysis of the Leninist-Maoist and New Left approaches helps to highlight their precise contribution to this thesis.

2.1.1 Leninist-Maoist theories

Leninist-Maoist theories provide the point of departure for the theoretical framework of this thesis. Here I introduce the main principles upon which they developed to highlight their contribution to analyses of student revolutionary power.

Although Marx did not consider students and intellectuals to be a significant independent social force, Lenin and Mao focused on their role in bringing about revolutions and were concerned to propose possible strategies for a successful student movement in Russia and in China.

Lenin and Mao's approach to student political activism was influenced by their revolutionary experience. They both argue that the contribution of student movements to the revolution is fundamental and emphasise the necessity of establishing and reinforcing the link between student movements and the proletariat. Both believe that revolution needs the young force of the students but they also stress that their contribution must be tied to other sectors of society. Revolution is only successful when it is based on radical mass mobilisation: students can trigger the mobilisation, but cannot lead the revolution, for the leading role is reserved for those sectors that constitute the majority of the society – in the case of China, the peasantry. For this reason,

neither Lenin nor Mao discusses the potential role of student movements in bringing revolution to a broader international level. Instead, they believe that it is workers and peasants who, having subverted the domestic order, can and must then internationalise the struggle.

Three writings are fundamental to understanding Lenin's thoughts on student movements: *To Secondary School Students* (1902); *The Tasks of Revolutionary Youth: First Letter* (1903) and *Student Movement and the Present Political Situation* (1908). In his letter *To Secondary School Students*, Lenin emphasises the fundamental role of education in forming revolutionary pupils, by distinguishing a necessary preliminary phase of education that precedes direct political activism. He advises students to focus on self-education to become radical revolutionaries and convinced Social Democrats.²⁰⁰ Lenin provides a general analysis of student movements, focusing in particular on students' social and political background as well as their relation to the masses and the party. In *The Task of Revolutionary Youth: First Letter*, he argues that students are an integral part of the society and provides a classification of student groups:

[...] we find that there are among the present-day students six political groups: reactionaries, indifferents, academics, liberals, Socialist-Revolutionaries and Social-Democrats. [...] there could not be any other grouping among our students, because they are the most responsive section of the intelligentsia, and the intelligentsia are so called just because they most consciously, most resolutely and most accurately reflect and express the development of class interests and political groupings in society as a whole. The students would not be what they are if their political grouping did not correspond to the political grouping of society as a whole.²⁰¹

However, it is not until *Student Movement and the Present Political Situation* that Lenin explains the relationship between the student movement and the proletarian organisation – that students should be the engine of mass mobilisation. Lenin points out that the coordinated political action that leads to revolution needs to be achieved by mobilising all sectors of society:

It is not sufficient merely to proclaim political co-ordinated action, repeating the 'last word' in lessons of the revolution. One must be able to agitate for political action, making use of all

²⁰⁰Lipset and Altbach, eds., *Students in Revolt*, 56.

²⁰¹Vladimir Lenin, "The Tasks of the Revolutionary Youth: First Letter," Lenin Internet Archive (www.marxists.org, 2002), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1903/sep/30b.htm>.

possibilities, all conditions and, first and foremost, all mass conflicts between advanced elements, whatever they are, and the autocracy.²⁰²

Lenin identifies the fundamental role of the “instigator” of mass revolution in that:

the academic movement is expressing the beginning of a movement among the new ‘generation’ of students, who have more or less become accustomed to a narrow measure of autonomy; and this movement is beginning when other forms of mass struggle are lacking at the present time, when a lull has set in.²⁰³

Later he concludes, “it is this task of organisation in their own student midst, this agitation based on the concrete movement that our university groups, too, should tackle.”²⁰⁴

In the same letter, however, Lenin highlights the limit of the student movement in Russia. He claims that “even the most active elements of the students obstinately cling to pure academic aims” and cannot appreciate the broader dimension of the agitation. Lenin is convinced that students cannot play a lasting role in the revolutionary process: the proletariat will have to take the lead to bring about a radical change of power structures. Lenin argues that “thousands and millions of threads tie the student youth with the middle and lower bourgeoisie, the petty officials, certain groups of the peasantry, the clergy, etc.” yet they are reacting:

It means that not only among students is the reaction against reaction beginning! And however weak and embryonic this beginning may be, the party of the working class must make use of it and will do so.²⁰⁵

Mao’s analysis also emphasises the class dimension of the struggle and privileges the role of workers and peasants in the revolutionary process. As in Russia, the Chinese revolutions of 1919 and 1949 were characterised by a high participation of students. Mao Tse Tung also displayed an interest in understanding how student activism can contribute to radical changes and transformation. In his speech *The Orientation of the Youth Movement* (1939), he argues that, despite some critics claiming otherwise, China’s young people have played a vanguard role. He went on to theorise:

²⁰²Vladimir Lenin, “The Student Movement and the Present Political Situation,” Lenin Internet Archive (www.marxists.org, 2004), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1908/oct/03b.htm>.

²⁰³*Ibid.*

²⁰⁴*Ibid.*

²⁰⁵*Ibid.*

What is a vanguard role? It means taking the lead and marching in the forefront of the revolutionary ranks. In the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal ranks of the Chinese people, there is a contingent composed of the country's young intellectuals and students.²⁰⁶

Like Lenin, Mao believed that student activism should be strictly linked to the political action of proletarian masses. For him student political involvement could only be successful if contextualised in the wider struggle of the main forces of the society: the proletariat and peasantry.

But this army [the students] is not enough; we cannot defeat the enemy by relying on it alone, for when all is said and done it is not the main force. What then is the main force? The workers and peasants. Our young intellectuals and students must go among the workers and peasants, who make up 90 per cent of the population, and mobilize and organize them. Without this main force of workers and peasants, we cannot win the fight against imperialism and feudalism, we cannot win it by relying only on the contingent of young intellectuals and students. Therefore, the young intellectuals and students throughout the country must unite with the broad masses of workers and peasants and become one with them, and only then can a mighty force be created.²⁰⁷

Mao characterised students who integrated with the proletariat as “revolutionary” while those not acknowledging the crucial role of peasants and workers in bringing about a successful revolution nor unite with them were “counter-revolutionaries.”

Mao had been part of student society and witnessed the central contribution of students in the establishment of the communist party in China.²⁰⁸ He maintained a class-based analysis and envisaged the political role of students according to, and within, this dialectical relation.

Leninist-Maoist analyses were based on the direct experiences of the protagonists of the period. For in the first half of the twentieth century, students had not yet presented themselves as capable of being a strong and defined force, a sector of society able to shape cross-border political dynamics. It was not until the early 1960s that the revolutionary potential of student movements was manifested on the international stage. It was during this period the New Left approach and its emphasis on the international role of student movements developed.

²⁰⁶Mao Tse Tung, “The Orientation of the Youth Movement,” in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung Volume II* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), pp. 241-251, 245.

²⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 245

²⁰⁸Arif Dirlik, *The Origins of Chinese Communism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

2.1.2 New Left Theories

New Leftist analysis captures the dynamics that allowed student movements to emerge as relevant international actors in the 1960s. It emphasises the international dimension of student power. Two of its leading theorists, Charles Wright Mills – who popularised the term New Left —and Herbert Marcuse acknowledged the importance of contextualising the movements of those years within the wider international political frame.

In his *Letter to the New Left* (1960), Mills argued that the “new generations of intellectuals around the world” should be considered “real live agencies of historic change.” Mills asserted that the groupings identified by Marx as the vanguard of the revolution (the working class, trade unions and labour-based parties) have been completely integrated into the capital system of advanced industrialised society.²⁰⁹ However, students and intellectuals have remained a source of radical change in society and a “potential mass base for revolutionary movements.”²¹⁰ Mills asks:

Who is it that is getting fed up? Who is it that is getting disgusted with what Marx called ‘all the old crap’? Who is it that is thinking and acting in radical ways? All over the world - in the bloc, outside the bloc and in between - the answer’s the same: it is the young intelligentsia.²¹¹

When Mills defined the role of “young intelligentsia” as a “historical agency”, he does not refer exclusively to the student revolts in the USA and Europe. While still acknowledging the differences between intellectuals in Western countries, the Soviet Bloc and Third World nations, Mills connected student protest movements in Turkey, Taiwan, Cuba, Poland, Bulgaria, Great Britain and Japan into one common struggle for the same aim: bringing about a structural change in the contemporary world. Mills argues:

But it’s just some kind of moral upsurge, isn’t it? Correct. But under it: no apathy. Much of it is direct non-violent action, and it seems to be working, here and there.²¹²

²⁰⁹ Charles Wright Mills, “Letter to the New Left,” in *The Politics of Truth Selected Writings of C. Wright Mills* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 255-266.

²¹⁰Lipset and Altbach, *Students in Revolt*, xvi.

²¹¹Mills, “Letter to the New Left.”, 264.

²¹²*Ibid.*, 265.

For Mills the new generations of intellectuals all over the world are the real live agencies of historic revolutionary change. Regarding the young intelligentsia all over the world, he concludes:

Isn't all this, isn't it something of what we are trying to mean by the phrase 'The New Left'? Let the old men ask sourly, 'Out of Apathy - into what?' The Age of Complacency is ending. Let the old women complain wisely about 'the end of ideology'. We are beginning to move again.²¹³

Mills saw the emerging generation of students and intellectuals across the globe as the "engine" for the emergence of a new, radical ideology and strategy that would impact power dynamics globally.

In *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), Marcuse proffered a radical analysis of contemporary industrialised society. His work inspired students across the globe to revolt against authoritarianism and to struggle for a radical transformation of society. Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* is the alienated man of contemporary society, a man who cannot understand other "ways of life" beyond the system that is provided to him/her, a society in which:

Individuals identify themselves with the existence which is imposed upon them and have in it their own development and satisfaction. This identification is not illusion but reality. However, the reality constitutes a more progressive stage of alienation.²¹⁴

The reality imposed on people is a token of technical progress. It is "a comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom"²¹⁵ which is typical of advanced industrial civilisations. Marcuse argues that there is still a chance of revolutionary transformation in the post-industrial technological society but, in common with Mills, he points out that the vanguard role cannot be played by the proletarian classes:

The capitalist development has altered the structure and function of these two classes [the bourgeoisie and the proletariat] in such a way that they no longer appear to be agents of historical transformation. An overriding interest in the preservation and improvement of the institutional status quo unites the former antagonists in the most advanced areas of contemporary society.²¹⁶

²¹³*Ibid.* 266.

²¹⁴ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon, 1964), 13 .

²¹⁵*Ibid.*, 1.

²¹⁶*Ibid.*, Introduction.

The revolutionary agent can no longer be the working class, as it has been absorbed and integrated into the system. Revolutionary change can only come from those groups who are rejected by the system:

...the substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable. They exist outside the democratic process; their life is the most immediate and in the most real need for ending intolerable conditions and institutions. Thus, their opposition is revolutionary even if their consciousness is not.²¹⁷

Precisely because they are “outside” the system these groups can “hit” the system without being deflected. They could embody the “great refusal”, a total opposition, a path to transform utopia into reality. It is this understanding of contemporary society and the critical analysis of its dynamics that inspired students throughout their revolts against the capitalist system in the 1960s. Marcuse was aware of his influence on student consciousness and defended student positions strenuously. He highlighted the fundamental role of systemic political issues that transcend national differences and specific domestic claims in sparking student uprisings worldwide. In his correspondence with Adorno, Marcuse argues:

I certainly do believe that the student movement does have the prospect of ‘effecting a social intervention’. I am thinking here mainly of the United States, but also France (my stay in Paris reinforced that once again) and South America. Of course, the causes that set off the process are all very different, but, unlike Habermas, it seems to me that, despite all the differences, the driving motivation aims for the same goal. And this goal is now a protest against capitalism, which cuts to the roots of its existence, against its henchmen in the Third World, its culture, its morality.²¹⁸

Like Mills, Marcuse was convinced that student uprisings all over the world were connected by the common goal of defeating capitalism and American imperialism. He asserted that understanding of the German student movement could not be analysed separately from revolts elsewhere in the West or Latin America.²¹⁹ New Left theorists insist on the cohesive international linkage of student movements’ political claims and goals. Their

²¹⁷*Ibid.* 260.

²¹⁸ Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, “Correspondence on the German Student Movement,” *New Left Review*, 1,233 (1999), 133.

²¹⁹*Ibid.*, 133.

understanding of a cross-borders movement sharing the same political vision reflects the international environment within which the Palestinian student movement operated. However, New Left analysis remains Western-centric in its understanding of the dynamics that sparked student activism. The focus on the post-industrial society cannot account for student political engagement in a colonial context. Thus it cannot appreciate in full the global contribution of an anti-colonial student movement of the kind observed in Palestine.

2.2 Theoretical Framework: Students as Anti-colonial Organic Vanguard

This thesis aims to understand how non-state actors impact the international system. It argues that the global impact of the Palestinian transnational student movement occurred at two interconnected levels. Domestically it has been the engine of social mobilisation. By articulating radical political discourses, and contributing to the establishment of popular organisations, the Palestinian student movement impelled other sectors of their society to mobilise for achieving political, civil and social rights. Internationally, it has forged political connections between the Palestinian struggle and that of other oppressed people, building solidarity networks and disseminating radical ideologies transnationally. It is in this sense that the Palestinian student movement may be seen as the anti-colonial organic vanguard of the Palestinian people.

Chapter one has anticipated that this thesis, while building on Burke's analysis of Palestinian student activism, departs from it by framing this study within a post-colonial approach. It takes as a reference the critical pedagogical and methodological approach advanced by *The Palestine Revolution* project. This endeavour centres Palestinian ordinary people and their voices at the core of the analysis. It emphasises the agency of the people and their "development of collective agency, political production, and active engagement with history, rather than passive subjecthood."²²⁰ In this sense, the project is about self-determination and expressions of

²²⁰ Nabulsi and Takriti, *The Palestinian Revolution*, <http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/teach>

Palestinians' own histories as agents of history. This very much parallels the goals of the early student movement, which emerged as a vanguard rooted among its society and tied to the revolutionary culture and internationalism of the Third World.

This thesis' conceptualisation of Palestinian students as a vanguard builds upon Leninist-Maoist theories on student movements yet draws attention to their limits when it comes to the Palestinian case. The concept of vanguard here refers not only to the forefront role students played in the emergence of the national movement, but also to the students' persistent contribution to national politics. In this sense, I argue for a broader definition of student vanguardism, one that appreciates student participation in the articulation and implementation of national strategies within a movement. In the Palestinian context the student movement has fundamentally contributed to the growth and political successes of the Palestinian national movement.

Anti-colonial refers to the specific context in which students operate and, more importantly, to the political strategies they implement. In particular, students devoted themselves to building solidarity networks and disseminating their discourse at the international level. In the introduction to this thesis, it has been argued that this effort can be framed as nationalist internationalism: the struggle for liberation and self-determination is part of a broader framework, an understanding of the international system based on anti-imperialism and Third Worldism.

This thesis argues that the Palestinian student movement may be seen as organic, borrowing Gramsci's use of the concept in his understanding of "organic intellectuals." Organic, in the Gramscian sense, refers to a specific relation between intellectuals and the class they stem from. It is this *organicità* that allows the student movement to act as "constructor, organiser, and permanent persuader" so to "give it [its broader class] homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields."²²¹

²²¹ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 5.

This thesis contends that it has been this organic relation that has allowed Palestinian students to intervene in domestic and international politics. It argues that students were able to play this dual function because they could enjoy the support of the Palestinian and Arab masses. This support, in a colonial setting, is vital for the emergence and development of a national movement. One of the prerequisites for a student movement to become a relevant actor in a regional system is its direct relation with the people. Student unions were the expression of their broader constituency and became the voice of their people in the context of statelessness and colonisation.

This relation with the broader society can also account for the shift in the student role over time. Subsequent chapters analyse how Palestinian student unions in the absence of national institutions in the 1950s and early 1960s operated as representative bodies and how, their role changed after formation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization in 1964. As the PLO emerged as the representative institution of the Palestinian people, GUPS transitioned to functioning as an arena of internal mobilisation and generator of international solidarity. This transformation was key to the evolution of the national movement and allowed students to maintain a central role in the struggle. In short, the direct relation with the masses allowed students to emerge as an organic vanguard, remaining at centre stage of the national movement through different phases of its political history.

2.2.1 Reading the Palestinian Student Movement through a Gramscian Lens

I take Leninist-Maoist theories on student revolutionary power as a fundamental point of departure for the analysis of the Palestinian student movement while contending that their conception of the relation between the students and the masses cannot fully account for the Palestinian case. The Leninist-Maoist understanding of social structures is based on the Marxist analysis of classes and the dialectical relation between them. This focus on class does not allow appreciation of the central political role that students played in a colonised society such as

Palestine. The centrality of class relations in Leninist-Maoist theories relegates the role of youth to that of “initiator” of political change: they do not envisage a relevant student contribution in the following phases of the revolution. This analysis of the Palestinian case, however, suggests that students pragmatically maintained a central role in different phases of the national struggle.

Lenin’s understanding of the student movement is grounded in the specific political context of Russia at the beginning of the 20th century. The Palestinian experience, however, differs from the Russian in that it was shaped by seizure of national territory and ethnic cleansing, rather than class dynamics.²²² The condition of statelessness, dispersion and social and political fragmentation was at the basis of student mobilisation and influenced relations with other sectors of the Palestinian society. Contrary to what Lenin observed within Russian society, Palestinian students were not fundamentally linked with the petit bourgeoisie. In Cairo and Damascus in the 1950s, for example, Palestinian students were mainly youth coming from refugee camps. Many of them sustained their studies with the help of parents and siblings committed to investment in their education as the sole opportunity for rebuilding a better future for the whole family.

This does not mean that Palestinian society post-1948 lacked a bourgeoisie. Indeed, it existed and survived the *Nakba* by repositioning its economic and financial capital within the broader Arab market.²²³ It does not mean, moreover, that the student movement did not have elements connected to the higher classes. In Beirut, for example, most of the students enrolled at the American University of Beirut (AUB) who engaged in political activities came from wealthier classes. However, the dichotomy of bourgeoisie-proletariat was not at the basis of the Palestinian mobilisation and did not shape student activism, at least not in the structural way envisaged by

²²² Class demands were not at the basis of the Palestinian anti-colonial struggle. However, as will be explored in chapters five and six, it should be noted that since the late 1950s, a current emerged within the Movement of Arab Nationalists advocating for a Marxist-Leninist approach to the vision of the Movement. In 1969, the newly formed Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine clearly referred to Marxism as its inspiring ideology. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine also referred to a class analysis in its vision in the late 1960s.

²²³See, for example, Pamela Ann Smith, “The Palestinian Diaspora, 1948-1985,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 15, no. 3 (Spring, 1986), 93.

Lenin in Russia. For instance, Palestinian students criticised the notables and traditional elites that ran the PLO when it was established in 1964, but their position was based on a criticism of the lack of radicalism in the old elites' political vision and strategy, rather than on class demand *per se*.

Unlike the Russian and Chinese experience, Palestinian students did not operate within a functioning state. Instead, they had to build political and social institutions that would allow their people to express their collective, political will and gain recognition as a relevant international actor. This is a central factor that shaped the way Palestinian students organised: transnational coordination and constant political commitment to sustain these structures were key to overcoming dispersion.

As argued in the next chapters, Palestinian students in the 1950s operated at two interrelated levels: in the aftermath of the *Nakba* they established the first popular organisation, GUPS, and contributed to similar efforts in other sectors of Palestinian society. They also contributed to the articulation of radical discourse and the emergence of political movements that later led the struggle for liberation within the PLO.

Once the PLO became the umbrella organisation representing Palestinian society and voicing its general will, student roles shifted. While they remained at the forefront of political life and continued to contribute to the development of the national movement, they did so under the rubric of the PLO, providing the movement and the emerging factions that composed it with cadres and members who had received political training in GUPS spaces.

The shift of the student movement's role during the 1960s and 1970s was concomitant with the evolution of the Palestinian movement as a whole. Students continued to play a central role in the struggle by providing the national movement with an important space for internal political training and effectively mobilising international solidarity. In this sense, the student movement remained at the centre of Palestinian politics and acted as a bridge between its people and the international community.

Where Lenin and Mao envisaged a revolution that transformed power relations between socio-economic classes, the Palestinian revolution started with the creation from scratch of national institutions aimed at subverting a different kind of power relation: that between coloniser and colonised. An additional factor, one not embraced by the traditional Leninist-Maoist understanding of the student role, was the constant quest to build alliances and mobilise international solidarity. Lenin and Mao were convinced workers could and must internationalise the revolution but only after the subversion of the domestic order. For this reason, neither Lenin nor Mao discusses the potential role of student movements in bringing revolutionary discourses and practices across their national borders.

The Palestinian experience provides a rare example of a context in which students were the central actor in internationalising their national plight. They established international networks with other revolutionary movements, as international solidarity and Third Worldism were a fundamental strategy underpinning their *modus operandi*. The absence of political and social institutions, statelessness and exile made international recognition and cooperation vital for Palestinian students and for their nation. Students understood Zionism as the expression of Western imperial practices. They knew the importance of delegitimising the Zionist project and Israel as a colonial state in an international system usually supportive of Israel. Students pushed their union forward into membership of important international student spaces such as the International Union of Students (IUS) and framed the Palestinian struggle for liberation within the broader context of anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism. This focus on the international remained a strategic priority in different phases of Palestinian politics. Students consistently continued to maintain their pivotal role in building international networks and highlighting the plight of their people when they operated within the framework of the PLO. But, how were students able to play a vanguard role in their national struggle? Furthermore, how were they able to build networks of solidarity and political cooperation with other Third World movements? What enabled Palestinian students to

remain at the forefront of the national plight in different phases of the struggle? How did students manage to voice the ambitions of their people and make them heard in the regional and international system? Addressing these questions brings up the broader matter of whether oppressed people, the subalterns, can be heard or, to use Spivak words, whether they “can speak” at all.²²⁴ Here I concur with those scholars in post-colonial and subaltern studies who have found Gramsci’s work inspiring in analysing the agency of subaltern people and their ability to organise counter-hegemonic struggles.

2.2.2 The Organic Vanguard

In my theorisation of the role of the student vanguard in a colonial context, I build on Gramsci’s theory of “organic intellectuals.” I suggest that Gramsci’s notion of the *organicità* between intellectuals and the class they stem from allowed Palestinian students to play a vanguard role in their national struggle and to have impacts in regional and international arenas. While the Italian philosopher grounded his analysis within the specific context of Western (and particularly Italian) society, I argue that his theorisation can be translated/adapted into the colonial context that characterises the Palestinian case. Gramsci’s framework, geographically and chronologically, can and has been applied to contexts vastly different from his home country of Italy and more generally, of Western Europe.²²⁵

Analyses in Chapter One have focused on Gramsci’s legacy in postcolonial studies pointing out the “global dimension of Gramscian thought and concepts.”²²⁶ Gramsci was concerned with the elaboration of a revolutionary theory of counterhegemony. Further developments on his seminal insights demonstrated his theory could be applied to non-Western contexts, particularly where

²²⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty. Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).

²²⁵For Gramsci’s relevance in subaltern studies, see Ranajit Guha, *Subaltern Studies VI: Writings on South Asian History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989); Stuart Hall, “Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, no. 10 (1986), 5-27 and Marcus E. Green, “Rethinking the Subaltern and the Question of Censorship in Gramsci’s Prison Notebooks,” *Postcolonial Studies* 14, no. 4 (2011), 387-404.

²²⁶ Capuzzo and Mezzadra quoted in Stefano Selenu, “In Search of a Postcolonial Gramsci: Method, Thought, and Intellectuals,” *Postcolonial Studies* 16, no. 1 (2013): pp. 102-109, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2013.803305>. in

relations of power were predicated on a broader, yet still focused and perfunctory, understanding of hegemony and subalternity.

In the case of Palestinian activists, Hussein persuasively argued for the relevance of Gramscian analysis in the emergence of new discourses and strategies of liberation. She points out that Gramsci's:

creation of a new conception of the world is synonymous with the creation of a new type of civil and political society. Hence, the elaboration of a new conception of the world marks the beginning of an energizing project of counterhegemony—one that centres around the power of critical pedagogy to revolutionize possibilities on the ground.²²⁷

The first steps towards the elaboration of counterhegemony are the “intense labours of intellectual criticism’ aimed at dismantling a world-view, and its transformation into political action.”²²⁸ In line with Gramsci's keen attention to issues of culture and the attendant *weltanschauung*, the figure of the organic intellectual is pivotal. The organic intellectual is he who does not merely enjoy an intimate relation with the members of the social class he represents; but rather, is organically linked to it by virtue of his own location within a given historic bloc, a location that is organic given the unity of thought and action that defines Gramsci's philosophy of praxis. In the context of a counterhegemonic movement, the criticism and dismantling of the old views is paired with the proposal of a new world, a vision that is committed, informed and can bring about radical political action.

Such political action necessarily involves the intellectuals and the masses to which they are organically related. Gramsci analysed this relation by emphasising two major factors. He argued that the relation between the intellectual and the masses is always reciprocal, pedagogical and

²²⁷Cherine Hussein, *The Re-Emergence of the Single State Solution in Palestine-Israel: Countering an Illusion* (London: Routledge, 2017), 19.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

horizontal (not merely hierarchical). Furthermore, Gramsci suggested that this relation should be understood within the social context in which it takes place.

As Olsaretti puts it:

Two points about this theoretical effort are especially relevant to whether the subaltern “can speak”: the first is the fundamentally interactive, pedagogical relationship between intellectuals and masses in modern times, which is mutually influencing; and the second is the impact of the social context – and ultimately of the masses – on the production of ideas by high intellectuals, which happens through influence on the theoretical agenda of intellectuals and influence on their recruitment pool. The subalterns cannot speak themselves but do influence intellectual production, however, indirectly.²²⁹

Where Gramsci was concerned with the peasantry and working class in a capitalist society, in the context of colonialism and dispersion, Palestinian students emerge as the organic vanguard of their people, articulating the political demands, strategies and discourses of Palestinian society.

Gramsci states:

Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields.²³⁰

Gramsci refers to intellectuals as a professional “category organic to social groups”, one which is tied to the class it stems from by a specific, organic, relation. Never falling, however, for a dogmatic and simplistic reductionism of complex societal relations, Gramsci goes on to argue that the relation between intellectuals and society is “*in varying degrees, “mediated”* by the whole fabric of society and by the complex of superstructures, of which the intellectuals are, precisely, the “deputies”.²³¹

In other words, the social and even more so historical, context within which this mediation takes place is of central relevance. It is this which allows Gramsci’s theory to loosen its commitment to a sole socio-historical locus (Western capitalist Europe) and potentially reach out, as we have already noted, to non-Western, non-only capitalist domains, to embrace postcolonial

²²⁹ Alessandro Olsaretti, “Beyond class: The many facets of Gramsci’s theory of intellectuals,” *Journal of Classical Sociology* 1, no. 4 (2014), 363-381 (372).

²³⁰ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 6.

²³¹ Gramsci, quoted in Selenu, “In Search of a Postcolonial Gramsci”.

contexts and thus contribute to reflections on post-coloniality. It follows that those we can identify or indicate as organic intellectuals in a certain socio-historical domain (or better, in Gramsci's parlance, a given historical bloc) will play similar functions even across different domains. It is, indeed, the flexibility – and the precision – of this framework that have made Gramsci's theory not only applicable, but also remarkably pertinent to critically assess power relations in (post)colonial contexts.

More specifically, it is “the *mediating* and *mediated* position of the intellectuals between civil and political societies”²³² that makes organic intellectuals so central to political action and mobilisation. Organic intellectuals are structurally tied to their class. For, they are the expression of the interests and ambitions of the class from which they originated. They articulate the socio-political interests, demands and grievances of their class and formulate a homogeneous worldview of it.²³³

Famously, they are different from the “traditional intellectuals”, those no longer capable of proper expression of their original socio-economic class, and who have therefore lost the capacity to articulate genuine class interests.²³⁴ Traditional intellectuals are an autonomous category as they see their role as politically independent from any class, although “in historical reality they defend the interests of hegemonic social groups.”²³⁵

Gramsci's theory is based on his analysis of the role of the *moderati* during the Risorgimento – the name given to the cultural, political and social movement that promoted Italian unification. Gramsci considers the leaders of the *Partito Moderato* (Moderate Party) to be an example of organic intellectuals. For, he argued, they were “intellectuals and political organisers,

²³² Selenu, “In Search of a Postcolonial Gramsci.”

²³³ Michiel Baud and Rosanne Rutten, *Popular Intellectuals and Social Movements: Framing Protest in Asia, Africa, and Latin America* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.

²³⁴ Olsaretti, “Beyond class”, 369.

²³⁵ Quoted in Baud and Rutten *Popular Intellectuals and Social Movements*, 3. Gramsci considers the clergy an example of traditional intellectuals: ecclesiastics used to be the organic intellectuals of the feudal aristocracy but when the bourgeoisie came into the ascendancy and replaced the feudal aristocracy, the clergy lost its organic function.

and at the same time company bosses, rich farmers or estate managers, commercial and industrial entrepreneurs, etc.” They were a “real, organic vanguard of the upper classes, to which economically they belonged.”²³⁶

Gramsci argues that the working class had not yet produced its own organic intellectuals.²³⁷ He holds, however, that the emergence of organic intellectuals is a precondition for the working class to subvert their subaltern position. Importantly, the working class organic intellectuals would play a more proactive role than their bourgeois counterparts:

The mode of being of a new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, ‘permanent persuader’ and not just a simple orator (but superior at the same time to the abstract mathematical spirit).²³⁸

In another passage, Gramsci clarifies the importance of the organic relation, the constant tie between the intellectuals and their people, the leaders and the masses:

One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation. In the absence of such a nexus the relations between the intellectual and the people-nation are, or are reduced to, relationships of a purely bureaucratic and formal order; the intellectuals become a caste, or a priesthood (so-called organic centralism). If the relationship between intellectuals and people-nation, between the leaders and the led, the rulers and the ruled, is provided by an organic cohesion in which feeling-passion becomes understanding and thence knowledge (not mechanically but in a way that is alive), then and only then is the relationship one of representation. Only then can there take place an exchange of individual elements between the rulers and ruled, leaders [*dirigenti*] and led, and can the shared life be realised which alone is a social force with the creation of the "historical bloc".²³⁹

This passage provides an important framework for understanding the political significance of Palestinian student movements. Here, Gramsci defines the organic relation as based not only on shared interests, but also on the emotional bond between leaders and the people.

Ruba Salih has emphasised the relevance of people “feelings and passion” in the elaboration of new ways of understanding and making politics among Palestinian refugees. She

²³⁶ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 60.

²³⁷ See Angelo D’Orsi *Gramsci – una nuova biografia*, (Feltrinelli 2017), pp. 97-120, for a discussion of Gramsci’s own involvement in the workers’ movement in Turin after War World I and the foundation of the journal *L’Ordine Nuovo*. Gramsci starts elaborating in depth the relation between intellectuals and the proletariat, the first seeds of this theory of intellectuals he will refine in the *Notebooks* years later.

²³⁸ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 10.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 418.

suggested that Gramsci's notion of cathartic politics can explain the elaboration of new political imagination and counterhegemonic discourses:

For Gramsci, the cathartic moment occurs when "structure ceases to be an external force which crushes man, assimilates him to itself and makes him passive; and is transformed into a means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethico-political form and a source of new initiatives." (Gramsci, 1961:40 quoted in Thomas, 2009). If, as Gramsci notes, passions and feelings of common people in politics are central since intellectuals know but do not necessarily understand while ordinary people feel but do not always necessarily understand or know, refugees cathartic politics represent a springboard for a chaotic but radical political imagination.²⁴⁰

In this context, Gramsci emphasises the *organicità* between people and intellectuals, the "organic cohesion in which feeling-passion becomes understanding and thence knowledge"²⁴¹ becomes the fundamental link that make the relationship between intellectuals and the masses truly representative: shared feelings and passion are at the basis of the relation of representation. I find this all-encompassing notion of *organicità* particularly useful to explain Palestinian students' ability to voice their people's ambitions and represent them in regional and international spaces in the absence of national political institutions.

The Palestinian student movement was the expression of the broader Palestinian society in exile. Students had personally experienced the *Nakba* and the socio-economic and political disruption it had brought about. Many came from refugee camps throughout the Arab region and had witnessed the failure of Arab politics around Palestinians. This shared experience was at the heart of their political organising. In other words, the student movement belonged to the masses, it was anchored within its people. It was this organic relation that allowed it to emerge as a political actor and to play a dual function. First, students articulated and voiced the political demands of their people: they did so by advocating for the Palestinian cause at the regional and international level, and by providing the spaces for the emergence of popular political movements that elaborated radical strategies of liberation. These movements, rooted in student activism, later came

²⁴⁰ Ruba Salih, "Refugees and Cathartic Politics," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 117, no. 1 (January 2018): pp. 135-155, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-4282073>.

²⁴¹ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 418.

to represent the Palestinian people through the PLO. Secondly, students led the reorganisation of their scattered society by establishing the first Palestinian popular union, thus inspiring other segments of society (such as women, workers and members of particular occupations) to act similarly and to form their own unions.

Gramsci did not necessarily envisage such a “structural” role for organic intellectuals: he did not think of them as organised in a structured body such as the Palestinian student union. In this sense, Gramsci’s analysis cannot account for the Palestinian experience in the aftermath of the *Nakba*.²⁴² The Italian philosopher was convinced that the working class required an organised leadership, a body able to express the collective will of the people. Yet the structure he envisaged was not a popular organisation such as a sectoral union. Rather, it was the Revolutionary Party. Gramsci did not suggest that all endeavours of organic intellectuals should be focused within the Party. He did argue, however, that the Party must play the role of an organic intellectual of the working class.²⁴³ Gramsci conceived the Party as “the first cell in which there come together the germs of a collective will tending to become universal.”²⁴⁴ For him, the Party was a “collective intellectual.”²⁴⁵

Gramsci’s notion of the organic intellectuals and the Party emerged from the analysis of the Russian Revolution and the role of the Social Democratic Party within it. Palestinian students operated in a different context, that of colonisation and exile. The social dynamics were radically different, shaped by the experience of dispersion and statelessness and the need to re-build social

²⁴² Recent analyses of contemporary political activism among Palestinians have emphasised the pertinence of Gramsci’s thought and particularly the notion of organic intellectuals. Hussein has argued that beyond the re-emergence of the single state discourse as a more just solution to the Palestinian question there is a “single state movement” that can be defined as Gramscian “organic intellectuals”. They have a central role in the articulation of a radical project of critical pedagogy and, by doing so, they are setting the basis for the emergence of an “Anti-Zionist historic bloc” that challenges the vision of Oslo accords vision and its narrative. Hussein, *The Re-Emergence of the Single State Solution*.

²⁴³ Roger Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2015), 111.

²⁴⁴ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 129.

²⁴⁵ Palmiro Togliatti and D. Sassoon, *On Gramsci: And Other Writings* (Place of Publication Not Identified: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979), 177, quoted in Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought*, 112.

structures. Hence, the establishment of a popular organisation, the GUPS, prior to the formal emergence of different political parties within the national liberation movement.

Palestinian political movements played a central role in the national struggle. They were rooted among the masses and at the forefront of Palestinian political life, elaborating strategies of resistance for the national cause. They played the role of “collective intellectual” envisaged by Gramsci. Parties and movements recognised the need to support the establishment of popular organisations and unions. The exceptionality of statelessness made these structures vital for re-unifying the people and re-organising its social texture. This also explains the importance which political movements and parties attached to GUPS elections in attempts to influence the composition of its Executive Committee. Through contestation for control of the union, access to the Palestinian community transnationally could thus be expedited.

The political commitment and work of the GUPS provided an important model for other unions: Palestinian students maintained a constant connection to their broader constituency. They were not a detached elite but operated among the masses. Far from seeing their role as confined to the theoretic elaboration of political strategies, they were committed to grassroots activism. Students shared, to cite Gramsci, the “feelings and passion” of the broader society from which they hailed. It was their organic connectedness to the Palestinian people which drove commitment both to political mobilisation and to promotion of socio-cultural activities that would reinforce their bond to the masses. Thus they organised cultural events, trips and even facilitation of the religious pilgrimage (*Hajj*) for older Palestinians.

The political transformations of the late 1960s made the PLO a truly popular movement, the direct expression of people’s will recognised as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Now run by the radical political parties whose cadres had roots in student activism, it had become the umbrella institution under which the broad-based popular movements operated. The PLO of the 1970s was what Gramsci would call a “collective intellectual” and “functioned

according to the ethos of the time, based upon the model employed by national liberation movements worldwide in the anti-colonial struggle for liberation.”²⁴⁶

GUPS, as the oldest popular organisation and the historical vanguard of political mobilisation, played an important role in the national movement and supported the PLO’s dynamism at the internal as well as international level. While the Union followed the political directions set by the PLO, in their interaction with the Organisation as well as with political movements and parties, students often voiced the more progressive views of the broader Palestinian society. This was the case, for instance, in 1974 when the PLO issued its Ten-Point Program: students discussed the new developments extensively, met with PLO leaders and expressed their criticisms and reflections over the changes in the strategies of the Organization.²⁴⁷ In this sense, the Union acted as a bridge between the PLO and its constituency as it contributed to maintaining the organic relation between the movement and the people.

2.2.3 The Impact of Colonialism on Strategies of Mobilisation

This study demonstrates the necessity of acknowledging the specific context in which students operated. It is colonialism which has shaped the structure as well as the strategies of the student movement. Palestinians were forced to reorganise their society and their institutions transnationally, in an attempt to overcome fragmentation and dispersion. In other words, transnational organising was a necessity, a consequence of the condition of exile and statelessness brought about by the Zionist colonisation of Palestine. Similarly, the strategies of mobilisation, and particularly the commitment to international solidarity and cooperation with Third World

²⁴⁶Karma, Nabulsi, “The PLO: A Positive Model or Doomed for Failure? Part II Roundtable on Palestinian Diaspora and Representation.” *Jadaliyya*, July 10, 2017. <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/24029>.

²⁴⁷Adopted by the PLO in 1974, the Ten-Point Program supports the establishment of a Palestinian national authority "over every part of Palestinian territory that is liberated" as a first step for achieving the liberation of all Palestine. The document was understood as indicating PLO openness to a two-state solution and allowed the Organisation to achieve international recognition. See for example Brand *Palestinians in the Arab World*. GUPS criticism of the programme will be discussed in Chapter 7.

movements, were based on the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist principles that framed the struggle for liberation. In this sense, the student vanguard may be seen as anti-colonial.

Of particular pertinence is Boudreau's analysis of contentious politics and social movements and strategies in the colonial context. He is mainly concerned with the process of decolonisation and the way it shapes contentious politics. Boudreau suggests that the study of social movements in a process of decolonisation should address four major questions:

First, how directly did the colonial apparatus attempt to govern colonial society? Second, what was the geographic scope of colonial rule? Third, what spaces did the colonial system open up, even via its repressive apparatus, for members of colonial society to develop bonds of solidarity with one another? And, finally how did international influences, including anticolonial norms or factors that may weaken the imperial power, influence patterns of anticolonial struggle?²⁴⁸

The first three questions are particularly important in the Palestinian case. They are, one way or another, concerned with the geography and spatiality of the colonial project and the response to it.

Fanon has illustrated how space becomes a fundamental element in the colonial project as well as in anti-colonial resistance. He argued that the hegemony of colonialism is based on spatial segregation in the colony, a segregation that Fanon defines as compartmentalisation. This spatial organisation, the sharp demarcation between colonial cities and rural areas, the existence of different compartments in the city, attests to the divided character of the colonial world where the power relation and inequality between colonised and coloniser are incorporated into geography, space and in urbanism. In this context, Kipfer has argued that "as an expression of social inequality and of quasi-ontological forms of exclusion, colonial spatial segregation heralds an irreconcilable conflict between colonizer and colonized."²⁴⁹

In the Palestinian case, the spatial dimension of the colonial project had far reaching consequence and shaped the anti-colonial practices of the liberation movement.

²⁴⁸Boudreau, "Decolonization and Social Movements", 170.

²⁴⁹ Stefan Kipfer, "Fanon and Space: Colonization, Urbanization, and Liberation from the Colonial to the Global City," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25, no. 4 (2007): pp. 701-726, <https://doi.org/10.1068/dkipfer>, 709.

While Zionism's relationship with the geography of Palestine is clear, shaped by practices of settler colonialism, Palestinians had to elaborate strategies of anti-colonial resistance as well as mechanisms of political representation which could overcome the geographical fragmentation that Zionist colonisation had imposed on them.

In her study of Palestinian student movements, Burke emphasises how strategies of mobilisation and political activism among students are shaped by, and respond to, the different political environments in which they operated.

At the broader level, however, the attempt to reorganise national institutions and movements that could be the expression of people's will and lead the anticolonial struggle, required a political reorganisation that was necessarily transnational. Palestinian political organising, in this sense, can be understood as a transnational nationalism where cross-border mobilisation aimed to achieve national liberation. In other words, nationalism can be expressed, practised and fought for only through transnational practices.

It is this reality which makes Boudreau's fourth question, on the international dimension, even more relevant to understanding Palestinian strategies of mobilisation. International solidarity and cooperation were fundamental to the *modus operandi* of the Palestinian student movement. The following chapters will show how this focus on the international was the result of three factors. Firstly, it was the natural arena of political action for a movement that was forced to organise transnationally. Secondly, students understood the Palestinian struggle as an international question of addressing links between Western imperialism and Zionist colonialism, the role of the international community in the making of the "Palestinian issue" and their enduring support for Israel. Thirdly, student dynamism in the international arena was facilitated and boosted by the international political climate of the period (especially during the 1950s and 1960s).

Thus, this study argues, in a sense, internationalism was a necessity and a choice at the same time. It was a necessity because in the absence of a geographical centre that could facilitate

anti-colonial struggle and national mobilisation the international arena became a privileged space for political engagement. It was a choice because Palestinian students believed in the common struggle of oppressed people and the imperative of investment in Third World solidarity.

In this sense, Palestinian international engagement may be seen as “nationalist internationalism”, borrowing Lazarus’s definition of Fanon’s political vision. Lazarus talked of nationalist internationalism “to indicate Fanon’s dual revolutionary commitment to the national liberation struggle and the wider struggle for social internationalism, both being, for him, entailed in the concept of anti-imperialism.”²⁵⁰ Utilising this concept helps underline the intrinsic connection between the anti-colonial goal of national liberation and the broader anti-imperialist frame and Third World solidarity that characterised Palestinian students’ strategies. Elaborating on Fanon understanding on nationalist internationalism, Lazarus explains that, for the Martinique intellectual:

the *national* project also has the capacity to become the vehicle— the means of articulation— of a *social*(ist) demand which extends beyond decolonization in the merely technical sense, and which calls for a fundamental transformation rather than a mere restructuring of the prevailing social order.²⁵¹

This internationalist dimension in the analysis of Palestinian mobilisation – and more generally in the history of anti-colonial movements – has been downplayed. Nabulsi and Takriti have pointed out how the dominant narratives on anti-colonial movements, including the Palestinian revolution, privilege the “nationalist content over the internationalist and progressive dimension.” This approach does not allow appreciation of the international reach of the Palestinian revolution and it isolates it from “the broader global anti-colonial currents of which it was such an integral part.”²⁵²

The Palestinian students’ international engagement was interconnected with their national ambitions: the condition of colonised, exiled refugees shaped their view of the world and their commitment to a different international system. The anti-colonial nature of the student role as

²⁵⁰ Lazarus, "Disavowing Decolonization", 169.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁵² Nabulsi and Takriti, *The Palestinian Revolution*, <http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/teach>

international actors made the Palestinian student movement inexplicable within the mainstream New Leftist theorising on students' international role, shaped as it was by social dynamics typical of post-industrial society.

Understanding how the engagement of Palestinian students was driven by commitment to the national cause, rather than post-industrial anomie, is advanced by reference to Frantz Fanon's insights into the peculiarity of the colonial condition. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argues that:

... the location of the revolutionary change had shifted in the mid-twentieth century. It was no longer to be found in the industrial proletariat of Lille or Manchester, whose revolutionary impulses had been dulled by the booming economic miracle in Western Europe, but amongst the dispossessed peasantry of the Third World.²⁵³

As has now been demonstrated, the conditions that enabled Palestinian youth to mobilise were radically different from those envisaged by Marx, Lenin, Mao, Mills or Marcuse. For Palestinian students it was their organic rootedness, rather than their marginalisation, which propelled them into playing a vanguard role. Thus analysis of the emergence of student movements in industrialised countries cannot account for the colonial context that substantially shaped the dynamics and mechanisms of Palestinian student activism. As will be argued in the next chapters, GUPS' transnational coordination was intensive, and exchanges, political and organisational support were provided to other student groups and movements. Engagement with the IUS was a central strategy of the Palestinian student union in Cairo from the 1950s and remained a pillar of GUPS' political engagement. However, this commitment was not only the outcome of an international political project shared by students worldwide. For in the aftermath of the *Nakba*, Palestinian students *needed* international recognition to reaffirm their very existence. To use the words of a Palestinian student of the time, it was an imperative of "putting Palestine back on the

²⁵³ Martin Evans, "Frantz Fanon: Third World Revolutionary," OUPblog, May 9, 2013. <https://blog.oup.com/2011/12/fanon/>.

map.”²⁵⁴ Unlike other student organisations, Palestinian student unions through the 1950s and mid-1960s were the only popular organisations that could voice their people’s ambitions in international spaces.

GUPS maintained an important international role even after the national movement was established. The PLO was able to build relations of solidarity with revolutionary movements and political institutions worldwide on the basis of the networks and connections established by GUPS in the previous decade. Palestinian students all over the world remained a central reference point for solidarity activists. New Leftist analysis cannot account for this shift and the role Palestinian students played within the national movement and their contribution to the national struggle. Even when international student activism started to wane in the mid-1970s, their activism can only be explained by reading it within the anti-colonial framework that shaped Palestinian history.

Characterising the Palestinian student movement as anti-colonial aims to emphasise not only the international engagement that was central to its *modus operandi*, but also the strategies of popular mobilisation and the practices of collective participation that characterised it. Building on Fanon’s theorisation of anti-colonial and decolonisation movements as expressions of people’s will,²⁵⁵ the anti-colonial attribute in the definition of the Palestinian student movement refers to the practices and strategies they employed to develop collective agency, guarantee popular participation in the different phases of the struggle and elaborate and enact social, political, cultural and militant strategies of resistance.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the theoretical framework for analysing the Palestinian transnational student movement. It argues Palestinian students contributed to global politics by

²⁵⁴Zuhair Al-Khatib, first President of GUPS (1959). Interview by author, Amman, 26 January 2012.

²⁵⁵ See Chapter 1.

influencing political dynamics at two interconnected levels, the domestic and the international. They were able to do this as they acted as what I have termed an anti-colonial organic vanguard.

It has emphasised the need to articulate a theoretical approach able to account for the specific historical and political context in which Palestinian students operate. For conventional theories on student activism and student revolutionary power alone cannot adequately explain the dynamics of mobilisation in the context of colonisation and statelessness. This thesis thus suggests a new conceptual lens that combines three theoretical approaches: Marxist-Leninist theories on student revolutionary powers, Gramsci's notion of "organic relation" as articulated in his theorisation of "organic intellectuals" and post-colonial studies on social movements.

By doing so, this study contributes to theories on student politics, offering a new and more nuanced understanding of student political impact in the international system within the specific context of colonisation and statelessness. It seeks to explain that while Leninist-Maoist theories provide an important point of departure for the analysis of student vanguardism, a broader definition of "vanguard" is needed to be able to appreciate not only the forefront role students played in the emergence of the national movement, but also the students' persistent contribution to national politics.

Subsequent discussion of Gramsci's concept of organic relation to the Palestinian case has demonstrated how it was the *organicità* between students and their broader society that allowed them to act as a vanguard able to articulate and voice the political ambitions of the Palestinian people. Palestinian students were able to intervene in domestic and international political dynamics because they could enjoy the support of the masses. For in colonial settings such support and organic relation with the people is fundamental for the emergence and development of a national movement. Palestinians were forced to reorganise their society and its institutions transnationally, as a consequence of the condition of exile and statelessness brought about by the colonisation of Palestine. It is in this context that student activism should be analysed: student strategies of

mobilisation, and particularly the commitment to international solidarity and cooperation with Third World movements, were based on the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist principles that framed the struggle for liberation. In this sense Palestinian students embraced what may be called nationalist internationalism as they framed their struggle for liberation and self-determination within the international context of anti-imperialism and Third Worldism.

Depicting the Palestinian student movement as an anti-colonial organic vanguard, helps explain the shift in the way student mobilisation contributed to the national movement in different political periods. If in the aftermath of the *Nakba* and in the absence of national institutions, students acted as a representative body of their people, following the establishment of the PLO in the mid-1960s the students' role changed and GUPS was incorporated within the broader umbrella of the PLO. Student spaces became an arena of internal mobilisation and a generator of international solidarity. This shift can be explained if analysed through a prism able to appreciate the impact of the specificities of the colonisation of Palestine and statelessness on mobilisation and political structures as well as the organic relation between students and their broader society in a context of exile, geographical dispersion and political fragmentation.

The following chapters set out to apply the conceptual framework explored in this chapter to an investigation of Palestinian student movements in different periods of Palestinian political history, beginning with the immediate aftermath of the *Nakba* and what might, in retrospect, be seen as the golden age of the resistance movement.

3 CHAPTER THREE

PALESTINIAN STUDENT UNIONS IN THE ARAB WORLD IN THE 1950S: PART 1

Introduction

For the majority of Afro-Asian anti-colonial and liberation movements the 1950s ushered in a new chapter for, what were to become, successful struggles that finally led to national independence.²⁵⁶ Yet for Palestinians the decade represented the beginning of a traumatic experience of displacement. The end of the British Mandate of Palestine²⁵⁷ did not bring about realisation of the national aspirations held by the indigenous inhabitants of the area. Instead, it led to the expulsion of most Palestinians. Recovery from the shock of dispossession and the disappearance or fragmentation of the cultural, civil, social and political structures that had shaped daily life was traumatic. Statelessness, geographic fragmentation, dispersal and lack of international recognition or protection became the distinctive characteristics of the Palestinian nation.²⁵⁸

It was a critical decade for nascent political efforts to overcome the lack of sovereign representation that statelessness had engendered while having to rebuild a movement that could lead the nation to return and self-determination. Brand has argued that in order to understand the significance of this period:

the establishment of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964 should be viewed, not as the beginning of the first chapter of the re-emergence of the Palestinian national

²⁵⁶On decolonisation in Asia and Africa, see for example: Muriel Evelyn. Chamberlain, *Decolonization: the Fall of the European Empires* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999); Nicholas White, *Decolonization: the British Experience since 1945* (London: Longman, 1999) ; David Birmingham, *The Decolonization of Africa* (Taylor and Francis e-library, 2016); Marc Frey, Ronald Pruessen, Tan Tay Yong, eds., *The Transformation of Southeast Asia: International Perspectives on Decolonization* (Armonk NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003).

²⁵⁷The League of Nations mandate under which the British were given control of an area which included Mandatory Palestine and the Emirate of Transjordan.

²⁵⁸ For the displacement of Palestinians in 1948, see Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington, D.C: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992); Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and Pappé *The ethnic cleansing of Palestine*.

movement, but as its conclusion, the natural extension of Palestinian efforts in the 1950s and early 1960s, finally adopted and bolstered by Arab regimes, to establish a national entity.²⁵⁹

Since the early fifties, in the absence of a sovereign territorial base in which to reconstruct their shattered society, Palestinians were forced to organise and revive social and political institutions transnationally. Statelessness and refugeeness shaped Palestinian political mobilisation not only by imposing cross-border strategies, but also by subjecting them to the influence of regional and international political dynamics. Students were the first to confront this new reality, playing a pivotal role in the making and shaping of Palestinian politics in the 1950s.

In the post-*Nakba* period Palestinian student political engagement was twofold. It allowed the reorganisation of structures and unions in the Arab region that – in the absence of a national body – would be acknowledged by both Arab leaders and the masses as representative institutions of the Palestinian people. Secondly, it laid the basis for the emergence of new grassroots political movements with radical ideologies which, in subsequent decades, led the struggle for liberation.

This chapter analyses Palestinian student mobilisation in Cairo throughout the 1950s. It contends that students in Cairo, just like their colleagues in Beirut, Damascus or Amman, played the role of a vanguard organically – in the Gramscian sense – tied to their people. They led the political reorganisation of their scattered society working toward the establishment of transnational structures. In 1959, when it was officially launched, the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) became the first Palestinian transnational body established in the post-*Nakba* era as a direct outcome of student mobilisation in the 1950s. They had a relation of *organicità* with the Palestinian masses as they belonged to them. They articulated the ambitions of their people within an anti-colonial framework that broke with the traditional politics of Arab state actors. Student emphasised self-reliance, armed struggle and the need for mass participation in the struggle and challenged what they perceived as the immobility of Arab leaders.

²⁵⁹ Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World*, 4.

The chapter is divided in two. Part one provides an analysis of the political context in which Palestinian student activism was rooted and discusses the effects of geographic fragmentation on Palestinian society, its political mobilisation and the consequent post-*Nakba* crisis of representation.²⁶⁰ Part two analyses, through a Gramscian lens, the political role of the Palestinian Student Union (PSU) in Cairo during the 1950, focusing on five themes: political background; organisational structure; engagement with armed struggle; public mobilisation activities to reconnect a colonised people with their history and culture, and diplomatic endeavours to engage with Palestinian, Arab and international actors and institutions. The successes which they achieved illustrate Boren's observation that while students are naturally drawn to resist oppression, they may only succeed by mobilising the masses and exerting sufficient public pressure on opponents.

3.1 Contextualising Palestinian Political Mobilisation in the 1950s

This section will provide an overview of the socio-political context from which Palestinian student activism stemmed. It seeks to introduce the political dynamics of that time through a multi-dimensional prism encompassing all the events, factors and socio-political interrelations that impacted on Palestinian strategies and mobilisation. It shows how three interconnected socio-political dimensions influenced the making of Palestinian politics: internal, Arab and international.

3.1.1 The Palestinian Dimension: the Nakba, its Meaning and Consequences

The *Nakba*²⁶¹ is a turning point in Palestinian history. For, as Sa'di and Abu Lughod have pointed out, the *Nakba* must be considered the "beginning of contemporary Palestinian history, a history of catastrophic changes, violent suppression and refusal to disappear."²⁶²

²⁶⁰*Nakba*, 'catastrophe' in Arabic, refers to the process of expulsion and dispossession carried out by Zionist forces in 1947-1948.

²⁶¹The term seems to have been coined by Constantine Zurayk in his *The Meaning of Nakba, The meaning of the disaster* (Beirut: Khayat's College Book Cooperative, 1956).

²⁶²Ahmad Sa'di and Lila Abu Lughod, eds., *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 5.

Historically, the *Nakba* mainly refers to the events of 1948: the failure of Arab armies to repel Zionist forces and protect Palestinian communities, the establishment of the state of Israel and the expulsion, dispossession and forced exile of the indigenous population of Palestine.²⁶³ Palestinian understanding of the term has changed with the passage of time, yet the *Nakba* remains the core of Palestinian “genealogy”, a point of rupture from which the interwoven threads of Palestinian history have stemmed.²⁶⁴ The events of 1948 brought about a radical transformation of Palestinian demography, economy and social and political structures. Signing of the 1949 Armistice Agreement between Israel and the Arab countries confirmed the complete transformation of the geo-political and demographic character of Palestine.

It is estimated that at the time of the 1947 UN partition of Palestine, the Palestinian indigenous community represented over two thirds of the total population of Palestine. Yet by the end of the hostilities the Palestinians found themselves scattered and herded into communities separated both one from another and also from Israeli-held Palestine.²⁶⁵ Of the 1.3 million Palestinian-Arab inhabitants living within what was to become the international boundary of Israel, only 150,000 managed to remain.²⁶⁶ A further 700,000 were expelled from their original villages and took refuge in the remaining areas of Mandate Palestine not occupied by Israel and now administrated or annexed by other Arab countries. The West Bank became part of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, while Egypt assumed control of the Gaza Strip.²⁶⁷ The remaining population was dispersed into neighbouring Arab countries, primarily Transjordan (the name given to the area to the east of the Jordan River), Lebanon, Syria and Egypt as well as across the globe.

²⁶³ Ilan Pappé (*The ethnic cleansing of Palestine*) has provided a detailed account of the events of 1948, defining Zionist practices towards the Palestinians as ethnic cleansing.

²⁶⁴ Nadine Picadou, *Le Mouvement National Palestinien: Genèse et Structures* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1989), 27.

²⁶⁵ Rosemary Sayigh, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries*, 98.

²⁶⁶ UNRWA, *UNRWA: a brief history 1950-1982* (Vienna: UNRWA headquarters, 1983), 2-6.

²⁶⁷ For the Gaza Strip, see: Hussein Abu an-Naml, *Qita 'a Gaza 1948-1967: Tatawrat Eqtisadiatan w syasyatan w ejtima'ayatan w a'askariatan (Gaza Strip, 1948-1967: Economic Political Sociological and Military Development)* (Beirut: Palestine Research Center, 1979); for Jordan, see: Avi Shlaim, *Collusion across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement and the Partition of Palestine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

Most Palestinian refugees were peasants, dispossessed of their land and displaced into camps in urban areas. They had to economically reinvent themselves, often providing labour for the emerging oil industry in Gulf countries or finding employment with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the international body established in December 1949 to provide registered Palestinian refugees with education, health care, social services and emergency aid.²⁶⁸

Deprived of their land and the economic means to sustain their families, most expelled Palestinians found themselves living in overpopulated camps organised by international relief agencies as well as statal actors. They were deprived of social and cultural ties to society and homeland, denied the right to have a passport and lacked political representation either internationally or vis-à-vis the representatives of hosting states. Palestinians were often subject to the “political and economic vagaries of the countries that ‘hosted’ them.”²⁶⁹

The status of Palestinian refugees varied from country to country. Lebanon has always pursued discriminatory policies toward Palestinian refugees with regard to employment, travel, ownership of property, education and political rights.²⁷⁰ Jordan, which now included the Palestinian West Bank, guaranteed full citizenship rights to Palestinians as Jordanians in an attempt to integrate them, thus rejecting the idea of a separate Palestinian national and political entity.²⁷¹ Syria, along with Egypt (which administered the Gaza Strip), eventually issued travel documents and offered employment and educational access for Palestinians. However, they only permitted limited political activities.²⁷²

²⁶⁸ For further analysis on Palestinian class transformation see Smith, “The Palestinian Diaspora, 1948-1985”.

²⁶⁹ Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World*, 8.

²⁷⁰ Sayigh, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries*, 111.

²⁷¹ Walid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 136.

²⁷² For Egypt, see: Abu An-Naml, *Qita'a Gaza 1948-1967*; Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World*. For Syria see: Sayigh, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries*.

These different conditions in the host states shaped the way Palestinian students would mobilise politically. In Jordan, their aspirations for the liberation of Palestine had to be framed within calls for reform within the kingdom as specifically Palestinian movements were not tolerated by the Hashemite authorities. In Syria, Palestinian political mobilisation was organised underground.

Dispossession and economic insecurity were not only the drivers of changes in Palestinian class culture but also impacted the socio-political life of Palestinians and the way they reorganised. The circumstances in which Palestinians found themselves gave rise to a sense of “social uprootedness”²⁷³ and marginalisation, an obliteration of traditional ties they had in Palestine. This social annihilation had three major impacts. It “cemented opposition to permanent resettlement”²⁷⁴ and reinforced the search for and replication of a social structure and relations that had characterised rural life. Furthermore, it spurred a constant, and at times an almost obsessive, commitment to education. For schooling was considered the only “way out”²⁷⁵ from social and economic marginalisation, the sole guarantor of dignity and a better future. Palestinian students in Arab countries would play a central role in the economic and political reorganisation of their communities. By enrolling in universities and colleges in the Arab world and beyond, they were well placed to mobilise and access political spaces, at the local, regional and international levels, in the process engaging with radical new analyses, ideologies and global perspectives.

In the aftermath of the 1948 war, Palestinians possessed a high level of national consciousness, but their status as refugees and the fragmentation of their community deprived them of the national and political institutions to embody this.²⁷⁶ Regional political developments during the post-*Nakba* period shaped Palestinian political representation and mobilisation. The immediate

²⁷³Fred Brunhs, “A Study of Arab Refugee Attitudes”, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Spring, 1955), 133.

²⁷⁴Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: the Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 47.

²⁷⁵Sayigh, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries*, 118-119.

²⁷⁶Rashid Hamid, “What Is the PLO?” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 4, 4 (1975), 90-109.

aftermath of the 1948 war was characterised by contestation over who would “represent” the Palestinians.²⁷⁷

Two distinct trends should be highlighted: an institutional effort to provide Palestinian political representation and a grassroots effort to contribute to the Palestinian struggle through pan-Arab mobilisation and a radical transformation of regional political structures.

At the institutional level, the Arab League, which had been formed in 1945 in Cairo, attempted to provide Palestine’s scattered refugees with a political body able to represent them. In the summer of 1948 it established the Arab Higher Committee (AHC) led by the Grand Mufti Hajj Amin el Hussein and in the autumn of the same year established an All Palestine Government (APG) which was based in Gaza. Neither the APG nor the Mufti was to subsequently play a major role in Palestinian politics. The APG continued to formally exist and receive financial support until 1959 and the Mufti, through the AHC, continued to claim to represent the Palestinian people until his death in 1974.

A variety of factors prevented the APG and the AHC from being effective representatives of Palestinians. The pivotal role of Arab leaders in its establishment, and reliance on Arab League financial support made the APG constantly dependent on Arab countries.²⁷⁸ The APG was restricted to a small geographic area, Gaza. Moreover, it lacked any electoral legitimacy as its members were comprised of notables from the families and clans who had dominated traditional leadership and was thus detached from the popular masses. Being elitist, the APG was far removed from the Palestinian refugees it claimed to represent. Its strategy remained static, non-mobilisational and constrained by regional realpolitik and diplomatic considerations.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 135.

²⁷⁸ Johanna Caldwell, “Inter-Arab Rivalry and the All-Palestine Government of 1948,” *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 62 (2015), 50-64.

²⁷⁹ See: Avi Shlaim, “The Rise and Fall of the All-Palestine Government in Gaza,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 20, 1 (1990), 37-53; Pamela Ann Smith, *Palestine and the Palestinians, 1876 - 1983* (London: Croom Helm, 1985).

The endeavours of these institutions were opposed by King Abdullah of Jordan. Having annexed the West Bank, he asserted for his kingdom the right to represent the Palestinian people. Interested in reinforcing his role in the regional system and with territorial ambitions in Palestine, King Abdullah opposed any proposal for Palestinian representation or self-government, instead seeking to merge the Palestinian people with Jordan's population.

Attempts by the APG and AHC to claim Palestinian political representation failed and the Mufti's role in Palestinian politics was eclipsed by the emergence of a new generation of revolutionary leaders. This affected the entire class of notables who had dominated Palestinian politics until 1948.

Rosemary Sayigh has summarised the different Palestinian grassroots approaches to political representation and mobilisation during the 1950s:

[Firstly], the majority of the older generation, the *jeel Falesteen* [the generation of Palestine] remained fixed to their pre-1948 loyalties, whether national or provincial leaders, and distrusting of new political parties as divisive or anti-religious. Second[ly], a large number of the younger *jeel al Nakba* [the generation of the *Nakba*] joined the opposition movements, following the principle a younger teacher expressed when he said, 'we would have joined the Devil's party if it had put Palestine among its aims'. Third[ly], a very small minority examined the position of all existing parties and decided that none of them had been able to provide a correct analysis of the Palestinian crisis, and thus that they were unlikely to provide a correct program of action to solve it²⁸⁰

In the aftermath of the *Nakba* Palestinian youth who wanted to overcome the political constraints imposed on them by statelessness and hosting countries' policies worked through Pan-Arab and transnational groups such as the Ba'ath Party, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN), all of which had the liberation of Palestine at the core of their political platforms.²⁸¹

3.1.2 Palestinian Student Activism in Arab Parties

The Palestinian *Nakba* highlighted weaknesses in the political strategies of the Arab ruling

²⁸⁰Sayigh, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries*, 149.

²⁸¹Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 138.

classes, often regarded as colluding with Western colonial powers. The events of 1948 paved the way for the emergence of a more radical ideology, a popular nationalism, which advocated for the unity of the Arab nation and liberation not only of Palestine but the whole region.²⁸² Much analysis of post-1948 events highlights the interrelations between the Palestinian cause and the Arab cause. Zionism was commonly perceived both as a threat to Palestinian national aspirations but also an extension of imperial interests in the region, and of continued Western attempts to maintain control of the Arab world.²⁸³ The old Arab politicians were discredited and Pan-Arabism came to be considered as the only means to overcome political fragmentation, imperialism and Zionism.²⁸⁴

The *Nakba*'s impact on Middle East politics was fundamental to the emergence of a radical ideological discourse that was to characterise the region for decades to come. Parties that had always supported the Palestinian cause and blended elements of nationalism, social justice and religion, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, became stronger in the aftermath of the 1948 war. Furthermore, new political movements, inspired by Pan-Arabism and anti-imperialist principles – the Ba'ath party in Syria and Iraq and the Movement of Arab Nationalists – emerged at the beginning of the 1950s and remained prominent actors for subsequent decades. Palestinian students in the Arab region played a fundamental role in the elaboration and dissemination of these revolutionary ideologies. It was in these political spaces that Palestinian students developed a critical political approach to their national cause and began to organise a revolutionary strategy for the liberation of Palestine.

Ideologically, the leading Arab political formations in the late 1940s belonged to three strands: Pan-Arabist, Communist and Islamist, with the Muslim Brotherhood, the Ba'ath party and the Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN) as the most influential parties. Their influence varied

²⁸²Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 401.

²⁸³ See, for example: Constantine .Zurayk, *The meaning of the Nakba*; and Walid Kazziha, *Revolutionary Transformation in the Arab World: George Habash and his Comrades from Nationalism to Marxism* (London: Charles Knight, 1975); Fayeze Sayegh "Zionist Colonialism in Palestine (1965)".

²⁸⁴Kazziha, *Revolutionary Transformation in the Arab World*, 10.

according to geographical area and changed over time. The Muslim Brotherhood was stronger in Egypt and Gaza in the first half of the 1950s. Ba'ath had taken root in Syria, Jordan and Iraq. MAN emerged in Lebanon and by the end of the 1950s had expanded its political influence over the entire region. The Communists were present across the entire region and played an important political role, particularly at the beginning of the 1950s. The following sections will detail the precise influence these political tendencies had for Palestinian students.

3.1.3 Muslim Brotherhood

At the beginning of the 1950s, the Muslim Brotherhood had a substantial presence among Palestinians living in Egypt and Gaza. This was mainly due to its active support for the armed resistance of Palestinians during the 1948 war and an impassioned militant language easily accessible for ordinary people. Various personal life histories throw light on the importance that young students attributed to armed struggle, cooperating with or even joining the Muslim Brotherhood in the hope of eventually initiating military action to liberate Palestine.

Their dedication is exemplified by testimony from Intisar Al-Wazir (henceforth, Umm Jihad) in her account of the early years of the political activism of her husband Khalid Al-Wazir (also known as Abu Jihad). Inspired, his wife reported, by the idea of armed resistance, Abu Jihad, one of the historical leaders of Fatah and the PLO, joined the party when he was a teenager in the early 1950s.²⁸⁵ He soon became responsible for the *Ikhwan* student section in Gaza and was placed in charge of political as well as military training of young Palestinians. Yet when, in vain, he urged the movement's leaders to adopt armed struggle in Palestine he gradually distanced himself from the party, taking with him the young Palestinians he had trained and forming a new group, completely detached from the party, one which would focus exclusively on armed struggle.

²⁸⁵Interview with Intisar Al-Wazir (henceforth, Umm Jihad), member of Fateh Central Committee, in Yahya Yakhluif, *Shahdat 'an Tarikh at-Thawra al Falestiniyah* [Testimonies on the History of the Palestinian Revolution] (Ramallah: Office for Intellectual Affairs and Studies in Fateh, 2009), 37-66.

A number of sources²⁸⁶ report Yassir Arafat's involvement with the Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo as far back as 1947 when he was the logistics coordinator for the smuggling of abandoned World War II weapons from Egypt into Gaza. This role allowed Arafat to get in touch with other young Palestinians leaving Gaza to study in Cairo.

3.1.4 Ba'ath

In the immediate aftermath of the 1948 war, the Ba'ath movement was the strongest secular Pan-Arab movement in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq. The party's secular political ideology was based on the concept that there was a single Arab nation and that all Arabs have the right to live in a single united states. Arab unity could be achieved only through transformation of the political system through social reform and socialist approaches.²⁸⁷ The secular character of the movement and the party's strong criticism of Arab traditional leadership made it particularly attractive to Palestinian students. Inspired by the revolutionary movements and theories spreading like wildfire across the Third World, they initially turned to Pan-Arabism in the hope it might ultimately bring about the liberation of Palestine.²⁸⁸

Ba'athist commitment to the Palestinian cause guaranteed the party significant support from Palestinians throughout the 1950s. Ba'athist influence on Palestinian students was particularly strong in the West Bank and Jordan in the first half of the 1950s. One of the former students interviewed for this thesis, Mohammad Abu Maizar, recalls that the Jordan Student Conference was established in 1953 with the backing of the Ba'ath, and had students from both banks of the Jordan River among its cadres.²⁸⁹ The large support enjoyed by the Ba'ath among young

²⁸⁶Interview with Salim Zanun (henceforth, Abu Al-Adib), member of Fateh Central Committee and President of the Palestinian National Council (PNC), in Yakhluif, *Shahdat 'anTarikh at-Thawra al Falestiniyah*, 9-34.

²⁸⁷ Hanna Batatu *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

²⁸⁸Kazziha, *Revolutionary Transformation in the Arab World*, 20.

²⁸⁹ Mohammad Abu Maizar, member of PSU Executive Committee in 1959, interview by author, Amman, May 2011.

Palestinians contributed to the spread of the movement's ideology throughout the 1950s, even in those areas where its presence was still imperceptible, particularly in the Palestinian West Bank.²⁹⁰

Two developments contributed to the spread of Ba'athist ideology among students. The first was the arrival in Egypt in 1954 of more than 50 students, most of them Palestinians, expelled from the American University of Beirut (AUB) in Lebanon for their political activities. This boosted the impact of Ba'athism within the Palestinian Student Union (PSU). The 1957 PSU election saw four Ba'athists elected. A further impulse was provided by the expulsion of 80 highly politicised students from Baghdad University. Their arrival in Cairo in 1959 brought about a significant increase in the recruitment of Palestinian students into the ranks of the Ba'ath party.

3.1.5 The Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN)²⁹¹

The *Harakat al-Qawmiyyin al-Arab* (MAN) played a fundamental role in shaping Palestinian students' political practices and thoughts. MAN's Pan-Arabism was in response to the loss of Palestine and the 1948 Arab defeat.²⁹² In contrast to other Pan-Arab and nationalist parties, the MAN was established in direct response to the *Nakba*, with the major contribution coming from Palestinian students in Lebanon.

MAN ideology was based on Arab nationalism but its engagement in the struggle for Palestine shaped its political strategies and goals to the extent that the co-founders, George Habash and his close friend Wadi' Haddad, argued that they had created a "Palestinian-Arab political organization."²⁹³ Central to MAN ideology was the conviction that the liberation of Palestine was a precondition for the liberation of the entire Arab region from imperialist and colonialist interests.

²⁹⁰Hamze Barqawi, interview by author, Damascus, 4 and 9 April 2012. Barqawi was a member of the Conference of Jordanian Students' executive committee in 1954. He became the representative of the Arab Student Union in Germany and the first GUPS president in Germany in 1959. During the 1950s he was a Ba'athist. He later was member of the General Union of Palestinian Writers.

²⁹¹ This sub-section does not seek to analyse the fundamental contribution made by Palestinian students to the emergence and development of the MAN, since it will be more thoroughly explored in chapter 4.

²⁹²Kazziha, *Revolutionary Transformation in the Arab World*, 16.

²⁹³ Interview with George Habash, in: Helga Baumgarten, "The Three Faces/Phases of Palestinian Nationalism, 1948-2005," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 34,4 (2005), 25-48, 29.

This focus on Palestine distinguished the MAN from other Pan-Arab movements. It drew support from all Palestinian social classes and took root in the refugee camps of Lebanon and Jordan. The majority of MAN supporters comprised Palestinian teachers and students recruited in secondary schools and universities.²⁹⁴ The involvement of Palestinian students in the MAN illustrates the leadership role played by youth, especially students, in reorganising Palestinian resistance and political parties across the region.

3.1.6 The Arab Dimension: a New Regional System

Palestinian student political mobilisation in the 1950s can be fully analysed only if it is contextualised within the broader Arab system. Regional political developments shaped the course of Palestinian student politics. For, as an Arab diplomat has explained: “in the Middle East everything is related to everything else.”²⁹⁵ Statelessness and refugeeness meant that Palestinians had to politically reorganise in hosting countries, often participating in the internal political dynamics of host states. They also had to elaborate new mechanisms of representation in order to seek ways to integrate and find space for manoeuvre in a regional system that was just emerging and testing its political strength and weaknesses vis-a-vis the interests of single states and amidst international dynamics dominated by the Cold War.

In the aftermath of World War II, the regional balance based on interrelations between nation-states was a relatively new phenomenon. Many of the new-born states were still assessing their domestic system and defining their national identity.

The 1948 war represented a watershed moment for the political mechanisms of each state. In the 1950s political destabilisation characterised the domestic politics of the countries that had fought against Israel in 1948. In Egypt, King Faruq was dethroned, Prime Minister Mahmoud al-Nuqrashi was murdered, the Wafd (the party which had dominated Egyptian politics since the end

²⁹⁴ Helga Baumgarten, “The Three Faces/Phases of Palestinian Nationalism, 1948-2005,” 26.

²⁹⁵ Quoted in Gregory Gause III, “Systemic Approaches to Middle East International Relations,” *International Studies Review* 1, no. 1 (1999), 1.

of the First World War) was destroyed and both the Muslim Brotherhood and Young Egypt²⁹⁶ were banned. In Jordan, King Abdullah I was assassinated while in Syria, a military coup was carried out by commanders who had fought in Palestine. The 1958 Iraqi revolution was led by Abdel-Karim Qassem, another veteran of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.²⁹⁷

For the Arab countries still engaged in nation-building the need to overcome internal instability was closely tied to the efforts to find a place in the international arena. During the 1950s, most Arab states had to reshape their relations with the old colonial powers. It was not solely the Cold War dichotomy that influenced and impacted Arab political choices and dynamics. For the Palestinian cause and relations with Israel added an “extra dimension”²⁹⁸ in intra-Arab dynamics. Some states were irrevocably unwilling to negotiate or normalise politics with Israel while others sought an official or unofficial *modus vivendi*. As a rule, Egypt and Syria took the former path, and Jordan and Lebanon the latter”.²⁹⁹

These different approaches were the reasons for political tensions that shaped regional dynamics. Such was their intensity that some scholars have characterised intra-Arab relations of those years as the “Arab Cold War.”³⁰⁰

The 1950s were dominated by the convergence of the factors highlighted above. Internal nation-building efforts were strongly connected to the necessity of reshaping relations with old and new Western powers while aiming to organise a new regional integration. This convergence was

²⁹⁶ The main opposition parties in Egypt. For a detailed study of the Wafd see: Marius Deeb, *Party Politics in Egypt: The Wafd & Its Rivals, 1919-1939* (London: Ithaca Press for the Middle East Centre, St Antony's College, Oxford, 1979). For a detailed study on the Young Egypt party see James P. Jankowski, *Egypt's Young Rebels: "Young Egypt," 1933-1952* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1975).

²⁹⁷ For post-1948 events in Syria see for example: Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria. A Study of Post-War Arab Politics 1945-1958* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 33-34. For Iraq see Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of Its Communists, Baathists, and Free Officers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 766-776. For Jordan see Avi Shlaim, *The Politics of Partition: King Abdullah, the Zionists, and Palestine, 1921-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

²⁹⁸ Roger Owen, *State, Power, and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (London: Routledge, 2000), 75.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

³⁰⁰ See for example: Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War, 1958-1964; a Study of Ideology in Politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

characterised by a contradictory regional dynamic. While Abdel Nasser's Egypt attempted to reinforce Arab unity and political independence, other regional leaders remained dependent on their former colonial powers to reinforce their sovereignty and strive for regional leadership.³⁰¹ This dynamic became clear in the second half of the 1950s when President Nasser's emphasis on Egypt's independence and Arab unity was able to mobilise the masses through anti-colonial and anti-imperialist principles. In 1955, this took the form of opposition to the Baghdad Pact, a British and US-inspired Cold War military alliance modelled on NATO.³⁰² In 1956, following Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal, there was intense opposition to the subsequent military confrontation launched against Egypt by Israel, Britain and France. The Suez Crisis (also known as the second Arab-Israeli war), together with the 1955 agreement with Czechoslovakia to purchase Soviet military equipment,³⁰³ underlined Egypt's distance from the Anglo-US alliance and their imperial ambitions. Egypt emerged as a major actor in non-aligned politics and in 1955 played a key role in the Bandung Conference.³⁰⁴ Nasser's eloquent articulation of the importance of anti-colonialism and Arab unity – primarily disseminated via the *Sawt al-Arab* (Voice of the Arabs) radio station – galvanised the Arab masses.

Thus there was a conducive climate to shape Palestinian student activism in the 1950s. Students found in Egypt a large space of manoeuvre for political mobilisation. Many Palestinian students enthusiastically supported Nasserism and Arab nationalism and by the end of the 1950s were able to influence the political dynamics within the student union in Cairo. In 1958, Pan-Arab

³⁰¹ Yazid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 14.

³⁰² Also known as CENTO (Central Treaty Organization), the Pact was open to members of the Arab League and was central to British and American political strategy in the region. See Kemal Yeşilbursa, *The Baghdad Pact: Anglo-American Defence Policies in the Middle East, 1950-1959* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: the Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill, USA: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

³⁰³ For the relevance of the 1955 Egypt-Czechoslovakia agreement see for example Karen Dawisha, *Soviet Foreign Policy towards Egypt* (New York: St. Martin's, 1979).

³⁰⁴ A conference attended by 25 Asian and African countries, aimed at promoting Third World economic and cultural cooperation while condemning and opposing colonialism and neocolonialism. For more details, see: Christopher J. Lee, *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010).

enthusiasm peaked with the establishment of the United Arab Republic, formally uniting Egypt and Syria.³⁰⁵ The formation of the UAR galvanised new generations of Palestinians and Arabs, providing a favourable framework for mobilisation and political engagement.

3.1.7 The International Dimension: Cold War and Revolutions

International politics during the 1950s was characterised by intensification of the Cold War, a new bipolar system that dominated world political dynamics, as well as anti-colonial struggles which put many Third World nations on the path to independence. The international climate shaped Palestinian student politics in two ways, both influencing students' articulation of an anti-colonial vision and framework for the national struggle and facilitating their effort to "put Palestine back on the map."³⁰⁶

In 1957, the USA set out the Eisenhower Doctrine, a commitment "to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations, requesting such aid against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism."³⁰⁷ It was clearly seen as a response to a perceived USSR/Egyptian threat to US interests in the region.³⁰⁸ In 1958, the Doctrine was used to justify a three-month long US military intervention in Lebanon which was designed to thwart those intent on joining Lebanon with the UAR.³⁰⁹

Across the Middle East students challenged Western intervention. The 1950s were characterised by a new level of Third World solidarity, an attempt to connect the struggles for liberation but also to find a new political space for young African and Asian nations in the dichotomous international system of the Cold War. Students spearheaded protests against the Baghdad Pact and in Amman were central to opposition to continued British influence in Jordanian

³⁰⁵Owen, *State, Power, and Politics*, 69.

³⁰⁶ Al-Khatib.

³⁰⁷*The Eisenhower Doctrine*, U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State), <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/eisenhower-doctrine>. (accessed 24/12/2019).

³⁰⁸ Salim Yaqub has shown how Eisenhower's unspoken goal was to contain Arab Nationalism and constrain Nasser. See Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism*.

³⁰⁹ On the impact of the Eisenhower Doctrine on Lebanon see Irene L. Gendzier, *Notes from the Minefield: United States Intervention in Lebanon and the Middle East, 1945-1958* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

affairs. This context shaped the efforts of the Palestinian student movement to forge vital international political relations and networks.

By the 1950s, the Algerian struggle represented the main point of reference for the Palestinian masses, especially the youth. The struggle for Algeria provided a fundamental inspiration for the elaboration of a more consistent vision of resistance among Palestinian students. The Algerian fight against French settler-colonialism was the crucial issue around which, in the post-*Nakba* years, Palestinian students could mobilise, discuss anti-colonial principles and ideologies, and begin to contextualise Palestine within an international anti-imperialist frame.³¹⁰

3.2 Palestinian Student Mobilisation

In the absence of national institutions able to represent the scattered Palestinian people, Palestinian students took upon themselves the task of reorganising their society, starting from student spaces in the Arab region. Students attempted to elaborate a new political platform that could provide an alternative to traditional politics. They played the role of an anti-colonial organic vanguard, leading the post-*Nakba* mobilisation of Palestinian society by operating at the grassroots level and articulating their vision in radical anti-colonial discourse.³¹¹ Palestinian student spaces became the pulse of a new political re-articulation that would shape the future of the Palestinian cause.

The impacts of Palestinian students in the early 1950s produced different outcomes according to the varying political and intellectual influences in the different states and cities where they found themselves.

In Cairo, the PSU was reorganised around a political platform devoted only to Palestine and Palestinians, and virtually detached from specific party interests.³¹² The political activism of

³¹⁰ Abu Iyad and Rouleau, *My Home, My Land*, 23.

³¹¹ For an elaboration of students as anticolonial organic vanguard see chapter 2.

³¹² For Palestinian student activism in Egypt in the post-*Nakba* period, see Laurie Brand (1988), "Nasir's Egypt and the Reemergence of the Palestinian National Movement," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 17, 2, 29-45.

Palestinian students in Cairo, laid the basis for the eventual establishment of Fateh (Palestinian National Liberation Movement). In Beirut, the activities of Palestinian students, along with other Arab colleagues, particularly at AUB, were fundamental to the establishment of the MAN, the mother movement of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP).³¹³ In Amman, while student initiatives were supported by the Pan-Arab Ba'ath party, Palestinian and East Bank Jordanian students managed to articulate popular opposition to the kingdom's politics through creation of Jordan's first student organisation.

As explained above, during the 1950s the local and regional environment played a major role in the elaboration of student's vision and strategies. It is the diversity of the socio-political and cultural context in the cities in which Palestinian students operated that explains the heterogeneity of political vision and strategies in Cairo, Beirut and Amman. The socio-political and cultural peculiarities of Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan impacted on the political articulation of Palestinian student groups in each country. The distinct Egyptian political and cultural climate of the post-World War II period was characterised by a strong nationalist and anti-colonial sentiment. The emphasis on national identity and on the cultural and political role of the country within the regional system may have set an example for a new understanding of Palestinian nationalism and its ties to the Arab world.³¹⁴ Unlike Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, newly-formed countries resulting from colonial divide-and-rule, Egypt had already experienced several decades of anti-colonial struggle based on a well-defined understanding of Egyptian Arab identity. Jordan and Lebanon, however were still struggling to define their national, cultural and political identity, relying mainly on Western support to guarantee their internal socio-political, economic and military stability.

³¹³Walid Kazzuha, *Revolutionary Transformation in the Arab World*; Muhammad Jamal, Barut *Haraka tal-Qawmiyin al-Arab: al-nashah, al-tatawwur, al-masair* [The Movement of Arab Nationalists: Establishment, Development, Paths] (Dimashq : al-Markaz al-Arab ilil-Dirasat al-Istiratijiyah, 1997) Basil R. Kubaisi, "The Arab Nationalist Movement 1951-1971: from Pressure Group to Socialist Party" (dissertation, 1973). .

³¹⁴I would like to thank Dr Gennaro Gervasio for introducing this concept to me during a Skype interview on 10 October 2013. For Egyptian nationalism, see: Anouar Abdel Malek, *L'Egypte Moderne: Idéologie Et Renaissance Nationale* (Paris, France: HARMATTAN edition, 2005). For Jordan, see: Massad, *Colonial Effects*. For Lebanon, see Fawwaz Tarabulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, (London: Pluto, 2007).

Palestinians and Arab students in Beirut and Amman strongly opposed such strategies, considering them both the reason for Arab political weaknesses and for the humiliating Arab defeat in 1948. They also understood the struggle for liberation of Palestine as inherently connected to the liberation of the whole region from the colonial yoke. It was not by chance the exhortation that “the road to Tel Aviv goes through Amman, Damascus, and Beirut”³¹⁵ became the MAN slogan, reflecting the perspective of those youth who forged the movement through student societies in Beirut.

3.3 The Palestinian Student Union in Cairo

A large number of Palestinian students who wanted to attend higher education had applied to institutions in Egypt, mainly in Cairo, even before the *Nakba*. Not only was Egypt geographically adjacent to Palestine, but it also boasted the oldest and most renowned university system in the Arab region. Many of the Palestinians studying in Cairo were enrolled at the Al-Azhar University (an Islamic institution offering subsidies to needy students), Cairo University (named Fouad I University until 1952) or at the American University in Cairo. As tertiary education expanded in Egypt, and new universities were founded, Palestinian students were also found in other Egyptian cities such as Alexandria and Asyut.³¹⁶

Since the mid-1950s Palestinians benefitted from “free public education at all levels on the same basis as Egyptian nationals.”³¹⁷ Palestinian students from all over the Arab world could apply to all Egyptian universities, obtaining subsidies and scholarships for their living costs. The number of Palestinian students in Egypt therefore, sharply increased.³¹⁸ Palestinian youth were arriving

³¹⁵ Fouad, Mattar, *Hakim al-thawra: Qissathayat al-doctor George Habash* [The wise man of the revolution: The life story of Dr. George Habash] (London: High Light Publications, 1984), 60.

³¹⁶ Laurie Brand, “Nasir's Egypt and the Reemergence of the Palestinian National Movement,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 17, 2 (1988), 29-45 (33).

³¹⁷ Oroub El-Abed, *Unprotected: Palestinians in Egypt since 1948* (Beirut, Lebanon: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2009), 97.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

from the whole region, particularly coming from Gaza. Additionally, Egypt received a large number of Palestinian students expelled from Lebanese universities in 1955 and from Iraq in 1958.

Palestinian students were organised in a Union in Cairo even before the *Nakba*. Sheikh Mohammad Abu Sirdaneh, a Palestinian university student in Cairo recounted:

There were more than 60 Palestinian students in Al-Azhar University when I enrolled there in December 1940. We, as Palestinian students, were living in the same building, and we thought about constituting a Palestinian *rabta* - a Union. We rented two rooms in Fouad Street. We were paying 1/2 Egyptian Pound as a monthly fee. The Executive Committee of the Union consisted of five students.³¹⁹

As reported by Abu Sirdaneh, the first PSU President was Ibrahim Abu Sitta, a law student at Fouad I University, with Mohammad Qasim Abu Al-Haj as Treasurer. Abu Sirdaneh was the Secretary and the other two committee members were Adib Al-Shakhsheer and Asa'ad Bayood Al-Tamimi.³²⁰ The Union's activities were limited to cultural and social events, as the regime did not allow any political engagement.³²¹ According to Jamal Massud Al-Khayyat, a high school student in Cairo in 1948, on the eve of the Arab war against the newly established Israel, 114 PSU members met in Helwan Secondary school. They decided to suspend PSU activities and redistribute the funds of the Union to Palestinian students in need and unable to get in touch with their families in Palestine. Al-Khayyat recalls that five Egyptian pounds was allocated to the older students and two to the younger.³²² Salman Abu Sitta, a secondary school student in Cairo in the early 1950s, recalled that in 1950 Palestinian students met in the flat he rented with his brother, Suleiman, with the aim of reactivating the *rabta* and Suleiman was elected its President.³²³ Al-Khayyat reported that in 1951 "We elected Esam An-Nazer as President of the Union – Musa,

³¹⁹ Abu Sirdaneh, interview by author, Amman, 5 January 2012.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World*, 213.

³²² Jamal Massud Al-Khayyat, interview by author, Amman, 23 March 2012. Jamal Massud Al-Khayyat was a student in Cairo at the end of the 1940s and in the 1970s became Arafat's consultant in Nablus.

³²³ Salman Abu Sitta, Skype interview, 25 February 2016. Abu Sitta recalls that the second president in 1951 was Esam An-Nazer. Jamal Massud Al-Khayyat recounted that the *rabta* was reactivated in 1951 with Esam An-Nazer as President. He mentions some of the participants at the meeting: A'fif Karkabeh from Tarsheha, Mousa Abu Ghoush from Ramallah, Rajah Al-Ameen, Abdalmuhsen Abu Maizer, Issam Al-Taher, Hisham Al-Masri and Suhail Khouri.

Arafat's uncle, was in charge of funds while I was the Secretary Assistant."³²⁴ According to Mohammad Abu Maizar, Esam An-Nazer was a Palestinian student from Hebron and member of the Communist party.³²⁵ Among the PSU members in 1951 were Yassir Arafat (Abu Ammar) and Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad). Together they inspired and led, along with other Palestinian youth, a radical change in PSU political vision and strategies, laying the basis for the establishment of a new revolutionary movement for the liberation of Palestine.

3.3.1 Political Background

In the aftermath of the *Nakba* the PSU was “a sort of umbrella organization grouping Palestinian students of various political stripes – Muslim Brothers, Communists, Ba’athists, Arab Nationalists and others”. However, in 1952 a group of young students decided to challenge the party-oriented organisation of the Union and ran for the PSU Executive Committee election with a simple platform based on the assertion of Palestinian identity and the self-reliance of Palestinians in their struggle for justice.³²⁶

In 1951, Salim Zanun, an active student organiser from Gaza, had just arrived in Cairo and met Yassir Arafat through a mutual friend.³²⁷ Arafat was then in the midst of his campaign for the presidency of the PSU, trying to replace the old Executive Committee that he perceived to be too loyal to the alliance of parties controlling it, with a more resolute and independent front that would exclusively be concerned with the liberation of Palestine. Arafat had heard that Zanun was one of the leaders of the Gaza student movement, as President of the Students Union at the school of Imam al Shafei.³²⁸ He thus asked him how many Palestinian students had moved to Cairo that year, to which the answer was 54. Arafat immediately tried to recruit them to back his candidacy as

³²⁴Al-Khayyat.

³²⁵Abu Maizar.

³²⁶Abu Iyad and Rouleau, *My Home, My Land*; Andrew Gowers and Tony Walker, *Behind the Myth: Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Revolution* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1992).

³²⁷Interview with Abu Al-Adib in Yakhluif, *Shahdat 'anTarikh at-Thawra al Falestiniyah*, 9-34.

³²⁸Salim Zanun (also known as Abu Al-Adib), interview by author, Amman, 3 January 2012. Salim Zanun was a student in Cairo between 1951-1954. He is the PNC president and a member of Fateh Central Committee.

President of the PSU. Zanun supported Arafat's idea of challenging the traditional composition of the PSU and decided to introduce him to Salah Khalaf, then a Palestinian student at Dar Al-Ulum, a teachers' college closely associated with Al-Azhar University in Cairo. Salah Khalaf shared Arafat's vision for a different PSU and promised he would recruit the 150 Palestinian students³²⁹ of Al-Azhar University to back Arafat in the PSU elections.

According to Salah Khalaf, he and Arafat were both on good terms with the Muslim Brotherhood despite never having joined the party. They sympathised with the Movement, acknowledging its concrete engagement with armed resistance in 1948. Despite being aware of the support the Movement could guarantee them during the election, both Arafat and Salah Khalaf were convinced that Palestinians should preserve their political independence and should not be backed by any Arab party or regime.³³⁰ Abdel-Fattah Hammoud, Zuhair Al-Alami and Moad Abed also joined this newly formed front, which ran for election with a list – called the Student Union list – composed of six independents, a Muslim Brother, a Communist and a Ba'athist. By including a member from each party, these young Palestinians wanted to highlight the democratic practices and diversity of their group and their vision of a list transcending party politics. Rather, they were for the Student Union. The political analysis at the centre of their platform was simple: "Palestinians could rely only on themselves."³³¹ Palestinian students were already breaking with traditional understanding of politics in the region and were ready to play a leading role in articulating a new framework and strategies for their struggle. This view was shared by the majority of Palestinian youth and the Student Union list won the PSU election.

Informants offered different accounts of the 1952 elections. Salim Zanun explained that students were very serious about the elections:

³²⁹ Abu Al-Adib recalls that all 150 Palestinian students at Al-Azhar University were blind, and how Arafat promised to make sure they would be able to cast their vote. Interview with Abu Al-Adib in Yakhluif, *Shahdat 'an Tarikh at-Thawra al Falestiniyah*, 9-34.

³³⁰ Abu Iyad and Rouleau, *My Home, My Land*, 20.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

There was a committee to supervise the vote: the previous President and members of the Union's Executive Committee presented a report on the work they had done and then they opened the floor for election. I remember the list was not accepted as a list, only individuals could offer themselves as candidates, at that time there were no lists against lists [but individuals running for the Executive Committee position].³³²

Some of the students who attended the elections remember that there were no other students running against Arafat and his comrades.³³³ Some others, however, recalled that the elections were tense with some participants contesting the results, claiming that many of those who had cast the ballot were not Palestinians.³³⁴ Another Palestinian ex-student, Mazen Al-Ansari, recounts that he participated in the election and had the right to vote even though at the time he was still a secondary school student: "the election were held in a small apartment on the top of a building in the Abdeen area; I voted against Arafat and for Abdel-Muhsein Abu Maizar, who ran with a different list."³³⁵ Some students who attended the elections recall that there were tensions over the counting of the votes.³³⁶ All agree that eventually Arafat's list won an overwhelming majority. Arafat received 365 votes, followed by Salim Zanun with 335.³³⁷

In the new Executive Committee Arafat was President and Salim Zanun Vice President, joined by Salah Khalaf, Abdel-Fattah Hammoud and Zuhair Al-Alami, along with Hani Bsisu from the Muslim Brotherhood and three other young Palestinians. This was the first Executive Committee in PSU history to prioritise the Palestinian national cause over party ideology.³³⁸

However, the victory of a list promoting the assertion of Palestinian identity and self-reliance did not mean that Palestinian students rejected parties' influence. On the contrary, throughout the 1950s the alliances inside the PSU Executive Committees always reflected Egypt's

³³²Salim Zanun, interview by author, Amman 26 March 2012.

³³³Hisham Sharif, interview by author, Amman 26 March 2012. Hisham Sharif was the PSU president in 1958 and a member of GUPS Executive Committee in 1959 and 1960. He attended the 1952 election as a high school observer.

³³⁴Yakub Hussein, interview by author, Amman, 22 February 2012.

³³⁵Mazen Al-Ansari, interview by author, Amman, 13 March 2013. Al-Ansari was a PSU member and in 1959 he was elected to the GUPS Executive Committee.

³³⁶Yakub, Al-Ansari.

³³⁷Zanun.

³³⁸Interview with Abu Al-Adib in Yakhluif, *Shahdat 'an Tarikh at-Thawra al Falestiniyah*, 9-34. This concept was however confirmed by Hisham Sharif, Salim Zanun and Mazen Ansari in their interviews.

own political balance. The victory of the Student Union list simply demonstrated that “students put their desire of unified Palestinian action before their party preferences.”³³⁹

For the first half of the 1950s, most of the Executive Committee’s seats were held by the Muslim Brotherhood, with Communists as the second largest group. Although neither Arafat nor his comrades were officially members of the Muslim Brotherhood, their relations with the party were widely acknowledged.³⁴⁰ Arafat was reconfirmed as PSU President until his graduation in 1956 and departure from Cairo. Hisham Sharif recounted having run against him for the presidency in vain since 1953:

I nominated myself alone, not within a group. I had my programme, and I went to all the universities walking or on a bicycle or with any transportation I could find, trying to convince students to elect me, and every time that I did not succeed [Arafat] came to hug me, saying ‘next time you will succeed’. I ran three times without being elected.³⁴¹

In 1956, Salah Khalaf was elected President of the PSU Executive Committee. Most interviewees do not recall the 1956 elections and it was not possible to fully ascertain the political composition of the committee. It has been reported, however, that the majority of the elected members were still connected to the Muslim Brotherhood while two members, Faruq Qaddumi (Abu Lutuf) and Isam Khalifa were Ba’ath’s supporters.³⁴² All informants clearly remember that 1956 was the last year of the Muslim Brotherhood’s strong presence in the PSU Executive Committee.

The political balance shifted in 1957 due to the political changes in the region, the repression of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt³⁴³ and the dissemination of Ba’athist ideology.

Two main versions of the 1957 elections were received from informants. Hisham Sharif recalls having been elected in that year as an independent along with four Ba’athists and four supporters of

³³⁹ Abu Iyad and Rouleau, *My Home, My Land*, 21.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid*; Alan Hart, *Arafat, Terrorist or Peacemaker?* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1984), 84-86

³⁴¹ Sharif.

³⁴² Lutuf Ghantous, email exchange, July 2014. Lutuf Ghantous was a member of the GUPS Executive committee from 1959 to 1964.

³⁴³ A Muslim Brotherhood member attempted to assassinate Nasser in 1954 and consequently the party was outlawed in Egypt.

the Muslim Brotherhood. Other students instead recounted that in 1957 Saadadin Ghanthour was elected President of the union and among the members of the Executive Committee there were Faruq Qaddumi, Asim Khalifa, Nafez Al-A'aqud, Rashid Abdelhamid and four other students.³⁴⁴ The political balance was in favour of the Ba'ath and the Arab Nationalists. In 1955, the arrival from Beirut, following their expulsion from AUB, of 50 student sympathisers of the MAN boosted the popularity of Arab nationalism. In 1958, Hisham Sharif, an independent with no ties to political parties, was elected President. He found himself in a complicated position, presiding over an Executive Committee composed of four Ba'athists and four supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood.³⁴⁵ According to Hisham Sharif, when he was elected Zuheir Al-Khatib was the treasurer, Faruq Qaddumi was the Vice-President, and among the other members there were Alina Seryasin, Nahed Al-Rayes, Najib Abu Laban and Yousef Al-Ghosin.³⁴⁶ After these elections Muslim Brotherhood influence waned as Ba'athism become prominent.³⁴⁷

Two dynamics operated in PSU elections throughout the 1950s. Students acknowledged the relevance of a body connected to its constituency, tied to it through elections. This connection would allow the Union to claim legitimacy from regional and international actors. From the 1952 election the PSU was understood as a Palestinian space, one detached from party contestation, devoted only to the Palestinian cause. Composition of the PSU Executive Committee mirrored the political dynamics in Egypt and the broader Arab world. Students were not oblivious to party politics. All interviewees have suggested that there were no tensions among PSU members affiliated with different parties. There was consensus that within the Union they would all prioritise the work of the Union and its role in providing a voice for Palestinian students. The PSU was a locus of political exchange and confrontation, a vanguard with a strong grassroots commitment and for this reason it attracted attention from all Arab parties and tendencies. This was key to the PSU's

³⁴⁴Kamal Khaldi, interview by author, Skype, 26 September 2013. Khaldi was a PSU member in 1957.

³⁴⁵Al-Khatib also confirmed this account.

³⁴⁶Sharif.

³⁴⁷Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World*, 70.

central role in representing Palestinian students and gaining credibility and political relevance in the regional system.

3.3.2 Organisational Structure

The main body of the PSU was the Executive Committee.³⁴⁸ It held office for an academic year, with elections held every September. The Executive Committee was composed of nine members, including a president, secretary and treasurer.³⁴⁹ It held executive powers and met every week. Decisions were made by a simple majority. It also oversaw special committees, such as the Cultural Committee, the Financial Committee and a Student Affairs Committee, tasked with helping students, with bureaucratic issues pertaining to universities or other Egyptian institutions.

The Executive Committee was elected by the PSU General Assembly. The General Assembly convened annually for the elections, and was composed of all the Union's members. The sole membership requirement, other than being a student from Palestine, was payment of an annual membership fee of 2.5 Egyptian Pounds. According to Nabila Al-Nimr (Umm Lutuf), a Palestinian student in Cairo in the mid-1950s, there were no women among PSU members until 1956. She remembers:

We were only four women at that time as there were not many Palestinian women who could access education. One of us was not interested in politics while the other two were Communists. We started our struggle to become members of the Union. In those years the PSU was dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, and they did not want to allow us into the Union. But eventually, after long debates, they agreed and women were allowed to be active in the committees.³⁵⁰

However, as reported by Umm Lutuf, women were entitled to vote only when the political composition in the Executive Committee shifted in favour of the Ba'athists in 1958.³⁵¹

Palestinian students in secondary school could join the Union. Usually they were entitled to a discount on the membership fee. They were not permitted to stand for the Executive Committee.

³⁴⁸The information on the Executive Committee's structure is based on interviews with Abu Maizar, Zanun and Sharif.

³⁴⁹Abu Maizar. In some years there were eleven elected members.

³⁵⁰Nabila Al-Nimr (Also known as Umm Lutuf), interview by author, Tunisi, 1 September 2012. Nabila Al-Nimr was a PSU member and later she was elected to the Fateh Central Committee.

³⁵¹ Al-Nimr.

The 2.5 Egyptian Pounds fee was, at the time, a considerable sum for most Palestinian students, but the money was needed to organise the Union's activities.³⁵² In order to assure financial support and not to burden students with all of the expenses, in 1952 the Executive Committee appealed to the Arab League. Though they provided only limited financial assistance³⁵³ the League reserved the right to control any financial transaction of the PSU.³⁵⁴ The Union could not even afford to rent an office. However, Arafat, with his renowned resourcefulness,³⁵⁵ was able in 1952 to establish its headquarters on the second floor of the building housing the All-Palestine Government head office, in Jawad Husni Street.³⁵⁶

3.3.3 Armed Struggle

Most accounts indicate that there were no organised military activities conducted by the PSU during the 1950s. However, Abu Al-Adib direct account, as collected by Hart, suggests that Arafat was able to persuade the Egyptian authorities in the early 1950s to let him establish a military training camp inside the University of Fouad I. This was for Palestinians and Egyptian students in preparation for fighting the British forces still in the country. According to this account, Arafat's real intention was instead to prepare Palestinian youth for the liberation of Palestine. The camp was allowed to operate until 1954.³⁵⁷ According to these accounts, however, the military training camp was built before Arafat won the PSU election and thus was not conceived as part of the Union activities.

³⁵²Interview with Abu Al-Adib in Yakhluf, *Shahdat 'an Tarikh at-Thawra al Falestinia*, 9-34.

³⁵³During his interview al-Khatib referred to an amusing anecdote regarding the PSU's financial straits. He recalled how he once had to attend a student conference in Tunis but only had the money for a one-way ticket. While in Tunis, he heard of another conference being held in Morocco and managed somehow to get himself invited there as a Palestinian representative. The organisers bought him the ticket and he left Tunis. The same problem occurred in Morocco, so he found another conference in Oslo and had himself invited there as well. As days went by, he kept on travelling and eventually managed to make his way back to Cairo.

³⁵⁴Interview with Abu Al-Adib in Yakhluf, *Shahdat 'an Tarikh at-Thawra al Falestinia*, 9-34.

³⁵⁵Al-Khatib. He recalls how Arafat managed to convince the reluctant landlord to allow them to rent the office. To assuage his fears that indigent students would be unable to pay the rent Arafat wrote on one of his business cards, next to his name and title, a note for the Egyptian President: "Dear Mohammad Nagib, I'm sorry you didn't find me home today. I'm very busy but I will call you soon." Arafat then made sure that the landlord found the business card. He thus came to believe that Abu Ammar was a close friend of the President and agreed finally to rent the office to the PSU.

³⁵⁶Abu Maizar. According to him, before 1952, the PSU office was based in Bab el Loq.

³⁵⁷Hart, *Arafat*, 85.

Although Palestinian students' involvement in military training during the 1950s seems well acknowledged, it should be understood they did so as individuals, not via the direct coordination of the Union.³⁵⁸ Salah Khalaf recalled that in the mid-1950s some PSU members who were willing to help the new resistance front emerging in Gaza with the aim of confronting Israel took charge of smuggling weapons into the enclave. However, none of these activities seems to have been directly organised by the PSU.³⁵⁹

However, there is at least one testimony that suggests otherwise. In her account of her husband's military activities in Cairo, Umm Jihad recalls that Abu Jihad had moved from Gaza to Alexandria University in 1954. He was immediately recruited by the PSU in Cairo and after the Israeli attack on Gaza in February 1955, was appointed by the PSU as "head instructor of a military training centre where the students were trained in order to go and fight in Gaza."³⁶⁰ Umm Jihad's account seems to imply the existence of a dedicated military centre directed by the PSU, but this remains unconfirmed by any other testimony. Even the most direct account of military activities in those years, as reported by Hart, insists upon the strong relation and coordination between Arafat and Abu Jihad in building and organising armed actions in Gaza as early as 1953 but the coordination never seemed to have been part of an official PSU military strategy.

What should be noticed here is that regardless of whether PSU directly engaged in military activities, Palestinian students since the early 1950s envisaged armed resistance as a central strategy for the struggle for liberation. This emphasis on armed struggle highlight the anti-colonial framework that inspired Palestinian students and that later developed into strong cooperation with other Third World people similarly fighting colonialism. There was an emerging reliance on violent

³⁵⁸ Abu Maizar; Al-Khatib; Hussein Abu An-Naml, interview by author, Beirut, May 2011. Abu An-Naml is a former member of the GUPS Executive Committee in Cairo.

³⁵⁹ Abu Iyad and Rouleau, *My Home, My Land*, 24.

³⁶⁰ Interview with Umm Jihad in Yakhluuf, *Shahdat 'an Tarikh at-Thawra al Falestinia*, 37-66.

resistance against oppression which inspired the analysis and the elaboration of strategies of liberation among Third World leaders.³⁶¹

Several Palestinian students of that time recalled their frustration in 1955 when Israel attacked the defenseless population in Gaza while all Arab armies stood idle. While some students tried to join the armed activities organised by the youth in Gaza, the Union provided no direct military support. It did, however, organise protests in Egypt and requested a meeting with President Nasser.³⁶² When the PSU delegation was received by the President it presented a request for military training for Palestinians. Nasser agreed although the direction of the training was not given to the Palestinians and was instead coordinated “informally” by Egyptian army intelligence.³⁶³ The PSU’s role deserves consideration. Its request to arrange military training indicated students’ ability to pressure regional leaders in order to reorganise their scattered society. In this sense, Palestinian students were already acting as an anti-colonial organic vanguard by leading the political and military mobilisation of their people.

In 1956, during the Suez Canal war, some students had organised a Palestinian commando battalion in order to fight alongside Egyptian volunteers, an endeavour that was not coordinated by the Union.³⁶⁴ However, according to Salim Zanun, who was in Gaza during the 1956 war when the enclave was invaded by Israel, two people – Wafa Sayegh and Kamal Adwan – were sent to Cairo for contacting with Arafat and Salah Khalaf in order to coordinate their support for the resistance in Gaza.³⁶⁵

Only at the end of 1956 did a more sophisticated ideological approach with regard to armed struggle emerge among PSU members. News of the Algerian struggle for independence and the first successes of the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN), together with frustration generated by

³⁶¹ See for example “On Violence” in Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

³⁶² Abu Iyad and Rouleau, *My Home, My Land*, 22.

³⁶³ Hart, *Arafat*, 109-110.

³⁶⁴ Abu Iyad and Rouleau, *My Home, My Land*, 22.

³⁶⁵ Zanun.

the 1955 Israeli attack on Gaza and the inaction of Arab regimes,³⁶⁶ favoured the elaboration of the idea of a broad-based movement which would bring together Palestinians of all political persuasions with a view towards launching an armed struggle in Palestine. Yet, “at the time - just after the Suez War of 1956 - [the] ideas concerning the creation of a large popular movement, let alone an army of national liberation, were still nebulous, but they were to crystallise into specific objectives over the next two years.”³⁶⁷ This process was the first revolutionary outcome of the political activism of those students who had met in Cairo with the shared dream of national liberation. It was eventually to lead to the establishment of Fateh.

3.3.4 Public Mobilisation

PSU mobilisation was inspired by the overall objective to provide Palestinian students – and the Palestinian community in general – with services and assistance which statelessness had deprived them of. They were committed to building political spaces to advance their cause. PSU activities for public mobilisation consisted of demonstrations and rallies; publication and distribution of magazines and leaflets and social activities. The PSU launched many successful protests, strikes and actions aimed either at demanding Palestinian students’ rights or to address specific issues. Informants who were students at the time report that among the most successful demonstrations and protests organised in the 1950s, two episodes in particular were significant.

The first was in the autumn of 1951 when the Arab League had decided to cut off the allocated budget for needy Palestinian students. The students reacted by organising a series of demonstrations in front of the Arab League office and eventually occupied it.³⁶⁸ Their protest was successful and the subsidies were reinstated, but some of the protesters, including Salah Khalaf, were arrested.

³⁶⁶Abu Maizar; Al-Khatib; Abu An-Naml. They all reported the strong ideological and emotional impacts of these events on the students.

³⁶⁷Abu Iyad and Rouleau, *My Home, My Land*, 25.

³⁶⁸This episode is reported in Abu Iyad and Rouleau, *My Home, My Land*, 23; Gowers and Walker, *Behind the Myth*, 40-42.

The other was in February 1955 when Israel attacked Gaza and there was intense frustration at the failure of the Egyptian army to defend Palestinians. The students in Cairo organised demonstrations and started a hunger strike, asking Nasser to meet them. They then presented him with three demands: 1) abolition of the visa system imposed on Palestinians to leave and enter Gaza; 2) resumption of train services between Egypt and Gaza (interrupted when the demonstrations had broken out); 3) military training for Palestinians.³⁶⁹ These requests were presented only after Arafat and a student delegation returned to Cairo from a three day-trip to Gaza, a trip organised with Nasser's blessing. The protests were successful as Nasser decided to meet the students and eventually agreed to their requests.

Thus by the mid-1950s the Union was largely acknowledged as a representative body of the Palestinian people inasmuch as Nasser agreed to formally meet the delegation and then to discuss issues that were well beyond strictly student matters. The requests presented to the Egyptian President attest to the political role PSU played: they tackled practical issues for Palestinians. In the absence of national bodies that could represent them Palestinian students took upon themselves the responsibility to advocate for their people.

A less successful protest was organised in 1957 during the visit to Egypt of UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld.³⁷⁰ The students – whose attitude to the UN was shaped by its approval of the partition of Palestine – requested that President Nasser not meet the UN leader, but their demand was rejected. When they organised a demonstration against Hammarskjöld their rally was broken up by the police.

Publication of magazines and leaflets was aimed at disseminating the political vision of the PSU among Palestinians and in the students' residential communities. Throughout the 1950s, publishing and distributing magazines was a central strategy of Third World student movements,

³⁶⁹*Ibid*, 22.

³⁷⁰Interview with Abu Al-Adib in Yakhluf, *Shahdat 'anTarikh at-Thawra al-Falestinia*, 9-34.

particularly those still fighting colonialism. Sow has described how African student unions articulated their political discourse in various journals, magazines and newspapers published in France and in Africa throughout the 1950s thus radicalising the anti-colonial movement by calling for independence and African unity as a precondition for cultural, social and economic emancipation.³⁷¹

Palestinian student strategies were similar. Publication of *Sawt Falestin* (Voice of Palestine), a magazine produced in Cairo, was an important step towards recruitment of supporters and dissemination of revolutionary principles.³⁷² The magazine was distributed in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Gaza. It marked the first underground strategy to make contact with those Palestinians in the Arab region who were willing to take on an active role in the struggle. According to Salim Zanun, *Sawt Falestin* was published as early as 1953 and was issued every two or three months, depending on the financial situation of the Union. The first editor was Yousef Al-Kazmi, who was replaced by Salah Khalaf in 1954. Publication was supervised by the Cultural Committee which was coordinated by Salah Khalaf with the support of Abdel-Fattah Hammoud.

The dissemination of printed material took on a more political and underground character in the second half of the 1950s. A group of graduates who had moved back to Gaza, among them Abu Al-Adib, Mo'ath Abed, Mohammad Harbi Alyyan and Wafa Al-Sayegh, had decided to create a new Palestinian committee devoted to armed struggle and completely detached from party ideologies and dynamics. These young Palestinians regularly printed leaflets to be distributed in Gaza and Egypt, but it was extremely hard to circulate the material as such forms of political activism were forbidden in both places. Salim Zanun reported that in order to overcome this, a student delegation led by Kamal Adwan and Wafa Al-Sayegh went to Cairo in 1955 on the eve of the Israeli attack on Gaza to establish regular cooperation with the PSU for issuing and distributing

³⁷¹ Sow, "African students," 30.

³⁷² Hart, *Arafat*, 91.

political leaflets. The logistical support provided by the Union and the common political vision made clandestine dissemination in Gaza possible.³⁷³ This cooperation highlights the fundamental role students played at the grassroots level, in mobilising not only in universities and schools, but also addressing the entire Palestinian population in both Cairo and Gaza.

Social activities were organised to rebuild social ties among students as well as within the refugee community in Egypt. The Union organised trips, dinners and cultural evenings where Palestinians had an opportunity to meet and socialise.³⁷⁴ These activities and events provided Palestinian students, but also the broader community, with space to discuss politics or social and cultural matters. They were also good fundraising opportunities for the Union. Hisham Sharif, for instance, remembers acting in a theatrical performance remembering the heroic feats of Salah Ed-din – founder of the Ayyubi dynasty, who retook Jerusalem from the Crusaders – alongside Salah Khalaf who took the title role. The audience paid five piasters each for attending the show and by the end of the evening the Union had raised a good amount of money. The Union also organised cultural meetings and debates. Cairo provided a favourable environment for the intellectual and artistic growth of students but also for intense political debates. According to Umm Lutuf, the Union provided a stimulating space for discussing political developments with other Arab students and the broader community, especially on the eve of the Algerian Revolution.³⁷⁵ This reveals the relevance of the international dimension of the Palestinian cause and its bond with other liberation struggles. It suggests that mobilisation strategies at the grassroots level aimed at stressing the interconnection of the Palestinian cause with other revolutions. This was a central aspect of student mobilisation in the 1950s, well beyond the Palestinian case. In analysing African student politics Sow argued that

their continent and the rest of the struggling world were one and indivisible. They discussed all the great issues of the time, intervening everywhere and denying no attitude required by

³⁷³Interview with Abu Al-Adib in Yakhluuf, *Shahdat 'anTarikh at-Thawra al-Falestinia*, 9-34.

³⁷⁴Gowers and Walker, *Behind the Myth*, 40-42.

³⁷⁵Umm Lutuf.

their open-handed approach, their genuine internationalism and their exacting and vigilant conscience as militants: in other words, their perception of their historical mission and responsibilities.³⁷⁶

The internationalist dimension of anticolonial struggle was a characteristic of liberation movements in the 1950s and students played a central role in elaborating and disseminating an understanding of nationalism and liberation that encompassed and offered solidarity with other peoples' struggles against oppression. This vision was reinforced by Egypt's prominence in the Non-Aligned movement. The establishment in Egypt in 1957 of the African and Asian People's Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) was testament to Nasser's commitment to international solidarity.

Palestinian students also organised to commemorate national anniversaries, in which Palestinian personalities were often asked to give a speech.³⁷⁷ These commemorations reinforced social ties among Palestinians and emphasised shared experiences, memories and common narratives. Anti-colonial intellectuals have pointed out the importance of reclaiming and reviving history as a strategy of resistance and liberation. According to Fanon, colonisation does not entail the appropriation of land; it is a complex process that also "turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it."³⁷⁸ National liberation therefore stresses the need to re-appropriate one's national history.³⁷⁹

While stressing the fundamental role played by the PSU in Cairo in promoting social ties among Palestinian refugees, Faruq Qaddumi recalls the crucial contribution students made in support of the Palestinian community. It was the Union that dealt with bureaucratic and

³⁷⁶ Sow, "African students," 30.

³⁷⁷ Abu Al-Adib recalls the event organised to commemorate the anniversary of the death of Abdel Qader Al-Husseini, where Hajj Amin Al-Husseini was asked to speak. Interview with Abu Al-Adib in Yakhluuf, *Shahdat 'an Tarikh at-Thawra al Falestiniya*, 9-34.

³⁷⁸ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 169.

³⁷⁹ Cabral Amílcar, *Return to the Source Selected Speeches by Amilcar Cabral*, ed. Africa Information Service (New York, USA: Monthly Review Press, 1973), 43. Laleh Khalili has analysed the relevance of commemoration as well as its changes over time among Palestinians. Laleh Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: the Politics of National Commemoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

administrative issues for the majority of Palestinians in Cairo, aiding students with visa requests, university applications, housing and other practical issues.

Umm Lutuf remembers that the PSU social committee was concerned with providing assistance to students in need:

we would borrow the expensive books, especially for the faculty of medicine, from our Christian sisters, and we would photocopy them in order to make them available for Palestinian students who couldn't afford to buy them.³⁸⁰

She also recalls the battle women had to fight to get a female student dormitory for Palestinians until the authorities relented.

Along with these activities to support students the Union also paid great attention to the broader Palestinian community in Egypt, attempting to fill the institutional and social void brought about by refugeeness. In particular, Qaddumi emphasises PSU's commitment to organise the *Hajj* to Mecca for Palestinian refugees in Cairo. The Union assisted with logistics in organising the pilgrimage, from transportation to fundraising, to coordination with relevant Egyptian authorities.³⁸¹ It was this constant grassroots commitment, the devotion and constant engagement with the Palestinian people, that eventually gained legitimacy for the efforts of these youth, gaining wider political recognition as the representative body of the Palestinians.

3.3.5 Diplomatic actions

PSU's diplomatic actions were directed towards Palestinian political leaders and institutions as well as regional and international actors. At the Palestinian level there were no leaders or institutions that could claim any effective prominent role in representing people's interests and aspirations.³⁸² Nevertheless, Palestinian students adopted a policy aimed at building amicable relations with the traditional leaders in an attempt to legitimise and amplify their ability to

³⁸⁰Al-Nimr.

³⁸¹Faruq Qaddumi, interview by author, 01 September 2012, Tunis. Faruq Qaddumi (Abu Lutuf) was a member of the PSU Executive Committee in 1958. He has been PLO Secretary General and the Head of the PLO Political Department.

³⁸²See section 2.3 of this chapter.

represent Palestinian society.³⁸³ In particular, in 1952, the PSU Executive Committee led by Arafat paid an official visit to Hajj Amin Al-Husseini, Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. From that point, Hajj Amin Al-Husseini was invited to all the official activities organised by the PSU and relations with Al-Husseini and the representatives of the Gaza-based All-Palestine Government (APG) were always friendly.³⁸⁴

Since the beginning of the 1950s, Palestinian youth had been reaching out to Egyptian leaders, acting as representative of the Palestinian community, seeking to be acknowledged as interlocutors with state-actors. The first official meeting with the Egyptian head of state was held just after the 1952 PSU election when a delegation of students, led by Arafat, went to meet General Mohammad Nagib, who had been nominated President only a few months earlier following the Free Officer coup. The students prepared a message for President Nagib, one which was dedicated to the memory of Palestinian and Egyptian martyrs. It had a clear request, unusually written in blood: “do not forget Palestinians.”³⁸⁵ The particular political and social role Palestinian students would play throughout the years and decades for their scattered community was therefore already clear at the beginning of the 1950s when the Union activities were just being organised. In 1955, following the PSU’s first meeting with Nasser, during the Israeli attack in Gaza, students were invited to send a delegation to further discuss PSU aspirations and vision and the general Palestinian cause. The delegation was composed of Salah Khalaf (independent), Abdelhamid At-Tayeh (Ba’athist), Izzat Auda (Communist) and Fouad Ahmad (Arab Nationalist).³⁸⁶ Thus the students had gained legitimacy in the eyes of state actors, acknowledged to be the voice of Palestinians.

At the regional level, the PSU cultivated constant and strong relationships with student unions from other countries, supporting their struggles and often participating in their activities. In

³⁸³ Interview with Abu Al-Adib in Yakhluif, *Shahdat ‘anTarikh at-Thawra al Falestiniyah*, 9-34.

³⁸⁴ Al-Khatib.

³⁸⁵ Hart, *Arafat*, 89.

³⁸⁶ Abu Iyad and Rouleau, *My Home, My Land*, 22.

particular, Palestinian students played a crucial role in the establishment of a General Union of Arab Students (GUAS) in 1959, once again putting Palestine at the core of the regional political process. Zuhair Al-Khatib, first President of the GUPS, noted that “by the results of our internal elections, you could predict the political trend of all other Arab student unions that year.”³⁸⁷ Collaboration with other Arab student unions was a fundamental trait of PSU activity throughout the entire decade. Mohammad Abu Maizar, for instance, remembers that from 1956, when he moved to Cairo and became a member of the PSU Executive Committee, the meetings of student unions from other Arab countries such as Kuwait, Morocco, Algeria and Bahrain were held at the PSU headquarters. The continuous meetings and discussions that this generated laid the way to the creation in 1959 of GUAS, the same year in which the GUPS was established. Umm Lutuf emphasises the cooperation with the Algerian FLN and its members based in Cairo. She reports:

We set up a radio station dedicated to the Algerians, and through it [the FLN members] could send messages to their people in Algeria. We would always take our Algerian friends with us, to any event, meeting or party. [...] We organised fundraising events for the Algerian revolution and helped them as much as possible. This is why as soon as Algeria won its independence we [Palestinians] were offered to open an office there.³⁸⁸

Stressing the importance of regional cooperation, Umm Lutuf also recounts that the PSU worked closely with the Ba’athist students expelled from Iraq following the 1958 coup d’état which toppled the Hashemite monarchy, in particular with Saddam Hussein.

However, the most significant achievements of PSU diplomatic actions were at the international level. Since 1952, the PSU had been applying in vain for membership of the International Union of Students (IUS) – a body established in Prague in 1946 – but was always rejected on the grounds that Palestine was not a nation.³⁸⁹ Contact with the IUS was eventually

³⁸⁷ Al-Khatib.

³⁸⁸ Al-Nimr.

³⁸⁹ While the Union was established by international student groups with various political visions, it soon became controlled by communist groups. In the Cold War climate the IUS was acknowledged as a pro-Soviet institution heavily dependent on Soviet support. This led in 1950s to a split with the creation of the International Student Conference (ISC) formed mainly by pro-Western student unions. See Philip G. Altbach, “The International Student Movement,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 1 (1970), 156-174. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200947000500111>. Gert Van.Maanen, *The International Student Movement. History and Background* (The Hague: International Documentation and Information Centre, 1967).

established and in 1954, Palestinians were invited to attend an international student festival in Warsaw. A delegation of four students, including Arafat and Salah Khalaf, travelled to Warsaw but the PSU was not granted full membership.³⁹⁰ The Palestinian presence and contribution to the festival, however, convinced the IUS President to pay a visit to Cairo in order to assess the PSU and determine whether it merited full IUS membership.³⁹¹ When the IUS President arrived in Cairo in 1955, Palestinian students arranged a warm welcome. Around 200 people were waiting for him at the airport and invited him to visit their headquarters in Cairo the next day. Hisham Sharif was among the students receiving the IUS President. He has provided a detailed account of the meeting, revealing some ingenious ruses students used to impress the president:

The PSU office was too small and ill equipped to receive such a personality [as the IUS president] so we borrowed the All-Palestine Government venue, which had meeting rooms and landline phone services. In addition, Arafat asked me to go down to the grocery shop and constantly call during the meeting. I was calling every five minutes, asking ‘Hey, how are you?’ and Abu Ammar [Arafat] would answer: ‘What is going on there? What is happening with you? Ok, we will try to help you.’ After six or seven calls Arafat pretended to lose his temper saying ‘we have too much work, too many students here, we cannot continue this way!’ The IUS president was positively impressed by the numerous calls that Arafat received and when he inquired about them, Arafat told him that the calls were from their branches in Asyut, Alexandria and other Egyptian cities.³⁹²

The IUS President was thus convinced the PSU deserved full membership and on returning to his Prague headquarters successfully lobbied for it. It proved to be a game changer. At least within the international student movement Palestinians were now recognised as a nation. Palestine was “back on the world map.”³⁹³

This was an historical achievement for a scattered people lacking any political recognition and mechanisms and bodies to operate in the international system and engage with state actors. Being recognised as the Palestinian representative at IUS was a radical change that would allow the PSU to voice Palestinian national aspirations for liberation. In the post-*Nakba* period,

³⁹⁰ Abu Iyad, *My Home, My Land*, 21.

³⁹¹ This reconstruction is based on Hisham Sharif’s account. Zuhair Al-Khatib instead remembers that Arafat learned by chance that the IUS president was going to make a short stopover in Cairo on his way back from Khartoum to Prague.

³⁹² Sharif.

³⁹³ Al-Khatib.

representation for Palestinians was what Pitnik has defined as the process of “making someone present again.”³⁹⁴ The Zionist project of settler colonialism in Palestine and the plan of ethnic cleansing of the indigenous people had made Palestinians absent from the regional and international political scene. PSU membership of IUS was a momentous first step, allowing Palestinians to be present on the world stage, to have a platform from which to subsequently impact regional and international politics.

Access to this international space would contribute to the elaboration and dissemination of new radical ideologies. As members of the IUS, Palestinian youth attended conferences, fora, meetings and congresses, where they met leaders of revolutionary movement, such as Che Guevara and Mao Tse Tung. Events in the Third World were inspiring Palestinian students and making their dreams seem achievable. Hope was in the air. Suddenly the revolution appeared less distant.³⁹⁵ Within a few years Palestinian students, with growing experience in transnational organisation, were able to establish Palestinian Student Unions all over the world. It was at an IUS conference in Peking, in 1958, where a Palestinian delegation led by Hisham Sharif and Zuhair Al-Khatib had the chance to connect and discuss strategies of mobilisation with other student unions from all over the world, that the idea of creating a transnational body for Palestinian students started to take on a more concrete form. In Beijing, the PSU was for the first time elected as a member of the IUS Executive Committee, a position of responsibility that not only made the PSU grow in popularity but also, and above all, allowed Palestinian students to learn from others’ experiences and develop a more articulated international dimension of the Palestinian struggle.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a brief political background of the PSU’s history and focused on the analysis of five specific themes of PSU activities: political background, organisational structure,

³⁹⁴Hanna Fenichel. Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley, USA: University of California Press, 2013).

³⁹⁵Abu Maizar; Abu An-Naml.

armed struggle, public mobilisation and diplomatic actions. Highlighting the practices, strategies, doctrines and *modus operandi* of the PSU, it has chronicled how the PSU laid the foundations for the future revival of the principle of popular sovereignty and legitimate representation for the Palestinian people.

The chapter has chiefly focused on PSU experience in Cairo. It has provided a brief analysis of the political context, at the domestic as well as the regional and international levels, in which Palestinian students operated. In the aftermath of the *Nakba* the geographic fragmentation, the annihilation of political, cultural and social structures and the lack of political rights in hosting countries made any expression of popular sovereignty for Palestinians impossible and the national aspirations of the people existed in a political void. The attempts of the Palestinian and Arab traditional leadership to impose political representation from “above” failed. It has demonstrated how throughout the 1950s the efforts of Palestinian students were directed at reorganising their community, by forging new political and national structures, particularly the Palestinian Student Union in Cairo.

We have seen how by the mid-1950s the PSU was emerging as a representative body of the Palestinian people and how a dynamic electoral process had made the Union a central space for the articulation of new ideologies, a forum in which Palestinian interests were prioritised over party affiliations. The chapter has highlighted PSU’s rupture with traditional politics and analysed how engagement in military activities indicated the extent to which Palestinian students were committed to armed struggle within the framework of anti-colonialism. Analysis of how mobilisation and diplomatic endeavours characterised the *modus operandi* of the PSU has shed lights on two fundamental traits of Palestinian student politics: how their engagement was well grounded among the masses while also rooted in a regionalist and internationalist dimension that allowed students to develop strong connections with other Third World movements. The student activists of the PSU

were, in Mills's words, "real live agencies of historic change".³⁹⁶ Thanks to their efforts, the PSU became a relevant actor in the regional space, an anti-colonial organic vanguard for the scattered Palestinian people.

In conclusion, this chapter has initiated the analysis of the role of student unions in overcoming the lack of representation engendered by the refugee status of the Palestinian people. The study will be further expanded in the following chapter, which explores Palestinian student activism in Beirut and Amman. Student mobilisation in Lebanon and Jordan produced different political visions and strategies, yet as with the PSU in Cairo, Palestinian students in Beirut and Amman were at the forefront of articulating political discourse and grassroots strategies that subsequently shaped the Palestinian revolution.

³⁹⁶ Wright Mills, "Letter to the New Left," in *The Politics of Truth Selected Writings of C. Wright Mills*, 265.

4 CHAPTER FOUR

PALESTINIAN STUDENT UNIONS IN THE ARAB WORLD DURING THE 1950S:

PART 2

Introduction

This chapter expands the analysis of students' role in overcoming the lack of recognition of Palestinian popular sovereignty and means of representation during the 1950 and how they voiced their ambitions. Moving on from the primary focus on Egypt in the previous chapter, this explores Palestinian students' political engagement in Lebanon and Jordan. Here, as in Egypt, Syria and elsewhere, Palestinian student activism was characterised by a commitment to grassroots engagement with communities, offering a voice for the aspirations and demands of a displaced nation, building presence with a wide range of actors and addressing the socio-economic constraints faced by Palestinians. This chapter argues that, like their fellow Palestinian students elsewhere, those in Lebanon and Jordan served as a vanguard organically tied to those they represented, articulating the plight of the Palestinian people within a revolutionary framework rooted in anti-colonial principles.

This chapter initially focuses on the *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa* (The Tight Bond) a society at the American University of Beirut (AUB) within which Palestinian students, alongside those from other Arab nations, engaged in activities of fundamental importance to the emergence of the Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN), a movement which spawned both the establishment of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). Political mobilisation at AUB not only laid the basis for a new approach to the Palestinian cause, but also elaborated an articulated ideological framework for the whole Arab region.

Analysis then turns to the role of the Conference of Jordanian Students (CJS) in Amman in the mid-1950s. CJS contended with a newly imposed geo-statal reality – the disappearance of Palestine and the expansion into the West Bank of Palestine of an enlarged Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. They worked within an inauspicious environment for Palestinian students, as well as East Bankers, to voice opposition to the pro-western alliances of the Hashemite Kingdom. This chapter analyses how the experience of the CJS differed both from that of the PSU in Cairo or Palestinian activism at AUB. For, not only did it fail to develop into a political movement but also it was a movement of secondary school students. There can be no doubt, however, that it had a lasting impact in raising the consciousness of youth. As with the PSU and *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa*, the CJS had an important, if not revolutionary, outcome in shaping the relationship and cooperation between Palestinian and Jordanian students for decades to come.

4.1 Student Activism at the American University of Beirut: the *'Urwa al Wuthqa*

Since its foundation in 1866 AUB has played a fundamental role in the cultural and political development of Lebanon and the rest of the Levant. Initially known as the Syrian Protestant College, it was established by American missionaries.³⁹⁷ It changed its name in the mid-1920s to mirror post-World War 1 geopolitical realities. AUB and Saint Joseph University remained the only universities in Lebanon until 1951.³⁹⁸ AUB attracted students from across the Arab world, particularly from Syria, Jordan and Palestine. AUB was not tainted by association with colonial overlords, for at the time the role of the USA in the region was not yet perceived in terms of imperialist threat. Thus, AUB was an attractive choice for those students who could afford its fees or obtain help to do so.

³⁹⁷ For more on AUB, see: Stephen B. L., Penrose, *That They May Have Life; the Story of the American University of Beirut, 1866–1941*, (New York: Trustees of the American University of Beirut, 1941); Betty S. Anderson, *The American University of Beirut Arab Nationalism and Liberal Education*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011); Bayard Dodge, *The American University of Beirut; a Brief History of the University and the Lands Which It Serves*, (Beirut: Khayat, 1958).

³⁹⁸ Ra'uf Said Ghusayni, "Student Activism at Lebanon's Universities, 1951-1971" (dissertation, 1974), 8.

Since the early 20th century AUB administrators had not sought to thwart student cultural and political activities. These contributed to a redefinition of Arab culture and civilisation, a new interpretation of Arab history as a key to socio-cultural changes inspired by western modernity.³⁹⁹ Founded in 1918, the *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa* (henceforth, simply *'Urwa*) was, at the outset, primarily concerned with academic programmes and the inclusion of Arabic language and rhetoric.⁴⁰⁰ *'Urwa* rose on the back of a cultural *nahda* ("awakening"),⁴⁰¹ building on the Pan-Arab vision that emerged after World War I. Across the Arab world, groups promoting Arab nationalism had had to operate clandestinely and many were short-lived. *'Urwa* drew inspiration from these secret societies.

A key figure was Constantine Zurayk, a scholar originally from Damascus, who completed his PhD in the USA before joining AUB. In 1934, he was appointed as a faculty adviser to *'Urwa*. Along with other Arab Nationalists, Zurayk organised an underground group that became known as the *Jama'it al-Kitab al-Ahmar* (The Red Book Group), taking its name from the colour on the cover of a booklet written by Zurayk, *Kitab al-Qawmiyya al-'Arabiyya* (The Book of Arab Nationalism).⁴⁰² The Red Book Group used *'Urwa* for disseminating its Pan-Arab vision and to recruit new members until the beginning of World War II when it was shut down.⁴⁰³ Zurayk's work remained a fundamental reference point for the political analysis of post-*Nakba* students, providing the theoretical underpinning upon which the political framework of *'Urwa*, and later of MAN, was developed.⁴⁰⁴

³⁹⁹Anderson. *The American University of Beirut*, 13–14.

⁴⁰⁰Amjad Ghanma. *Jam'iyat Al-'Urwa Al-Wuthqa: Nsh'atuha Wa-Nshatatua*. [The 'Urwa al Wuthqa Society: its Establishment and Activities] (Beirut: Riyad Al-Rayyes, 2002), 57.

⁴⁰¹*Nahda* indicates a period of cultural renaissance in the Arab world starting in the late 18th century to the beginning of the 19th. The *nahda* is considered the beginning of the 'modern' era in the Arab world and is associated with increasing contacts with Europe. For reference see: Abdulrazzak Patel, *The Arab Nahdah: The Making of the Intellectual and Humanist Movement*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

⁴⁰²Makram Ghassan Rabah, "The Student Movement at The American University of Beirut, 1967-1975" (dissertation, 2007).

⁴⁰³Ghanma, *Jam'iyat Al-'Urwa Al-Wuthaq*, 171.

⁴⁰⁴Barut has highlighted the strong influence of Nasir al-Din's thought on MAN. Barut, *Harakatal-Qawmiyin al-Arab: al-nashah, al-tatawwur, al-masair*.

4.1.1 Political Background

The *Nakba* represented a turning point in the political development of Palestinian and Arab students at AUB and shaped the vision of *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa*. Until the early 1950s the society was composed of students affiliated to several parties representing various regional political tendencies. It served as an umbrella group for students with different political visions but a shared and powerful perception of Arab identity. The most popular political forces were the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, the Communist Party and the Ba'ath.⁴⁰⁵

Following the 1948 Arab defeat, the society became the space par excellence for elaboration of a radical political framework and new mobilisation strategies. Determining who sat on the Steering Committee (*al-lajna al-idaria*) of *'Urwa* in 1948-49 and their political affiliations has not been possible. However, Abdel-Mohsen Qattan (at the time a committee member and later to become a prominent politician, businessman and philanthropist) reported that his sympathies at the time were Ba'athist. He recalled that the future leaders of what was to become MAN were already occupying most seats.⁴⁰⁶ The Steering Committee took a consistent political role, denouncing the Zionist project, decrying the *Nakba* and openly stating its goal was Arab unity.⁴⁰⁷

In the years that followed *'Urwa's* direction was largely shaped by a core group of students, two of whom were already members of the 1948–1949 Committee: Ahmad Al-Khatib and George Habash. Habash, a Palestinian medical student, was profoundly impacted by the 1948 Arab defeat. He had interrupted his studies at AUB to contribute to the Palestinian struggle and had volunteered in a hospital in Al-Lidd.⁴⁰⁸ On his return to Beirut he drew close to a fellow AUB student, Hani Al-Hindi who had also suspended his studies to join the irregular Arab forces when the Arab–Israeli

⁴⁰⁵Sobheh Ghosheh interview by author, Amman, 20 February 2012 and Al-Kubaisi, 'The Arab Nationalists Movement 1951–1971.', 49–51.

⁴⁰⁶ Abdel-Muhsen Qattan, interview by author, Amman 15 May 2015. Qattan was an *'Urwa* committee member between 1948 and 1951 and chief editor of the *Al-'Urwa al Wuthqa* magazine in 1951. He founded the Qattan Foundation.

⁴⁰⁷Ghanma, *Jam'iyat Al-'Urwa Al-Wuthqa*, 171.

⁴⁰⁸Hilda Habash, interview by author, Amman 16 September 2013. Mrs Habash is the widow of George Habash.

war broke out. During the conflict Al-Hindi had been shocked by the disorganisation of the Arab armies and lack of coordination and common goals among their leaders.⁴⁰⁹ Habash and Al-Hindi, along with three other friends, Hussein Tawfiq, Abdel-Qader Amer and Jihad Dahi, decided to establish a new organisation, *Kata'ib al-Fida' al-'Arabi* (Arab Commando Battalions). Its aims were very clear: assassination of all reactionary Arab leaders who had betrayed the Palestinian and Arab struggle against Zionism, attacking Zionist and Western interests in the Arab region and sabotaging the armistice with Israel.⁴¹⁰ The *Kata'ib* expanded its network into Egypt and Syria⁴¹¹ but, lacking coordination, failed to achieve its stated goals. A botched attempt to assassinate Syrian President Adeeb As-Shikakli in 1950 led Habash and al-Hindi to accept that military action would not be successful in bringing about the radical change they had in mind.⁴¹² They soon understood that only organisation of the masses and a truly popular movement could lead to the liberation of Palestine.⁴¹³

Habash won the 1949–1950 *'Urwa* elections, indicating the shift towards a more articulate Arab nationalist framework.⁴¹⁴ Little is known of Habash's presidency of *'Urwa* in 1949–1950 and the composition of the steering committee. However, several interviewees pointed out that the 1950–1951 elections represented a crucial turning point.⁴¹⁵ Sobheh Ghosheh remembers running for the "Neutralists", a list of independent students who advocated for political neutrality of the student

⁴⁰⁹ Al-Kubaisi, *The Arab Nationalists Movement 1951–1971*, 40.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴¹¹ For a detailed analysis of *Kata'ib* ideology and its influence on the future establishment of MAN see Barut *Harakatal-Qawmiyn al-Arab: al-nashah, al-tatawwur, al-masair*

⁴¹² George Habash and Mahmoud Soueid. 'Taking Stock. An Interview with George Habash,' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 28, no. 1 (1998), 86-101. doi:10.2307/2538058, 89-90.

⁴¹³ Hani Al-Hindi, interview by author, Amman, 24 December 2011. Al-Hindi was a founder member of the Movement of Arab Nationalists. Al-Kubaisi, 'The Arab Nationalists Movement 1951–1971'.

⁴¹⁴ Ghanma, *Jam'iyat Al-'Urwa Al-Wuthqa*, 175.

⁴¹⁵ Habash; Ghosheh; Hani Al-Hindi and Abdallah Nasrawi, *Harakat al-Qawmiyyin al-'Arab, Nsh'atuhawa-Tatwurriha 'Abir Wathiqiha 1951–1968* [the Movement of Arab Nationalist]. (Beirut: Muaassasat al-Abhath al-'Arabiyya, 2004), 77.

body.⁴¹⁶ The Arab Nationalist list, led by Habash, by contrast had a radical programme that insisted on the political role of students.

This society was founded to benefit the Arab case, and it maintained this Arab nationalist trend despite all the difficulties it faced. And here we are addressing you with this statement, hoping that the principle upon which the society was founded will be dominant in this university. In the next few days, you, my brothers, will decide the direction you all want for your association. The Arab students can't continue without goals or specific principles; this means they cannot remain neutral among all the different trends.⁴¹⁷

The Arab Nationalist list urged the students to acknowledge their political responsibility to the Arab nation. They rejected any claim to be neutral but, nevertheless, proclaimed:

Our list is the neutral list, and by neutral we mean stepping away from any party involvements, but accepting that both we and you agree upon our Arab national creed... This is the Arab Nationalist list, in addition it is neutral and doesn't belong to any party... The future of your association depends on your will, so you have to prove that you are Arab Nationalists and loyal to your association's goals and to your creed.⁴¹⁸

This was a clear exposition of how Arab Nationalist students were not only ready to play a vanguard role, but considered it a fundamental responsibility of their generation to do so. The main objective of the Arab Nationalists' list was, they argued, "preserving the message" for which the *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa* had been founded, "advancing the real national soul among the Arab students."⁴¹⁹ Students, they asserted, should acknowledge that "practicing true Arab nationalism is complementary to the public culture which is part of the university education, and finding a united ideology among Arab students."⁴²⁰ What was needed was "spreading the *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa* vision in all large institutions all over the Arab world, and finding close links among Arab students in all institutions and regions."⁴²¹

⁴¹⁶Ghosheh.

⁴¹⁷*Bayan al qa'emeh 'Al-qawmiyin al Arab'* (Statement of the list of Arab Nationalists) 2 May 1950 Students 1920s Collection, AA: 4.3.4, Box 3, File 8, American University of Beirut/ Library Archives. Translation by the author.

⁴¹⁸*Bayan al qa'emeh.*

⁴¹⁹*Mn Ahdaf 'al-Qa'emeh Al-qawmiyin al-'Arab* (The Goals of the list of Arab Nationalists) April 1950, Students 1920s Collection, AA: 4.3.4, Box 3, File 8, American University of Beirut/ Library Archives. Translation of the author

⁴²⁰*Ibid.*

⁴²¹*Ibid.*

These aspirations to contribute to the political and social development of the whole Arab region proved popular. The Arab Nationalists convincingly won the *'Urwa* election.⁴²² Within the new leadership a momentous step in the political history of the region was made. Four committee members – George Habash, Ahmad Al-Khatib, Wadi' Haddad and Saleh Al-Shibe – established an underground movement whose political nucleus would be the *'Urwa* steering committee.⁴²³ This was the first step towards the formation of MAN. What distinguished the new group was the centrality of the Palestinian question: “the belief that the liberation of Palestine required Arab unity. We believed that the movement had to be very tight knit.”⁴²⁴

Until its dissolution in 1955, the Arab Nationalists maintained control of *'Urwa*, even after Habash graduated and left AUB. An *'Urwa* member recalled that competition for a place on the committee was always intense but was usually won by the Arab Nationalists.⁴²⁵ *'Urwa's* growing focus on regional affairs often led to open confrontation with the University administration.⁴²⁶ Regional political developments, particularly the Free Officers revolution in Egypt in 1952 and growing mass support for Pan-Arabism, saw the society coming to assume a central role in political life in Beirut, mobilising students and others in the struggle for Arab unity and removal of reactionary regimes. Its political dimension became even more noticeable after the 1953 elections.⁴²⁷ The society had come to view itself as a fundamental space for developing students' political vision, galvanising them for clandestine struggle and disseminating the ideological framework of Arab Nationalism. Salam Ahmad, an *'Urwa* member, remembers being recruited

⁴²²Ghosheh.

⁴²³Al-Hindi and Nasrawi. *Harakat al-Qawmiyyin al-'Arab*, 79; Al-Kubaisi, 'The Arab Nationalists Movement 1951–1971', 53. Hani Al-Hindi joined the core group when released from prison in 1951.

⁴²⁴Habash, and Soueid. 'Taking Stock', 90.

⁴²⁵Yusuf Shibl, 'On Past Presidents and Football Stratagems: Fifty Years of Memories at AUB' in *Main Gate* Vol V n. 3 (Spring 2007).

⁴²⁶The 1951–1952 election of *'Urwa's* steering committee was won again by the Arab Nationalist list. Ghanma. *Jam'iyat Al-'Urwa Al-Wuthqa*, 194–197.

⁴²⁷Also the 1952–1953 elections were won again by an Arab Nationalist list. Ghanma. *Jam'iyat Al-'Urwa Al-Wuthqa*, 210–212.

into the Arab Nationalist Youth (later known as MAN) by Basil Al-Kubaisi, a member of the steering committee of *'Urwa* in 1953:

There was an Iraqi friend who went to the university before me, his name was Basil al-Kubaisi, He was assassinated in Paris later by the Zionists. I met him at the university, and he introduced me to the Arab National Youth– that was our name before being the Arab Nationalists' Movement. I found them the most pure, loyal, moral, and incorruptible youth, so I worked with them, and I became an active member of *'Urwa*. We had our social and cultural activities, and we established the Arab Cultural Club in 1954 or 1955, I don't remember exactly. *'Urwa* functioned as a steering committee. We organised demonstrations, strikes and political activities inside and outside the university, in Beirut and all the Lebanese cities, as *'Urwa* was more well-known than any other political party.⁴²⁸

The society's political focus was made explicit in the statement published after the 1953 board elections. Addressing all Arab students everywhere, it asserted that the goal of the society was to work towards the unity of the Arab world, to readdressing injustice and revenging the crimes of the *Nakba*.

The Arab National Youth presents itself to the elections in the form of the *'Urwa Al Wuthqa* society on clear and proper ideological grounds and announces its attachment to the new national approach emitting from the depths of the *Nakba*, which finds the way for us to wash ourselves free from dirt and clear of impurities, and prepare itself on a strong national basis for the coming battle of revenge.⁴²⁹

The Steering Committee's primary responsibility was "recruiting nationalist youth in several different committees to help them contribute their efforts to move the association forward and to give generously without limits."⁴³⁰

Tensions mounted between *'Urwa*, the AUB administration and the Lebanese government. In the spring of 1954, as students rallied against the pro-Western anti-communist alliance which became known as the Baghdad Pact, AUB suspended *'Urwa* activities. When it was able to resume activities, in November 1954, the new committee's priority was to resist the University administration's willingness to disband the society. The 1954–1955 academic year saw intense

⁴²⁸ Salam Ahmad, interview by author, Amman 28 March 2012. He was an *'Urwa* member between 1953 and 1955.

⁴²⁹ *Bayan al-Qwmiyyin al-'Arab* (Statement of the Arab Nationalists) 1953 Students 1920s Collection, AA: 4.3.4, Box 3, File 8, American University of Beirut/ Library Archives.

⁴³⁰ *Bayan al-Qwmiyyin*.

manifestations of what scholars have called “contentious politics.”⁴³¹ On and off campus there were sit-ins, hunger strikes and occupations. Unable to control the movement, AUB banned *‘Urwa*. The administration’s reaction attests to the desire and ability of students to influence both the life of the University and that of the entire country and its diverse communities.

4.1.2 Organisational Structure

The structure of *‘Urwa Al-Wuthqa* was outlined in its by-laws and internal regulatory document.⁴³² There were three different types of membership: active, permanent and honorary. Any student, professor or other individual could apply for active membership. All those who had been active members for at least six academic terms were considered to be permanent members. Any individual (not necessarily a member) who offered significant assistance could be granted honorary membership by the Steering Committee. All active members had the right to vote. Any amendment to the by-laws required a two-thirds majority. A two-thirds majority was also required to reverse decisions taken by the steering committee or to readmit expelled members. Active members also voted on the granting of honorary membership. Any member could nominate individuals by sending his or her candidature to the Steering Committee and would be approved provided that at least one-third of the members voted in favour. Honorary members, unlike others, were not permitted to vote for steering committee elections.

The Steering Committee comprised a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer and four other members. It was required to meet every week and its deliberations could be witnessed by all *‘Urwa* members but they could only intervene if authorised to do so by the president. Taking of minutes was obligatory. Through its formal structure and procedures it was made clear that the

⁴³¹ The concept is primarily associated with the work of McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly. For an introduction to theories of contentious politics and their relevance for the analysis carried out in this thesis see chapter 1.

⁴³² Unless otherwise stated, all the information on the structure of the *‘Urwa al Wuthqa* has been collected from *Al-qanun al-asasi l-jmye al ‘Urwa al Wuthqa al-jam eah amerikye bi beirut* (the by-laws of the *‘Urwa Al-Wuthqa* society at the American University of Beirut Students) Students 1920s Collection, AA: 4.3.4, Box 3, File 3, American University of Beirut/ Library Archives.

steering committee had to constantly interact with members and that the role of members in decision-making was fundamental. The committee was authorised to establish sub-committees. From 1948 onwards the work of the steering committee was largely organised through subcommittees – for finance, sport and trips, public relations and communication, membership and cultural activities. The *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa* magazine had its own sub-committee.⁴³³ At times other sub-committees were established. Thus, one was created to investigate political development in the whole Arab region and particularly Iraq and others to organise particular demonstrations and events.⁴³⁴

Regarding gender balance, from 1948 the Steering Committee always had at least one female member. Nehad Haikal, Nahida Fadli and Samira Abu Ghazaleh (one of the future founders of the General Union of Palestinian Women), were among the most active committee members in 1951-53.⁴³⁵ Women's participation reflected the conviction of *'Urwa* that all components of the student body, and all sectors of society, should be mobilised to bring about social and political changes.

There was a constant stress on active engagement. All members were required to attend all events organised by the society, especially debates and celebrations. A member could be expelled following three unjustified absences and the secretary was charged with warning members after they had missed two consecutive sessions. A further article specified that all active members had to attend feedback sessions, at the beginning and end of each academic year, to discuss members' suggestions. This kind of structure ensured the constant engagement of all members in the political development of the society. It reflected the fact that when its regulations had been determined in 1925 *'Urwa's* goals had been cultural. There now had to be an evolution in light of the post-*Nakba*

⁴³³See, for example, Ghanma, *Jam'iyat Al-'Urwa Al-Wuthqa*, 171–224.

⁴³⁴*Ibid.*, 212.

⁴³⁵For example, Ghanma, *Jam'iyat Al-'Urwa Al-Wuthqa*, 171-224.

realisation that active participation was need to better pursue the political objectives of the society. This conviction was shared by those who went on to form MAN.

'Urwa was primarily financed through membership fees and any profits made from publishing *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa*. Active members were required to pay a membership fee. Any member failing to pay within two weeks could be fined twenty per cent of the fee and if s/he continued to not pay was liable to expulsion. Permanent and honorary members did not have to pay membership fees.

Abdel-Muhsen Qattan reported that expenses were limited, as AUB covered the costs of printing the magazine.⁴³⁶ At times there were fundraising campaigns. Using contributions from students, *'Urwa* was able to establish a fund for Arab students in need.⁴³⁷

'Urwa had an AUB-appointed advisor. There are no sources on how the advisor was selected. However, informants do report that the role of the advisor was often crucial, particularly in 1950-51 when Zurayk held the post. In subsequent years Zurayk remained an inspirational figure for the activists of what was to become MAN and for the wider student body.⁴³⁸

4.1.3 Armed Struggle

'Urwa Al-Wuthqa never considered military activities as a possible strategy for achieving its goals. There are no records of any kind of training or even of any kind of discussion regarding military operations or armed strategies. As a student body affiliated to AUB, military activities were never formally regarded as a strategic option. That being said, many of the most influential members of the steering committee had had direct military experience during the debacle of 1948. They consistently articulated a vision that considered armed resistance as a legitimate response to political oppression and injustice.

⁴³⁶Qattan.

⁴³⁷Ghanma, *Jam 'iyat Al- 'Urwa Al-Wuthqa*, 249.

⁴³⁸Al-Kubaisi, 'The Arab Nationalists Movement 1951–1971'.

As noted earlier, Habash had initially invested energy in armed operations, setting up *Kata'ib al-Fida'*. While it later became clear that armed struggle could not be successful without the support of a mass movement, armed resistance was not excluded from strategic options. Habash's involvement with *Kata'ib al-Fida'* briefly overlapped with his activism in '*Urwa Al-Wuthqa*'. Hani Al-Hindi has reported that in 1950 several senior AUB students joined the secret organisation. It organised military training for groups of five or six students.⁴³⁹ When in October 1950, the *Kata'ib* unsuccessfully plotted to assassinate Syrian President Adeeb As-Shikakli the conspirators included Habash and another '*Urwa* member. While being investigated for his role, Habash continued his political activity within AUB, boosting his popularity and reputation as a serious activist by the courage and determination he had shown in the *Kata'ib* action.⁴⁴⁰ This suggests that while the '*Urwa* never contemplated military activities as a strategy for achieving political goals, leaders and most members considered armed resistance to be indispensable. For, as with members of PSU in Cairo, Beirut-based students considered armed struggle to be a necessary strategy for liberation.

4.1.4 Public Mobilisation

The post-*Nakba* aspirations of student activists involved with the '*Urwa Al-Wuthqa* were to disseminate the society's vision, recruit members for the underground Arab Nationalist Youth and build a mass movement able to mobilise all sectors of Arab society.⁴⁴¹ In furtherance of these aims they organised many public demonstrations and protests. In November 1948, '*Urwa* rallied against the partition of Palestine and the Balfour Declaration.⁴⁴² The protest against the Declaration became

⁴³⁹ Al-Hindi.

⁴⁴⁰ Despite being investigated for the action, Habash was not actually involved. Al-Hindi and Nasrawi, *Harakat al-Qawmiyyin al-'Arab*, 77.

⁴⁴¹ The Arab Nationalist Youth (as-Shabab Al Qawmi al-'Arabi) were the youth branch of MAN, established by the movement in 1956, See Walid Kazzuha, *Revolutionary Transformation in the Arab World*: Chapter 2.

⁴⁴² Anderson. *The American University of Beirut*, 141.

an annual event.⁴⁴³ Public protests intensified in the early 1950s. Student demands were becoming more consistent, mirroring the shift towards a more articulated ideological framework based on Arab nationalism. Following election of the first Arab Nationalist-led steering committee, public demonstrations and protests intensified, provoking further tension with AUB's administration.

Students mobilised a larger popular base around contentious politics, providing the political and ideological vision for framing their discontent. Indicative of students increased politicisation and sensitisation were March 1951 demonstrations in support of Moroccan independence⁴⁴⁴ and the October 1951 rally in support of the Wafd party in Egypt and its struggle to end British occupation of the Suez Canal.⁴⁴⁵ Student protestors were demanding an end to all forms of Western colonialism and insisting on the pressing need for Arab unity. They had a newly sophisticated understanding of regional and international political dynamics and a readiness to actively shape the future of the region. The demonstrations were not isolated events but part of methodic efforts to disseminate a new political vision for student youth.

According to Al-Hindi, the October demonstration was particularly tense as there were several injuries and seven students were ordered to be expelled. Only the strong mobilisation of the students and their direct appeals to the Lebanese Prime Minister prevented their expulsion.⁴⁴⁶ Growing student activism was feared by the AUB administration and relations with *'Urwa* were tense until it was disbanded in 1955.

Salam Ahmad recounted that the anti-Baghdad Pact protests were the most intense political activities of the era, not just for *'Urwa* members but for people drawn from communities all over Lebanon.⁴⁴⁷ AUB administrators were well aware of the significance of the students' opposition to the Baghdad Pact. For in a letter to the AUB President, Zurayk explained why students opposed

⁴⁴³Ghosheh.

⁴⁴⁴Anderson. *The American University of Beirut*, 141.

⁴⁴⁵Ghusayni. *Student Activism at Lebanon's Universities*, 39.

⁴⁴⁶Al-Hindi and Nasrawi, *Harakat al-Qawmiyyin al-'Arab*, 85.

⁴⁴⁷Ahmad.

any alliances with Western powers, considering their attempts to retain control over the Arab world.⁴⁴⁸

On 27 March, 1951 students protested in front of the main AUB gate, attempting to exit the campus and take the demonstration to the streets of Beirut. Riots and clashes with the army and the gendarmerie started.⁴⁴⁹ A student, Hassan Abu Ismail, was killed and another, Mustafa Nasrallah, severely injured. More than 40 students were arrested, some of whom were suspended while others were expelled.⁴⁵⁰ Among the expellees were some of 'Urwa's most active members close to MAN: Basil Al-Kubaisi, Taher Mahaini, Yousef Tamimi, Faysal Kadra, Sami Sanbar, Usama Al-Hafifi and Ziad Habash. AUB restrictions on 'Urwa and student mobilisation provoked resistance. The West Hall of AUB was occupied and several 'Urwa members launched a hunger strike in protest at the banning of their society.⁴⁵¹ Thanks to student mobilisation, the expulsions and the ban became a *cause celebre* far beyond Beirut. There were solidarity demonstrations opposing the AUB decision at the University of Syria in Damascus.⁴⁵² The students were aware of the necessity of mass organisation and were able to play a leading role in mobilising the masses and coordinating with the broader community in Lebanon and elsewhere. It was as if they had heeded Mao's argument that a successful revolution requires the unity of young intellectuals and the masses.⁴⁵³

⁴⁴⁸Letter from Acting President Constantine Zurayk to President Penrose in New York, detailing student unrest and demonstration, March–April, 1954. 1953 Students 1920s Collection, AA: 4.3.4, Box 3, File 12, American University of Beirut/ Library Archives.

⁴⁴⁹*Al-tadhahraty hawlh arjal elamen alama'rka 'Hrabieh' ma' el-tullab* (The men of the security transform the demonstration in a riot with the students) *al Nahar* n. 5606 28 March 1954 Students 1920s Collection, AA: 4.3.4, Box 3, File 11, American University of Beirut/ Library Archives.

⁴⁵⁰Salah Dabbagh interview by author, Beirut 20 April 2012. Dabbagh was an 'Urwa member between 1952 and 1955. Dabbagh recalls being suspended but then reinstated in her academic course. See also 'The Story of Mustafa' *Outlook* 17 April 1954.

⁴⁵¹Ghusayni. *Student Activism at Lebanon's Universities*, 51-55.

⁴⁵²*Al-Hazab ma'ynehl wsiya' ntaq al-adrab bhityshmal alswaqyeen w al-a'mal w al-lajeen* [The parties ask to enlarge the strikes' platform so to include the drivers, the workers and the refugees] *An-Nahar* 27 January 1955 n 5862; *Adraba Tullab al-jama'ah Surya ehtijajana'lafasltullab al jama'ah al-amerikiyeh* [The student of the University of Syria on strike in protest for the expulsion of students from the American University] *An-Nahar* 28 January 1955 n 5863. Students 1920s Collection, AA: 4.3.4, Box 3, File 11, Press clippings about Protesting against Iraq's joining the Turko-Pakistani treaty, 1954/1955 American University of Beirut/ Library Archives.

⁴⁵³ Mao Tse Tung, *The Orientation of the Youth Movement*. See Chapter 2.

Alongside the tactics of contentious politics the need to write and to publish was never forgotten by *'Urwa*. Though many leaflets and pamphlets were issued it was the *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa's* magazine which served as the most important tool for dissemination of the society's political vision.⁴⁵⁴ The magazine sought to provide space for the articulation and dissemination of an all-encompassing ideological framework able to stimulate broader reflection among students. These included social issues around the role of the family and of women in socio-political transformations or the role of religion in society. Two articles in the magazine typify this: "The Message of Women is an Assertion of Life" by Wadi' Qassem, on 2 February 1952 and "Islam and the Arab Question" by Abdel-Rahman Hassunon 3 April 1952.⁴⁵⁵

Themes of magazine articles were wide-ranging. They reflected the keen and informed interests students were now taking in independence struggles on the far side of the Arab world. An *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa* article written by Wadi' Haddad published in December 1951 helped to consolidate grassroots solidarity with those struggling for Moroccan independence.⁴⁵⁶ *'Urwa* publications reflected the political vision of the society and often included pieces written by leading figures in the Arab national movement. These included Michel Aflaq (the Syrian intellectual who played a significant role in the development of Ba'athism) or a politician such as the founder of Lebanon's Progressive Socialist Party, Kamal Jumblatt.⁴⁵⁷

Abdel-Muhsen Qattan, chief editor of the magazine in 1951, recounted that there was no censorship. All students were welcome to publish and the editor would usually intervene only with

⁴⁵⁴One of the most relevant booklets published by the *'Urwa* and still available is Dr Habash's lecture *al-Dafa3 al-mashtraq* (Joint Defense) March 1952 Students 1920s Collection, AA: 4.3.4, Box 3, File 9, American University of Beirut/ Library Archives.

⁴⁵⁵*Risala al-MaraTwyid al-Hayat*(Letter of the Women Assurance of Life) Al *'Urwa al Wuthqa* n 2 Feb 1952 ; *Al Islam w al-Qadie 'Arabie* (Islam and the Arab Question) *'Urwa al Wuthqa* n 3 Apr 1952. Students 1920s Collection, AA: 4.3.4, Box 3, File 11, American University of Beirut/ Library Archives.

⁴⁵⁶*Qadie el Sha'ab 'Arabie fi Marakesh* (The Question of the Arab People in Marakesh) Al-*'Urwa al Wuthqa* Dec 1951 Students 1920s Collection, AA: 4.3.4, Box 3, File 11, American University of Beirut/ Library Archives.

⁴⁵⁷ For a detailed report on *Al-'Urwa Al-Wuthqa* publications between 1948 and 1955 see Ghanma. *Jam'iyat Al-'Urwa Al-Wuthqa*.

regard to style, length and formatting. He remembered long discussions with Sa'dun Hamadi, one of the most active 'Urwa members, to persuade him to make his articles shorter.⁴⁵⁸

A further means of mobilisation was promotion of social and cultural events. The 'Urwa's cultural committee organised two major events in the academic year, presenting concerts, plays and musicals. In her memoirs, Nahida Fadli, President of the Cultural Committee in 1952, remembers the concert given in the AUB West Hall by the Lebanese singer, Fayruz. This was one of the most acclaimed celebrations of Arab identity. She also recalls that the theatrical piece presented that year by 'Urwa satirised American culture.⁴⁵⁹ The sports committee used to organise trips to other countries, particularly Egypt Syria and Iraq, to reinforce connections with other Arab students. Abdel-Muhsen Qattan remembered a trip to Syria, during which AUB students were received by students at the University of Syria. He recounted that the whole trip was organised entirely by the students, with no AUB support.⁴⁶⁰

Other activities included fundraising for poor students or blood donations for Palestinian refugees. In 1952, the 'Urwa steering committee asked all students to fast on the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration and donate the money they would have spent on food to the Arab Student Fund.⁴⁶¹ Symposia were frequently arranged during which there were readings from Arab nationalist writers, especially those from Zurayk's *The Meaning of Nakba*.⁴⁶² Also discussed were the work of the Syrian/Iraqi educationalist Sati' al Husari and analyses of the role of Mazzini, Garibaldi and others in unifying Italy.⁴⁶³

'Urwa had a further consistent focus: community education. The society, especially after Arab Nationalists came into the ascendancy on the Steering Committee, expanded its work outside the university. Contact was made with students at the International College (an AUB-affiliated

⁴⁵⁸Qattan.

⁴⁵⁹Ghanma.*Jam 'iyat Al-'Urwa Al-Wuthqa*, 243–246.

⁴⁶⁰Qattan.

⁴⁶¹Ghanma.*Jam 'iyat Al-'Urwa Al-Wuthqa*, 248.

⁴⁶² See for example Kazzuha. *Revolutionary Transformation in the Arab World*.

⁴⁶³Al-Hindi.

secondary school) and they were aided to start their own society, *al-'Oroba*. Habash played a key role. While it was independent, *al-'Oroba* shared *'Urwa*'s political vision. Most of the high school students who founded the society went on to be elected to the *'Urwa* Steering Committee.

An *'Urwa* Cultural Club attracted students from different institutions and backgrounds.⁴⁶⁴ It became a leading venue in Beirut where students and others could debate politics.⁴⁶⁵ It also helped recruit support for MAN after *'Urwa* was closed down.

There were clear similarities between the role and strategy of students in Cairo and in Beirut. Both knew that movements could not build popular support without mass mobilisation, the creation of a strong grassroots presence. Both had a vision of the need for an organic relation with the wider community of displaced Palestinians and Arab youth. Both were determined to disseminate their radical vision via students to the broader society. Both sought to be a voice for those disappointed with traditional politics and yearning for leaders and who wanted change.

4.1.5 Diplomatic actions

Unlike the PSU in Cairo, which invested much effort in building relations at regional and international level, *'Urwa* was not noted for its outreach to the non-Arab world. As Abdel-Mohsen Qattan has pointed out, this lack of engagement, indeed at times even the rejection *in toto* of a failed Western-imposed world order, was a defining feature of much Arab Nationalist student activity. Having consciously decided to eschew external outreach, *'Urwa* thus based its strategy almost exclusively on grassroots work at local and regional level. Exchanges with students in universities in Syria, Egypt and Iraq were particularly important.

Some former students recalled at least two official meetings between the *'Urwa* steering committee and the Lebanese Prime Minister. Amjad Ghamna reported that in December 1951, an

⁴⁶⁴Jardani.

⁴⁶⁵Al-Hindi and Nasrawi. *Harakat al-Qawmiyyin al-'Arab*, 87–88. It should be noted that while Al-Hindi reports the establishment of the Club in 1951, Mohammad Jardani, Dabbagh and Ahmad in their interviews recalled that the Club was established after the dissolution of the *'Urwa*, i.e. in 1956.

'*Urwa* delegation led by Nahida Fadli and Samir Sanbar met the PM to discuss the decision of the Ministry of Labour to deny employment rights to Palestinians in Lebanon.⁴⁶⁶ There are no records of what transpired. What is revealing is that students were emboldened to lobby for the rights of the substantial and stateless Palestinian refugee population in Lebanon who, despite UNRWA assistance, was struggling to make a living. Another delegation, also led by Fadli and Sanbar, met the PM in January 1952 to demand suspension of the expulsion from Lebanon of Sa'dun Hamadi and Hazem Mushtaq. They were listened to. Their colleagues were allowed to remain in Lebanon.⁴⁶⁷

Regarding international engagement, the only instance found was around the fate of the 56 students expelled from AUB following protests against the Baghdad Pact. Maan Karani, President of the '*Urwa* Membership Committee, along with Samir Sanbar, an ex-AUB student and '*Urwa* Steering Committee member, met Major Salah Salem⁴⁶⁸ and Ahmad Said.⁴⁶⁹ The students sought to put pressure on the Egyptian government to accept the expellees into their own universities.⁴⁷⁰ '*Urwa*'s demands were met and over fifty students, now sensitised to and enthused by Arab Nationalism, left Beirut for Cairo.

Subsequent interactions between these ex-'*Urwa* members and Cairo-based Palestinian student activists were to help shape the political development of Palestinian youth for years to come. Their endeavours led not only to the establishment of the first Palestinian transnational union, (GUPS) but also to the articulation of the political vision and strategies of many tendencies within the Palestinian resistance movement.

⁴⁶⁶Ghanma, *Jam 'iyat Al- 'Urwa Al-Wuthqa*, 199.

⁴⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 199.

⁴⁶⁸A leading member of the Free Officers Movement that orchestrated the 1952 Egyptian Revolution.

⁴⁶⁹A noted Egyptian broadcaster, the director and voice of *Sawt al Arab* from its 1953 foundation until 1967.

⁴⁷⁰Ghanma, *Jam 'iyat Al- 'Urwa Al-Wuthqa*, 238.

4.2 Palestinian Student Mobilisation in Jordan: the Conference of Jordanian Students

Palestinian student activism in Jordan during the 1950s was primarily via the Conference of Jordanian Students (CJS) (*Mu'tamar At-Tullab Al-Urduniyyin*). CJS may have been short-lived (lasting only from 1953 to 1957), but it provides an interesting case study in the history of student mobilisation in the region.

Its evolution differed markedly from experiences elsewhere. Four key differences stand out. Firstly, it was the first grouping of students in the Arab world to be active at a national level. Further, CJS was established by the efforts of existing parties and did not produce a new ideological framework for the wider Palestinian cause. Thirdly, it was composed of high school, rather than university, students. Finally, and most crucially, it was comprised of Palestinian students from the West Bank along with (trans-)Jordanian students.

CJS contributed to the elaboration of a radical framework for the Palestinian–Jordanian opposition movement to Hashemite rule during the 1950s. The students' experience in Jordan positioned themselves at the centre of a multi-dimensional political discourse in which regional claims intersected with local demands. The struggle for the liberation of Palestine, as it was elaborated by the Palestinians and incorporated into the broader framework of Pan-Arabism in the whole region, acquired a new meaning for Jordanian activists. The struggle for Arab Unity and the liberation of Palestine was connected to a “call for revolutionary change at the domestic level.”⁴⁷¹

Three major factors contributed to the emergence of the student movement in Jordan. Following the annexation of the West Bank, the inhabitants of the kingdom were markedly better-educated. Palestinian and Jordan students were learning from those who had gone to study abroad of radical new political visions. Finally, it was a period of gathering grassroots mobilisation by

⁴⁷¹ Betty S. Anderson, *Nationalist Voices in Jordan: The Street and the State*, (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2005), 7.

existing Jordanian political parties, in particular the Ba'ath, the Communists and the Islamic Brotherhood.⁴⁷²

The annexation of the West Bank and its incorporation into the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in the aftermath of the *Nakba* had major demographic, social and economic repercussions. The kingdom tripled its population, acquiring not only the indigenous inhabitants of Central Palestine (the West Bank) but also the bulk of Palestinian refugees who had fled from communities inside what had become the boundaries of the new state of Israel.⁴⁷³ Jordan now had a dual nature. The East Bank was composed mainly of nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes with only a few urban centres with populations exceeding 30,000. The West Bank, however, had several cities which formed hubs of economic, political and cultural development.⁴⁷⁴ Palestinians were better educated. Most were literate, while in the East Bank only twenty-eight per cent of those of school age were enrolled.⁴⁷⁵ While Palestine already had university graduates the first university in the East Bank only opened in 1962.

A further major difference was that Palestinians were more politicised than East Bankers, not only because of the ongoing struggle against British and Zionist colonialism, but also because of a history of trade union organisation. The Arab Workers Society had existed in Palestine since the early 1920s, had more than 15,000 members and had started developing contacts with other trade unions and attending international conferences.⁴⁷⁶

For East Bank secondary students wanting to continue their education their only opportunities were to leave for Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and, to a lesser extent, the UK. These contacts with youth from other Arab countries were eye-opening, enabling them to realise they

⁴⁷²Samer Kheir Khraïno, *Al-Haraka Al-Tullabia Al-Ordonia 1948-1998* [The Jordanian Student Movement 1948-1998], (Jeddah: Matab3a Dar Al-Balad, 2001), 16.

⁴⁷³Massad, *Colonial Effects*, 12. See also: Luigi Achilli, *Palestinian Refugees and Identity: Nationalism, Politics and the Everyday*, (I.B. Tauris, 2015).

⁴⁷⁴Naseer Hasan Aruri, *Jordan: A Study in Political Development (1921-1965)*, (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1972), 33-34. See also Avi Plascov, *The Palestinian Refugees in Jordan 1948-1957*, (London: Frank Cass, 1981).

⁴⁷⁵Aruri. *Jordan: A Study in Political Development*, 34.

⁴⁷⁶*Ibid.* 34.

shared a culture, history and traditions that transcended colonial borders.⁴⁷⁷ Betty Anderson has argued that this awareness of a shared identity facilitated the spread of Arab nationalism and new insights into concepts of political opposition.⁴⁷⁸

In the aftermath of the *Nakba*, Palestinian and Jordanian opposition parties found common ground and a shared national vocabulary under the umbrella of Arab nationalism. Under it, Jordanian and Palestinian activists formed the progressive and Arab nationalist political parties of the Jordanian National Movement (JNM), designed to garner support for revolutionising the Hashemite governmental structure.⁴⁷⁹ Within this shared arena Palestinians could work for achieving the liberation of Palestine, Jordanians could call for radical reforms in the kingdom and Communists could pursue their struggle for socialism.⁴⁸⁰

The strongest opposition parties in Jordan were the Ba'ath, the Communist Party and the Muslim Brotherhood. Jordanian students had contributed to the establishment of the Ba'ath. Mohammad Abu Maizar, who was a member of CJS, recounted how students like Radi As-Shakhsheir, Sulaiman Al-Hadidi and Amin Shqair enrolled in Syrian universities in the late 1940s, participated in the Ba'ath party founding conference in 1947 and played a central role in disseminating Ba'athist ideology, especially in the East Bank.⁴⁸¹ The Ba'ath and the Communist Party could boast large support among students and even before the 1950s had attempted to set up underground cells in schools. However, it was only in 1951 that the first committees were created in various schools in Amman, Salt, Irbid, Hebron, Jerusalem, Nablus and Karak with the intention of establishing a national student movement. This effort led to the creation of CJS in 1953.

⁴⁷⁷Benedict Anderson R. O'G, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.(London: Verso, 1991), 114.

⁴⁷⁸ Anderson, *Nationalist Voices in Jordan* , 19-20.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁴⁸¹Mohammad Abu Maizar, interview by author, Amman 07 December 2011.

4.2.1 Establishment of the CJS

Schools were becoming the new laboratory for political mobilisation based on Pan-Arabism and anti-colonialism. At the end of 1951 student representatives of three schools in Amman met to discuss the possible establishment of a Jordanian student union.⁴⁸² Though there are no records of how this initiative arose, it has been suggested that Ba'athist and Communists took a leading role in organising the students and calling the meeting.⁴⁸³ The result was publication of a platform. The students depicted themselves as a "preparatory committee" pending creation of a conference of Jordanian students which would lobby for a Jordanian Student Union, a national university and reduction of private school fees while fostering wider knowledge of Arab culture and history.⁴⁸⁴ This final ambition, moving beyond the strictly student-issue focus of their other aspirations, was born out of resentment at the continued strong British presence and perception of interference in the affairs of a country which they had created. Thus a parallel could be drawn between the original culture-focused approach of *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa* at AUB and the initial steps of Jordanian student activism. Acknowledgment of the relevance for youth of Arab history and culture linked them to the Pan-Arab ideology being elaborated across the whole region.

The preparatory committee's platform was disseminated to all Jordanian schools and reported in several newspapers. Recruitment had to be clandestine after three students were expelled for their involvement with the initiative. The idea of creating a national body for Jordanian students gained support, especially after the Free Officers took power in Egypt. In both the East and West Banks committees were set up in high schools with support from either the Ba'ath or the Communist Party. They were established and led by students who were already members of these parties.⁴⁸⁵ In August 1953, representatives from student committees in Amman, Salt, Irbid, Tafileh, Nablus, Hebron and Jerusalem met in Amman at the *Kulliyya As-Sharia'* in

⁴⁸² The three schools were the Islamic Scientific School, Mutran School and the Hussein College.

⁴⁸³ Abu Maizar.

⁴⁸⁴ Khraïno, *Al-Haraka Al-Tullabia Al-Ordonia*, 46.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 46.

Jabal Al-Webdeh to launch the Conference of Jordanian Students. Although the police had given students permission to gather, they surrounded the building before breaking in in a vain attempt to prevent attendees from electing an executive committee.⁴⁸⁶ Muheddin Al-Masri, who represented Irbid students and was elected to the Executive Committee, recalls the political composition of the committee:

...So, the Conference represented the political life [of the country], as in Hebron a [supporter of] the Muslim Brotherhood won, and in Nablus a communist won, and Mohammad Abu Maizar was Ba'athist [he was elected in Jerusalem], and I was also Ba'athist, also Hani Al Khasawneh in Amman was Ba'athist, and in the south there was Yehia Khris also Ba'athist. We were involved in the political life, and we had achieved democracy, as no other group, neither farmers nor workers nor any other group achieved democracy as the students did.⁴⁸⁷

It is evident that the parties played a major role in the formation and political development of the Conference. As with the PSU in Cairo, the composition of the Executive Committee often reflected the balance of power among the parties in the country. Unlike the PSU, however, Jordanian students did not propose a new political framework as there were bold strategies already in place. Essentially, the Conference remained connected to the opposition work of the JNM, an opposition movement that emerged in the 1950s and worked to promote pan-Arab unity and challenge the regime.⁴⁸⁸ It did, however, try to maintain some distance from them. Muheddin Al-Masri argued that:

...yes, the [Ba'ath] party encouraged the establishment of a student union, but we were guiding the party, for instance, we were five members of the union in Irbid, and I was elected to be the general secretary, so, we were guiding the party to the right direction according to our point of view. ... The party had its principles, but we had our techniques, for instance if the party's orders on any matter contradicted the union's point of view, we would apologize to the party on the implementation of that order or instructions as we were democratic. In the union, we were elected, while the leadership of the party did not come by elections. I myself refused several times to carry out the instructions of the party, and told them that those instructions contradict the principles of democracy, so the leadership yielded to our will.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 46.

⁴⁸⁷Muheddin Al-Masri, interview by author, Amman 12 March 2012. Al-Masri was a Conference member from 1953 to 1956 and he is a former Jordanian ambassador.

⁴⁸⁸ For more on JNM see Anderson, *Nationalist Voices in Jordan*.

⁴⁸⁹Al-Masri.

This statement shows how student leaders were aware of the need for democratic practices and gaining legitimacy in the eyes of students. They were conscious of their crucial role in representing and expressing popular will. This awareness of their representative role was supported by a constant commitment to mobilise all sectors of society, assuring them that popular legitimacy would come not only through elections but also from grassroots engagement.⁴⁹⁰ Thus, there were multiple parallels with the experience of PSU in Cairo and *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa* in Beirut. Abu Maizar has highlighted the fundamental role that students played in sustaining parties and contributing to the development of their visions and strategies. Thus, he argued that:

[In the aftermath of the annexation of the West Bank] the Jordanian army was led by the British, as all the highest military ranks were held by the British. There were several arrests among the leaders of the political opposition in Jerusalem and the West Bank. It was then that the students took the lead in the struggle.⁴⁹¹

This vanguard role played by students in Jordan reflects the regional trend favouring the emergence of new ideologies and movements able to mobilise the masses for radical political changes. This trend suggests that Benda's argument – that students acted as the “most effective agency of anti-colonialism”⁴⁹² – also applies to the Arab world.

With regard to the political composition of the Executive Committee, Khraïno has pointed out that the Muslim Brotherhood had opposed the formation of the Conference, considering it a ‘leftist’ initiative and that members of the party participated in the Conference only in a personal capacity.⁴⁹³ The Ba'ath and the Communist Party held most seats on the committee. The Communists were particularly strong in the West Bank, especially around Nablus, while the Ba'ath Party had strong East Bank support and held the presidency of JCS throughout its existence.⁴⁹⁴ Aida Najjar, a member of the Conference's Executive Committee in 1953, recalled that around 1955 the

⁴⁹⁰ See §3.3.4. Public mobilisation.

⁴⁹¹ Mohammad Abu Maizar, interview by author, Amman 8 May 2011

⁴⁹² Henry J. Benda, “Non-Western Intelligentsias as Political Elites,” in *Political Change in Underdeveloped Countries*, 237. For an in-depth articulation on these theories see Chapter 1

⁴⁹³ Khraïno, *Al-Haraka Al-Tullabia Al-Ordonia*, 47.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

MAN also became strong, with large support among students.⁴⁹⁵ MAN's influence spread quickly in Jordan, especially in Amman where George Habash and Wadi' Haddad, after leaving AUB, had engaged in painstaking grassroots work, mainly among Palestinian refugees, but also among students through a Cultural Club they established in Amman.⁴⁹⁶ Though there are no extant documents that outline the political vision of CJS, former students' testimonies highlight the complex ideological framework underpinning their activism. Hani Khasawneh, the President of the Conference, recalled that:

The aim was to strengthen the State of Jordan, to get rid of the British influence and to have a national government, which will defend Palestine and will fight with other Arab countries like Syria and Egypt to restore the rights of the Palestinian people.⁴⁹⁷

An anti-colonial spirit, therefore, was basic to the students' political engagement in Jordan and the Palestinian cause was at the core of it. Khasawneh added that:

...the main objective for the Jordanian national student movement during the 1950s was never the basic demand of improving students' conditions, this was not a priority. Yes, it was an objective but not a priority. The students union was a kind of extension of the JNM and the Arab movement. [Students'] spirit was awakened in 1948 when Palestine was lost and the Arab armies were defeated and new generations discovered that the official Arab regimes were not able to protect Palestine and Arab rights in Palestine [...] this mobilized Arab minds and they were willing to connect with this cause and support any Jordanian political movement that would work for Palestine, defend the Arabism of Palestine. They rejected any movement that neglected the objectives of the liberation of Palestine. And if we wanted to study the potential or conditions of any political party or movement in the Arab world especially the Orient and Egypt, why it was founded, why it had popularity, or why it collapsed, or lost its popularity, then we should ask the question: what was its position on the question of Palestine? Answering this question we find the answer for the previous questions.⁴⁹⁸

The Palestinian struggle therefore was fundamental. Students in Jordan supported those parties and groups that were opposing traditional politics and the old actors who had failed either to defend or to recover Palestine. The political destiny of Jordan was, in their view, strongly interconnected with that of Palestinians. All saw that the Hashemite monarchy had failed to protect

⁴⁹⁵AidaNajjar, interview by author, Amman 29 March 2012. She was a member of the Conference until 1956.

⁴⁹⁶Hamdi Matar Al-Khatib (also known as Abu Samir) interview by author, Amman 29 December 2011. Matar was a founder of the Movement of Arab Nationalists in Jordan.

⁴⁹⁷ Hani Khasawneh, interview by author, Amman 26 December 2011. Hani Khasawneh was CJS president from 1953 to 1957 and he is a former Jordanian minister.

⁴⁹⁸Khasawneh.

either Palestinians against Zionism or Jordanians against neo-colonialism. A radical change in Jordanian politics would not only liberate Jordan from Western interference but would also represent an important step forward in the Palestinian struggle.

Muheddin Al-Masri has provided an enlightening testimony of the kind of change that students required from the Hashemite monarchy: a move away from British colonialism, towards Pan-Arabism. Al-Masri reported some of the discussions he had with his CJS colleagues:

I had an exchange with a communist fellow, as I asked him ‘why are you struggling for Jordan? And if we defeat colonialism in Jordan, what would you achieve?’ And he answered: ‘Jordan then will be independent’, so I said: ‘But we struggle to let Jordan be united with the Arab Nation and be a part of one Arab homeland, not only to achieve national independence for Jordan.’⁴⁹⁹

Anti-colonialism and Pan-Arabism inspired Jordanian students but the environment in which they struggled was not conducive. Neither CJS, nor the JNM, were able to bring about radical change. When martial law was imposed in 1957 all opposition movements and parties were proscribed. However, the CJS experience remained a fundamental point of reference not only for Palestinian student activism but for the political development of the whole Arab region. After 1957 these Palestinian and Jordanian high school students spread throughout the Arab world, enrolling in universities and contributing to the emergence of transnational student unions – the General Union of Palestinian Students, the General Union of Jordanian Students and the General Union of Arab Students.

4.2.2 Organisational Structure

CJS was made up of students from high schools throughout the country. Each school had its committee and there were also local committees representing students of several schools in the same area. For instance, Hamze Barqawi, who was a student from Nablus and member of the

⁴⁹⁹ Al-Masri.

representative committee for the northern West Bank, recalled that his local committee represented students from Nablus, Jenin, Tulkarem and Qalqilya.⁵⁰⁰

These representatives attended the annual national Conference. Usually these took place in Amman. Since the Jordanian government never granted official recognition to the student organisation, the congress was often organised underground.⁵⁰¹ This clandestine aspect made it difficult to maintain the high level of participation of 1953. However, despite these limitations, in 1956 around four hundred students attended the annual conference.⁵⁰² The CJS could therefore boast a high level of representation.

An Executive Committee was elected at each national conference. Each of the eight members represented a different district of the country. At least one woman was elected every year. Aida Najjar, who in 1953 became the first woman to be elected, recounted in her memoirs that she represented the Zein Al-Sharaf girls' school at the Conference. She remembers that Noah Batshun from the Ahlia school was also there, but generally not many women participated. CJS was supportive of women's activism and Aida Najjar recalled the warm welcome she received when she stood on the table to address the Conference.⁵⁰³ Haifa Majthub, who was elected to the Executive Committee in 1955, recalls the strong spirit of cooperation among male and female students.⁵⁰⁴

The Committee met at least once a month but followed no fixed schedule. Hani Khasawneh remembers that the Committee members, living as they did in different cities, did their best to arrange meetings whenever there were important issues to discuss or activities to be organised.⁵⁰⁵ Muheddin Al-Masri recalls that because of the need for secrecy they had no fixed meeting place

⁵⁰⁰ Barqawi. Barqawi was a member of the Conference until 1956. See Figure 1 attached at the end of this thesis the list –called *Al-'Oruba-* with which Barqawi run in the 1953 election.

⁵⁰¹ However, Hani Khasawneh recalled that a Conference was held in a cinema hall as there was at the time no need to go underground. It is not clear the exact date and year of this conference.

⁵⁰² Khraïno, *Al-Haraka Al-Tullabia Al-Ordonia*, 46.

⁵⁰³ Aida Najjar, *Banat 'Amman Ayyam Zaman*, [Amman's Girls in the Old Days] ('Amman: Al-Salwa, 2008), 204.

⁵⁰⁴ Haifa Majthub, interview by author, Amman 14 March 2012.

⁵⁰⁵ Khasawneh.

and would gather to meet in their houses – in his rented room in Irbid, Mohammad Abu Maisar's house in Jerusalem or Hani Khasawneh's house in Amman. At the end of one meeting they usually scheduled the next one, thus easing difficulties of communication and distance.

The decisions of the Executive Committee were then communicated to the schools' committees so that all students could be informed and mobilised for events and actions.⁵⁰⁶

In all schools CJS members paid a membership fee of five piastres per month. It remains unclear whether the fees were managed by the central Executive Committee or by the committees in each school. Al-Masri only remembers that these fees were usually used to help poorer students pay secondary school examination costs.⁵⁰⁷

The CJS organisational structure differed from that of the PSU and the *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa*. The Conference was based around a system of representation which reflected both geography and the administrative structures of the Jordanian state. Through it students sought to thus participate in the decision-making process of most of the governorates of which Jordan was composed while working to maintain a constant connection with the student constituency in schools. Unlike the PSU or *'Urwa*, the work of the Executive Committee was not organised through a system of sub-committees. While the structure was centralised, the *modus operandi* was more informal, focused mainly on guaranteeing coordination among different geographical districts in the political campaigns and nationally organised actions.

4.2.3 Armed Struggle

Like the PSU and the *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa*, CJS students never engaged in military activities. There are no records of any training or action organised by CJS at the national or local level. Similarly, from the accounts of the interviewees, it is clear that armed struggle and military operations were never discussed or considered a strategic option. This lack of focus on military preparedness did

⁵⁰⁶Al-Masri.

⁵⁰⁷*Ibid.*

not mean that students were opposed to armed struggle. Like Gramsci, they believed “every political struggle always has a military substratum.”⁵⁰⁸ Armed struggle was seen as a necessary strategy to combat Zionism and rescue Palestine.

At a time when British domination of the upper ranks of the Jordanian army was increasingly unpopular, several interviewees confirmed the crucial role of students in rallying for the Arabisation of the Jordanian army, demanding dismissal of British officers and the rights of the indigenous population to rise within it.⁵⁰⁹

Aida Najjar reported an important episode in which students clearly asked to have military training and to be allowed to serve in the army. In 1954, Irbid schools were visited by the Commander of the Mafraq military department. The students organised a strike, skipping classes to attend the Commander’s speech. The Commander was speaking in English with his words being translated into Arabic by the school principal. Suddenly Muheddin Al-Masri interrupted, loudly demanding to address the principal and the audience: “What is this? We don’t need to take lessons on nationalism from this colonialist!” The students all supported Al-Masri’s intervention and left the room, boycotting the event.

Consistently, the students demanded to be trained for military service in an Arabised army. They desired to fight colonialism and believed armed struggle was a fundamental necessity for defeating it across the region.⁵¹⁰ As Najjar has put it: “Like all people at that time they [the students] wanted to hold weapons, hoping to liberate Palestine.”⁵¹¹

4.2.4 Public Mobilisation

Muheddin Al-Masri has pointed out that CJS activists sought to play both a political and a social role. They advanced their cause through demonstration and protests, press articles and social

⁵⁰⁸ Perry Anderson, “The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci,” *New Left Review*, 1976,42.

⁵⁰⁹Khasawneh.

⁵¹⁰Najjar, *Banat Amman*, 207.

⁵¹¹*Ibid.*

activities. One of the most significant protests in the history of student mobilisation in Jordan took place in the autumn of 1952. Haqi Kasawneh, a student who headed the preparatory committee which paved the way for the formal establishment of CJS, was killed during a protest. All of those interviewed have vivid memories of the demonstration as it was one of the first events in which students took a leading role. Muheddin Al-Masri recalled:

In 1952 – before the Egyptian Revolution – we participated in a demonstration to support Mustafa An-Nahhas, the President of Al-Wafd Egyptian party and the prime minister who abolished the British-Egyptian Treaty, and he was also the one who had signed this treaty in 1936. We participated in that demonstration to support the decision of the abolition of the treaty, and the police opened fire against us, Haqi and I were in the front, so Haqi got a bullet, and we moved him to the Italian Hospital, but his wound was infected after surgery and then he died.⁵¹²

Since the very beginning of the 1950s, therefore, students in Jordan were at the forefront of political engagement. They mobilised not only to pressure the Jordanian government on domestic issues but also to show support for or opposition to regional political developments. Khasawneh and Abu Maizar recalled the 1954 mobilisation against the Baghdad Pact. Jordanian students were extremely concerned, especially knowing that the Hashemite Kingdom was under Western pressure to join it. Students organised protests and demonstrations, the most important of which, and the most violent, took place in Jerusalem. A young woman, Raja Abu ‘Amasha, was killed by the police while she was marching with other students towards the Turkish Embassy.⁵¹³ The determination and mobilisation of Jordanian students, together with the efforts of the entire opposition movement in the kingdom, eventually succeeded in preventing Jordan from joining the Pact.

Students had noted, however, the tragic outcomes of the 1952 and 1954 demonstrations and the use of state violence to repress contestation. Muheddin Al-Masri has pointed out:

⁵¹²Al-Masri.

⁵¹³Abu Maizar, Khasawneh.

The government was trying to limit the Conference's role in the professional side away from the political role, but we used to declare that we were a part – and the functional part – of the society.⁵¹⁴

All interviewees suggested that students were the “engine” of demonstrations and protests. Khasawneh summed up their influence: “We had our political role, and we were able to organise strikes in the cities, and a lot of people supported us.”⁵¹⁵ Students acted in a vanguard role, pushing for radical change in Jordanian politics when in 1955 they led demonstrations demanding both the dismissal of Lieutenant-General Sir John Bagot Glubb (known as Glubb Pasha), the British commander of Jordan’s Arab Legion and free democratic elections. When students denounced election results, accusing the government of vote rigging, most of them, including Hani Khasawneh and Muheddin Al-Masri, were arrested and imprisoned. However, the determination of student activists and their mobilisation of other sectors of society paid fruit. Glubb Pasha together with other senior British officers was dismissed from the Arab Legion. New and fair elections enabled formation in 1956 of the first (short-lived) leftist-nationalist government of Jordan, led by Sulaiman Nabulsi.⁵¹⁶

Aida Najjar recalled that students used to organise protests and mobilisations for Palestine. She remembered one of the biggest demonstrations, following the Zionist attack on Qebia, a Palestinian village close to Ramallah. Najjar reported that she took a leading role as students marched through the streets, urging an impressive number of people to join them. She remembered how everyone in Jordan, Palestinians and East Bankers alike, would mobilise for Palestine.⁵¹⁷ Mohammad Abu Maisar summed up student mobilisation thus: “it was a joint struggle: against the Jordanian army, its British leadership and against Israel.”⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁴ Al-Masri.

⁵¹⁵ Khasawneh.

⁵¹⁶ Anderson, *Nationalist Voices in Jordan*, 4.

⁵¹⁷ Najjar.

⁵¹⁸ Abu Maizar, May 2011.

In relation to printed materials, the CJS Executive Committee did not coordinate students' production and publication efforts. The initiative was left to individuals. However, Aida Najjar reported that in the mid-1950s there was an increase in the publishing of magazines and newspapers in the kingdom. Many were published by political parties or those close to them. At school level some published magazines were distributed not just among students and teachers but also to the wider community.⁵¹⁹ Student contributions to newspapers were considered fundamental. Indeed, a popular newspaper, *al-Hawadeth*, had a "student corner" dedicated to contributions from students. Najjar remembers the first of her articles which the paper published. She dedicated it to her friend Bayan Nuwaydeh on the occasion of the 1953 *Nakba* anniversary.⁵²⁰

Student activists also wrote for their schools' magazines. One of the most influential was *Voice of a Generation*, published in Irbid but distributed to schools all over the country.⁵²¹ Welcoming contributions from any Jordanian school, it soon became a space for students to address and confront social and political themes. Of particular importance was the section, "Women's World" to which many students and teachers contributed, stimulating reflection on the role of women in society.⁵²²

The means by which students contributed to debates on pressing social and political issues accounted for their success in developing and disseminating a radical approach to Jordanian political dynamics. Their numerous writings and analyses reinforced the opposition movement and helped to engage broader sectors of society, particularly the young intelligentsia, to engage in constant reflection on vital social and political matters.

Social activities were also integral to the experience of student mobilisation in Jordan. Like the PSU and *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa* their determined grassroots activism sought to support all sectors of society in the daily struggles which were, they argued, symptomatic of a malaise in political

⁵¹⁹Najjar, *Banat Amman*, 174.

⁵²⁰*Ibid.*, 174.

⁵²¹*Ibid.*, 178.

⁵²²*Ibid.*, 180.

dynamics in the kingdom. Muheddin Al-Masri has provided a detailed account of the range of cultural activities and social assistance organised by students. Samer Khraino has reported that students used to organise political lectures and discussions in their schools.⁵²³ There are no detailed accounts of these debates but most of the interviewees pointed out that their discussions were focused on readings. Haifa Majdoub and Aida Najjar both recalled that students used to read and discuss Maxim Gorki, risking arrest because the works of the Russian writer and activist were banned in Jordan.⁵²⁴

Students frequently organised film screenings. Muheddin Al-Masri explained that these events were sometimes free of charge in order to stimulate debates and raise the consciousness of attendees. On other occasions a financial contribution was required, either covering the cost of renting the space in which the film was shown or to raise funds for students in need. Cultural events were sometimes organised for fundraising purposes and were announced through the distribution of leaflets in schools. Khraino has also pointed out that the dissemination of broadsheets was a common technique students used to raise awareness and understanding of issues of the day.⁵²⁵

With regard to social assistance activities, most CJS work was dedicated to supporting students in need. Scholarships were often provided for those young people who could not afford school fees and books and clothes also were provided. Muheddin Al-Masri recalled that “we didn’t differentiate between students on the basis of their political affiliation, we just helped poor students.”⁵²⁶

The CJS also acted as a trade union to improve the conditions of its members. Activists lobbied for a reduction in school fees and establishment of a national university. Members also

⁵²³Khraino, *Al-Haraka Al-Tullabia Al-Ordonia*, 153.

⁵²⁴Najjar, *Majthub*.

⁵²⁵Khraino, *Al-Haraka Al-Tullabia Al-Ordonia*, 153.

⁵²⁶Al-Masri.

monitored the conditions for students in schools and often a CJS member would intervene with schools' administrators and principals:

We were responsible for students' matters, for instance we were calling for an end to the beating of students, and if any problem happened between a student and his teacher, we used to handle it. We were considered to be a public authority elected by students themselves, thus we had legitimacy in the eyes of the officials.⁵²⁷

As *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa* in Beirut and PSU in Cairo, CJS built its political strength and legitimacy on the democratic process through which its representatives were elected. This was to help pave the way for a new form of political participation and mobilisation in the region and constant engagement with the broader community. This continuous grassroots involvement was aimed at building and reinforcing the link with all sectors of society, finally mobilising them for radical change not only in the country but in the whole region.

4.2.5 Diplomatic Actions

Like *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa*, CJS did not endeavour to build external networks. Khraïno has pointed out that the Communist party did seek to represent CJS in international fora, in particular at international conferences in Bucharest and Warsaw.⁵²⁸ However, the interviewees did not recall this international participation and there are no accounts. It should be noted that, like *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa*, CJS was denied the opportunity to engage with the wave of international student solidarity that grew in intensity from the mid-1950s as it was shut down by the Jordanian state in 1957.

Conclusion

This chapter has expanded the analysis, begun in Chapter Three, of student activism in the Arab region throughout the 1950s. Focus on the similarities and differences between *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa* at AUB and CJS in Jordan has indicated that, as PSU in Cairo, these experiences are

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁸ Khraïno, *Al-Haraka Al-Tullabia Al-Ordonia*, 47.

testimony to the efficacy of student efforts to overcome the lack of representation for Palestine's scattered society.

The chapter has demonstrated how *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa* made a revolutionary contribution to regional politics and how student activism at AUB was fundamental to establishing the Movement of Arab Nationalists. As with their counterparts in Cairo, student activists articulated a radical ideological framework and positioned the Palestinian struggle at the centre of Arab nationalism. In Jordan the students who, for its truncated existence, supported CJS, also made fundamental contributions to post-*Nakba* social mobilisation. If in Cairo and Beirut student effort produced new political approaches that, at different levels, departed from the vision of the main parties, in Jordan students mobilised under the framework of the JNM, a grouping of the most important opposition parties. They made two vital contributions to the development of the JNM – emphasising the relevance of the Palestinian struggle in the political vision of the movement and stressing the need for direct engagement with the masses.

While the political backdrop to the activism of PSU, *'Urwa Al-Wuthqa* and CJS differ, their strategies were similar. It has been shown that the way they operated indicates a shared understanding of political engagement among students in the whole region. Students in Cairo, Beirut and Jordan were committed to introducing armed action as a fundamental strategy for the revolutionary change they were advocating.

Also, and perhaps most importantly for the future evolution of the Palestinian resistance movement, all three organisations introduced new democratic practices. These not only gave them legitimacy in the eyes of those they represented but enabled them to directly address and challenge political leaders across the region. After the trauma of the *Nakba* they became acknowledged by Palestinians as the first bodies democratically elected by their constituency. The electoral legitimacy they gained was derived from a constant engagement, grassroots activities and mass mobilisation.

Frantz Fanon has pointed out that in an anti-colonial struggle the general will of a people is expressed in the commitment to national liberation and in an initial phase of voluntary association characterised by the assertion of national solidarity and emancipatory revolt. Thus, popular participation – and mobilisation – is the highest expression of political will that manifests itself when the masses “meet together, discuss, propose, and receive directions.”⁵²⁹ Analysis in this and the previous chapter has provided empirical support to Fanon’s theories on popular will.

⁵²⁹Fanon, *Wretched*, 195.

5 CHAPTER FIVE

THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF THE GENERAL UNION OF PALESTINIAN STUDENTS: 1959-1964

Introduction

The 1960s can be described as the formative years of the Palestinian revolution, the decade in which the injustice of the occupation of Palestine started gaining significant global attention. It was characterised by the convergence of two fundamental outcomes from the student political engagement of the previous decade. The first was the reorganisation of the scattered Palestinian people into popular organisations, the most critically significant of which was the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS), established in 1959.⁵³⁰ The second was the emergence of new groups with a radical political vision and strategies for armed struggle. Fateh was the most important and along with the earlier-established Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN) strongly influenced both, student mobilisation and the ways in which Palestinians discussed politics, worked collectively and made decisions. GUPS and Palestinian political movements developed synergistically during the 1960s, influencing each other in shaping and defining their vision and strategies.

GUPS was the first Palestinian popular organisation established transnationally. It represented the first successful attempt to revive Palestinian social and political structures and to overcome geographical dispersal and fragmentation. Since its establishment, GUPS has played a crucial role in the political development of the Palestinian people. Not only has it been able to reunite Palestinian students scattered all over the world under a single union, setting a significant example and inspiration for other sectors of society, but it has also led increasingly effective lobbying for the Palestinian cause in the international arena. Thus, GUPS managed to levy the Palestinian cause within the international arena through unprecedented diplomatic activity.

⁵³⁰ Other Unions which were established after GUPS were the General Union of Palestinian Workers in 1963 and the General Union of Palestinian Women in 1965. Subsequently established were General Unions for teachers, writers, doctors and engineers.

Palestinian students became the central reference point for activists and institutions across the globe who declared solidarity with Palestine.

The fact that in the 1960s (prior to the formation of the PLO) GUPS was an internationally accredited representative body for Palestinian refugees meant that all Palestinian political movements paid great attention to the Union's politics and its internal dynamics. GUPS and the Palestinian political movements were integral to each other. During the 1960s GUPS functioned as an internal arena of mobilisation in which the leaders and members of the new movements and guerrilla groups received their initial political training. It was the indispensable space in which students could gather to articulate radical political frameworks and strategies of liberation. GUPS called for formation of a national entity to represent their country prior to the establishment of the PLO in 1964. It represented Palestine at the international level until the formal foundation of the PLO and continued to informally do so for years to come. GUPS was the body to "put Palestine back on the map."

In analysing the foundation and political trajectory of GUPS this chapter further advances the theoretical argument that Palestinian students acted as an anti-colonial organic vanguard of their people. GUPS exhibited the characteristics of a political vanguard: it was able to play a representative role at regional and international levels while building organic relationship with the broader constituency of displaced Palestinians. It was this capacity that allowed a relatively unknown non-state actor to impact international and regional systems dominated by states.

This chapter starts by detailing the establishment of GUPS, before looking at the domestic, regional and international political context in which GUPS operated between 1959 and 1964, when the establishment of the PLO brought about a shift in the representative role of Palestinian institutions. It looks at the socio-political processes and transformations that influenced the Union before analysing the Union's political background, organisational structure, military activities, public mobilisation and diplomatic actions.

5.1 Establishment of the General Union of Palestinian Students

Previous chapters have shown how, after the *Nakba*, students rallied to overcome the lack of representation of their people and how transnationalism became a defining feature of Palestinian identity and strategies of struggle.⁵³¹ By the late 1950s, with the formation of the United Arab Republic (UAR) between Egypt and Syria, and consequent enthusiasm and hope for a radical change in regional politics, Palestinian students sought a wider arena for furthering national aspirations. Support from Nasser is widely acknowledged to have been central to the success of the GUPS Founding Conference in 1959.⁵³² All interviewees have confirmed that Nasser encouraged Palestinian student transnational efforts. Some suggest Nasser's support was a sincere demonstration of pan-Arab attachment to the Palestinian cause while others have implied he did so in order to control Palestinian student activities. What is certain is that UAR provided the central arena – the “political opportunity”⁵³³ to quote Tilly – for Palestinian student transnational mobilisation.

Zuhair Al-Khatib, President of the PSU in 1958, recounted that:

In 1958 there was an international conference for students in Beijing. There were delegations from all over the world and there was also a delegation of students from the Arab world: Morocco, Algeria, Tunis, Lebanon, etc. Most of the Arab countries had student unions, while we [Palestinians] had only a league (*rabta*) for Palestinian students in Cairo, and there was also another league in Alexandria. In Beijing we started thinking and discussing the idea of creating a general union for Palestinian students. Then, when we went back to Cairo we followed up with the discussion. At that time I was the PSU Treasurer and when we held new elections I was elected as the PSU President, and we started working for the establishment of the general union.⁵³⁴

⁵³¹ The relevance of “transnationalism” as a defining factor of Palestinian identity and its political implications has been discussed in several studies. See for example: Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Laleh Khalili "Virtual Nation: Palestinian Cyberculture in Lebanese Camps" in Rebecca L Stein, and Ted Swedenburg., *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 126-149; Helena Lindholm Schulz and Juliane Hammer, *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland* (London: Routledge, 2003) and Miriyam Aouragh, *Palestine Online: Transnationalism, the Internet and the Construction of Identity*, (London: I.B. Tauris Academic Studies, 2011). Also, see the introduction to this thesis for further elaboration.

⁵³² See for example Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World*. All interviewees confirmed this.

⁵³³ On political opportunity see McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*

⁵³⁴ Al-Khatib.

Al-Khatib confirmed that it was the engagement in international spaces that contributed to student awareness of the need to develop their structure into a transnational union, one which would voice the ambitions of the scattered Palestinian society

Said Kamal, a member of the GUPS Executive Committee in the 1960s, recalled a different beginning. He suggests that the idea of a transnational union came to Palestinian students in Iraq in the aftermath of the 1958 coup which removed the Hashemite monarchy. Kamal reported how these students were expelled from Iraq for their espousal of pan-Arabism ideology following antagonism between Nasser and Abdel-Karim Qassem, the Iraqi officer who came to power after the coup. He recalls they started working towards the establishment of the union with the support of Iraqi colleagues.⁵³⁵ Though endorsed by Brand in her account of the establishment of GUPS, this version was not confirmed by other interviewees.⁵³⁶ When interviewed, some students who had been with Kamal in Iraq did not recall the existence of any association in Baghdad, not even after the 1958 coup.⁵³⁷

Far more significant, as consistently pointed out by informants, is the central role played by Palestinian students in Syria in inaugurating the preparatory process for the creation of GUPS. Palestinians in Damascus had been politically active since the early 1950s. In the second half of the decade some Palestinian youth attempted to establish a political movement independent from other Arab parties and exclusively concerned with the liberation of Palestine. This led to the establishment of the *'Arab mn Falestin* (Arabs of Palestine), a small clandestine organisation made up primarily of high school students. Hayel Abdelhamid is widely recognised as one of the main

⁵³⁵ Kamal suggests that Saddam Hussein, at that time in Cairo, contributed to the establishment of the Union. Said Kamal, interview by author, Cairo, 11 April 2013. Said Kamal was a member of the GUPS executive committee between 1964 and 1969.

⁵³⁶ Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World*, 71.

⁵³⁷ Ghantous; Ahmad Khalifeh, interview by author, Damascus 20 April 2012. Khalifeh was a member of the Student Association in Syria in 1957.

founders and most committed leaders of *'Arab mn Falestin*.⁵³⁸ According to his younger brother Marwan Abdelhamid, a GUPS member in the early 1960s:

At that time [1956-57] the strongest parties were the Ba'ath and the MAN while the Islamic parties-*Hzb al-Tahrir* (the Party of Liberation) and Muslim Brotherhood- were quite agile. All these parties tried to recruit Palestinians and many Palestinians were actually joining them as there were no other available alternatives for mobilising and liberating Palestine. Hayel believed that it was inconceivable that Palestinians had to join traditional parties while they were supposed to be the vanguard in the struggle for the liberation of Palestine! So, he insisted on the idea of being the vanguard. Other parties had their political programmes already set and they had their own interests and specific ideologies, but when you are a Palestinian you do not have anything else to fight for, you do not have social or economic claims. Your claim is only one, your magic words are 'Palestine and the right of return to Palestine'⁵³⁹

'Arab mn Falestin worked at grassroots levels with encamped refugees in an attempt to politically reorganise the Palestinian people. It only ever was a minor political initiative, and was later disbanded, but *'Arab mn Falestin* did contribute to the mobilisation of Palestinian youth. Marwan Abdelhamid explained:

But who are the people that can lead this reorganisation? The students. I am not saying that *'Arab mn Falestin* established the student league [in Damascus], but it disseminated the idea [of mobilising youth] as the leaders were all convinced that the students represented the new educated generation.⁵⁴⁰

Taysir Quba'a, President of GUPS in 1964, reported that he enrolled in the University in Damascus with the specific intention of contributing to the establishment of a student *rabta*. Quba'a explained that he had not considered enrolling but did so when asked by MAN leaders to disseminate pan-Arabism among students. He recalled:

I enrolled in the Faculty of Dentistry where attendance was compulsory. I used to see other students in the cafeteria, after class. I would go while still wearing my white coat, so they used to call me 'the doctor'. But soon I realised that the compulsory attendance was preventing me from focusing on student organising as much as I wanted. So, I quit dentistry and I enrolled in Arts and Literature (*adab*) that did not require [mandatory] attendance.⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁸ For an account of the establishment and development of "Arabs of Palestine" see Faysal Hourani, *Al-Watan fi Dhakira* [The Nation in the memory](Ramallah: Dar al-Tadwir, 2010).

⁵³⁹ Abdelhamid, interview by author, Amman, 17 September 2013. Abdelhamid was among the funders of GUPS Yugoslavia branch.

⁵⁴⁰ Abdelhamid.

⁵⁴¹ Taysir Quba'a, interview by author, Amman, 28 December 2011. Quba'a was GUPS president in 1964/1965.

In Syria, like the other places where Palestinian students were organising, youth became the engine of a radical break from traditional politics, marked by the establishment of a Palestinian Student Association (PSA). The students decided to establish an “association” rather than a “union” or “league” in order to abide by the Syrian law that forbade political, but allowed, cultural associations.⁵⁴² It has not been possible to determine the exact date PSA was set up.⁵⁴³ Like other student groups in the region, the PSA in Damascus was represented by a steering group which included activists from the strongest political groups in the city – Ba’ath, MAN and *‘Arab mn Falestin*.

When the Association’s members were contacted by their counterparts in Cairo, all shared the belief that a transnational union was fundamental for the direct engagement of the Palestinian people in their struggle. Zuhair Al-Khatib explained:

We had a preparation committee meeting in Damascus in order to organise the first conference, and we held [the conference] in the Cairo University’s theatre on the 29th of November 1959 with the participation of hundreds of Palestinian, Arab and international students. There were four official delegations of Palestinian students that formed the General Union: from Cairo, Alexandria, Damascus and Beirut. There were also delegations of Palestinian students from other cities or from secondary schools: these delegations were admitted as observers. And there were student representatives from all over the Arab region and from all over the world.⁵⁴⁴

The 29th of November was chosen for its historical significance, recalling the day in 1947 when the UN General Assembly had voted to partition Palestine, a fateful decision that paved the way for the dispossession, exile and statelessness. Twelve years later, on the same day, Palestinian youth took the first step towards redressing the condition of fragmentation caused by that historical vote.

⁵⁴² Sami Qundil, interview by author, Damascus, 1 April 2012. Qundil was one of the student association leaders.

⁵⁴³ The interviewees’ accounts differed: Sami Qundil put the official date as early as 1954. Taysir Quba dated it to 1958 and Marwan Abdelhamid around 1957.

⁵⁴⁴ Al-Khatib.

5.2 The historical context in which GUPS operated: 1959 - 1964

This section begins by analysing the regional implications for GUPS and how the turbulence of Arab politics in the early 1960s influenced the Palestinian movement. It then looks at how Palestinian politics impacted GUPS, before providing an overview of the international context in which GUPS operated.

5.2.1 Regional Politics

The UAR's breakup in 1961 engendered an unexpected convergence of different interests among progressive and reactionary regimes in the region that had permanent implications for Palestinian student mobilisation. When in 1961 Iraq threatened to invade Kuwait, Nasser, now opposing Syria, stood by Jordan and Saudi Arabia. A Ba'athist coup in Iraq in February 1963 briefly renewed hope for a united Pan-Arab front but the consequences of a further coup in Baghdad in November "pushed Nasser into détente with the conservative regimes."⁵⁴⁵ Tensions generated by events in Syria and Iraq were often exacerbated by Arab leaders who used radical rhetoric to assert their commitment to the cause of Palestine. Ba'athists – especially in Syria – attempted to discredit Nasserism by presenting themselves as the real champions of the Palestinians and by insisting on more decisive and proactive strategies to oppose Israel.⁵⁴⁶

These, and subsequent, realignments impacted Palestinian student mobilisation. Collapse of the UAR in 1961 led to the postponement of the GUPS general conference as most of its MAN-affiliated-members were arrested and expelled from Syria. Events in Iraq in 1963 influenced the composition of GUPS Executive Committee, with Ba'ath supporters being expelled from the union.

⁵⁴⁵Raymond A Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 38.

⁵⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 38.

Israeli plans to divert water from the Sea of Galilee (Lake Tiberias) provided an impulse to set aside regional rivalries. Nasser, realising the futility of engaging in premature armed conflict with Israel, called for a united Arab approach to protect the headwaters of the River Jordan. His initiative led to an Arab League summit in Cairo in February 1964. Delegates from 13 Arab states discussed for the first time the need to establish a Palestinian entity.⁵⁴⁷ In a historical decision, Ahmad Shukeiri, the Palestinian representative, was charged with initiating consultations for the creation of a Palestinian organisation. In June 1964, the *Munazzamat at-Tahrir al-Filastiniyyah* (Palestine Liberation Organization, PLO) came into being.

The decision to establish the PLO indicated that Arab leaders had little appetite for direct confrontation with Israel. For many, the creation of a Palestinian entity was a way of reducing pressure for Arab involvement in a war. Also of significance was the shift in the discourse of Arab states. They no longer simply called for the implementation of UN resolutions. Guided by the emergence of the Non-Aligned movement and its growing strength within the UN, they now situated calls for the liberation of Palestine within the anti-colonial framework adopted at the Bandung Conference in 1955. Linking the cause of Palestine with anti-colonial principles strengthened bonds of solidarity with the Third World and what was to become known as the global South. This was to have major impacts for Palestinian student politics for decades.

5.2.2 Palestinian Dimension

Regional developments shaped Palestinian politics in the early 1960s. Following the break-up of the UAR many MAN-supporting Palestinians continued to strongly support Nasserism. However, the crisis within the Pan-Arab front had dampened the expectations which many people, and particularly students had had in the late 1950s. They began to situate their liberation struggle alongside those of others. They saw how in Algeria the anti-colonial struggle of the FLN was

⁵⁴⁷ Following the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq, Abdel-Karim Qassem in 1959 expressed an intention to establish a Palestinian entity. Also, in 1963 the Arab League Conference had manifested support for one. However, nothing practical had been done.

succeeding without significant Arab support. Thus, thought many students, Arab direct involvement may not after all be *sine qua non* for the liberation of Palestine. Young Palestinians started to focus on what had made the FLN successful, coming to appreciate the revolutionary role of the peasantry. Experience in Algeria resonated more with Palestinians than classic Marxist-Leninist emphasis on the indispensable role of the industrial proletariat.⁵⁴⁸ Liberation, they began to think, could be achieved by popular movements without the support of nation states. These reflections prompted greater interest in ensuring Palestinian self-reliance.

Palestinian students were identifying with radical global discourses of revolutionary warfare and developing a more sophisticated understanding of armed struggle in the context of Palestine. The first half of the 1960s saw the growth and reinforcement of political grassroots movements which supported armed struggle. Many of the guerrilla groups formed in this period were later dismantled. Others were to become important actors in Palestinian political life, with major impacts for GUPS. For example, the Palestinian Liberation Front (PLF), established in 1961 by Ahmed Jibril and strongly supported by Syria, was a Palestinian faction supporting armed struggle and pan-Arabism. The PLF operated throughout the region. It was one of the first popular movements to contact GUPS in an attempt to coordinate military training for students.⁵⁴⁹

Of these groups, Fateh (“conquest”, a reverse acronym from *harakat al-tahrir al-watani al-Filastini*) established in 1959, became the strongest and played a central role in Palestinian politics. Fateh grew directly from the Palestinian student activism of the 1950s and transformed political dynamics within GUPS. Soon Fateh became, alongside existing parties such as MAN and Ba’ath, a powerful new contender for political influence within the student union and for control of its leadership. By the mid-1960s it had taken the driving seat.

⁵⁴⁸For the influence of the Algerian struggle on Palestinian politics see, for example, Abu Iyad and Rouleau, *My Home, My Land*. For the role of peasants in national liberation, see, *inter alia*, Sayigh, *Palestinians: from Peasants to Revolutionaries*.

⁵⁴⁹ Al-Khatib.

5.2.3 I. Fateh

Fateh's ideological roots derived from the work of the PSU in Cairo. The body had provided its founding leaders – including Yassir Arafat, Salah Khalaf, Salim Zanun and Faruq Qaddumi – with the space and opportunity to discuss the Palestinian cause and start elaborating new strategies for the struggle. On graduation, these and other PSU members had left Cairo. Like many educated and qualified Palestinians of their generation, they moved to the oil-rich Gulf, usually Kuwait, in search of employment. In his memoirs Salah Khalaf gave a detailed account:

We discovered that wherever there was a concentration of Palestinians, at that time, between '58 and '62, there was a Palestinian movement. So Hani, for instance, and his group were forming a group in Germany. Hamdan was forming a group in Austria. Kawkaban was forming a movement in Spain. Abed-Fattah was forming a group in Saudi Arabia. Abu Mazen [Mahmoud Abbas], Abu Yusef [Muhammad Youssef Al-Najjar], they were forming a group in Qatar. We were forming a movement in Kuwait. There were some others in Iraq and Gaza and Damascus. But we were the only ones who managed to have a magazine, called *Filastinuna* (Our Palestine). It was offered to us from a Lebanese from Tripoli. So, through the magazine – and there was a P. O. Box at the magazine – we became known before the others. So the others started to talk to us, to write to us. So we became the core through the P. O. Box of this magazine. And then, we managed to see each other and finally, in '62, we had a conference in Kuwait and the whole were united in Fateh.⁵⁵⁰

Key principles inspired Fateh ideology. Only armed struggle could liberate Palestine. The Palestinian revolution should be a popular struggle built around mobilisation of the masses. Palestinians had to be self-reliant, their movement had to be independent and its goal was the liberation of all parts of historical Palestine. It was important to realise how long the struggle would be and to constantly ensure younger Palestinians were drawn into the movement for national liberation.

Fateh did not reject Pan-Arabism nor the call for Arab unity. It simply inverted the priorities. It challenged the old shibboleth that “the road to Palestine had to pass through Arab capitals,” instead asserting the liberation of Palestine was the road to Arab Unity. While MAN understood the Palestinian plight as intrinsically connected to the struggle for Arab unity and advocated for major involvement by Arab states, Fateh emphasised the need for Palestinian people to lead their own

⁵⁵⁰ Abu Iyad and Rouleau *My Home My Land*, 24.

struggle for liberation. Although for the first five years after the formation of GUPS Fateh remained underground, it nevertheless, contended with pan-Arab parties for positions of power in GUPS.

5.2.4 International Dimension

In the international arena, the articulation of new ideologies and the emergence of social movements as key players in international dynamics provided GUPS with new opportunities and strategies. Scholars have pointed out that a new perception of power dynamics, influenced by the emergence of the Non-Aligned bloc and the spread of Marxism in the Third World, led to international cooperation and solidarity for a radical change of society and the whole world political system.⁵⁵¹ This new climate was characterised by a strong opposition to colonialism and neo-colonialism that deeply influenced the political developments in the global south. Third World politics provided an alternative to the polarised political dynamics of the 1960s. Student spaces were a central arena for the development of political cooperation.

GUPS benefitted from the opportunities provided by admission to IUS. In 1960, GUPS was elected to the IUS Executive Committee, a formidable achievement for a body only established a few months earlier and one which represented stateless students scattered all over the world. In the absence of national institutions able to represent Palestinian society at the international level, the Union's political engagement with IUS brought political recognition and, in due course, strengthened cooperation between the PLO and other revolutionary movements.

⁵⁵¹For an analysis of Third World Marxism and its relevance in the Middle East, see Maxine Molyneux and Fred Halliday, "Marxism, the Third World and the Middle East," *MERIP Reports*, no. 120 (1984), 18. See also Benita Parry, "Liberation Theory: Variations on Themes of Marxism and Modernity," in *Marxism, Modernity, and Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarous (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 125-149 and Patricia Ruffin, "Marxist, Neo-Marxist and Third-World Interpretations of Development," in Patricia Ruffin, *Capitalism and Socialism in Cuba: a Study of Dependency, Development and Underdevelopment* (Londre: MacMillan, 1990), 3-31.

5.3 GUPS in its Formative Years

Three trajectories that would guide GUPS's evolution were already clear at its Founding Conference. Students showed keen awareness of the political significance of having a Palestinian transnational organisation, the need for strong regional cooperation and the importance of building a presence for their subjected nation in the international arena.

The meeting opened with an "anthem" chanting the political struggle of the Palestinian people: '*Aidun* (Returning).⁵⁵² Following a tradition of political commitment typical of student movements in anti-colonial struggles, the Union's goal was a political one: students conceived of their organisation as a tool for mobilising towards liberation.⁵⁵³

GUPS' political vision was characterised by a strong pan-Arab dimension. All interviewees confirmed how Palestinian students strengthened political bonds with other Arab students and were particularly motivated to develop relationships with Algerian students.⁵⁵⁴ Delegates from unions across the Arab world attended the GUPS Founding Conference as did the President of the Organization of Arab Students (OAS) in the USA. The internal structure adopted by GUPS was inspired by those of other Arab unions.⁵⁵⁵ There were close ties with the General Union of Jordanian Students (GUJS) which was formed in Cairo around the same time as GUPS. GUJS, along with GUPS, strongly contested the categorisation by the Hashemite regime of students living in the West Bank as Jordanians and asserted that students from the West Bank or ex-West Bankers who had become refugees in Jordan should be represented by GUPS. For this, many were imprisoned.

⁵⁵² Abdelhamid. See Figure 2 attached at the end of this thesis: Abdelhamid badge for the 1959 GUPS conference.

⁵⁵³ Studies on student movements in Asia Africa and America have emphasised their political consciousness and role. See for example Anirban Barnejee, *Students and Radical Change*, (Burdwan: University of Burdwan, 2003); Dip Kapoor, (Ed.) *Education, decolonization and development: Perspectives from Asia, Africa and the Americas*, (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2009). For a detailed elaboration on this refer to chapter 1.

⁵⁵⁴ Abu Maizar; Al-Nimr.

⁵⁵⁵ Abu Maizar.

Statelessness, lack of the right to a national passport and constant precariousness to political whims in refugee-hosting states were obstacles faced by students. This included those holding Jordanian passports. For issuance of a Jordanian passport by the Hashemite authorities was not without problems. Ghantous recounted that:

I remember at that time I used to carry a Jordanian passport because we [Palestinians] did not have a Palestinian passport. Zuhair Al-Khatib used to carry a Jordanian passport. [...] When we held the first conference, the Jordanian Embassy in Cairo sent us [Palestinians with Jordanian passport] letters claiming that if we defined ourselves as Palestinians, they would withdraw our passports. I carried the Jordanian passport from 1959 until 1972, and it was withdrawn from me 17 times, but unfortunately for the Jordanian government there were a lot of [Jordanian] students studying with us in Cairo and they later took diplomatic positions [with their government] around the world, so one time I sent my passport to the [Jordanian] consul in Tunisia, he renewed it and sent it back to me. So, we were literally forbidden from calling ourselves Palestinians, Zuhair Al-Khatib also [...] had his passport withdrawn twice.⁵⁵⁶

It is worth comparing Palestinian students' pioneering contribution to the political reorganisation of their people with contexts in which student mobilisation for liberation struggles developed under the framework of a broader national movement. For example, in the struggle for Algerian liberation the *Union générale des étudiants musulmans algériens* (UGEMA) came into being only after the establishment in 1954 of the FLN.⁵⁵⁷ In the case of Palestine, however, students' transnational efforts were driven by the uniqueness of their people's plight, the absence of political institutions and the need for them to take a vanguard role and reorganise their own society.

Zuhair Al-Khatib has confirmed that students were not simply thinking of their interests, but had a broader national goal:

Our vision was simple and straightforward: the liberation of all Palestine, from the river to the sea. We started to think about creating a national body, a national movement, after the establishment of the student union.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁶ Lutuf Ghanthous, interview by author, Skype, 27 July 2012. Ghantous was GUPS president between 1961 and 1963.

⁵⁵⁷UGEMA considered itself as a Unit of Combat within the liberation struggle. UGEMA was the only autonomous NGO in the history of the Algerian Revolution. On the relation between UGEMA and FNL see Clement M. Henry, "The UGEMA Generation of Algeria's Civilian Leadership," *The Journal of North African Studies* 21, no. 5 (December 2016), 877-895 and David B. Ottaway, "Algeria," in *Students and Politics in Developing Nations*, ed. Donald Emmerson (New York: Praeger, 1968), 3-36.

⁵⁵⁸Al-Khatib.

Lutuf Ghantous' account sheds light on the political role students envisaged for GUPS from the outset:

One of the main goals of the First Conference was to set the internal structure. We decided that we would establish branches in any city that had more than 15 [Palestinian] students and these branches would have elections. It was recommended that we travel all around and try to establish contacts with student organisations and build [GUPS] branches before the second conference. Politically, we wanted to show that the Palestinians had an organisation, a liberal organisation in which elections were held. Our aim was to bring these branches together, to create an entity that represented our people, even if we were outside of our country, even if we did not have a geographical centre that we could call ours.⁵⁵⁹

This reference to the necessity to represent the Palestinian people and its demands in regional and international spaces is a constant, recurrent theme of Palestinian student politics. In Ghantous' words, GUPS was regarded by international partners as "liberal" precisely because it was legitimated by democratic elections. The preamble to the GUPS constitution enshrined the principle of popular democratic organisation as part of the "sound path to victorious return."⁵⁶⁰

GUPS Founding Conference voted to give Ba'athists a majority on its first Executive Committee. Ba'athism was already popular and the creation of the UAR had won more adherents. This was the first clear instance of what was to become a constant characteristic of post-*Nakba* Palestinian student politics: the strong and complex interrelation between student bodies and political parties. The impact on GUPS of regional politics and party contestation was to become even more evident in the years to come.

GUPS' Second Conference, planned for September 1961 in Damascus, was cancelled when Syria quit the UAR and many Arab nationalist students were arrested.⁵⁶¹ Students were active after the split, mobilising not within the framework of GUPS but through their party, namely MAN. Taysir Quba'a recounts that MAN leaders convened a meeting with party-affiliated students, urging them to mobilise in protest at the Ba'ath's decision to withdraw from the Union.

⁵⁵⁹Ghantous.

⁵⁶⁰GUPS *Constitution* (1962) Preamble.

⁵⁶¹For a detailed elaboration on the Conference see Musa Shahadeh, "HwlTajribeh Al-Ittihad Al-3am Al-Talebeh Al-Falestini" [First Experience of the general Union of Palestinian Students] *Shu'un Filastiniyah*, no. 5, (November 1971), 178-193. The second conference, originally planned for autumn 1960, was postponed until 1961, postponed again because of the UAR split and finally held in 1962.

Demonstrations were held daily for months and were repressed by the Syrian army. Quba'a reports that he was arrested three times along with other MAN-supporting students:

[the last time I was arrested] I was in a cell with other students, [...] a guard took me to see an official. The official asked me where I had my passport. I said it was at home. So he told me he would drive me home. Once there he told me to take my passport and anything else I might need and from there we went to the station. He gave me some money and he told me to leave to Beirut. I thought that George Habash had asked him to release me [...] when I arrived in Beirut Wadi' Haddad was waiting for me. He told me: "You should leave immediately to Gaza for the GUPS conference."⁵⁶²

Quba'a's account suggests both that such students owed their primary loyalty to MAN but also that party leaders knew the importance of engaging with GUPS. In the early 1960s pan-Arab movements were largely still forced to be clandestine and their relations with regional political leaders were often problematic. Political parties of all tendencies were keen to preserve and use GUPS structure and its access to institutional spaces both to advance their vision to the wider world and to recruit new cadres.

Most Palestinian students of those years were, simultaneously, active militants of political parties and committed GUPS members. Both these dimensions were considered fundamental for achieving national liberation. Parties were the arena in which revolutionary ideologies and anti-colonial strategies could be elaborated. GUPS was the transnational body able to represent Palestinian demands internationally and regionally.

The 1962 GUPS conference was impacted by regional infighting between MAN and Ba'ath. The Ba'ath-led Executive Committee prevented MAN-supporting branches from participation, sparking an internal crisis that would only be solved in 1964. Nevertheless, the 1962 conference was a fundamental moment in the articulation of GUPS political vision and in the history of vanguard role of Palestinian students. For the first time since the *Nakba* a representative body gathered and passed resolutions calling for the establishment of a Palestinian national entity, a liberation organisation and an army. Students detailed the main principles that they envisioned

⁵⁶² Quba'a.

must inspire a national liberation movement. The Union emphasised the necessity of a bottom-up strategy in building the national movement and called for revolutionary democracy and mass participation in the struggle. The Conference also insisted on the importance of a joint political and military authority able to implement armed resistance.⁵⁶³ Their ambition had now led them to create a dynamic transnational union but also to join parties and establish movements with clear anti-colonial ideologies that broke with traditional politics.

The disintegration of the UAR and events in Iraq in 1963 eventually led to a reconfiguration of power within GUPS that established the predominance of Arab Nationalists. Shahada provides a complex account of the events that led to this shift. He reported that relations between the Ba'ath-led Executive Committee and MAN-led branches were already tense by the end of 1961. Regional tensions flared within GUPS when in 1963 its Administrative Council tried to suspend Ba'athist members of the Executive Committee. Rejecting the order as illegitimate, the Ba'athists declared themselves to be the legitimate Executive Committee, formalising an *inshiqaq* (split) which threatened to destroy GUPS.⁵⁶⁴ Taysir Quba'a, an Arab nationalist GUPS leader, suggested expulsion of Ba'athists was not motivated by politics but because of their financial mismanagement.

The crisis was resolved at the Third GUPS Conference held in 1964 in Gaza. A new Executive Committee was elected. It ratified the decision to expel Ba'athists, saying they had to act to “condemn the suspended members who tried to destroy the unity of the union, to divide and embezzle its money. We expel those members from GUPS, and we would like to thank the members of the Administrative Council who brought the suspended members to trial”.⁵⁶⁵

Lutuf Ghantous, a Ba'athist and a protagonist of the 1963 crisis provided a more political analysis:

⁵⁶³Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World*, 71.

⁵⁶⁴ Quba'a. Shahadeh, "Hwl Tajribeh Al-Ittihad Al-A'aam Al-Talebeh Al-Falestini". Lutuf Ghantous version has been confirmed by Zakariah Abu Sneneh, interview by author, Amman, 2 January 2012. Abu Sneneh was a MAN affiliated GUPS member.

⁵⁶⁵Shahadeh, "Hwl Tajribeh Al-Ittihad Al-A'aam Al-Talebeh Al-Falestini".

Taysir Quba'a led a group of *Qawmiyyin* (Arab Nationalists) and occupied the offices of GUPS, backed by the Egyptian *Mukhabarat* (secret service) that deported all the Ba'athists from Egypt. [...] We asked to attend the 1964 conference in Gaza, run by the Arab Nationalists with the support of the Egyptian *Mukhabarat*, so that we could explain [to all the GUPS branches] our situation. The IUS representative guaranteed our safety. But the conference was a farce. We were allowed to answer questions but not to present our arguments. When we left with the IUS representatives, we were all imprisoned and then deported by the Egyptian police.[...] ⁵⁶⁶

Ghantous' account demonstrates the involvement of Egypt in GUPS politics and shows how the Egyptian *Mukhabarat* sought to shape developments within the Union by facilitating the deportation of the Ba'athists. Hamze Barqawi, a Ba'athist affiliated GUPS member at the time, remembered how:

They [GUPS MAN-affiliated members] accused us of stealing the money and running away, while we accused them of standing by the fascist coup in Iraq. We issued statements condemning each other. In other words, we were Syria's Ba'ath mouthpiece while they spoke in the name of Nasser's Egypt.

Nabil Sha'ath, President of the Arab Student Organization in the USA in the 1960s, explained that he was asked to preside over the conference as he was not affiliated to any party, though close to Nasser. His presidency would guarantee neutrality and regulate contestation between the two groups.⁵⁶⁷ Sha'ath recounted that he coordinated with Egyptian officials for the arrival of Ba'athist students from Syria. He confirmed that the conference was tense and recalls how it was impossible for the Ba'athist minority to make their voices heard.

The relevance of elections as a central mechanism to guarantee legitimacy was stressed by Ghantous. Presenting the Ba'athist perspective on the 1964 conference, he argued that:

We never intended to split the Palestinian student movement. During the first and second conferences we had representatives of all parties, Muslim Brothers, Communists, Ba'ath and *Qawmiyyin*. We insisted on elections and accepted the results. The [Egyptian] *Mukhabarat* put a lot of stress on our work but we did not give in. However, the student movement as an organized entity, freely elected, representing student interest and Palestine integrity, died with the Third Conference.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁶ Ghantous.

⁵⁶⁷ Nabil Sha'ath, interview by author, Amman, 08 June 2013. Sha'ath was President of the ASO in the early 60s. He has been a chief negotiator for the PLO and held several ministerial positions with the PA. Sha'ath affirmed that while he was not officially affiliated to any party at the time of the conference he was secretly a member of Fateh.

⁵⁶⁸ Ghantous.

For Ghantous, the 1964 conference marked the moment that GUPS lost its representative role. However, GUPS was able to survive the turbulent events of 1963 and to continue to assert its legitimacy, both regionally and internationally. During the crisis students showed a deft political pragmatism that allowed them to navigate the complex dynamics of Arab politics.

Zakariah Abu Sneneh, a MAN member elected GUPS treasurer in 1964, explained that MAN-affiliated students sought a majority within the Union. He reported that the new Executive Committee had five Arab Nationalists and four members of other factions:

We could not have all [the Executive Committee's members] from one movement [MAN], so we got five out of nine ... we elected Hayel Abdelhamid from the German branch ... two students affiliated with the PLF in Alexandria, Abdel-Aziz Abu Shamaleh and Maher al-Jaoumi and then Gazi Fakhri, from Cairo, who was from the Shukeiri group.⁵⁶⁹

Marwan Abdelhamid has explained how his brother Hayel (secretly a member of Fateh) was elected:

So Taysir Quba'a was elected President and Hayel was a member of the committee. No one could know that Hayel had already been appointed by Fateh for working underground in Egypt while being a member of the Union. But after the conference Hayel was expelled from Cairo so he went to Beirut where he met George Habash; they had known each other in Damascus. At that time the Arab Nationalists were in good relations with Nasser. So Habash went to Cairo and talked to Nasser so that Hayel could go back to Cairo. Of course, George Habash did not know that Hayel was the secret representative of Fateh! In Cairo, Hayel was able to build a good relationship with Nasser. He later facilitated the relationship between Egypt and Fateh. Hayel started working underground to establish a branch of the movement he and Hani had established in Germany. There were thousands of students in Egypt, a huge base from which to draw. This organisation remained underground until 1967 when it was disclosed that Hayel was a Fateh leader.⁵⁷⁰

Hayel Abdelhamid's role in GUPS further indicates, as argued above, how all parties were committed to support GUPS as the first (and oldest) of the popular unions able to represent Palestinian people regionally and internationally. George Habash did not hesitate to pressure Nasser to ensure the GUPS Executive Committee could do its work effectively. Taysir Quba'a remembers that when Hayel was expelled he feared for the future of the Executive Committee and requested support from the MAN leadership:

⁵⁶⁹ Abu Sneneh.

⁵⁷⁰ Abdelhamid.

I travelled to Beirut and went to George Habash and Hani Al Hindi, and I said to them: if Hayel does not return I will not be able to lead the Union, and this is my resignation. I will not go back to Egypt without Hayel. [...] In the end George Habash and Hani Al-Hindi travelled to Cairo and met Nasser who ordered to let him return, so I returned with Hayel.⁵⁷¹

Hayel Abdelhamid' strategy to work undercover to establish a branch of his movement confirms how by the mid-1960s a strong commitment to the party of affiliation characterised students' participation in GUPS. Zakaria Abu Sneneh's testimony confirms the anti-colonial organic vanguard role played by GUPS members:

[...] we got involved in the Union committees, but we still followed the party [MAN]. I told the party's leaders that I would not quit the party, I continued my political engagement in both the Union and the party and I liked the latter more as I knew that the party remained the political reference point. [...] In 1964 we went to China, and the delegation was headed by Taysir; the Chinese government invited us because at that time there were no other representatives for Palestine, only us, we were there before Shuqairy. We stayed 18 days in China [...] when we were asked about GUPS strategy, we presented MAN's strategy as GUPS did not have a strategy for the struggle [...] when they asked: 'How do you want to struggle?' we provided the MAN answers – that we want to liberate Palestine – and we spoke about resistance, and the three Ts (*tansiq*: coordination, *tawrit*: entanglement, and *tawqit*: timing).⁵⁷²

5.3.1 Organisational Structure

GUPS' structure is set out in its Constitution.⁵⁷³ It reflects both its political mandate to represent a people scattered all over the world and the aspiration to work towards implementing an overarching vision, while acknowledging the autonomy of local branches scattered across the Palestinian diaspora. The result was a pyramidal structure that sought to guarantee GUPS organisational cohesion from the top and democratic practices from its base upwards.⁵⁷⁴ In a booklet published in 1970 GUPS clearly stated that their structures were inspired by the principle of democratic centralism "in order to safeguard student unity and maintain effective control over the various branches."⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷¹Quba'a.

⁵⁷²Abu Sneneh.

⁵⁷³Unless otherwise stated, this analysis is based on the GUPS Constitution 1964. The constitution was amended in 1964, 1978 and 1984.

⁵⁷⁴ See Figure 3 attached at the end of the thesis: GUPS STRUCTURE.

⁵⁷⁵ *General Union of Palestine Students. - L'Union Générale Des Etudiantst [=Etudiants] De La Palestine: 2nd World Conference On Palestine. Amman, 2-6 September 1970. N.pl.: [General Union of Palestine Students.]*

Concerning membership criteria, all Palestinians enrolled in any tertiary institution, *jama'at* (universities) or *kullyyat* (colleges), were eligible to be active members.⁵⁷⁶ Would-be members had to submit applications to the local branch whose executive committee was responsible for approving them. Any suspension or expulsion of members has to be in the general assembly of the branch.⁵⁷⁷ The general assembly was made up of all active members of the branch and had the right to elect the branch's Executive Committee as well as the representative to the transnational Conference.

The Constitution clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the three transnational bodies that govern the Union. The Conference is the highest authority, its members elected by local general assemblies using a proportional voting system. The agenda of the Conference is set by the Executive Committee and it should be sent to the local branches two months in advance. Local branches can request inclusion of other points to the agenda which, if rejected by the Executive Committee, may then be discussed and voted on during the Conference. The structure thus served to promote executive efficiency while guaranteeing the democratic right of branches to participate in all political discussion and decision-making. The GUPS pyramidal model was taken up by other Palestinian popular unions such as the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) which was founded in 1965.⁵⁷⁸ The GUPS model served as a template for attempts to guarantee democratic representation to people scattered across different countries and to offer some order and functionality amidst the challenge of dispossession and the absence of a homeland.

The Conference is the legislative body of the Union, shapes its general policies, discusses the reports of the nine-member Executive Committee, approves the new budget and elects the 25

⁵⁷⁶There are three categories of members: active members, observer members and honorary members. Observer members are secondary school students and students of vocational institutions. Honorary members are students who, while being active members have greatly served the union (i.e. ex-members of the transnational directive board and Executive Committee, members of the Executive Committee of the local branches).

⁵⁷⁷Article 2 points 3-11.

⁵⁷⁸For an account of how GUPS provided support for the establishment of the GUPW see Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World*.

members of the Administrative Council. The Administrative Council serves as the link between the legislative body (the Conference) and the executive body (the Executive Committee). Through oversight of the Executive Committee, it seeks to ensure the will of the Union's broader constituency is respected and implemented.

The GUPS constitution attributes the central role of the organisation to the Administrative Council. However, most interviewees did not recall any meeting or any particular interaction between the Council and Executive Committee: apart from the Administrative Council role in the 1963 crisis, the Administrative Council was rarely mentioned by interviewees. Zakaria Abu Sneneh recalled how during the 1965 elections, in agreement with his MAN comrades, he agreed to compromise regarding the composition of the Executive Committee. Taysir Quba'a told him it was more important to assure MAN's numerical superiority on the Administrative Council, rather than ensuring they had the numbers to lead the Executive Committee. Generally, when asked about meetings and decision-making processes, former GUPS members refer exclusively to the Executive Committee, suggesting that the executive held effective control of GUPS.

The GUPS constitution identifies three main fields of intervention. When it came to external relations, the task of coordinating liaison with Arab and international actors was allocated to two members of the Executive Committee. In the field of internal relations the GUPS Vice President and the Secretary of the Executive Committee are responsible for communication with branches. In the field of administration two Executive Committee members are charged with guaranteeing accountability and transparency.

While the constitution stipulated weekly meetings of the Executive Committee, interviewees recalled there were no set times and dates for its meetings. Committee members were

constantly in touch. They were at the office, in Cairo, every day all day, and sometimes even slept there. It was, said one, “a 24/7 job.”⁵⁷⁹

The Executive Committees between 1959 and 1964 were almost exclusively male. However, several former members recall the contribution made by women. Taysir Quba’a has often praised the contribution of Jihad Salameh in the Palestinian delegation to the IUS meeting in Sofia in 1964 and her visits to and supervision of several branches in Europe.

The Constitution specifies that the Union can accept any unconditional financial donation. This insistence on unconditionality was a way of guaranteeing the Union’s political independence. During the 1960s the Union was able to collect important donations by regional actors. The King of Morocco provided an annual contribution to the Union as did the Kuwaiti government.⁵⁸⁰

As noted earlier, the precisely calibrated democratic mechanisms developed by GUPS were sacrificed to political considerations during the 1964 conference. The necessity to preserve the union’s transnational role in a field of contestation for Palestinian and Arab political movements prevailed over the liberal-democratic practises envisaged in the constitution. This pragmatism allowed the Union to preserve its role in representing its constituency in regional and international arenas.

5.3.2 Armed Struggle

Palestinian students, wherever they were found, considered armed resistance part of legitimate strategies for the liberation of Palestine. Indeed, the first GUPS Constitution unambiguously indicated that one of its political goals is “to prepare Palestinian students for the war of return.”⁵⁸¹ The political transformations of the 1960s favoured the translation of this vision into seeking military training. Fanon’s understanding of armed resistance as a liberation-based act against the violence of the coloniser shaped Third World anti-colonial struggles and resonated

⁵⁷⁹Quba’a.

⁵⁸⁰*Ibid.*

⁵⁸¹Article 3 point 14.

deeply for Palestinians. The struggle for Algerian independence reinforced the idea that anti-colonial wars could be won through direct confrontation. The emergence of Palestinian guerrilla movements with strategies for armed struggle stimulated the interest of military activities in GUPS. Zuhair Al-Khatib recounted that after its establishment GUPS was contacted by Ahmad Jibril, the leader of the Syrian-backed PLF who proposed establishment of a Palestinian *fida'i* group within GUPS. These contacts were interrupted when Syria split from the UAR, and never developed into concrete cooperation.⁵⁸²

GUPS placed armed resistance at the core of its political vision but was unable to itself organise military activities. The military training which students did receive was provided by the popular movements emerging in the 1960s. In the intertwined relation between the Union and the guerrilla movements students played a dual role, that of armed militants and also members of GUPS. Interviewees who were former members of GUPS in Lebanon recounted that students participated in military training organised by MAN. Leila Khaled and Assad Abdel-Rahman, remember that MAN arranged a two-week training open to GUPS members as early as 1963. Khaled explained that participants were not all Palestinians for it was open to all MAN-affiliated Arab students. The training included theoretical lectures and practical exercises with the few rifles they had available: “it was about understanding warfare, as if we were preparing... as if we were thinking about waging a popular war. ... It served mainly to motivate us for the armed struggle.”⁵⁸³ Palestinian students saw themselves situated within a tradition of armed resistance practised by the Chinese, Vietnamese, Cubans, Algerians and others.⁵⁸⁴ Armed resistance was a fundamental

⁵⁸²Ahmad Jibril was a Syrian Army officer and the founder of PLF. During the period of Syrian-Egyptian unity (1958-61) he was often in Cairo where he met with Al-Khatib and other GUPS members daily. After the split he could not return to Cairo.

⁵⁸³Leila Khaled interview by author, 1 August 2015, Amman. Khaled was the first Palestinian woman hijacker, currently member of the PFLP political Bureau.

⁵⁸⁴See for example various covers of Fateh's Revolutionary Studies and Experiences series, published throughout the 1960s in Karma Nabulsi, and Abdel Razzaq Takriti, eds., *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016.

<http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/uploads/sources/588c76c293b61.pdf>

expression of mass mobilisation. It was seen as the enactment of popular general will. This conviction characterised Palestinian politics throughout the 1960s.

5.3.3 Public Mobilisation

Public mobilisation activities aimed at achieving the Union's goals were outlined in the Constitution. Article 3 categorises GUPS as not just a union but "the intellectual vanguard organisation" of the Palestinian people.⁵⁸⁵

GUPS lobbied for the rights of students. From the outset, it called for greater study opportunities for Palestinian youth. As early as the 1959 Founding Conference its leaders were negotiating with East European student unions to lobby for more scholarships for Palestinians.

Marwan Abdelhamid recalled:

The first agreement was signed with Tito's Yugoslavia. They gave us two scholarships to study there. But we did not know how to award the two scholarships as we had four branches at that time. So Lutuf Ghantous had a brilliant idea and suggested to the Yugoslavians that they should divide the scholarships: instead of having two scholarships for 25 dollars each we would have four for 12.5 dollars each. By doing so each GUPS branch was granted a scholarship.⁵⁸⁶

Abdelhamid, who obtained the scholarship given by the Damascus branch, reported that competition was ferocious as over 700 students applied. GUPS provided logistical support to negotiate the minefield of constant bureaucratic hurdles which stateless Palestinians had to overcome in order to travel. Abdelhamid's recalled that:

When I won the scholarship the UAR had already been established and some of the Ministries were in Syria while others were in Egypt. When I presented my papers for travelling to the Ministry of Education in Syria they refused my application claiming that the scholarship agreement should have been ratified through the government, not just by GUPS, even if it addressed only Palestinians. We had to start a long fight with the Ministry. Mohammad Saleh Subh conducted the negotiation as a GUPS leader. [...] I was told by the Minister of Education Amjad al Traboulsi that the competent institution [on the matter] was the Central Ministry of Education in Egypt. [...] I informed Lutuf Ghantous, we travelled to Cairo and I met the Minister through Lutuf. Eventually I obtained the visa and travelled to Yugoslavia. I was supposed to arrive to Yugoslavia in August 1960 but I was able to leave only in May 1961, basically at the end of the academic year.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁵Article 3 points 12, 13 and 14.

⁵⁸⁶Abdelhamid.

⁵⁸⁷*Ibid.*

In the absence of national institutions able to support students with administrative and bureaucratic issues, and with differing regulations imposed on Palestinians by various hosting states forever complicating their daily lives, GUPS took responsibility and filled the void.

The publication of magazines and leaflets was an important tool for disseminating information about the Palestinian question and raising awareness among the international community. All GUPS branches published leaflets and informative material and some had widely distributed journals. At the transnational level GUPS produced and distributed several booklets throughout the 1960s. They detailed the historical roots of the Palestinian question, emphasising the colonial origin of the struggle and were intended for raising awareness among the international community. A 1962 pamphlet, *Palestinian Refugee*, was published by the Coordinating Secretariat of the National Union of Students suggesting that GUPS coordination with international partners was fundamental for the dissemination of Palestinian discourse. The pamphlet focused on the conditions of the refugees, gave a historical account of their struggle for return and outlined the role GUPS had assumed in response to the exile, dispersion and statelessness of those they represented.⁵⁸⁸ A 1964 booklet, entitled *The Palestinian Question in Digest*, was intended for those attending the IUS Congress and presented a broad overview of the Palestinian struggle, highlighting both its Arab and international dimension.⁵⁸⁹ GUPS also published a periodical, *Jabal al-Zaitun* (Mount of Olives), which was widely distributed.⁵⁹⁰ By means of constant community engagement GUPS sought to reorganise a fractured society. As the first post-*Nakba* popular organisation it played a central role in supporting the creation of other unions and promoting broad cooperation among different sectors. Taysir Quba'a remembered:

⁵⁸⁸ *The refugee of Palestine*, published for the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) by the Coordinating Secretariat of the National Unions of Students (1962).

⁵⁸⁹ *The Palestine Question in Digest* Submitted to the IUS 8th Conference Sofia (GUPS, 1964).

⁵⁹⁰ Only few numbers of the 1966 issue are held at the Library of Congress in Washington but at the time of this research they were not available for consultation. Though thus impossible to analyse the contents of the magazine, it should be pointed out that according to the majority of the interviewees *Jabal al-Zaitun* helped reach a broad audience across the world.

We offered a room in our headquarters to establish the women union. We took care of printing costs and all such logistic things. The President at that time was Samira Abu Ghazaleh. She was very active indeed and was constantly contacting people inside and outside Egypt to establish branches. The same happened with the Workers' Union. Its President Husni Al-Khuffash was always at our headquarters, calling and organising actions.⁵⁹¹

The constant interaction among the different popular organisations is confirmed by the experience of local branches. GUPS' branch in Iraq often published political statements along with the Workers Union. Even more consistent was cooperation between GUPS and worker and student unions in West Germany. They organised political work side by side and the activities of the two unions often overlapped. Abdallah Frangi, a GUPS member in Germany in the early 60s, reported:

We also established the Palestinian worker union as the number of Palestinian workers in Germany was growing rapidly since Germany needed workers after WWII. We tied them first to the Palestinian students' union and then they established their own union. Therefore, the first two Palestinian unions in the diaspora, aside from the Arab countries, were the student and the worker unions in Germany. We began the political and unionist work helping every student to learn the language, to enrol at university and with their employment. So we had a large number of offices spread all over Germany, 24 student branches and 26 workers branches. Nabil Nassar, a Christian and a wonderful person, in order to better understand and address the workers, read the Qur'an three times more than I did.⁵⁹²

His recollections clearly indicate the importance which students attached to constant and direct engagement with the broader community.

5.3.4 Diplomatic Actions

Throughout the 1960s diplomatic actions were at the heart of GUPS *modus operandi*. GUPS was able to cultivate, reinforce and expand the relations the PSU had built with other student unions and with international organisations during the previous decade. At a time when Cold War rivalries were fracturing the international student movement, GUPS was particularly focused on relations with the IUS and with the International Students Conference (ISC), the rival body set up in response to what was perceived as Soviet-bloc control of the IUS. At the time, IUS and ISC were competing to attract students unions to affiliate with them, especially those in Asia

⁵⁹¹ Quba'a.

⁵⁹² Abdallah Frangi, Skype interview, 28 July 2012. Frangi was a Fateh affiliated GUPS member in Germany and Europe in the mid-60s early 70s. He held several representative positions in Germany for the PLO and later the PA.

and Africa. A noted achievement was when in 1962 IUS declared its commitment to celebrate May 15 as the “Day of Solidarity with Palestine.”⁵⁹³ This indicated clearly how, thanks largely to GUPS, Palestine now sat at the core of international politics, embedded within the wider context of global anti-imperialist struggle.

The diplomatic pressure GUPS exerted on IUS and the strong international support Palestinian students enjoyed are reflected in IUS resolutions. These resolutions were less concerned with students’ issues than with the broader Palestinian struggle for recognition and the right of return. Students were challenging the hegemonic (in the Gramscian sense)⁵⁹⁴ discourse of Zionism in international spaces.

In 1961, the IUS Executive Committee called upon the IUS Secretary to inform the United Nations about IUS support for the Palestinian struggle.⁵⁹⁵ IUS produced a memorandum which was submitted to the UN General Assembly. It denounced imperialist support for Israel, emphasised US and British responsibilities for colonisation of Palestine and decried the inability or unwillingness of the UN to enforce measures to realise Palestinian rights, most importantly the right of return.⁵⁹⁶ It was a strong political statement that reflected the radical political vision of young Palestinians who denounced the collusion of international powers with the colonisation of Palestine. Thus, IUS statements in 1961, 1962 and 1963 expressly stated that IUS “reaffirms the support to Palestinian people and students and their representative organisation (The General Union of Palestinian Student) in their struggle to return to their homeland.”⁵⁹⁷

Political recognition was the central goal of GUPS diplomatic actions. Taysir Quba’a explained that GUPS aimed at gaining political legitimacy within international spaces. The Union was

⁵⁹³Sharif Al-Husseini, *Mwajha Al-nashatat Al-sahyun a’ala al-sayed al-tullabi* [Confronting Zionist activities at the student level] (Beirut, Organization for the Liberation of Palestine: Research Centre, 1968).

⁵⁹⁴ David R Howarth, “Gramsci, Hegemony and Post-Marxism,” in *Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Mark McNally (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

⁵⁹⁵Al-Husseini, *Mwajha Al-nashatat Al-sahyuni*, 47.

⁵⁹⁶*A Nation in Exile. May 15, Day of Solidarity With Palestine Students and Refugees*. Prague: I.U.S.

⁵⁹⁷ IUS Executive Committee, Algeria May 1963. Decision on Palestine in Al-Husseini, *Mwajha Al-nashatat Al-sahyuni*, 54.

constantly acting to raise awareness about the Zionist settler colonial project among student bodies. Quba'a has reported how during the 1964 IUS Conference in Sofia the GUPS delegation decided to challenge the presence of Israeli student representatives, questioning whether they should be allowed to continue as IUS members. He reported that he spent the whole conference talking to participants coming from all over the world about Palestine. In this sense, Quba'a suggested that recognition was not enough, Palestinian youth also wanted political support. He recounted:

During a session, one of the conference's organisers took me on the side and told me 'Taysir do you know how much each single day of this conference costs us?! You keep bringing the Palestinian question up, preventing the assembly from discussing other issues. You are blocking the conference. What you are aiming at? Let us move on.' But I had no intention to let it go! I was sitting next to a Panamanian representative and he had asked me where I was from. When I said Palestine he had no idea what I was talking about so I pointed it on the map and he said 'ah, Israel!' and I said 'No! Palestine!' So I decided to make sure everyone at the conference would know Palestine and understand our history and struggle. I was determined to explain to everyone our cause and our reasons.⁵⁹⁸

Since the early 1960s, IUS provided GUPS with a suitable space for advancing Palestinian demands. The Sofia conference represented an important victory for GUPS efforts to highlight the link between Zionism and Western imperialism. The IUS noted that Israeli governments were the "basis of imperialism, aggression and oppression against the Arab people a bastion for American imperialism that uses it [Israel] as a base for penetrating Asian and African countries."⁵⁹⁹

Conference delegates approved a motion that:

We also consider the attempts by U.S. imperialists and their Zionist agents to deceive the conscience of the Arab and Jewish masses, through bringing out the Palestinian cause as an issue of racism, to turn the attention of the progressive forces in the world about the nature of the anti-colonial struggle of the Palestinian people, and their struggle to regain their historic rights. The struggle of the Palestinian people and students is not only in favor of the Arabs, but also is in favor of the forces that believe in peace and progress in the world, because this struggle is a part of all the struggles of anti-colonial forces against the colonial powers.⁶⁰⁰

GUPS had obtained solid support from other Third World countries, contesting Israeli diplomatic pressures and working to delegitimise Zionism not just in IUS gatherings, but through outreach to student and youth movements worldwide. In 1964, for instance, GUPS participated in

⁵⁹⁸ Quba'a.

⁵⁹⁹ Al-Husseini, *Mwajha Al-nashatat Al-sahyuni*, 58.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

the International Conference of World Assembly of Youth (WAY) and successfully lobbied for a declaration supporting the Palestinian right of return and condemning Israeli colonialism.⁶⁰¹

Relations between GUPS and the ISC produced fewer practical results. GUPS was generally skeptical towards the ISC due to its perceived pro-western affiliations. However, it did recognise the need to reach out to ISC and to attend its conferences. In 1960, GUPS obtained the status of observer member. It was clear, however, that the kind of support ISC could offer to the Palestinians was different from that available from IUS. ISC statements and recommendations in the early 1960s focused mainly on cooperation and support in student matters, using apolitical language and generally avoiding expressions of political solidarity.⁶⁰²

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how GUPS acted as an anti-colonial vanguard. The political dynamism of Palestinian students during the 1950s had enabled the emergence of GUPS as the first transnational popular organisation of the post-*Nakba* period. GUPS was the first successful attempt to organise dispersed Palestinians into a structured national organisation able to operate transnationally. During the 1960s the Union functioned as an internal arena of mobilisation in which newly emerging movements and guerrilla groups could recruit and train adherents. Simultaneously, it acted as a Palestinian representative body at the international level, until the formal establishment of the PLO in 1964.

This chapter has analysed the key factors which drove the foundation of GUPS in 1959: Palestinian students' vanguard role in the political mobilisation of their people; the regional Pan-Arab climate that facilitated connections and exchanges among Palestinian students scattered throughout the region and the engagement with international student spaces in which new radical

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.* 61-63.

ideologies were discussed and cooperation and solidarity between Third World liberation movements were promoted.

It has been demonstrated how student activism was integral to Palestinian political life. Students contributed not only to creation of the first transnational union but they were also active militants –and often even founders – of the radical movements that emerged in those years. These interconnections and cross-fertilisation between the Union and parties and movements were a constant in the early life of GUPS life and contributed to the elaboration of strategies of liberation in the following years. Indicative of this was the participation of GUPS members in military training organised by political parties. In the first half of the 1960s Palestinian political movements acknowledged the relevance of the Union as still the only body able to represent Palestinians in regional and international spaces and attempted to influence the composition of its executive body.

The synergistic development of parties and GUPS attests to the students' role of organic vanguard as articulated in the first chapters of this thesis. Students were at the forefront of the elaboration of strategies of liberation within popular movements and led the reorganisation of their scattered society. They inspired other sectors of society to similarly build transnational structures with mass support which were able to voice Palestinian aspirations for recognised nationhood. After establishment of the PLO in 1964 GUPS was able to identify its shortcomings and lack of the kind of organic relation with those it represented and which GUPS had forged. The following chapter will explore how this critique shaped the complex relation between GUPS and PLO in the following few years and contributed to the shift of the organisation into a revolutionary movement rooted among the masses by the end of the 1960s.

6 CHAPTER SIX

GUPS AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT (1964-1969)

Introduction

The establishment of the PLO in 1964 inaugurated a new era of institutional reorganisation and political developments which brought Palestine to the attention of the international order. The political vacuum that students had worked hard to fill before 1964 was now largely occupied by the PLO. Yet, while the PLO enjoyed diplomatic legitimacy and political support at the regional level, it lacked a direct connection with the masses, the kind of organic relation with its constituency that would guarantee it popular legitimacy.⁶⁰³ In the latter half of the 1960s, GUPS was challenged to define its relation with the PLO and adjust its role according to changed national, regional and international circumstances. From now on, GUPS would act less as a political representative of the Palestinian people and more as one of what were by now several sectoral unions, part of a broader society represented by the PLO. While GUPS supported the establishment of the PLO, it regretted it had not emerged from grassroots engagement with the scattered Palestinian people. Thus, initially GUPS avoided full integration into the structure of the PLO. It continued to operate independently, urging the PLO towards a more revolutionary bottoms-up movement. Intimate relations were forged between GUPS members and emerging groups of *fida'iyin* and students often enlisted in the guerilla ranks. The fact that relations were often strained between the PLO and various guerilla groups added to cynicism within GUPS towards the PLO.

On New Year's Day 1965, Fateh announced the launch of armed struggle. This changed even further the political balance at the national and regional level. As Palestinian guerrilla movements emerged as major players in regional politics and challenged the political status quo, GUPS internal dynamics were impacted. It had to better define its relation and interactions with the

⁶⁰³ For an elaboration of the organic relation as outlined by Gramsci see Chapter 2.

popular movements within the framework of what had become genuine, no longer theoretical, armed struggle. In this new climate of commitment to armed struggle, GUPS became the arena *par excellence* in which the PLO and the emerging movements flexed their muscles and contended for control.

GUPS remained one of the most important and widely respected Palestinian popular organisations. It gained an unprecedented level of engagement in international spaces. As an organisation, it had grown significantly. By 1966 it had 27 local branches throughout the Middle East, North Africa, Europe and the USA, and an estimated membership of 15,000.⁶⁰⁴ Its presence on the ground and connections with far-flung exile communities made GUPS a space from which the PLO could seek support and new recruits.

Analysis of the increasingly complex interactions between GUPS, the new guerilla movements and the PLO in the mid/late 1960s serves to further confirm the theory of students as anti-colonial vanguards. Even though there was now a recognised national political body GUPS role expanded. With its access to international student spaces and the political support it enjoyed from liberation movements, it was positioned to advocate for recognition of the PLO as the Palestinian national movement.

This chapter analyses GUPS' political development and activism in the first half decade of the existence of the PLO. It begins with an overview of the main historical events that characterised this period and how they shaped opportunities and challenges for the student movement. The second part focuses on GUPS history, its relations with newly emergent actors and its role following the launch of armed struggle in 1965. This chapter focuses on four themes: GUPS political background, armed struggle, mobilisation strategies and diplomatic actions.

⁶⁰⁴Gert Van Maanen, *The International Student Movement. History and Background* (The Hague: International Documentation and Information Centre, 1967), 324.

6.1 Historical background

This section outlines the main political developments that characterised the period under considerations at the internal regional and international levels.

6.1.1 Palestinian political developments

The PLO was established in May 1964 and quickly became an acknowledged regional actor, legitimised by Arab diplomacy. GUPS representative role was now eclipsed as it no longer was the sole Palestinian national referent in regional and international arenas. During the PLO's earliest days GUPS criticised its elitist composition while also acknowledging that the creation of the national body was as a positive step towards national liberation.

The launch of the Palestinian revolution represented the other major development which had important consequences for GUPS. For Palestinians, the start of the revolution would become known as *al-intilqa* (the launching), referring to New Year's Day 1965 when *Al-'Asifa*, Fateh's military wing, announced that from the Jordanian-controlled West Bank it had launched sabotage operations against Israeli settlement projects in northern Palestine. These raids back into occupied Palestine were not the first attempts to confront the occupation forces – for in 1964 Fateh and MAN's Palestinian branch had organised other operations. The 1965 *intilqa*, however, was for the first time announced through a press release. While the PLO, established a few months earlier, was seen as a somewhat aloof institution that had originated from Arab diplomacy, *Al-'Asifa* operations captured the imagination of the Palestinian masses. *Al-'Asifa* communique appealed

... to the Arabs of Palestine, to our single Arab nation and to lovers of freedom everywhere to aid the fighting men of *Al-'Asifa* in their heroic struggle. We pledge ourselves to fight until Palestine is liberated and resumes its place in the very heart of the Arab world.⁶⁰⁵

The emergence of guerrillas onto centre stage influenced the political life of GUPS. More students joined the various groups which emerged and more engaged in military activities. The

⁶⁰⁵Al-'Asifa Forces General Command. Military Communiqué No.1.From the Headquarters, 1 January 1965. In Documents on Palestine Volume II: 1948-1973, Jerusalem: The Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, 2007. Available through Nabulsi and Takriti, *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016.

militants of the guerrilla movements shared with GUPS members a critique of Arab traditional politics, offering an alternative strategy to what many saw as the empty politics of Arab states. GUPS was forced to define its relation with the guerrilla movements as well as with the PLO. Tensions between different political groups intensified in the second half of the 1960s and affected relations between local GUPS branches and the executive committee. However, GUPS managed to preserve its independence even as parties and movements kept influencing it and contesting within it.

Student engagement with armed struggle increased further after 1967 and the Arab defeat in the Six Day War. The *Naksa* (setback) indicated to Palestinian students and the masses that Arab strategies would not liberate Palestine and that guerrilla warfare had more potential to destabilise the Zionist state than conventional war.⁶⁰⁶ For MAN and its founders this led to a re-elaboration of strategies and a re-organisation of structures. While still emphasising the relevance of a pan-Arab framework and strategy for the liberation of Palestine, George Habash and his comrades recognised the “urgent need for the continued independent existence of a Palestinian branch” that would invest in armed struggle.⁶⁰⁷ This decision led to the establishment of *al-Jabhah al-Sha`biyyah li-Tahrir Filastin*, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

Confidence that self-reliance and armed struggle might bring liberation from occupation was boosted in March 1968 when Palestinian guerrillas resisted an Israeli army attack on a *fidai`iyin* camp in the Jordanian border town of Karama. Israel managed to destroy the camp and killed and captured many guerrillas but sustained an unexpectedly high rate of casualties as the Jordanian army was drawn into battle alongside the *fidai`iyin*. The resilience displayed by the Palestinian fighters marked a turning point, making the resistance movements pivotal actors in both Palestinian and regional politics.

⁶⁰⁶ On the Six Days war see Wm Roger Louis and Avi Shlaim, *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War Origins and Consequences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁶⁰⁷ Kazzuha, *Revolutionary Transformation in the Arab World*.

The extent to which armed struggle was now validated, not just among Palestinians but the wider Arab masses, was evidenced by the post-Karama assertion by King Hussein of Jordan that “we are all *fida’iyin*.”⁶⁰⁸ A legacy of Karama was that grassroots political movements took control of PLO institutions, turning it into a more popular expression of the people’s will.⁶⁰⁹ This fundamental transformation of the PLO into a mass movement able to lead the anti-colonial struggle changed its relationship with GUPS. The Union became fully integrated within PLO structures and synchronised its role and political activism with the PLO’s missions, goals and strategies.

Prior to June 1967, the two forms of contemporary Palestinian nationalism grew in parallel: the PLO, represented legitimacy sanctified by the Arab regional order; the other, the PRM, [Palestinian Resistance Movement] represented extra-legal grassroots militancy and self-reliance. One provided the ‘entity’, the other the ‘identity’.⁶¹⁰

Palestinians now had to contend with stark new geographical and political realities. All of historical Palestine was now under the direct occupation of Israel as they had seized the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

6.1.2 I. The Palestinian Liberation Organisation

The formation, by the Arab League, of the PLO represented a turning point in the Palestinian struggle.⁶¹¹ Arab states envisaged it as a “sound basis for organising in order to enable them [the Palestinians] to assume their duties in liberating their homeland and determining their destiny.”⁶¹² For the first time since the *Nakba*, regional leaders acknowledged, and legitimised the existence of a Palestinian national institution committed to achieving self-determination.

⁶⁰⁸Massad, *Colonial Effects*, 240.

⁶⁰⁹ Nabulsi, “The PLO: A Positive Model or Doomed for Failure?”

⁶¹⁰ Sayigh Yazid, “The politics of Palestinians in Exile,” *Third World Quarterly* 9, No. 1, (January 1987), 28-66, 35.

⁶¹¹Jamal R., Nassar. *The Palestine Liberation Organization: From Armed Struggle to the Declaration of Independence*. (New York: Praeger, 1991), 19-21.

⁶¹²Quoted in Nassar, *The Palestine Liberation Organization*, 20.

The structure of the new organisation resembled that of a government in exile. Its spokesperson was the head of the Executive Committee, a body composed of 15 people.⁶¹³ The Palestinian National Congress, the PLO's legislative body, was made up of 422 members and reflected the geographical distribution of Palestinians. While in principle it aimed at equal representation of all sectors of Palestinian society, it was composed mainly of Palestinian notables. The twelve trade unionists and ten representatives of women's organisations within the National Congress were overshadowed by the number of officials elected by parliaments in Jordan and the Gaza Strip, mayors and presidents of urban and rural councils, middle-class professionals and businessmen from the *shatat al-falestini* (the diaspora).⁶¹⁴

The resultant lack of a solid popular basis gave rise to criticism. The Palestinian people did not lend unconditional support to the PLO in the first stage of its existence. It was perceived to be too beholden to the interests of Arab states and to be run by notables and élites lacking popular legitimacy.⁶¹⁵ This scepticism was shared by GUPS members. The Union had been advocating for the emergence of a Palestinian entity since its second conference and students welcomed the establishment of the PLO. Despite their reservations, they did not shun the new organisation and GUPS did not seek to antagonise the PLO. GUPS acknowledged the relevance of the PLO as the representative institution of the Palestinian people, while urging it to become more representative and radical.

Said Kamal and Taysir Quba'a reported that GUPS sent a delegation to attend the PLO's Founding Conference in 1964.⁶¹⁶ Ahmad Shukeiri, the PLO's first chairman, had invited them and declared that GUPS was to be one of the popular bases upon which the Organisation was to be built. Most delegation members were the sons and daughters of Palestinian martyrs who had given

⁶¹³ See Figure 4 at the end of this thesis on the PLO structure.

⁶¹⁴Rashid, Hamid "What Is the PLO?" *Journal of Palestine Studies* 4, no. 4 (1975), 90–109:94.

⁶¹⁵*Ibid.*, 94-96.

⁶¹⁶ Kamal; Al-Khatib.

their lives for the struggle for Palestine. They wished to emphasise the importance of resistance by highlighting the high price that many had already paid for the cause. The GUPS delegation thus strongly lobbied for the establishment of a Palestinian liberation army.

6.1.3 II. GUPS -PLO relations; 1964-1969

Between 1964 and 1969 both the PLO and GUPS acknowledged the necessity and importance of cooperating. However, they understood in different ways the political work that needed to be done. The PLO, bolstered by legitimisation from supportive Arab states, sought to centralise the work of Palestinian associations and bring them under its wing. However, GUPS was keen to maintain a degree of autonomy in order to protect its political role and its strategies based on grassroots commitment and popular mobilisation. These differences made the PLO-GUPS exchanges often tense and antagonistic. This was made evident during the PLO's Second Conference in Cairo in 1965 through a public letter which GUPS distributed to all PNC members. It began by recalling in detail discussions around establishment of a national entity which had taken place at GUPS Third Conference in Gaza in March 1964. Students wished to emphasise their effort and contribution in re-building the national movement and how they had expressed an aspiration to establish an organisation built upon "revolutionary and organised" mass movements and unions.⁶¹⁷ The stress the letter put on the importance of mass participation in the national movement recalls Fanon's theories about enactment of "general will" in anti-colonial struggles. The letter emphasised how GUPS had reacted positively to the formation of the PLO and regarded it as the sole representative of the Palestinian nation. It urged the PLO to contribute to the budget of GUPS, to refrain from intervening in the Union's business and insisted that the PLO should not nominate who should be GUPS office holders.

⁶¹⁷ *Al-Watha'q Al-Falestinyyia Al-Arabyyia Al-A'am 1965* [The Palestinian Arab Document for the year 1965] (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1966), 280.

The PLO, however, had a different understanding of how a sectoral union should contribute to the work of the national movement. In a letter to the GUPS Executive Committee, it suggested a more centralised control of some of the Union's prerogatives, situating its work under the rubric of the PLO committee for popular organising.⁶¹⁸ While it made a financial contribution to GUPS it was much less than the students had asked for, frustrating the Union's hope to receive sufficient support to enable the convening of an international seminar scheduled for March 1965.

The Union's response was indignant. Rejecting the PLO's attempt to assert control over the students, the uncompromising language used in a letter distributed to all GUPS branches illustrates how badly, in less than a year, relations with the PLO had deteriorated:

We believe that there is a deliberate negative policy against the Union ... And the Union which was the first effort to organise a sector of the Palestinian community was the first popular union responding positively to the Organisation, and considered itself one of the organisation's bases as it strongly believes in unified Palestinian work and in the unity of the revolutionary entity. ... And this is reflected in many conversations which describe the students and their Union and work as an immature work. Some even describe us as "children."⁶¹⁹

Students denounced the PLO for failing to recognise the indispensable role the Union had played in the struggle for liberation and accused it of being unable to sustain and strengthen popular organisation. Implicitly accusing it of elitism, it reminded the PLO it belonged to the Palestinian masses. Using colloquial and provocative language, it went on to caustically say that GUPS "is not a farm to be added to the other farms in Al-Shonah."⁶²⁰ The letter ended by referring to the offices which the PLO had by now established in 16 countries. They should not, said GUPS, resemble embassies, for:

What we want is for the Organization's offices to be at the same level as the responsibility that it holds ...centres of activities and serious work for the cause, a revolutionary work which is directed not to the government's officers but to the popular masses in every country in which the Organisation has an office.⁶²¹

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 290.

⁶²⁰ Referring to an area of the Jordan Valley, this suggested that PLO cadres were more interested in private gain than in benefitting the people they represented.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, 281.

6.1.4 III. From the Movement of Arab Nationalists to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine

The establishment of the PFLP was the outcome of two major factors: the ideological tension that had characterised MAN in the first half of the 1960s, and the regional political shift generated by the 1967 war. Already by 1964 there had been tensions between MAN's founding fathers and younger members pushing for the movement to merge with Nasserism and an ideological shift toward Marxism. The Marxist-oriented current within MAN was led by MAN leaders Mohsen Ibrahim and Nayef Hawatmeh. Their vision for the movement was disseminated through a magazine, *Hurryieh*, edited by Ibrahim.⁶²² This tension led to a reorganisation within MAN which gave major autonomy to its branches. Kazzuha has argued that the history of MAN since 1964

has not been that of a centralized pan-Arab organization, but the record of political activities of its branches in different Arab countries. Though these branches continued for a long time to operate under the same name, and remained held together by a coordinating central body, in practice each branch enjoyed a great measure of political independence.⁶²³

The creation of a specific Palestinian branch of MAN came in response to the establishment of the PLO and the increasing support that emerging popular movements, namely Fateh, had started to enjoy among Palestinian in refugee camps. MAN's historic leaders – George Habash, Wadi' Haddad, Ahmad Yamani (Abu Maher) and Abdel-Karim Hamad (Abu Adnan) – established the Palestinian branch, known as the National Front for the Liberation of Palestine (NFLP), in order to better compete with the new actors on the Palestinian political scene. NFLP's ideology was based on MAN's political vision. While it shared the belief of the new guerrilla movements in armed struggle, it did not accord self-reliance the same importance as Fateh did. Instead, initially the NFLP envisaged armed struggle as a catalyst for a massive Arab intervention, a trigger for an all-out united Arab war against Israel. NFLP's military wing, *Shebab al-Tha'ar* (Vengeance

⁶²² For an in-depth analysis of MAN internal dynamics and the Hurryieh group influence, see Barut, *Ḥarakatal-Qawmiyin al-Arab*.

⁶²³ Kazzuha, *Revolutionary Transformation in the Arab World*, 76.

Youth) started armed operations in November 1964 and continued until the outbreak of the 1967 Six Day War.

The *Naksa* provoked new thinking and led to the dissolution of MAN and the transformation of its local branches into independent local parties. In December 1967, Habash announced the merger of the NFLP with two other movements: the Palestine Liberation Front – led by Ahmad Jibril – and the Heroes of the Return, established by Jibril with Syrian support. This led to the establishment of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). As it developed in the following two years, PFLP's ideology was shaped both by MAN's traditional Pan-Arab vision as well as the Marxist inclinations that had characterised MAN since 1964. The first statement issued by the PFLP reiterated the front's conviction that revolutionary violence among the masses was the most effective strategy to achieve liberation. Armed resistance was the only method Palestinian masses could use to challenge Zionism. The PFLP continued to situate the Palestinian struggle for liberation within the broader framework of the Arab struggle against imperialism in all its forms.

While the PFLP believed in the necessity to unify the different Palestinian movements operating on the ground, internal divisions and ideological differences led in 1968 to two major splits within the party. Just a few months after its establishment, Ahmad Jibril criticised MAN's tutelage over the front and denounced what he said was the PFLP's predilection for intellectual theorising and posturing, rather than action. Seceding from the PFLP, he established the *al-Jabha Sha'biya lil-Tahrir Filastin-al-Qadiya al-Ama*, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General Command (PFLP-GC).⁶²⁴

Creating further disunity, a faction within the PFLP led by Nayef Hawatmeh which advocated for even more direct reference to Marxist-Leninist theories of grassroots mobilisation, also seceded. Hawatmeh established the *al-Jabha al-Dimuqratiya li-Tahrir Filastin* (Democratic

⁶²⁴*Ibid.*, 79.

Front for the Liberation of Palestine, DFLP). The DFLP was to play an important role in the elaboration of the PLO's political programme throughout the 1970s, yet its popularity among Palestinian students never matched either of Fateh or the PFLP. They had become the two major parties set to dominate student politics.

6.1.5 Arab Dimension

Palestinian politics was now even more strongly connected to broader regional and international events. This had major impacts on student activism. Regional political tensions at the beginning of the 1960s had been behind the decision of the Arab League, under pressure from Nasser, to establish the PLO. As noted earlier, many Arab states had hoped that creation of a Palestinian entity would relieve pressure on them to confront Israel on the battlefield. Through the PLO, stated the Arab League, Palestinians could now "take responsibility for their national cause."⁶²⁵ Rhetoric notwithstanding, establishing the PLO did not mean that Arab states took Palestinians seriously as autonomous and equal players in regional affairs. For its part, GUPS resented how the PLO continued to interfere in the work of the Union and its internal democratic contestations. This interference was a critical cause for GUPS ongoing ambivalence towards the PLO.

The years following the establishment of the PLO witnessed major changes in the political balance in the region. Egypt and Saudi Arabia fell out as Nasser supported republican forces in the civil war in Yemen, while Saudi Arabia supported the royalists. Egypt's role as the champion of Arab nationalism and Palestinian liberation was questioned both by traditional leaders and progressives.⁶²⁶ While Palestinian guerrilla groups had started armed actions against Israel, Nasser's strategy to avoid war with Israel was forfeiting much of the popularity he had enjoyed with the Arab masses.

⁶²⁵Leila S. Kadi, *Arab Summit Conferences and the Palestine Problem (1936-1950), (1964-1966)* (Beirut: Palestine Liberation Organization Research Center, 1966), 109.

⁶²⁶Hinnebusch and Ehteshami, *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*, 38.

The convergence of these factors eventually led Egypt – and the other Arab states – to embark on military confrontation against Israel in 1967. The ensuing Arab defeat and the loss of all that remained of the nation of Palestine – as well as Egypt’s loss of the Sinai Peninsula and Syria’s loss of the Golan Heights – imposed a radically different political balance in the region. The political project of Arab Nationalism still enjoyed large support among the Arab masses, yet it became clear that its implementation was impractical. Egypt was no longer the dominant regional power, wealth from oil was beginning to strengthen Gulf States and a new era of cooperation began between conservatives and progressives.

Within GUPS, the 1967 defeat had a major impact on the role of MAN. The Movement, as articulated in the previous chapter, had maintained a strong presence within GUPS and contestations with Ba’athists impacted the internal dynamics of the Union. Walid Kazziha has demonstrated how:

the devastating defeat of the UAR and the “progressive Arab regimes” in June 1967 exacerbated the Movement’s alienation from Nasirism, and ushered in the third phase of its development. The new phase witnessed the intensification of the ideological conflict within the movement and the eventual consolidation of the organizational, political and ideological independence of its branches, thus ending for all practical intents and purposed its existence as a pan-Arab organization.⁶²⁷

A further consequence of the 1967 defeat was that Israel was politically reinforced by Nasser’s recognition of UN Resolution 242.⁶²⁸ The Zionist project seemed stronger than ever, controlling swathes of Arab land. Arab leaders lost legitimacy, leaving room for political manoeuvring from the emerging Palestinian resistance movement. The changing role of Arab states in the Palestinian question and the leading position of Palestinian movements and institutions also influenced student politics. While in the second half of the 1960s GUPS was active mainly within

⁶²⁷Kazziha, *Revolutionary Transformation in the Arab World*, 103.

⁶²⁸ Resolution adopted by the Security Council on 22 Nov 1967 in the aftermath of the war and based on the following principles: withdrawal of Israel from territories occupied in the conflict and respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area. UNISPAL <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/8f4ec1ce53ed321c852574740014cfd7/7d35e1f729df491c85256ee700686136?OpenDocument> (accessed: 22/09/2020).

international spaces its relation with Palestinian and Arab actors was now mediated by the resistance movements and the existence of the PLO.

6.1.6 The International Dimension: New Actors, Radical Politics

The dynamism and global spirit of youth rebellion which spread across the globe in 1968, and in particular the mass protests which started in France in May 1968 and the Tet Offensive launched by the Viet Cong against US forces in Vietnam, strongly influenced, and inspired, Palestinian students.⁶²⁹ Students all over the world played a central role in the transnational dissemination of radical opposition to the domestic and international order.⁶³⁰ Across the globe anti-imperialism was seen as the ideological common ground upon which youth would build their cooperation. The events of 1968 provided an important new opportunity for Palestinian students, leading to more intense relations and cooperation with Europe's radical youth and student movements from the global south. In particular, GUPS branches in Germany were caught up in the spirit of optimism and rebellion, building links with New Leftist movements and facilitating their political connections with the emerging Palestinian resistance groups. GUPS also intensified interactions with student movements elsewhere. Particularly close were links with Cuba and Iran.⁶³¹ The struggle of other oppressed peoples was seen as intimately connected to the Palestinians' anti-colonial struggle. Palestinian students took their message to new audiences, showing the linkages between Zionist settler colonialism and the broader threat of imperialism. GUPS was able to push the Palestinian question atop the agenda of international student bodies.

⁶²⁹ Nabulsi and Takriti, "Palestine in the world: Palestinian solidarity and solidarity with Palestine" *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016. <http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/teach/week/10> (accessed 13/02/2020)

⁶³⁰ See for example Alain Touraine, *The May Movement: Revolt and Reform: May 1968 - the Student Rebellion and Workers' Strikes - the Birth of a Social Movement* (New York:Irvington Publisher, 1979).

⁶³¹ GUPS published joint statement with the Cuban student movement as well as the Iranian student movement, See *Al-Kitab Al-Sanawi Al-Qadia Al-FalestinyiaL'Am 1966*, [The Yearbook of the Palestinian Cause Year 1966] (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1967), 106-109.

6.2 GUPS and the Emergence of the National Movement

6.2.1 Political background

As already noted, 1964-1965 was a time of particularly intense political debate as GUPS found itself under intense pressure from regional and Palestinian political movements. Multiple groups – and particularly MAN, Fateh and the PLO – sought to gain leverage within the Union. At the time of the formation of the PLO the GUPS executive committee was led mainly by Arab Nationalists. Fateh supporters were in the minority within GUPS international structures but enjoyed political preeminence among GUPS branches in Germany. By the mid-1960s the PLO was able to influence Union branches in the Arab world. As noted above, Ahmad Shukeiri, the PLO's first chairman, had committed to respect the independence of the Union but relations deteriorated following the 1965 GUPS International Seminar and increasing evidence of PLO attempts to control GUPS. Aware of the important role GUPS played at many levels, the PLO adopted a more pro-active strategy to further its desire to control GUPS. Pro-PLO lists were presented during elections for leadership of local GUPS branches in Arab countries. In Egypt in particular this strategy won large support.

Fateh and MAN criticised the Organisation's lack of popular and grassroots engagement and both opposed the PLO's attempt to control the Union. However, MAN was at odds with Fateh over the launching of the *intilqa* and the beginning of Palestinian armed struggle.⁶³²

Ibrahim Al-Raheb, a MAN affiliated GUPS member in Syria at that time recalled:

At that time there was a political conflict between Fateh and MAN over guerrilla actions. We insisted that these actions needed to be coordinated with Nasser in order to avoid Israeli retaliations against Egypt because of us. Fateh instead was convinced that armed actions could be launched from occupied Palestine as the Palestinian question is more important than inter-Arab disagreements.⁶³³

⁶³²MAN criticised the timing of the *intilqa*. The Movement argued that the launch of armed struggle should have been postponed.

⁶³³ Ibrahim Al-Raheb, interview by author, Damascus, 2 April 2012.

GUPS branches in Germany supported and endorsed armed struggle enthusiastically but the executive committee in Cairo adopted an official position of neutrality, being influenced by criticism from MAN and from Nasser that it was premature.⁶³⁴ GUPS official position was strongly criticised by the German branches which directly attacked the Executive Committee through their magazine *Al-Awda*.⁶³⁵

The Fourth GUPS Conference, in December 1965, took place a few weeks after the PLO had wrested control of GUPS Egyptian branches. It was clear that these issues – namely the Union relations with the PLO as well as its position on guerrilla's operations – needed to be addressed. Discussions during the conference were dominated by the PLO-GUPS relationship. During branches' elections prior to the conference many had expressed fears the Union could lose its political independence. When Shukeiri sent a PLO delegate to attend the conference in an attempt to control it, PLF members – supporting Shukeiri – exerted pressure on the conference to support the PLO.⁶³⁶

Bassam Abu Ghazaleh, a MAN-affiliated GUPS member, recalled how prior to the conference MAN-affiliated students had discussed the risks of ceding control over the Union to the PLO, and were ready to prevent such an outcome:

We, Arab Nationalists used to dominate the Union, before the [1965] conference. Before the conference we had a meeting and Taysir Quba'a said that the predictions were negative and we could lose the elections. So we decided that if we could not win, it was better to sabotage the conference. So I told Taysir: 'you are a member of the Executive Committee, you will be sitting in the 'central stage'. Can you get a sense of what the election results could be from the discussions held before the vote?' He said 'yes'" 'So when elections approach, if you realize that we do not have enough chances to win, give us a sign.' When Taysir gave the sign we remained speechless but we knew we had to do something. There was one of our comrades sitting behind me. His name was Samir and was from Nablus. Suddenly someone arrived and

⁶³⁴Taysir Quba'a reported that there were tensions even within MAN as some MAN-affiliated members of GUPS had opted for joining *al-Asifah*. Abu Sneneh; Kamal.

⁶³⁵ Ido Zelkowitz, *Students and Resistance in Palestine: Books, Guns and Politics* (S.I.: Routledge, 2019), 34.

⁶³⁶Assad Abdel-Rahman, interview by author, Amman, 28 March 2012. Adel-Rahman was member of GUPS-Lebanon. He is a PFLP funder and was member of the PLO Executive Committee until 2018. See also Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World*, 76.

slapped him. He asked: 'why are you slapping me?' And a fight started...this is how we made sure to have the elections and conference suspended.⁶³⁷

Such sabotage of the conference appeared Machiavellian and violated principles underlying the democratic practices of the Union. Yet students of that time explain their decision to sabotage elections as necessary for guaranteeing the independence of the Union and allow it to keep playing a vanguard role in elaborating discourse and strategies that broke with traditional politics and voiced radical demands. Only the intervention of regional leaders (particularly Nasser who enjoyed trust and support among contesting groups) led to a compromise. The new Executive Committee that was eventually formed had as its President an independent, Mohammed Sbeih, while the other eight seats were divided among the different political forces.⁶³⁸ Khader Shehadeh, a MAN affiliated GUPS member reported:

So the union was unified at that time under the leadership of Mohammad Sbeih. Sbeih was an independent but it later became clear that he was Fateh-affiliated. Taysir Quba' stayed in the Executive Committee as Vice President of Exterior Relations. There were four Arab Nationalists in total. Regional leaders came all to Cairo to solve the problem, and find a compromise. At that time the union was the strongest syndicate organisation. We were stronger than the PLO. In practice, the popular and political influence of the GUPS was much bigger than the PLO under the leadership of Shukeiri.⁶³⁹

That Nasser felt impelled to intervene, and also the willingness of opposed groups to reach a compromise, attest to the central political role they all recognised was played by GUPS and the importance of preserving its existence, inclusivity and international contacts. While the compromise reached after the fractious Fourth Conference allowed GUPS to keep working, political transformations in the Palestinian and regional political arena kept impacting the Union. Lama'i Kumbarji a Fateh-affiliated member of GUPS Cairo branch between 1963 and 1967, recalled:

⁶³⁷ Bassam Abu Ghazaleh, interview by author, Amman, 5 September 2013.

⁶³⁸ Mohammad Sbeih recalls that serving as President as the only independent on the Committee was hard as he was often accused of taking sides whenever there were disagreements on political decisions. However, Sbeih confirmed that despite the tension the Union was able to establish several new branches between 1965 and 1967. Mohammad Sbeih interview by author, Cairo, 9 April 2012. Sbeih was elected GUPS President in 1965. Currently he is the PLO representative at the Arab League.

⁶³⁹ Khader Shehadeh, interview by author, Amman 3 January 2012.

At the transnational level a compromise was reached with Sbeih as President. But there were local elections in 1967 and we lost them. The Arab Nationalist won. How? When the elections took place, Fateh was a well-known party. The movement disclosed itself a year before the elections. When we [Fateh-affiliated students] were discussing our participation in the local elections, we disagreed on the name we should use. Some supported Fateh, others instead wanted to have *Al-'Asifa* because it was better known at that time. But some of us disagreed on the use of *Al-'Asifa* as, they argued, the name was too big and was identified with people who were actually fighting and defending the colonised land in Palestine, while we were outside, in the *shatat*. So we decided to name the list *Ansar Al-'Asifa* [supporters of *Al-'Asifa*] to clarify that we were not the fighters combating in the homeland but that we supported them. At that period, armed groups such as *Al-'Asifa* were often accused of attempting to drag Egypt into a war... so we lost the elections... The Arab Nationalists won, they had a list with the names of martyrs.⁶⁴⁰

The regional climate influenced the political orientation of the Arab branches and reflected the large support Nasser enjoyed before the 1967 war. This testimony attests to the intertwined relations between GUPS and the grassroots political movements emerging at the time. Students engaged with radical ideologies and embraced the anti-colonial vision that inspired the new political actors.

Regarding branch elections in 1967, Shehadeh added:

On 22 February 1967, all branches of the Union held elections and it was a massive victory of the MAN in most of the union branches, except those of Germany and Austria, which remained under the leadership of Fateh. Big branches like Cairo Baghdad, Beirut, were under the control of the Movement. I remember the elections were for two bodies, the delegates to the General Assembly that was supposed to be held in the summer and for the local Executive Committee... I won the elections and I took the position of the General Secretary of the Cairo branch. Then, the Six Days war sparked so we didn't hold the General Assembly for several reasons...security, political and financial issues... until the end of 1969...⁶⁴¹

6.2.2 Armed Struggle

The rise of the PLO and the launch of the *intilqa* affected the approach of GUPS and its members to armed struggle. While in the first half of the 1960s students had advocated for armed struggle and at the individual level many trained with guerrilla groups, now there were concrete opportunities. The PLO had a stated goal to establish a Liberation Army, giving students' scope to urge the Organisation towards proactive military resistance. Reflecting the new commitment to armed struggle, GUPS sent an open letter to the PLO National Council in May 1965, informing

⁶⁴⁰ Lama'i Kumbarji, interview by author, Cairo, 11 April 2012.

⁶⁴¹ Shehadeh.

them that the GUPS Conference had declared that “the armed revolution is the only way to return.”⁶⁴² In correspondence addressed to the PLO in late 1965 GUPS detailed its understanding of what an army of national liberation should look like:

First: The Palestinian Liberation Army- despite all the efforts made by the Military Committee and the leadership of the Liberation Army to establish this Army, we believe that there is a major issue that the Executive Committee, the leadership of the army and the Military Committee, should consider: our aim should be the establishment of a popular militia, as every Palestinian who can carry a gun should be trained and able to answer the call of duty at any moment [...] And beside this militia, the leadership of the Palestinian Liberation Army should focus on establishing a large force of commandos who should be the spine for any Palestinian military work on one hand, and the spine of the popular militia on the other hand.⁶⁴³

Mass mobilisation and participation were fundamental for military success. Students advocated for a transformation of PLO military structures to enable the national army to become the expression of the people. When Fateh and its military wing *Al-'Asifa* openly declared themselves, students were further moved to join the armed struggle. It should be reiterated, however, that while in the second half of the 1960s many students participated in armed actions with various groups, they still continued to do so as individual militants, not on behalf of GUPS.

However, GUPS did see the need to prepare youth for armed struggle. Bassam Abu Ghazaleh reported that in 1965 or 1966⁶⁴⁴ the GUPS Executive Committee organised an important training camp in Egypt with the support of the Egyptian government. GUPS members from any branch could apply and over 50 students spent two months at a training camp run by *As-Sa'iq*.⁶⁴⁵ Abu Ghazaleh recalled:

We used to wake up at 4 am to the sound of the bugle and we would join the battalion. We used to start with gymnastics and wall bars and then we had to run for two hours. ... We would always finish short of breath. Once back, we would have breakfast and then start with the march, fording, training with weapons including machine guns. It was tough but it was nothing compared to the training of Egyptian soldiers. ... On September 23 we got two days off for the celebration of the Egyptian revolution anniversary. They drove us to the city and

⁶⁴²*Al-Watha'q Al-Falestinyia Al-Arabyia Al-A'am* 1965, 281.

⁶⁴³*Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁴Abu Ghazaleh could not indicate the exact year. He was, however, convinced that it was after 1964 and before the Six Days War.

⁶⁴⁵*As-Sa'iq* (derived from Arabic “storm, thunderbolt”) was established in September 1966 by the Syrian Ba'ath party. See Helena Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organization: People, Power and Politics* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

told us they would come back to pick us up two days later. We were excited. However, we all respected the appointment and went back, except for a couple of people. There was also Ahmad Al-Habash with me, he was a friend from Nablus who later became a Fateh leader and died in a failed armed operation. We were very dedicated to the cause. I even remember that at the camp someone complained about the food as we had to eat bread and sand. We wanted to punch him as it was a shame that he was complaining knowing that we were training with Saiqa, a *fida'iyin* group!⁶⁴⁶

Abu Ghazaleh's recollections attest to student commitment to military activities at the individual as well as at the organisational level. According to his account, students affiliated to different movements joined the training. Abu Ghazaleh remembers:

It is true that GUPS did not have a written strategy or guideline [on how to implement] armed struggle. Yet we were all convinced that Palestine could only be taken back by force. We translated this conviction into action by allowing whoever wanted to get trained to join the training camp in Egypt.⁶⁴⁷

Training at the *As-Sa'iqa* camp brought Palestinians into direct contact with Africans also undergoing training. Abu Ghazaleh, for example, recalled that

There were other African soldiers [...] we would not train together but we would meet them in the evening and sit and chat. Some of them were communists. We [MAN-affiliated students] were also leftist so we integrated very well with them.⁶⁴⁸

Such interactions with international militants were common and deepened the students understanding of revolutionary struggle. They were convinced that decolonisation was achievable through armed resistance seeing, as Mao had theorised and demonstrated, that armed revolution is an instrument of political power that can bring about liberation.⁶⁴⁹ Palestinian students had opportunities to study in detail the military tactics which had been used by revolutionaries elsewhere, and to analyse whether they could be applied, considering the geography and topography of their country. Mohammad Abu Maizar recalls that after studying Cuban guerrilla tactics students realised they could not implement the same strategies in Palestine.⁶⁵⁰

Several informants recall how students prepared themselves on the eve of the 1967 Six Day war. Taysir Quba'a recalled that when war broke out:

⁶⁴⁶ Abu Ghazaleh.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁹ Mao Tse Tung, "Problems of War and Strategy," in *Selected Works*, vol. II, 219-225.

⁶⁵⁰ Abu Maizar.

Thousands of students, males and females –as there were more than 1,000 female students at that time - came to the GUPS headquarters. The street was blocked by their huge number. There were thousands of them who came and told me: ‘Taysir we want weapons’. I went to Kamal Rifa’at, and I told him that the students wanted to fight. This was in the fourth or the fifth day of the war. He agreed and asked us to select 500 trained students.⁶⁵¹ ... We never went to the front as the day after the selection process Egypt was defeated. So I told the students: ‘we should still go back to the occupied homeland. We should make sure our families will not migrate. So, I sneaked to Jordan and from Jordan I returned to Palestine.’⁶⁵²

Quba’a pointed out that after the defeat students played a positive role:

First, they actually prevented their families from migrating, everyone worked in his city, village, or camp trying to help people so they wouldn’t be forced to leave. Second, almost all [Palestinian parties’] military bases were full of students, especially in the Ghour [Jordan Valley]. The students were begging and even fighting to convince [the higher ranks] to let them go for a military patrol. They were like: ‘why did you send him not me?’⁶⁵³

Students’ vanguard role included youth from across the diaspora. Abdallah Frangi, the representative of the GUPS branches in West Germany between 1962 and 1967, recalled:

During the 1967 war Abu Jihad [Khalil Ibrahim al-Wazir, co-founder of Fateh] was in Germany and we [GUPS members] decided to join the war. A friend, called Nabil Nassar, insisted that we should preserve our youth as there are enough fighters back home. I was convinced, on the contrary, that just as in other liberation wars such as Vietnam, Algeria and Cuba, we should be the vanguard in Palestine. Our group was the first to return and fight in Palestine. We were a group of ten. Ghazi Al-Hussein, son of Abdel-Qader Al-Husseini was with us, and I was the group commander. We went from Germany to Algeria then to Syria, where we met Abu Jihad. We left on 11th June and the war had broken out on the 5th of June. We stayed in Algeria for a three-week training course, then departed to Damascus on the 29th of July. We entered Palestine through Al-Himma with the help of the Iraqi Army and headed towards the West Bank ...When we left Frankfurt, newspapers wrote that we were going to fight for our country. The Israelis arrested the first and the second group then the rest of us. We left prison six months later. They knew that we had no military value but they realised the importance of our decision, to go and fight. Our act encouraged a big number of students in Europe even a larger number in Cairo to follow our example six months or a year later [after the battle of Karama].⁶⁵⁴

A message sent in May 1968 jointly by the Iraqi branches of GUPS and the General Union of Palestinian Workers epitomised the degree of commitment to armed resistance in the aftermath of the *Naksa*. The two Unions declared:

- 1- Absolute faith in the armed struggle as a natural path for the liberation.
- 2 - The need to mobilise all energies and capabilities to serve the armed struggle.

⁶⁵¹ Kamal Rifa’at was the leader of the Secretary of Ideology and Propaganda in Egypt.

⁶⁵² Quba’a.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁴ Frangi.

3- That the unification of the struggle and its escalation to the rank of revolution is the necessary consequence of the terrible dangers that threaten the existence of the entire Arab people and it is a key demand of the people.⁶⁵⁵

6.2.3 Mobilisation activities

In 1965, in a letter addressed to the GUPS Executive Committee, the PLO required the Union to hand over the distribution of scholarships as well as the management of student housing to the Organisation. The PLO considered the Union to be a sectoral organisation whose activities should be limited to representing the interests of students within the framework of the broader national movement. It was the PLO, they indicated, that had primary responsibility for providing opportunities for students and for bettering the lives of Palestinian youth across the *shatat*. However, the Union refused to accept such restrictions on its role. In their reply to the PLO, GUPS wrote:

... we present our opinion regarding some fundamental issues mentioned in your letter, so please examine it and reconsider your previous decision [...]
 Fourth (point 12 [of the PLO letter])
 All scholarships offered by Arab and friend states to Palestinian students are to be distributed by GUPS not by the Organization.
 Fifth (point 13)
 The fundamental reference body for requesting college housing is to be the Union's branches not the Organization's offices.
 Sixth (point 15)
 Student affairs in general are to be handled by the Union's branches not the Organization's offices.⁶⁵⁶

GUPS insisted on remaining the main referent point for students and kept supporting them in all aspects of their social and political life. The Union understood its role to be organically linked to the wider constituency of Palestinian youth and did not want to be relegated to the role of bridge between the Organisation and the student masses.

Adnan Abu Samra, a GUPS member in Italy from 1969 to 1978 recalled that on arrival in Italy all students would immediately be contacted by GUPS:

⁶⁵⁵ *Al-Watha'q Al-Falestinyia Al-Arabyia Al-A'am 1968* [The Palestinian Arab Document for the year 1965] (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1970), 52.

⁶⁵⁶ *Al-Watha'q Al-Falestinyia Al-Arabyia Al-A'am*, 1965, 286.

When we arrived in 1969 GUPS immediately reached out to us. They told us they would help us with all bureaucratic issues related to University enrolment, they took care of housing and they even organised an Italian course. We all got involved with GUPS activities. Very soon after our arrival we started mobilising in Italy, to raise public opinion and awareness about our cause.⁶⁵⁷

This account suggests that GUPS not only knew the importance of assisting students in practical matters related to their studies, but also appreciated the importance of their integration into host societies so that they could better present the Palestinian cause. GUPS invested major efforts in raising awareness of the dispossession of Palestine at regional and international levels, particularly through commemoration events, public lectures, seminars and the printed word.

Most interviewees recall that on national anniversaries celebrating seminal moments in the Palestinian struggle GUPS would publish statements calling on all branches to mobilise and commemorate the Palestinian history of resistance. The commemoration of anniversaries not only helped to reinforce Palestinians' cultural and political consciousness but helped them to rethink their history and elaborate new strategies of resistance.⁶⁵⁸ The branches often used these commemorations as occasions for making political appeals. As an example, in 1967 the Iraqi branch published a statement on the occasion of the anniversary of the martyrdom of Abdel-Qader Al-Husseini and the massacre of Deir Yassin.⁶⁵⁹ It called for Arab unity against Zionist threats to the entire region and the need to support Palestinian guerrillas. The statement also called for the unity of all Palestinian organisations under the framework of the "Revolutionary Organisation for Liberation" in order to collectively develop the appropriate strategies for the revolution.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁷ Adnan Abu Samra, personal conversation, Sant'Apollinare, Italy 20 June 2017.

⁶⁵⁸ On the relevance of national commemoration in the Palestinian struggle see Laleh Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁶⁵⁹ Abdel-Qader Al-Husseini, a respected nationalist leader from a prominent family, was killed by Palmach, a Zionist militia. Zionist paramilitaries razed the village of Deir Yassin outside Jerusalem, perpetrating the worst of the massacres of civilians that accompanied creation of the state of Israel and which terrified Palestinians into fleeing.

⁶⁶⁰ *Al-Qadia Al-Falestinyya L'Am 1967* [The Yearbook of the Palestinian Cause Year 1964], (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1969), 121-122.

Boudreaux has argued that the international dimension is fundamental in the struggle for liberation.⁶⁶¹ GUPS had grasped this. Arranging public lectures and convening seminars were central in GUPS strategy, locally and internationally. In 1965, the Union organised the first Palestinian International Seminar. This was to represent a milestone in GUPS mobilisation activities. To Cairo came a diverse group of politicians, intellectuals and activists from all over the world to learn about Palestine and to discuss the struggle for its liberation. There were representatives from around a hundred nations.⁶⁶² In a booklet distributed as background reading, GUPS explained:

Our Union, has never been, and will never be, merely a student organization, for this union, the representative of the youth of Palestine, and its tragedy, marks among its first objectives, the realization of 'the return', the return to the homeland, Palestine.our Union pursues its efforts to propagate the Palestinian issue among the national and international milieu of students on purely scientific basis this inflicting defeat on the enemy and realizing ultimate victory for our cause ... This Cairo seminar is a step in our propaganda campaign for which we have mobilized all our will and man-power to serve our cause. We have constant faith in the fact that there are various means and ways to help the Palestinian issue ultimately leading to victory.⁶⁶³

The booklet clarified GUPS' role in the struggle – that it was a political organisation which represented the youth of Palestine and their inalienable right of return. It also explained the complexity of the strategy for liberation. It should be fought through use of different tools – mass mobilisation, military resistance and international propaganda. Only thus could the truth of the dispossession of Palestine and the connection of Zionism with other imperialist ambitions be known to the wider world “on a scientific basis.” GUPS informed participants that:

This seminar is part of our civic education campaign that aims at making all of us comprehend our issue objectively; and to know that it necessitated a complete knowledge of the enemy and his capabilities to enable us to shape our offensive plan.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶¹Boudreaux, "Decolonization and Social Movements."

⁶⁶²*Al-Watha'q Al-Falestinyia Al-Arabyia Al-A'am* 1965, 149.

⁶⁶³*Israel, tool of western imperialism. Palestine International Seminar*, Cairo, 3[0]th March - 6th April, 1965.2d ed. (Cairo: Permanent Secretariat of the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization [1965]) From the Library of Congress, Washington.

⁶⁶⁴*Ibid.*

During the seminar there were several panels which focused on the role of Israel not only in the Middle East but also in Asia and Africa, thus highlighting its neo-colonial implications. The role of the international community, and particularly that of the United Nations, in the partition of Palestine was critically assessed. Participants discussed how the Palestinian struggle was strongly connected to the liberation struggles of the Third World.⁶⁶⁵

The success of the seminar indicated GUPS could mobilise people and represent its constituency's ambitions to the world. In this sense, the seminar affirms what this thesis has defined in the introduction as nationalist internationalism: an intrinsic connection between student commitment to the anti-colonial goal of national liberation and their broader anti-imperialist frame and Third World solidarity.⁶⁶⁶

The seminar had been a substantial team effort. The Union had coordinated closely with the Egyptian government which had provided visa and logistics support and sponsored accommodation. Hundreds of students had contributed to the organisation of the seminar. Quba'a explained:

We chose students of Languages, such as French, English, and Spanish, to accompany the delegates. And we gave them a one-hour-lecture every evening about the seminar and their role as escorts. We talked to the students who would accompany the African delegations... we told them to go to the library and study about the country of their delegations, so that when the plane landed they already knew what is her/his delegate's country, language, etc. And we had other groups, a group responsible for buses and internal travel, in order to make sure that all the guests would arrive on time. Another group was responsible for restaurants, hotels. In

⁶⁶⁵Dr. Clovis Maksoud, director of the Arab League office in New Delhi, spoke on "the plot of Israel in Asia". Dr Sayed Nofal, Assistant Secretary General of the Arab League, presented on "Palestine and the United Nations". Mehdi Ben Barka delivered a research paper on behalf of the National Union of Popular Forces in Morocco entitled "Israel in Africa." He spoke about the role of Israel in Africa as a colonial scheme against the Arab revolution on the one hand and a scheme to further ambitions of global colonialism on the other hand. Mr. Hussein Triki, director of the Arab League office in Argentina introduced the paper entitled "Slow invasion" referring to the process of colonization since the Balfour Declaration. Public discussions were attended by intellectuals and politicians such as the former British Minister of Planning Anthony Nutting, British author Ethel Mannin, British writer Nevill Barbour, former Indian Defence minister Krishna Menon, the French journalist Pierre Rossi, delegate of the Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam, Mr. Qahtan Al Shaby representative of the National Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen, and Abu Bakr Hallemy former director of the University of Karachi, President of the General Students Federation in India and of the revolutionary movement in Colombia and a representative of the Indonesian Press. *Al-Kitab Al-Sanawi Al-Qadia Al-Falestinyia L'Am 1965*, [The Yearbook of the Palestinian Cause Year 1965] (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1966), 96-97.

⁶⁶⁶ See Chapter 2 for an elaboration of the concept.

conclusion every single Palestinian student in Cairo had a mission. We had a register with all students' names, addresses and contacts.⁶⁶⁷

The seminar enhanced the status of the Union on the regional stage. Recognising the political significance of the occasion, King Hussein of Jordan cooperated with GUPS. He made available a plane which took seminar participants to the West Bank where he welcomed the international delegations before they participated in informative student-organised tours.⁶⁶⁸

GUPS had to smooth over international political tensions during the seminar, particularly that between the Chinese and Russian delegations. Quba'a reported that when a Chinese delegate intervened in a debate and started referring to Soviet policies he interrupted and asked him to maintain focus on the Palestinian question. GUPS did not want to undermine its relations with international organisations and at the same time did not want the Palestinian cause to be overshadowed by other international political debates.⁶⁶⁹

As an output from the seminar GUPS prepared a detailed document of proceedings and list of recommendations approved by the participants. The first point stressed the Arab dimension of the Palestinian struggle and positioned it within the broader framework of Third World solidarity confirming once more student attention to the international dimension and its reliance on transnational connections and mobilisation for achieving national liberation.

Regarding publications, all branches published leaflets and informative materials. Some had their own widely distributed periodicals. Students were aware that regular and direct communication with public opinion was fundamental to strengthening awareness on the Palestinian question and building solid political relationships. Abdallah Frangi, for example, remembers that in the late 1960s, GUPS in German published a bulletin with the aim to present the Union's vision:

Nabil [Nassar] was convinced that in order to win public opinion support in this country we should master the language and stop the demagogical language. We should also publish a bulletin in Frankfurt ... Our bulletin was published with the help of German friends and the

⁶⁶⁷ Quba'a.

⁶⁶⁸ Kamal.

⁶⁶⁹ Quba'a.

supervision of Nabil. It was different from *Al'Aidun* (The Returnees) bulletin which Hani and Hayel supervised, and different from *Filastinuna* (Our Palestine) which was supervised by Abu Jihad. Our bulletin was widely accepted here in Germany and in Europe due to its dialectical reasoning. A number of our members refused the bulletin because of its socialist ideas, but we were determined. It started with eight pages and developed to become a highly refined bulletin published every three months at first then every two months. Some issues concentrated on Palestinian art for example or Palestinian artists. We entered a field that Arabs hadn't entered before and Nabil had an important role in that.⁶⁷⁰

6.2.4 Diplomatic Actions

The second half of the 1960s saw an intensification of GUPS international engagement. This had two main goals – to strengthen political recognition in international spaces and to delegitimise Israel and Zionist ideology. Securing IUS membership was (as has been presented earlier) of fundamental significance. This empowered GUPS to start lobbying international actors to recognise the PLO as the umbrella institution representing and leading the Palestinian struggle. Indicative of success was the recommendation of the IUS Eighth Conference held in Sofia in 1964 that declared that IUS “supports the PLO as the organisation leading the Palestinian people and students in their struggle for their legitimate rights.”⁶⁷¹

This was a fundamental declaration, an initial step that situated the PLO among Third World movements and favoured their future cooperation. Despite its initial scepticism towards the Organization, GUPS lobbied for PLO's recognition in the international scene as the representative of the Palestinian people and in the following years was able to aid in building PLO links with other international revolutionary movements. Internally, relations with the PLO may have been rarely smooth, but on the world stage the Union supported the PLO and acknowledged the importance of having a representative body legitimised by global actors.

Mohammad Abu Maizar recalls that in the mid-1960s there was an explosion of GUPS activities in Europe. In most European countries and on both side of the Iron Curtain there were

⁶⁷⁰ Frangi.

⁶⁷¹ Hussein, *Mwajha Al-nashatat Al-sahyun*, 57.

solid connections with both student movements and radical parties. He recalls a GUPS conference in Paris in 1966 which was attended by prominent French leftists. GUPS presented the Palestinian cause as a legitimate struggle for liberation akin to that of the Algerian, Vietnamese and Mozambican peoples.⁶⁷² GUPS members, both in West Germany and Italy, were able to forge relations with New Left activists whose influence in student movements had grown enormously. GUPS issued a joint statement with the union of African students in France, linking the Palestinian movement to anti-imperialist struggles against remaining colonial regimes.⁶⁷³

Cooperation with Iranian student activists was based on shared analysis that identified how the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahleví, was, like the Zionists, a gatekeeper of the imperialist system. GUPS had fruitful relations with Latin American student movements contesting US-supported dictatorships. Palestinian students were offered scholarships in Cuba and GUPS and Cuban students reiterated their commitment to their joint struggle against imperialism in the Americas and in the Arab World.⁶⁷⁴

As noted earlier, GUPS engaged not only with IUS, but also with its Cold War rival, the Western-affiliated International Student Conference. Most of the interviewees recalled that ISC, unlike IUS, tended to be apolitical and the engagement with it was often limited to focused student issues. Said Kamal and Taysir Quba'a reported that their main goal when they attended ISC conferences was to challenge the legitimacy of the Israeli Student Union. Quba'a recalled how at ICS's Nairobi Conference in 1966, GUPS challenged participants to address the issue of Palestine:

The chairman of the session was an Indian delegate. He started: 'Now we will discuss the question of the Middle East.' I raised my hand and said, 'Mr. Chairman with your permission I want to leave the session.' He asked why and I responded: 'Because I want to call GUPS headquarters in Cairo and ask if we can change the name of the General Union of Palestine Students, to the General Union of the Middle East Crisis! We are Palestinians! Even the name makes you afraid?' Then a huge argument took place, and at the end of it everyone agreed on discussing the question of Palestine. But the Israeli delegation disliked this decision...We

⁶⁷² Abu Maizar.

⁶⁷³ *Al-Kitab Al-Sanawi Al-Qadia Al-Falestinyya L'A'am 1966*, [The Yearbook of the Palestinian Cause Year 1966] (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1967), 104.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 106-109.

declared for the first time that our struggle is not against the Jews, but against the Zionist state and we do not want to abolish Israel and throw them into the sea. On the contrary we want to live with them, we want a secular state. And I insisted that the conference should adopt a recommendation in favour of the secular state, where Muslims, Jews and Christians live altogether in democracy, regardless of the race or the gender, etc. The Israeli delegate argued strongly against this project. Eventually the majority of the conference voted in favour of it. ... So, the Israelis withdrew from the conference.⁶⁷⁵

The success of the Palestinian students did not go unnoticed by Israel. Quba'a's agitation in Nairobi came to the attention of Israeli intelligence and the Israeli general, Moshe Dayan. He recalled:

... The President of the Jewish Student Association of London was also invited to the conference. I do not remember his name, maybe David. So, when I was arguing that Palestinians are not against the Jews, I said: 'Here is David, and I am inviting him for dinner, it is not a problem.' Later in the evening David reminded me of my invitation so Sharif and I took him to dinner. I met David again just before going back to Egypt, I was sitting with Sharif and our fellow Mustafa Al-Zein, and I wanted to make a point in favour of our cause and have fun. ... So I told David 'You made me a big favour at the conference, and the decision was taken also thank to you, I want to return you the favour: be careful and make sure that you never go to Israel, never move there, and if you have friends who already moved there, call them back ... When he asked me why I told him that in a year a war for the liberation of Palestine would be waged. I just wanted to prevent the immigration of one or two persons! Ten months later, the Six Days war sparked! ... By the end of 1967 I was arrested in the West Bank ... in prison they used to torture me. Torture and questioning were usually at night but one day I was taken into a room in the morning. In that room I saw Moshe Dayan sitting by the table, with other military leaders. They told me to have a seat and Dayan said: 'I want to talk to you. I wonder why you came here.... People like you do not come here, people like you usually stay outside recruiting other people, but any way we don't want you in prison, so I will release you, but I want you to carry a message from me to Abdel Nasser.' ... I responded: 'You are making me more important than I actually am, I am just a student.' But Dayan insisted they had proof that Abdel Nasser trusted me. ... They called David into the room, then Dayan opened a file and said: 'on this specific date you told David the war will be waged in one year time, and ten months later, the war broke out, who could have known about it if it was not close to Abdel Nasser? I responded that it was just a joke...⁶⁷⁶

This episode is a testimony to the kind of credit student organisation had managed to build for themselves. GUPS activities attracted the attention of Israeli authorities that attempted to prevent student mobilisation at the transnational level.⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷⁵ Quba'a.

⁶⁷⁶ Zelkovitz reports a different version of the episode, based on an account given by Edy Kaufman who represented the Israeli Student Union in Nairobi. He explained that there were no contacts between the Israeli student delegation and the Palestinians but that he did receive a letter from Quba'a telling him not to go back to Jerusalem as it would soon be occupied by the Palestinians. Zelkovitz, *Students and Resistance in Palestine*, 40.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the internal and international role of GUPS between 1964 and 1969 and the challenges the Union faced to redefine itself after the creation of the PLO and the launch of armed struggle by popular movements which had emerged from student activism. No longer the sole translational body representing Palestine, GUPS welcomed the establishment of the PLO yet was sceptical, critical of its elitist nature and resented its attempts to control the Union. The second part of the chapter has analysed the political vision and modus operandi of the Union and how the PLO and other actors sought to influence it. The Union's growing commitment to armed struggle and revolutionary practices rooted in a global anti-colonial vision indicate how GUPS continued to be an organic vanguard, pragmatically adjusting to changed national, regional and international realities. GUPS invested substantially in building international solidarity.

Analysis of the Union's mobilisation and diplomatic activities indicates the importance of the anti-colonial framework in GUPS strategies. It organised the first international seminar in which the Palestinian struggle was presented and discussed within the framework of anti-imperialism. For GUPS, international spaces and networks of solidarity were key to gaining the political legitimacy Palestinian students needed in order to make their voice heard and advance the cause of the Palestinian revolution. GUPS consistently acknowledged the importance of international engagement and lobbied for third world movements and IUS recognition of the PLO as the representative body of the Palestinian people. Thus, GUPS opened the doors for the Organisation's interactions and cooperation with contemporary radical movements across the globe.

7 CHAPTER SEVEN

GUPS IN “THE GOLDEN” AGE OF THE PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE

Introduction

The 1970s were characterised by shifts in the balance of power at the domestic, regional and international levels. GUPS had to adjust to the new political dynamics of the period and find novel spaces of action and a new role in the changed environment.

The popular movements' takeover of the PLO's institutions crystallised the political shift from traditional politics to revolutionary discourse. The transformation of the PLO into a revolutionary mass movement empowered the Palestinians to be centre stage in regional and international politics. It brought about a radical reorganisation within Palestine's scattered society and its representative bodies. The PLO was now the 'umbrella organisation' of Palestinian popular movements, the expression of the will of the Palestinian masses. GUPS fully integrated into the PLO structure and its political role changed accordingly. While the Union operated as a representative body in the absence of national institutions – and to a certain extent even after the establishment of the Organisation – its role shifted with the PLO transformation in 1969. GUPS lost its representative role yet remained the central arena of internal mobilisation and reinforced even more its engagement in international space. This transformation allowed students to maintain their vanguard role in the struggle. After 1969 GUPS continued to contribute to the national movement in two key ways: providing the PLO and its component parties with an important space for internal political training while continuing to effectively mobilise international solidarity, supporting and complementing PLO endeavours to engage with the international political system dominated by states. Students' overlapping commitment to the Union and to the movements and parties of affiliation intertwined even more in the post-69 period. As an integral part of the national

body within a revolutionary framework, GUPS remained prominent on the Palestinian scene, contributing to the articulation and dissemination of resistance movement discourse and ambitions.

It is important to stress that this interconnection also meant that GUPS was influenced by the PLO's internal dynamics and intra-party tensions as well as by a series of dramatic regional transformations that severely constrained and re-focused the PLO. GUPS, like all Palestinian popular organisations, was exposed to the political crises and vicissitudes that have always characterised the life of the Palestinian resistance movement.

This chapter analyses GUPS' political developments, strategies and discourses during the period of the Palestinian struggle between 1969, when the PLO shifted into a revolutionary movement, and 1982, when the Organisation's forced departure from Lebanon initiated a crisis of strategies and political legitimacy.⁶⁷⁸ It shows how GUPS maintained a role of anti-colonial organic vanguard even while operating within the PLO structure. For not only did the Union provide a voice for popular will within the PLO, but also it integrated into the Organisation's structure, providing it with a fundamental space for political education and training.

The chapter is divided in two parts, beginning with an overview of the national, regional and international historical context in which GUPS operated; before focusing on the study of the Union's political vision, commitment to armed struggle, mobilisation and outreach activities between 1969 and 1982.

7.1 Historical background

7.1.1 Palestinian politics

As noted in Chapter Six, the battle around the Jordanian border town of Karama in March 1968 brought the Palestinian *fida'iyin* into the open. The scale and heroism of their resistance to

⁶⁷⁸Jamil Hilal, "PLO Institutions: The Challenge Ahead," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 23, no. 1 (1993):46-60, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.1993.23.1.00p0029p>.

Israeli aggression increased their reputation.⁶⁷⁹ This led to a reconfiguration of power within the PLO. By February 1969 the organisation was overwhelmingly controlled by Palestinian guerrilla groups and no longer by notables from traditional elites.⁶⁸⁰ Arafat, the founder and leader of Fateh, was elected PLO President. Amidst the plethora of popular movements and guerrilla groups Fateh was to constantly enjoy the largest support, a predominance which remained unchallenged for the following four decades.

The 1969 shift inaugurated a new phase of the national struggle and it positioned the PLO among revolutionary movements. The new PLO charter, adopted in 1968, emphasised the shift toward a revolutionary movement and stressed Palestinian self-reliance. It referred to the Palestinian plight as a national liberation struggle and emphasised the united desire of the Palestinian people “for the recovery and liberation of Palestine through armed struggle.”⁶⁸¹ The following years saw persistent PLO’s efforts to work its way into the corridors of power while asserting its legitimate and representative role in regional and international spaces. The Organisation had to find strategies that would enable it to navigate a regional system dominated by states and have a complex series of bilateral relations with regional leaders. While the PLO under its first chairman, Ahmad Shukeiri had been sustained by the Arab states that had established it, the new Palestinian leaders and the radical political shift they were leading impacted on the internal dynamics of the states in which the PLO was based.

The new assertiveness of Palestinians triggered a more consistent involvement of international powers in regional politics. As radical elements within the PLO began to openly challenge the legitimacy of Hashemite rule, there was concern in the West. Tensions erupted in 1970 when the PLO clashed with the Jordanian government in what was to become a turning point

⁶⁷⁹ Hamid, “What Is the PLO?”

⁶⁸⁰ For the previous composition of the PLO see Chapter 6.

⁶⁸¹ Nabulsi and Takriti, *From the Establishment of the PLO to the 1967 Naksa and the Rise of Revolutionary Legitimacy,* *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016. <http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/teach/week/5> (accessed 22/02/2020).

in the resistance struggle known as Black September (*Aylul al-Aswad*). Black September was an attempt to liquidate the PLO, a non-state actor that could destabilise the regional political balance and undermine the interests of regional state-actors and their international allies.⁶⁸² GUPS was caught in the middle of the clashes. When fighting began GUPS had just finished its second World Conference in Amman with delegations of students coming from all over the globe. Palestinian students who had come from other countries were not allowed to travel back by the Jordanian authorities and were often detained.

The victory of the Jordanian army had several repercussions. The PLO was forced to leave Jordan, the country that shared the longest border with Israel and that hosted the largest number of Palestinian refugees. Black September made the PLO aware of its precarious and isolated position in the region. Despite all the rhetoric of solidarity from Arab leaders it was clear their primary interest was to preserve their relations with international powers. Palestinian leaders recognised the need to find new strategies that would allow them to impact the regional and international system: Arafat noted in 1971 that “We [Palestinians] cannot affect the outcome of the political settlements if we do not participate in it.”⁶⁸³ The 1973 war between Arab countries and Israel, followed by Egyptian willingness to negotiate with Israel, attested to the changed regional scenario.

In 1974, the PLO responded to the new circumstances by endorsing a new diplomatic strategy known as the Ten-Point Program.⁶⁸⁴ Drafted by Nayef Hawatmeh, the leader of the DFLP, along with other PLO leaders, it was approved by the majority of the Palestinian National Council (PNC), but opposed by the PFLP, and what later became the Rejectionist Front. The Program envisaged for the first time the possibility of establishing a Palestinian Authority in any liberated

⁶⁸²For a detailed account of the Jordanian, Israeli and US interests in attacking the PLO and liquidate it see Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: the United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 131-136. On the events of Black September, see John K. Cooley, *Green March, Black September* (Abington: Routledge, 2016).

⁶⁸³Quoted in Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive*, 137.

⁶⁸⁴ Nayef Hawatmeh, interview by author, Damascus, 3 April 2012.

area of Palestine,⁶⁸⁵ no longer insisting on the precondition of the total liberation of the homeland.⁶⁸⁶ The Ten-Point Program paved the way for the PLO to be recognised as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people by most western countries and to be invited to the United Nations.⁶⁸⁷ GUPS, however, strongly criticised the Ten-Point Program and the 1974 Union's Conference in Algiers was characterised by lively discussions on the new developments.

The international achievements were overshadowed by regional events: in 1975 PLO found itself caught in the middle of the Lebanese civil war and had to deal with regional and international efforts to liquidate it. As a significant actor – justifying its military strength from the need to protect Palestinians from Israeli attacks on Lebanon when others would not – the PLO was unable to avoid becoming embroiled in the events which sparked the protracted Lebanese civil war.⁶⁸⁸ The Lebanese National Movement – *Al-Harakat al-Wataniyya al-Lubnaniyya* – (LNM), a coalition of leftist, pan-Arabist and Syrian nationalist forces opposed to traditional sectarian politics, was supported by the PLO. LNM highlighted the Arab dimension of Lebanese identity and pushed for changes in the political system. The Maronite-supported Phalange party (*al-Kata'ib*), supported by Israel, opposed the Palestinian presence and insisted on a radically different understanding of Lebanese identity.

⁶⁸⁵ Qais Abdel-Karim (Abu Laila) a DFLP leader involved in the drafting of the Program, explains that efforts to articulate diplomatic strategies started before 1974. He provides a detailed account of the Ten-Point Program Background and the position of the Rejectionist Front. Qais Abdel Karim interviewed, in Nabulsi and Takriti, *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016. <http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/uploads/sources/58e77908dc3c5.pdf> (accessed 05/01/2020).

⁶⁸⁶ Palestinian National Council ““Political Programme Adopted by the Twelfth Session of the Palestinian National Council”. Cairo, 8 June 1974,” *Filastin Al-Thawra*, June 12, 1974 translated by *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016. <http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/uploads/sources/588d9bb26b253.pdf> (accessed 05/01/2020).

⁶⁸⁷ Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organization*, 155.

⁶⁸⁸For testimonies on the Lebanese civil war and the Palestinian role in it see Nabulsi and Takriti, “Revolution on the borders II: The resistance in Lebanon, 1969-1976” *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016, <http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/teach/week/8>, (accessed 18/12/2019). For a study of Palestinians in Lebanon see Abbas Shibliak, “Palestinians in Lebanon And the PLO,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 10, no. 3 (January 1997), 261-274; Rami Siklawi, “The Palestinian Resistance Movement In Lebanon 1967–82: Survival, Challenges, and Opportunities,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (2017), 923. <https://doi.org/10.13169/arabstudquar.39.3.0923>; Osamah F. Khalil, “The Radical Crescent: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and the Lebanese Civil War, 1973–1978,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 27, no. 3 (February 2016), 496-522.

The Lebanese civil war was ignited by a series of armed clashes that became known as the Bus Massacre. Twenty-seven Palestinians were killed on an attack on a bus which *al-Kata'ib* justified as revenge for an alleged Palestinian attempt to kill their historical leader, Pierre Gemayel.⁶⁸⁹ The clashes went on until 1982,⁶⁹⁰ when following Israeli occupation of Beirut and the Sabra and Shatila massacre, the Organisation was forced to leave Lebanon and relocate to Tunis.⁶⁹¹ During the seven years of civil war, students strongly contributed to the Organisation military effort, playing a central role in the political life of the PLO.

7.1.2 Arab Dimension

Arab politics in the 1970s was characterised by two main developments: the emergence of the PLO as a revolutionary movement able to shape regional dynamics and the new diplomatic realignment following the 1973 war. Regional and international leaders could not ignore the support the PLO enjoyed not only among Palestinians but also among the Arab masses and Third World people. For the first time diplomatic actions and political strategies in the region had to take into account the role and impact of an actor independent from the control of states. Jordan opted for the repression of Palestinian resistance and Lebanon followed this example, with the endorsement of Israel and USA.

By the mid-1970s it was evident that some Arab states were ready to disengage from the conflict with Israel. Their acceptance of the idea that Palestine was a question for the Palestinians, rather than a national priority for each Arab state, coincided with international diplomacy to reduce the perimeter of potential further conflict in the region. The outcome of the 1973 war confirmed

⁶⁸⁹ Naomi Joy Weinberger, *Syrian Intervention in Lebanon: the 1975-76 Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 147.

⁶⁹⁰ In 1976 Syrian intervention in the Lebanese civil war with the Ta'al el Za'atar massacre shifted the balance of power in favour of the Maronites. The civil war officially ended with the Taif accords in 1990.

⁶⁹¹ For an account of Israeli intervention in South Lebanon and the 1982 siege of Beirut see Nabulsi and Takriti, "From the defense of the South to the Siege of Beirut" *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016, <http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/teach/week/9>, (18/12/ 2019); Khalil Nakhleh, "The Invasion of Lebanon and Israel's Imperial Strategy," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (1982), 325-327.

the new political pattern.⁶⁹² Egypt capitalised on the initial success of its resistance to the Israeli military to reposition itself in the international arena, beginning the shift towards the US sphere of influence and readiness to negotiate peace with Israel.⁶⁹³ The scale of historic change in the region was made apparent during the 1977 trip of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to Jerusalem and his address to the Knesset. The 1978 Camp David peace agreement signalled to the PLO its weakness vis-a-vis the Arab states. Above all, it indicated that Arab leaders were ready to negotiate with Israel without consultation with the PLO. This led to a reconsideration of strategies and a gradualist strategy of liberation.⁶⁹⁴ Once again in its history, GUPS was not immune to these profound political shifts. GUPS paid the price for wide-scale student opposition in Egypt and elsewhere to Sadat's policies. Relations became so tense that the Union relocated to Beirut following Sadat's visit to Jerusalem.

The 1970s closed with a new political reality in the Arab region: the PLO had imposed itself as a relevant player supported by the Arab masses. However, the relations with state actors, and particularly with Jordan and Lebanon, remained tense for the whole decade. Egypt had normalised relations with Israel putting the PLO in a complicated position that isolated it even further in the regional arena.⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹²On 6 October 1973 the Egyptian Army attacked Israel across the Suez Canal in coordination with the Syrian Army that attacked from the Golan Heights. Egypt aimed at regaining the Sinai territory lost in 1967 and showing to international power its relevance in the regional system. Sadat undertook the war as a tool for diplomatic gains. A few days after the spark of the war Arab OPEC members started a oil embargo in solidarity with Egypt and Syria. See William L. Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2016), 367-369.

⁶⁹³The USA invested major efforts in the peace negotiations between Egypt and Israel. Secretary of State Kissinger played a central role with the so-called shuttle diplomacy since as early as 1974 that finally led to the Camp David agreements in 1978. Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 306-308.

⁶⁹⁴ Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive*, 220-221. On the gradualist programme see Nayef Hawatmeh "Selected Statements Relating to the PLO 'Gradualist Programme'." Translated by The Palestinian Revolution, 2016, <http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/uploads/sources/589649b4ac70b.pdf> (accessed 23 September 2020).

⁶⁹⁵ This does not mean that no Arab state supported the PLO. While Jordan Lebanon and now Egypt had tense relations with the Palestinians, other states, particularly Syria and Iraq, kept a radical position against Israel rejecting any possible compromise. They continued to provide political support to the PLO even if this also meant that they attempted to have influence over the Palestinian body. Fuad Jaber, "The Arab Regimes and the Palestinian Revolution, 1967-71," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 2, no. 2 (1973): pp. 79-101, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2535482>. It should also be noted here that the relation with Syria was characterised by moment of tensions. In 1976 Syria supported the Maronite

7.1.3 International Dimension

By 1974 the PLO was officially recognised as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people by all members of the Arab League.⁶⁹⁶ The same year Arafat was invited to address the United Nations General Assembly and the PLO was granted the status of observer member. In his speech the PLO President stated:

The question of Palestine is being re-examined by the United Nations, and we consider that step to be a victory for the world Organization as much as a victory for the cause of our people. It indicates anew that the United Nations of today is not the United Nations of the past, just as today's world is not yesterday's world. Today's United Nations represents 138 nations, a number that more clearly reflects the will of the international community. ... Our peoples are now beginning to feel that change. Along with them, the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America also feel the change.⁶⁹⁷

Arafat referred to the changing world order in which people of the global south were able to make their voice heard and impact international politics. Student movements, anti-war and civil rights movements of the 1960s contributed to the dissemination of radical principles and an internationalisation of anti-imperialist struggles that positively influenced Palestinian politics in the 1970s.

Analysing internationalism as it was theorised by Marxist intellectuals and implemented by revolutionaries such as Mao Tse Tong and Che Guevara, Halliday explained:

However much the divisions of state and nation impose their own structure, the central thesis of revolutionary internationalism retains a striking validity: that conflicts within societies are to a considerable extent determined by international factors and by the international alliances which the contending parties establish, and that this internationalization of internal conflicts does much to explain the contemporary world. In contrast to much orthodox international relations writing, which argues that what happens within states is irrelevant to the study of relations between states, revolutionary internationalism sees internal and international conflict as recurrently linked.⁶⁹⁸

forces attacking their opponents in Lebanon among which there was the PLO. The attack is remembered as the Tal al-Za'atar massacre.

⁶⁹⁶The Arab League summit in 1973 had already seen the recognition of the PLO by all Arab states except Jordan. At the Rabat meeting in 1974 also Jordan acknowledged the PLO as the representative body of the Palestinian people. Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 391.

⁶⁹⁷Jørgen S. Nielsen, (ed) *International Documents On Palestine 1974* (Beirut: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 1977), 134.

⁶⁹⁸Fred Halliday, "Three Concepts of Internationalism," *International Affairs* 64, no. 2 (1988), 187-198. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2621845>, 195.

The 1970s were characterised by a revolutionary internationalism that highlighted the interconnectedness of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles. When addressing the UN Arafat emphasised internationalism and linked Palestinian ambitions for national liberation with struggles in Vietnam, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. In conclusion, he stated: “Today I have come bearing an olive branch and a freedom-fighter's gun. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand.”⁶⁹⁹

The PLO reference to armed struggle recalls a fundamental aspect of the internationalization of the Palestinian struggle: the use of external operations and international violence that characterised the beginning of the decade. Following the Black September events, Palestinian armed operations in European, African and Arab countries escalated. This surge in international violence had the effect of imposing the Palestinian question to the international attention and it also impacted on world politics. At the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich the *fidai'iyin* group *Aylul al-aswad* (Black September) attacked the Israeli team.⁷⁰⁰ In 1972, the UN General Assembly addressed for the first time the “issue of terrorism”. A non-state actor was shaping international political developments, forcing a contemporary assessment/definition of the notion of violence and its role in international relations. While the discussion was the direct outcome of *fidai'iyin* violence, the debate interested, and had repercussions for, all Third World movements reliant on armed struggle. States of the global south insisted on the importance of recognising the legitimacy of armed resistance in struggles of nation liberation and challenged

⁶⁹⁹ Nielsen, *International Documents*, 134.

⁷⁰⁰ According to Abu Iyad, Black September was an underground organisation established in the autumn of 1971 as a reaction to the Palestinian “feeling of frustration” with the Black September events in Jordan. The organisation was composed of members of different Palestinian *fidai'iyin* groups even if it had not “organic ties” with the PLO. Black September used “revolutionary violence” to impose the Palestinian struggle in the international system. For a detailed account of Black September operations, the Munich attack and Israeli retaliations see Abu Iyad and Rouleau, *My Home, My Land*, 97-120.

USA and Israel discourse on terrorism as “a challenge to the social order” insisting instead on the importance of identifying the roots of the violence.⁷⁰¹

Students had played a fundamental role in internationalising the struggle, securing acknowledgement of Palestine as a central cause in the global fight against imperialism and oppression and forging international networks of solidarity. Among those acknowledging their role was the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish who took two youth and student conferences as reference points to outline the important political changes and achievements of the Palestinian movement. At the Tenth World Festival of Youth and Students in Berlin in 1974 he stated:

Palestine is no longer a pawn in anyone's hands. Palestine went to Berlin with its own hands; it has achieved moral independence. Now Palestine enters by the front door rather than sneaking in through a secret window or through diplomatic pouches. This has been the most significant victory of the Palestinian Arab people's armed movement. A cause may have justice on its side but remain struggling in thin air until it provides itself with muscle. That was the difference between the Warsaw and Berlin Rallies. In the conscience of the peoples of the world, the torch has passed from Vietnam to us. Can we live up to that heavy responsibility? The greater the burden of responsibility, the more worthy is the struggle.⁷⁰²

Palestine was now at the core of global struggles for freedom.

7.2 GUPS within the National Movement

7.2.1 GUPS Conferences

GUPS' Fifth Conference was held at the beginning of August 1969 in Amman, a few months after the popular movements and guerrilla groups had gained control of the PLO. It was a significant event, recognised as politically relevant.⁷⁰³ The fact that King Hussein gave the opening speech and his prime minister, Abdel-Mune'em Rifa'ai, the closing remarks attests to the attention political actors paid to student politics. King Hussein took the conference as an opportunity to stress the Jordanian position towards the Palestinian struggle and its intention to prevent divisions between the East and West Banks:

⁷⁰¹ Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive*, 172.

⁷⁰²“Yasser Arafat in Berlin,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 3, no. 1 (1973), 166-168.

⁷⁰³ Brand, *The Palestinians in the Arab World*, 77.

What destiny has united, politics will never separate. So we do not permit any activity that aims at splitting our masses in both Banks. ... We will not permit that any seeds of separation be sown in territories under occupation. The Palestinian people have a legal right and we participate with them in defending this right, because it is the right of the Arab nation and the right of life- and even more, the right of this Arab sacred soil that was irrigated by the blood of our martyrs through past generations. The goal we are working for is to restore the right of Palestinians in Palestine complete and in full. Until we reach this goal- we will continue to move together in one entity.⁷⁰⁴

There was an explicit political message addressed not just to students but all revolutionary forces and political actors in the country. The radical shift in the PLO with emphasis on armed struggle and revolutionary anti-colonial discourse worried a regime which feared both the radicalisation of its citizens and the potential loss of the West Bank.

In a telegram which Arafat sent to the conference he insisted on the necessity of armed struggle, stating Palestinians would never renounce it until Palestine was liberated. Arafat stressed the centrality of GUPS for the national struggle. He acknowledged the historical role students played in Palestinian political reorganisation. Arafat defined GUPS as:

the revolutionary center, in which we learned to rebel and unite, and where we practiced the revolutionary struggle. Your union should be proud of being the first spark of the revolution of our people in January 1965 that gave it support and resoluteness. ... The policy stems from the power of the gun and your decisions and discussion should follow this truth: that our people will have no dignity and we will not liberate our land, unless this faith is cemented in our souls.⁷⁰⁵

Conference resolutions indicated the political role GUPS wanted to continue to play in the national movement. The Union emphasised its full support for the PLO and desire to find ways to increase its participation and contribution to the work of the PNC. GUPS addressed Palestinian internal dynamics and provided directions on strategies of mobilisation, emphasising the central role of unions and popular organisations and the need to remain united. The Conference committed:

- To support the leadership of the Palestinian armed struggle as the embodiment of the unity of the military body of national revolution.

⁷⁰⁴ Address of his Majesty King Hussein Inaugurating the 5th Convention of the General Union of Palestine Students held at the University of Jordan Auditorium 31.7.1969, Ministry of Culture and Information, Department of Publishing.

⁷⁰⁵ *Al-Kitab Al-Sanawi Al-Qadia Al-Falestinyia L'Am 1969*, 192.

- To work on the overall co-ordination with the various Palestinian unions and the establishment of the Supreme Council of unions at any time possible.
- Work by all means to uncover the Zionists, their imperial partners and agent's schemes to the Arab masses to resist, and point out the dangers in all national and non- national events.⁷⁰⁶

During the Fifth Conference, for the first time, Fateh took control of GUPS, reproducing the political balance within the PLO. Informants stressed, however, the inclusive approach that characterised the conference. Khader Shehadeh, a PFLP-affiliated elected to GUPS's Administrative Council in 1969, recalled:

At the Fifth Conference we [PFLP] became the second force in GUPS ... the majority of the Conference members were Fateh-affiliated, and we were a minority, but there was an agreement, to have a coalition, between Fateh and PFLP [for leading GUPS]. ... the Executive Eommittee was composed of nine members, and even if we were a small minority at the conference, in that elections for the first time we proposed proportional representation. It was refused, we were looking to the future, we thought that now this is the only way to represent people. The conference was held and the Administrative Council was elected. The Council has 25 members. We got seven seats and the rest went to Fateh. This was Fateh's first experience in leading the union, and it was the first time Fateh and PFLP would work together.⁷⁰⁷

Hussein Abu An-Naml, a PFLP-affiliated student, recounted negotiating the Fateh-PFLP agreement for the GUPS Executive Committee in Cairo ahead of the conference:

Hayel Abdelhamid [Fateh representative in Cairo] did not want GUPS total control for Fateh. He knew he also needed the support of the Arab Nationalists. At that time Quba'a had moved to the West Bank to do some political work, so I was the one in charge of the negotiations with Fateh and Abdelhamid. He suggested sharing the Executive Committee seats as following: six for Fateh, three for PFLP. I accepted as his offer was very generous because at that time the balance of power was all in favour of Fateh. So we went to the Amman conference where we elected the new Executive Committee. For the PFLP there were Sadeq Shafea'ai, me -Hussein Abu An-Naml- and Khader Shehadeh. The President was Amin Al-Hindi. The highest position given to PFLP was mine, Vice President of Internal Relations.⁷⁰⁸

Lama'i Kumbarji, a Fateh-affiliated student, was a Conference delegate representing the Beirut branch. He recalled:

the Executive Committee was composed of the President, Amin Al-Hindi, and a Secretary called Abdel-Qader Yassir. Mohammad Djani, he used to work in the Media Committee, and he was one of the most active young man. He came with the Lebanon delegation, Sakher Bsisu used to be the Treasurer, Younis Al-Sharif, Nabil Qulailat who in the early 1970's became the head of PLO office in Germany, were also there. Those all were from Fateh, the

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid.*,193.

⁷⁰⁷ Shehadeh.

⁷⁰⁸ An-Naml.

others were from PFLP. ... When the Executive Committee was formed I was not elected but after six months, someone resigned so I was asked to replace him.⁷⁰⁹

Shehadeh added that all members were committed to keeping the Union united. He recalls that some members would prioritise their party affiliations and the work they did for the party and for GUPS would overlap. He recalled how the Vice-President of the Media Committee, a Fateh member, would bring Fateh posters and print them at GUPS headquarters. However, Shehadeh continued:

the Union worked normally and there were no major problems. It is true that we faced some difficulties, but political developments smoothed things between us. What happened in Jordan and the fights there, for example, made us overcome our internal political divergences and stay united. We still had some negative and tense issues to deal with, for example, PFLP external operations would generate negative reactions from our brothers in Fateh. But this didn't reflect much on the Union's work. We were able to overcome all the issues that happened outside of the Union context. And this was possible for several reasons. First, the personality of brother Amin Al-Hindi. He was able to control things, deal with people and he was very humble. Also, we as PFLP members had experience in the Union and knew how to handle complicated situations.⁷¹⁰

Lama'i Kumbarji confirmed Shehadeh's testimony, stressing how students put the representative role of the Union above party interests. He also recalled political tensions between the Union and the PLO in the aftermath of GUPS Sixth Conference held in Algeria in 1971.⁷¹¹ The tension generated by the events of Black September was palpable. Divergent positions on the relationship with Jordan and the future strategies of the national movement were emerging, not just among parties but also within them. Students at the conference discussed these complexities. Informants have pointed out that the conference was considered a fundamental opportunity to reinvigorate and strengthen the international support Palestinians enjoyed in order to contest Hashemite intentions to liquidate and delegitimise the PLO. Student delegations from across the globe were invited to attend. Palestinian parties continued to pay great attention to GUPS gatherings and all sent delegates.

⁷⁰⁹ Kumbarji.

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*

GUPS condemned not only the Jordanian regime but also Arab states that were not intervening in support of the PLO. Reiterating student support for armed struggle, GUPS called for

the establishment of a broad Palestinian Jordanian national front to reflect the will of the masses to commit to the goals of the Palestinian revolution and protect and support its bases through the establishment of a democratic and national rule that turn the power in Jordan from a tool of repression of the Palestinian revolution to an authority that makes Jordan in accordance with its will by turning it into a revolutionary fulcrum base for our supporters.⁷¹²

This ambition was in tune with the Union's commitment to establish robust cooperation with Jordanian popular movements. Mouin Al-Taher, a Fateh member and student leader in the mid-1970s, recalled that by the end of the 1960s Palestinian students and all popular movements were very active in Jordan.⁷¹³

In the 1970s the GUJS Executive Committee was a coalition of different forces. Fayez Al-Idwan and Al-Amad were representing Fateh: the Salah Sdeed group [Al Ba'ath party-Syria] was represented by Saleh Al-Qallaab and Yusri Al-Husbaan, and I think there was a third person with them but I do not remember the name. And the DFLP was represented by Micheil Al-Nimari who was later assassinated. And the Iraqi Ba'ath was represented by Mazen Al-Saket and another one. I think Sameer Al-Habashnah who became also a minister here in Jordan used to be a member of the Executive Committee, so it was a coalition between Fateh, DFLP, Salah Sdeed's Ba'ath (the Syrian part) and the Iraqi Baath. They had a very strong relation with the GUPS, because basically the GUJS was in the opposition, against the regime.⁷¹⁴

Kumbarji recalls how GUPS positions on Jordan led to some tensions with the PLO:

In 1971, we had the GUPS Sixth Conference in Algeria. In that conference I was elected GUPS President. This is when we started having disagreement with the leadership as there was an attempt to control the Union. The disagreement was not with Abu Ammar but with Abu Lutuf who was the Head of the Department of Popular Organising. He wanted us to follow PLO directions. He wanted us to work as a basis of the PLO while we insisted to be the basis of the Palestinian revolution. We kept insisting on this point and this was the most important thing.⁷¹⁵

Yahya A'ashour (Hamdan), a Fateh-affiliated GUPS leader in Cairo, confirmed Kumbarji's account:

⁷¹² "Aham Kararat al-Muatmar al-Sadis lil-Ittihad al-Amm lil-Talabat Filastin Kama Nashartuha Majala Jabal al-Zaytun" in *Al-Watha'q Al-Falestinyia Al-Arabyia Al-A'am 1971* [The Palestinian Arab Document for the year 1974] (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1974), 685.

⁷¹³ The Jordanian Unions were linked to the Palestinian movement so deeply that they were dissolved by the Jordanian government in the aftermath of Black September. *Nida' al-Ittihad al-'Amm at-tullabieh al-Urdon ala Ittihad al-tullabieh ala'alami Hawl Hawadth Irbid* [Call of the General Union of Jordanian Students to the International Union of Students on the events in Irbid] in *Al-Watha'q Al-Falestinyia Al-Arabyia Al-A'am 1971*, 255.

⁷¹⁴ Mouin Al-Taher, interview by author, Amman, 12 December 2019.

⁷¹⁵ Kumbarji.

At the 1971 conference, we had a discussion on whether the Union should be a basis of the Organisation or of the revolution. ... I insisted it had to be a part of the revolution. I disagreed even with Abu Ammar. The Union was, and remained, independent.⁷¹⁶

Both Kumbarji and A'ashour stressed the Union's willingness to preserve its organic ties with the masses and its grassroots commitment. Being the basis of the revolution, rather than the PLO, meant students wanted to keep contributing to national politics even when this involved criticising the leadership. Kumbarji clarifies the specific factors that led to the disagreement in 1971. His account advances understanding of how GUPS related to the PLO and its component parties.

After what happened in Jordan, there was a mediation process called Jeddah Mediation,⁷¹⁷ an attempt at reconciliation. We as a union issued a press release declaring our opposition to it. At that time the PFLP was also against the mediation process. They issued a press release suggesting that there was a split between Fateh's lines; and they suggested that the GUPS' press release was a proof of this split. My position was really awkward! Am I against Fatah?! For me Fateh was better than the PFLP, otherwise I would have not joined it! So I made a speech emphasising that we are the General Union of Palestinians Students and we are not a basis for Fateh. Specifically on this issue we are against the Jeddah Mediation and we greet all the parties that were against it. But we asked all parties against it to translate their rejection into military work in Jordan. We called on them to take concrete actions rather than staying in Lebanon just issuing press releases! So we got caught in this media war ... we tried to keep the Union independence from all actors.

Other interviewees confirm Kumbarji testimonies. Majdi Mustafa, a GUPS leader in Germany, recalls that the Union was able to pressure the PLO leadership and to play a vanguard bridging role:

At that time Arab states, I think the Arab League actually, wanted to organise a meeting between a PLO leader, Kamal Adwan, and the Defence Minister of Jordan, Wasfi at-Tal. GUPS was strongly against this meeting! So it published several press communiqué all over the world criticising Arafat and the PLO position. The pressure we were able to exert on the leadership eventually led to the PLO decision to cancel the meeting.⁷¹⁸

Students continued to voice popular will. Shehadeh elaborates on the Union role vis-à-vis the PLO at the beginning of the 1970s, insisting on the relevance of the organic relation student had with the broader Palestinian society:

⁷¹⁶ Yahya A'ashour (Hamdan), interview by author, Cairo, 13 April 2012.

⁷¹⁷ The Jeddah mediation process was a failed attempt by Saudi Arabia and Egypt to reconcile Jordan and the PLO. See, Jaber, *The Arab Regime and the Palestinian Revolution 1967-71*.

⁷¹⁸ Majdi Mustafa, interview by author, Rome 13 February 2014.

The Union had a very distinguished aspect. It was independent in its decisions. This issue was clear, the Union was not an official voice, or a voice following the PLO leadership. We had positions not in harmony with the PLO. And we told them ‘you can’t say whatever you want, let us be the people’s voice, you know your commitments, you know the political issues that limit you. But we are a syndicate, a popular organisation, so we are supposed to say what you cannot say.’ And we played this role in a remarkable way ... in the last period of our experience as Fateh and the PFLP [in the Executive Committee] most decisions were taken by consensus. There were no voting situations where they voted against us. We were so interconnected that we distanced our work from party hegemony or building party blocks inside the Executive Committee.⁷¹⁹

This commitment, to voice the political ambitions of the people, their radical discourse and rejection of diplomatic steps that could compromise the anti-colonial struggle became more evident following the 1973 war. Kumbarji remembers that Arafat asked him to release a press communiqué supportive of PLO participation at the 1973 Peace Conference in Geneva⁷²⁰ but:

at that time the idea of negotiations was rejected, and the majority of the students supported armed struggle. I told him that if the Executive Committee would write such a communiqué all the branches would criticise it. So, I suggested having a board meeting to take that decision. Abu Ammar agreed with the idea. At that time we had no money and the PLO covered the flight tickets for the board members who came from all around the world. We gathered, we meet with Abu Iyad and other PLO leaders and at the end we decided that we would not support the PLO. At that time Abu Ammar was mad at me. I told him that I had gathered the whole board for him, and it wasn’t my responsibility if he couldn’t convince them.⁷²¹

Samir Qariuti, a delegate of GUPS Italy at the GUPS Seventh Conference held in Algeria in 1974, recalled the tensions around the Geneva Conference. The GUPS Conference was a major regional event, formally opened by Algerian President Houari Boumedienne, with delegations from all Arab countries along with student representatives from all over the world.⁷²² Discussions focused on the PLO’s Ten-Point Program and the Geneva Conference. Mouin Al-Taher, GUPS Lebanon delegate, recalled:

At the GUPS Seventh Conference these issues were dominating the discussions. There was a group in the previous GUPS leadership which consisted of brothers like Lama’i Kumbarji, Zuhdi Al-Qadri and others, which we called the right wing of Fateh. By the way, I do not believe now that this classification was correct. Now after we became more mature I can provide the right evaluation. But at that time we considered them as the right wing of Fateh, and considered ourselves to be the left. ... There was a disagreement about this programme

⁷¹⁹ Shehadeh.

⁷²⁰ Co-chaired by the USA and USSR, the Geneva Conference was an attempt to negotiate a solution to the Arab–Israeli conflict in line with UN Security Council Resolution 338 following the case-fire which ended the 1973 war.

⁷²¹ Kumbarji.

⁷²² Samir Qariuti, interview by author, Rome, 13 August 2016.

[the Ten-Point Program]. The Central Committee of Fateh sent two delegates to the conference: Salah Khalaf, and Hayel Abdelhamid. And I think Taysir Quba'a and Sharif Al-Husaini represented the PFLP. ... For the first time in the history of the GUPS conferences, Fateh presented two lists [for the election of the Administrative Council]: a list of the student coalition close to Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad) and on the other side the other students of Fateh who were closer to Hayel Abdelhamid, Hamdan A'ashour, and Khalid Al-Hasan.⁷²³

Intra-party tensions informed GUPS dynamics: the Union was a fundamental space for the debate of different ideologies, positions, strategies. Parties and different currents within the parties would try to influence the student body. Qariuti reports:

Before the official beginning of the conference we had a meeting with the Fateh leadership there. It was a meeting with all Fateh members attending the conference. I participated as I was a Fateh member representing GUPS Italy. I remember I personally had a strong disagreement with the leadership! I addressed the leadership directly. There were some other friends there who tried to stop me and I told them: 'I am not speaking to anyone else. I want to talk to them directly!' I was addressing Salah Khalaf and Abu Al-Houl (Hayel Abdelhamid) and I told them: 'why are you trying to convince us to vote for any specific list? We are delegates officially chosen and sent by our congress and we are accountable to them! We are not going to vote for any list that it is not a united list!' My point was that they couldn't ask me to pick a side within Fateh. I kept telling them I am for Fateh, not for any groups within it! ... At that time we used to have real confrontations, serious debates among all the different souls in the party and in GUPS.⁷²⁴

Mustafa sheds further light on Fateh internal dynamics and the relation between GUPS members and the party leadership:

At that time, Fateh leaders in charge of following the student sector and GUPS activities were Abu Iyad, Abu Al-Houl and Abu Jihad, and of course Arafat. We would be constantly in touch with them and refer to them on decisions that we were taking in GUPS. Actually, we would consult them and some decisions were agreed upon. Even for them, the Union was a perfect space, a fundamental space for pushing more radical positions and discourses when the PLO needed to keep a more diplomatic stance.⁷²⁵

Looking to GUPS as a vanguard, Fateh presented two lists. One represented and was supported by Fateh leaders who wanted to push for a more radical approach towards the Geneva Conference while the other was closer to the political line adopted by the PLO.

Shehadeh remembered:

In the Seventh Conference, some conflicts inside the Fateh movement emerged. We were the balance, and we took a decision to support the left direction inside Fateh in that conference. A

⁷²³ Al-Taheer.

⁷²⁴ Qariuti.

⁷²⁵ Mustafa.

new Executive Committee was elected. The people re-elected for the PFLP were Sadeq Shafea'i, Sharif Al-Hurani, Khader Shehadeh (me).

Sadeq al-Shafea'i, a PFLP affiliate, elected to the Executive Committee in 1974, added:

The political statement that came out [of the conference] was very close to totally rejecting the Ten-Point Program. GUPS took a very strong position of criticism ... I think that conference was unique, there were debates and differences. However, at the end everybody respected the final result.⁷²⁶

The final statement reiterated GUPS support for the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people while rejecting UN resolutions on the Palestinian question and the Geneva Conference. It also stated that while, in principle, students accepted the establishment of a National Authority in any area of Palestine liberated through armed struggle, they also believed that the establishment of such an authority would prevent the continuation of the revolution.⁷²⁷ This formulation was a way to agree while disagreeing.

Al-Taher confirmed:

At the end we came out with a formulation on establishing a Fighting National Palestinian Authority on any liberated part of Palestine. Which meant that we did not restrict ourselves to the West Bank or Gaza. If we liberate Al Jalil then we will establish a Fighting National Authority there. ... the Palestinian leadership basically wanted us to approve the tactic programme (Ten-Point Program). Technically we did not approve the same programme they had passed, but we rephrased it to make it fit with our beliefs and they agreed.⁷²⁸

Following the departure of GUPS from its Cairo HQ to Beirut the Eighth Conference – the last before the PLO's forced departure from Lebanon in 1982 – took place in December 1978 at Souq el-Gharb in Mount Lebanon. Baker Abdel-Mune'em, at the time the GUPS representative at IUS in Prague, was elected Conference President. He recalled that the presidential guard controlled all entrances to the venues as well as the surrounding areas and the dormitories and hotel in which participants were staying.⁷²⁹ He remembered that one of the main tasks of the Conference was to amend GUPS's constitution:

⁷²⁶Sadeq Shafea'i, phone interview, 23 December 2019.

⁷²⁷ *Al-Kitab Al-Sanawi Al-Qadia Al-Falestinyia L'Am 1975* [The Yearbook of the Palestinian Cause Year 1975] (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1978), 261.

⁷²⁸ Al-Taher.

⁷²⁹ Baker Abdel-Mune'em, interview by author, Amman, 27 April 2013.

At the GUPS Seventh Conference, in Algeria, the constitution was amended but the new draft, along with all the papers related to the conference, got lost. As a result, the Union had no choice but to work with the previous constitution. Now [at the Eighth Conference] I, was so keen to take care of such stuff and materials in order to make sure not to lose it that I used to take all of the recommendations and resolutions with me once we finished and hide them under my pillow when I went to bed for the whole conference.⁷³⁰

One of the most important changes to the constitution related to the relation between GUPS and the PLO. Until 1978, the Union's constitution had no explicit reference to the Organisation, stating instead that the Union was a pillar of the Palestinian revolution. At the Eighth Conference the text was amended to indicate that all GUPS members "adhere to the Palestinian National Covenant and the goals of the Palestinian revolution."⁷³¹

In Souq el-Gharb, as during previous conferences, there were representatives of different Palestinian parties and factions. Abdel-Mune'em added:

I was very keen in assuring the integrity of meetings. I was very strict on limiting the entry of meeting halls to the members, guests who are representatives of students and youth associations. This would help to avoid suspicion and manipulations when we vote. Therefore, I asked those who were responsible for guarding the place to focus and pay considerable attention outside the conference and the school's vicinity where there were the conference hall and the seniors' rooms. ... I also remember when Jihad Al-Ghoul, Rasim's brother and the chief of the group in charge of the security [the Force 17 commando]- was astonished with how systematic we were in the way we worked especially after he had felt the democratic spirit among us in arranging the conference. He said, 'brother Baker: we have learned a lot from you and you made us think about holding a conference for Force 17.'⁷³²

According to Abdel-Mune'em and Qariuti, one of the most significant resolutions adopted at the conference was the decision to establish contacts with Rakah, the Israeli Progressive front led by the Communist party and composed mainly of Palestinian citizens of Israel. Abdel-Mune'em remembers that the discussion on whether to contact them was lively:

Ahmad Abedel-Razzaq, a GUPS member, was fighting furiously to issue a resolution allowing the connection. This is how he got the nickname "Abu Rakah". Once, Abu Ammar attended one of the sessions. One of the attendants wanted to hear his opinion about this topic. His answer then was a surprise to most of the attendees. He said: 'The most honourable Palestinians are those who have Israeli passports.'⁷³³

⁷³⁰ Abdel-Mune'em.

⁷³¹ Zelkowitz, *Students and Resistance in Palestine*, 93.

⁷³² Abdel-Mune'em. Force 17 was a Fateh commando and special operations unit, initially responsible for Arafat's security.

⁷³³ *Ibid.*

GUPS was among the first Palestinian bodies to establish relations with Palestinians in Israel, playing, once again, a vanguard role in setting the strategies and vision of the national movement.

The election of the Administrative Council confirmed Fateh predominance and highlighted the tension between Fateh and the PFLP. According to Shafea'i:

The disagreement happened at the moment of deciding the Executive Committee. Since 1969 until that moment the Executive Committee was formed between Fateh and PFLP. In the Eighth Conference there was a proposal to include the PFLP-GC and al-Sa'iqa ... The PFLP didn't agree with this, and so they didn't enter in the Executive Committee. Therefore it was formed by Fateh, al-Sa'iqa, PFLP-GC and the DFLP. ... There were many members of the conference insisting that the PFLP should stay on the Executive Committee. However, that didn't happen.⁷³⁴

Baker Abdel-Mune'em however, provided a different account confirmed by other informants:

After elections, Fateh won with twenty three members ... The remaining five factions were left with one seat each. The other five seats were left to the PFLP which however did not want to participate in the elections, protesting against Fateh's large majority in the body. The seats however were kept for the Front hoping that they would change their mind, especially as most Fateh members supported PFLP participation in the Union leadership. I still remember Ahmad Abdel-Razzaq crying bitterly as he couldn't convince the Popular Front to participate in the conference ... This was because of his deep belief, like many others, that participation in the conference and alliance between Fateh and the Popular Front are national interests. ...the PFLP eventually changed its mind and joined all the GUPS bodies.⁷³⁵

7.2.2 Mobilisation and Outreach Activities

GUPS commitment to being a "bridge" between the people and the leadership is attested by several statements the Union issued and its constant insistence on its organic relation with the people. For example, at the PNC's ninth session in July 1971, the Union addressed the PLO leadership and stated:

The General Union of Palestine Students considers itself an accurate reflection of the sufferings of the Palestinian masses. ... The Palestinian revolution can no longer be kept prisoner of immobility. And the question now is how to reach a resolution. This question should no longer remain unanswered. In the Union, we do not pretend to have the answer or even all the elements to elaborate a full answer; but we honestly believe that we are part of the answer because we can contribute to fulfil the requirement to make a decision.⁷³⁶

⁷³⁴ Shafea'i.

⁷³⁵ Abdel-Mune'em.

⁷³⁶ *Al-Watha'q Al-Falestinyia Al-Arabyia Al-A'am 1971* [The Palestinian Arab Document for the year 1974] (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1974).

As it had now done for many years, GUPS addressed the issue of representativeness and effectiveness of PLO bodies, in particular the PNC. The Union insisted on national unity and the need to avoid fragmentation. It demanded revolutionary commitment from PNC members, clarifying that the role of armed factions was to be subordinate to that of popular political institutions. Students emphasised the importance of self-criticism in order to learn from previous mistakes and develop better strategies, stating that “Those who do not learn from the defeats and setbacks will not know how to win. ... We are the world of the future pushing the present we reject towards the dreamt future.”⁷³⁷

The memorandum which GUPS addressed to the PLO Executive Committee on the Jeddah mediation process provides further evidence of students' identification as mobilisers of the Palestinian masses, spokespersons for their constituency and interlocutors with the national leadership. GUPS strongly rejected any attempt to negotiate with the Jordanian regime, stressing instead the importance of working with the masses towards a radical change of the political system:

The General Union of Palestine Students believes that the only thing that could be done is to cut off all communication with the regime, considering it a key enemy and work diligently to organise the Jordanian Palestinian masses for the establishment of a democratic and national government expression of the hopes of the masses in Jordan and able to provide support and protection for the Palestinian revolution.⁷³⁸

GUPS continued to play a fundamental role in preserving and reinforcing democratic practices. For example in February 1972, students met with Abu Ammar, Abu Lutuf and Kamal Adwan, seeking information on efforts towards Palestinian-Jordanian mediation and progress toward national unity.⁷³⁹ Students, it was made clear, would hold the leadership accountable.

GUPS commitment to grassroots mobilisation shaped its cooperation with other Palestinian bodies which shared its political vision of popular unions and their constituency

⁷³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁹ *Al-Kitab Al-Sanawi Al-Qadia Al-Falestinyia L'Am 1972* [The Yearbook of the Palestinian Cause Year 1972] (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1976), 80.

feeding into the workings of political institutions.⁷⁴⁰ For example, GUPS along with the Unions of Women, Workers, Jurists, Teachers and Writers and Journalists, sent out a call for popular mobilisation on the eve of the 1973 October war. The unions appealed to the Palestinian and Arab masses to contribute to the fight by providing the “physical and moral support necessary to achieve victory.”⁷⁴¹ Students were demanding mass participation in political life – a participation that Fanon understood as vital for the success of national liberation struggles.⁷⁴²

GUPS did not limit its mobilising efforts to merely making statements. According to an informant who asked to remain anonymous, students in Europe strongly reacted to the end of the Arab oil embargo in 1974. She explained:

I was not a student so I was not a GUPS member. However I was active in Paris and of course I had contacts with GUPS. We were all very upset when the Arab states suspended the embargo and we wanted to deliver this message. To make a long story short we got in touch with GUPS in London. We sent a suggestion, to occupy the Arab League office there. All students were discussing different forms of protest, sit-ins, demonstrations. No one wanted to sit without acting.⁷⁴³

No other sources confirm the attempt to occupy the Arab League mission. But this and other evidences show how GUPS branches would mobilise in critical moments of the struggle. Sit-ins, demonstration and even occupation of embassies were constantly organised as was the case, for example, when Palestinian students occupied the Syrian Embassy in 1976, the year of the Ta'al al Za'atar massacre.⁷⁴⁴

Shafea'i noted that GUPS' successes:

wouldn't have been possible without strong coordination. We had more than 75 branches around the world, very active. The process was centralised and people were committed to GUPS and not influenced by their political parties.⁷⁴⁵

⁷⁴⁰ GUPS participated in the meeting of popular organisations in Beirut in 1972 to discuss King Hussein's policies on the West Bank. *Al-Kitab Al-Sanawi Al-Qadia Al-Falestinyia L'Am 1972*, 81.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴² Fanon, *Wretched*.

⁷⁴³ Anonymous, interview by author, Amman, 15 December 2019.

⁷⁴⁴ Francesca Burke, *Students of Resistance*, 293.

⁷⁴⁵ Shafea'i.

Mahmoud Al-Labadi, a Fateh-affiliated GUPS leader in German in the early 1970s, also recalled commitment to coordination:

We used to conduct meetings at the European level ... to coordinate or share opinions, and ask each other: how is it in France? And in Germany? And the UK etc. I remember that we held a few meetings but we couldn't continue because of financial reasons, tickets and accommodation. We used to sleep in youth hostels or on the ground. It didn't matter much.⁷⁴⁶

GUPS branches emphasised their political role within the national movement as well as in the hosting countries. Branches would often publish statements addressing political issues, several of which harshly criticised expulsion of Palestinian students from Germany following the Black September Munich attack in 1972.⁷⁴⁷ These statements were also supported by protests and contentious actions. In the UK for instance, students started a hunger strike.⁷⁴⁸

On some occasions, GUPS branches along with other local Palestinian unions directly addressed regional leaders, pressuring them on political matters. In 1975, GUPS, with all Palestinian unions in Lebanon, sent a telegram to all PLO revolutionary parties as well as to Algerian President Boumedienne, Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi and leaders of the Arab Socialist Baath Party in Syria and Iraq, to express their rejection of the US-brokered Sinai agreement on separation of Egyptian and Israeli forces.⁷⁴⁹

The Union branches kept providing practical assistance to Palestinians wherever they were. The living conditions of Palestinians remained a fundamental concern for GUPS. In 1972, GUPS Lebanon published with the General Unions of Teachers and the General Union of Workers a statement denouncing UNRWA employment policies as exploitative of junior staff.⁷⁵⁰

Helmi Belbisi, a GUPS leader in Pakistan in 1973, recalled student mobilisation during the October war.

⁷⁴⁶ Mahmoud Al-Labadi, interview by author, Amman, 3 July 2013.

⁷⁴⁷ *Al-Watha'q Al-Falestinyia Al-Arabyia Al-A'am 1972*, [The Palestinian Arab Document for the year 1972] (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1976).

⁷⁴⁸ Burke, *Students of Resistance*, 293.

⁷⁴⁹ *Al-Watha'q Al-Falestinyia Al-Arabyia Al-A'am 1975* [The Palestinian Arab Document for the year 1975] (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1978).

⁷⁵⁰ *Al-Kitab Al-Sanawi Al-Qadia Al-Falestinyia L'Am 1972*, 81.

At the time of the war I was a student in Karachi. I remember I used to go with other Palestinian fellows outside the mosques in Karachi on Fridays asking people to donate clothes or anything they could for the Palestinian people affected by the war. I remember Pakistani people's empathy and solidarity with our cause. They would even donate lambskin after the Eid sacrifice. We use to send a lot of donations to Palestine.⁷⁵¹

Belbisi added that students were also the reference point for political institutions in Pakistan at a time when the PLO had not yet established a mission. They would negotiate about student housing and scholarships.

Not many foreigners were coming to study in Pakistan! Every year there were a few scholarships reserved for students from different nationalities that would remain unused. I remember we went to talk to the governmental body in charge of these issues. We asked if they would give us the unused scholarships to bring more Palestinian students and they accepted!⁷⁵²

At the beginning of the 1970s GUPS had 81 branches in 23 different countries, 13 of which were in Europe.⁷⁵³ One of the biggest and most structured branches was a confederation of chapters in West Germany and Austria. According to Mahmoud Al-Labadi:

there were branches in Hamburg, Frankfurt, Bonn, Cologne universities. We had in Germany 24 branches almost the same as the number of universities. In every university there was a branch, with the stipulation that in every branch there were at least 15 active students. We were always less than 15 in reality, but we would pretend we had at least 15 people in order to start a new independent branch, and not to be affiliated with the nearest university. This is what happened in reality.

Qariuti explained how in Italy after Fateh had gained the majority in the Executive Committee, there was an increase in the number of local chapters.

Students were able to build large networks of cooperation with non-Arab groups and parties. It was mainly through the activism of GUPS members that radical movements in Europe came to understand the Palestinian struggle and express solidarity with it. GUPS became the main body facilitating the establishment and reinforcement of PLO political relations with international movements.

⁷⁵¹ Helmi Belbisi, interview by author, Amman, 7 April 2019.

⁷⁵² Belbisi.

⁷⁵³ *General Union of Palestine Students*.

GUPS organised the Second World Conference on Palestine between 2 and 6 September 1970 in Jordan. Abu Samra, who assisted the Italian delegation, remembered that:

from Italy there were Luciana Castellano and Giancarlo Pajetta from the Italian Communist Party. They had been invited by the GUPS leadership in Cairo directly, not by us, GUPS Italy. When they arrived I was asked to escort them. ... I remember that beside the conference, they would have several meetings with Fateh leaders and PFLP leaders. When the conference was over we could not leave Jordan as the clashes had already started. Our Italian guests went back after the truce while we Palestinians were not allowed to leave. We were taken into camps, prisons and interrogated. Some of us were allowed to leave, some others were sent to prison. I was able to go back to Italy in December.⁷⁵⁴

These contacts with Italian communists would strengthen throughout the decade.

The publication of booklets, posters and pamphlets was a central strategy of the Union. All branches published informative material in the language of the host country. Booklets prepared by GUPS Kuwait for the Second International Symposium on Palestine in February 1971 included detailed analyses authored by well-established scholars covering crucial moments of the struggle.⁷⁵⁵ In 1972, GUPS France published a leaflet detailing the political developments preceding Black September.⁷⁵⁶ Students aimed to influence public opinion, putting great stress on disseminating “scientific knowledge”⁷⁵⁷ on important moments of Palestinian history. In Italy, GUPS published its own material, but it would also translate and publish PLO publications.⁷⁵⁸

GUPS issued a booklet on Land Day (*Yum al-ʿArd*), the name given to the day remembering the death of unarmed Palestinian Israelis protesting land expropriation in 1976. Students were active in celebrating *Yum al-ʿArd* – and other key moments in Palestinian history and calendar of resistance – defining it a “day of unity of Palestinian struggle”.⁷⁵⁹ Many branches

⁷⁵⁴ Adnan Abu Samra, personal conversation, Sant’Apollinare, Italy, 12 November 2015.

⁷⁵⁵ *The 2nd International Symposium On Palestine. (Kuwait, February 13- 17, 1971.* N.pl.: [General Union of Palestine Students, 1071], 2 tomes, 85, 60.

⁷⁵⁶ Union Generale des Etudiants de Palestine, *La Revolution Palestinienne et le Regime Giordanienne*, (GUPS, 1971).

⁷⁵⁷ GUPS always emphasises its aim to contribute to the dissemination of scientific knowledge and insisted on the academic level of the work and political analysis it produced. See, for instance, *General Union of Palestine Students*.

⁷⁵⁸ See, for example, *Illustrazione Storico-Politica della Palestina* [Historical-Political Illustration of Palestine] Published by the PLO, Italian edition edited by GUPS (no publication date).

⁷⁵⁹ GUPS *Giornata della Lotta Palestinese* [Day of Palestinian Struggle], GUPS (no publication date).

produced posters celebrating different anniversaries, offering powerful visual material to help disseminate the Palestinian narrative.⁷⁶⁰

This rich production of printed material sustained the work on the ground that all branches were able to carry out throughout the 1970s. In Europe, as well as in the Arab region, students established strong relations with local student movements as well as with other political groups. GUPS cooperation with the Egyptian student movement, for example, has been well documented.⁷⁶¹ Palestinian students contributed to the protests and demonstrations organised by their Egyptian counterparts throughout the 1970s. Egyptian-Palestinian student committees were established and were so powerful in mobilising both, Palestinians and Egyptians that Sadat decided to ban them in 1972.⁷⁶² Students' presence on the ground, their ability to voice ambition for radical changes and opposition to the regime led to a harsh state response, the arrest of several Palestinians and the eventual expulsion of GUPS and several students from the country.⁷⁶³

Mouin Al-Taher also emphasised the importance Palestinian students in Lebanon gave to cooperation with national students.⁷⁶⁴ Kumbarji suggested that Palestinian student were extremely active at AUB, at the Arab University and at the American School for Girls.⁷⁶⁵ Anderson reports that immediately after Black September Palestinian students at AUB initiated a Free University project which provided courses on the history and politics of Palestine and the region. Students understood education as a tool in itself in their national struggle.⁷⁶⁶ Ghiyatha reports that in 1974 students organised a strike at AUB to protest the increase of tuition fees. The administration eventually expelled 103 students, 80 of whom were Palestinians.⁷⁶⁷

⁷⁶⁰ These posters are available at the Palestine Poster Project Archive <https://www.palestineposterproject.org/> (accessed 23/10/2020).

⁷⁶¹ See Hagai Erlich, *Students and University in Twentieth Century Egyptian Politics* (London: Frank Cass, 1989).

⁷⁶² Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab world*, 80-84.

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁴ Al-Taher. For a detailed analysis, see G  lle Le Pottier, *Student Activism on the Eve of the Lebanese Civil War* (Masters dissertation, University of Oxford, 2000).

⁷⁶⁵ Kumbarji.

⁷⁶⁶ Anderson, *The American University of Beirut*, 176.

⁷⁶⁷ Ghiyatha, *Al-Haraka al-Tulabiyya al-Filastiniyya*, 62-65.

Palestinian students were able to establish strong cooperation with student movements in Europe. In France, GUPS had strong bonds with associations of African students. They cooperated, published joint statements and supported each other in international spaces.⁷⁶⁸ Intense cooperation was also established with student movements in Sweden and Norway and with several university groups in the UK.⁷⁶⁹ In Italy, one of the strongest allies of the Palestinians was Mario Capanna, the leader of the Italian student movement.

These connections with leftist parties that GUPS established were at the heart of PLO diplomatic strategies. For instance, Qariuti explained that during GUPS Eighth Conference in Lebanon in 1978, he organised a delegation of the Italian Communist party. Pajetta, who had met PLO leaders for the first time at the GUPS World Conference in Amman, was again part of the delegation. According to Qariuti, they stayed in Lebanon for 26 days, having several meetings with all Palestinian and Lebanese political forces.⁷⁷⁰ The relations with local activists forged by the students did not go unnoticed. Students were often harassed and in 1978 the GUPS headquarters in Rome was, according to those who were students at the time, set on fire most probably by Israeli sympathisers.⁷⁷¹

Students understood their political activism in the host countries was more than a question of lobbying for the Palestinian cause. Instead, they saw themselves as social revolutionaries building networks with local progressive groups on the basis of a shared commitment to the same principles of justice, anti-racism and liberation. Students would therefore participate in local political life. In Italy, for example, GUPS students often participated in workers' strikes and demonstrations.⁷⁷²

Nabulsi and Takriti explain that revolutionary moments in the Palestinian struggle:

⁷⁶⁸ *General Union of Palestine Students.*

⁷⁶⁹ *Ibid.* For GUPS mobilisation in the UK, see Burke, *Students of Resistance.*

⁷⁷⁰ Qariuti. For harassment in West Germany see *General Union of Palestine Students.* For harassment in the UK see Burke, *Students of Resistance.*

⁷⁷¹ Abu Samra.

⁷⁷² Qariuti.

depended on the revolutionary infrastructure built during the long intervals between major events, the 'moments in between'. These extended moments allowed for careful organisational build-up, with cadre training, and the maintenance of communication channels between 'the inside' and 'the outside'. These connections were often coordinated through activities in the socialist or tricontinental countries.⁷⁷³

GUPS played a central role in this sense. Building on the extensive outreach activities that characterised the previous decades of student work, the Union reinforced its presence in international spaces establishing communication channels that became fundamental for the national movement.

An important success was GUPS participation in the World Youth Assembly in 1970. The Union was not only able to express support for the PLO and armed struggle, positioning the Palestinian cause among other national liberation struggles, but it also successfully pressured WYA to officially express support for a unitary democratic state in Palestine. Though the Youth Assembly, GUPS voice reached the United Nations.⁷⁷⁴

Sakher Bsisu, GUPS President between 1974 and 1981, recalled:

In 1974 we obtained the Vice Presidency at IUS and at the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY). Baker Abdel-Mune'em was selected as our representative at IUS,⁷⁷⁵ Murid Barghouti was instead the representative at the WFDY. And Azzam Al-Ahmad was also the Vice President of the General Union of Arab Students which us, as GUPS, had contributed to establish.⁷⁷⁶

Obtaining the vice-presidency showed how Palestinians had been fully acknowledged as relevant actors by both student unions and revolutionary movements. Palestinian students kept participating in international conferences as for example the Eleventh World Youth and Student Festival in Havana in 1978. GUPS kept highlighting this international dimension, their connection to other liberation struggles, especially those of comrades in Vietnam, Rhodesia and South Africa. Joint struggle and nationalist internationalism were a prominent element of GUPS strategies.

⁷⁷³ Nabulsi and Takriti "Revolution at Home," *The*

Palestinian Revolution, <http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/learn/part/5> (accessed: 27/1/2020)

⁷⁷⁴ GUPS, *World Youth Assembly*, UN New York, July 1970 (Amman: GUPS, 1970), unpaginated.

⁷⁷⁵ Abdel-Mune'em recounted that when he was first selected he initially refused, explaining to Abu Ammar that he had to finish his studies and needed six more months. Abu Ammar replied that "IUS had us waiting years before granting us official membership, now they can wait six months."

⁷⁷⁶ Sakher Bsisu, Skype interview, 27 November 2014.

7.2.3 Armed Struggle

Since the *Nakba*, Palestinian students had advocated and worked for the emergence of a revolutionary movement of liberation connected to the masses and committed to armed struggle. During the golden age of the national struggle they directly contributed to the implementation of military strategies and on-the-ground armed resistance. The 1970s saw a sharp increase in student participation in armed struggle. All the popular movements established youth and student bureaus with the aim of training and educating them for armed struggle. GUPS welcomed the formation of military camps that students could join and facilitated the participation of students from all over the world.

The final recommendation of the Sixth Conference formalised this support. GUPS emphasised that students represent the intellectual vanguard of the Palestinian people and called for the militarisation of the Palestinian student sector, mobilising students everywhere. The Union asked students to get trained, urging them to follow the example of how Vietnamese students were fully contributing to armed struggle. GUPS insisted on the need to establish training camps and to coordinate students' involvement in military resistance with the PLO leadership. GUPS also emphasised the importance of establishing extensive contacts with progressive forces in hosting countries, achieving media and financial support for the revolution.⁷⁷⁷ GUPS sought to foster constant support and consistent recruitment for the armed struggle. However, and most importantly, it did not envisage the student role as confined to militancy and armed actions. For social and political engagement were always seen as equally important for achieving liberation.

By the mid-1970s all Palestinian parties and movements had a student bureau with a military wing. Mouin Al-Taher, who was the leader of the Fateh *kata'ib at-tullab* (student battalion) Al-Jurmuq, detailed the events that led to its establishment:

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

When the battles [between the Lebanese army and Palestinian forces] started in Lebanon, particularly in May 1973, the confrontation happened mainly in the area of the Arab University while the Lebanese army would pass there attempting to enter the camps. There were students groups and resistance groups in the area. They started to recruit more students from all Lebanese universities for the two months of negotiations between the Palestinian resistance and the Lebanese government, or until the Arab intervention from Syria and Egypt, and the signing of Cairo Agreement or Cairo Protocol.⁷⁷⁸ ... The students were responsible for the protection of that neighbourhood. This was a military duty for the students. And the student organisation kept protecting that area until 1982. But, the student organisation was not just a Palestinian organisation. There were also Lebanese and other Arab students, from all political trends. Later on, after the spark of the Lebanese civil war, this student organisation favoured the establishment of the Student Battalion, which consisted of students, those who were studying in Lebanese universities and also Palestinian students from all over the world, who came to volunteer.⁷⁷⁹

Al-Taher suggested that the contribution of students coming from other countries was coordinated by GUPS. He recalled that there was a specific GUPS decision that asked all its members to enrol for military training:

GUPS took a decision for all its branches when the civil war started in Lebanon. It was requested that all students would suspend their studies for a term or would use their summer holidays to come to Lebanon and join military activities. When students would arrive in Lebanon they would not necessarily join our Student Battalion. If someone was a member of the DFLP for example he joined the DFLP and so on. Also the numbers were so big and we could not recruit them all so they were distributed between the different military units.⁷⁸⁰

According to Al-Taher and other informants the PLO leadership would take care of the distribution of independents in different military groups.⁷⁸¹ Shafea'i confirmed that students joined the battalion but insisted that there was no official GUPS involvement in recruitment: students would get involved in armed struggle as a personal decision, not through GUPS. However, the support for armed resistance was widespread and shared by all students. For them joining the armed struggle was a natural step that perfectly fitted with the Union's political vision.⁷⁸²

Abu Samra provided an additional explanation that clarified GUPS involvement in armed struggle:

⁷⁷⁸ Lebanese authorities and the PLO had signed in November 1969 the Cairo Agreement, brokered by Nasser. The Agreement established the criteria according to which the PLO could carry armed operations against Israel from South Lebanon. It also stipulated that Lebanon had no police control over the Palestinian camps. In May 1973 the Melkart Protocol was signed between PLO and Lebanese authorities in an attempt to reinforce the Cairo Agreement and stop the fight. See: Rex, Brynen. *Sanctuary and Survival: the PLO in Lebanon*. (S.l.: Routledge, 2019). It is most probable that Al-Taher refers here to the Merkart Protocol rather than the Cairo Agreement.

⁷⁷⁹ Al-Taher.

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid.*; Abu Samra.

⁷⁸² Shafea'i.

I think it was around 1978 when it was decided that we [GUPS members in Italy] should leave to Beirut to contribute to the armed struggle. It wasn't just us. Students from GUPS branches from all over Europe were involved. It was an initiative taken at the transnational level by the GUPS leadership. It was the leadership that coordinated with all the branches. However, it was not an official decision. There were not official papers or resolutions but everyone agreed and we were ready.⁷⁸³

Abu Samra added that students were not forced to go but the enthusiasm and the commitment to the struggle was high and students did not need to be convinced. Many would sign up immediately without hesitation. Qariuti remembered that there was massive participation from Yugoslavia.⁷⁸⁴ Sarhan Sarhan, who was a Fateh-affiliated student in Romania in the mid-1970s, recounted how he left Romania to fight in Lebanon. He remembered that many students enthusiastically contributed to the struggle, travelling from Romania to Syria in order to join the militias.

When I arrived [in Syria], all I had was my military attire and a scarf. I came from Romania wearing this along with 450 students. We all went to al-Beqaa. Mohammed al-Wa'ad, the martyr Guevara, was also present. We trained them in al-Beqaa to use weapons. Two of those who came from Romania lost their lives, and in the end about forty remained. Because we were entering exam season, a large group of young people returned to Romania with the help of the Fateh offices in Syria, which gave them travel tickets, to return to resume their studies. A group of them stayed behind, until we left Beirut, after which they also went back to Romania.⁷⁸⁵

According to Qariuti students from Italy were supposed to leave in multiple groups. For the first group twenty people signed up, but not all were able to make it to Lebanon. For, as he explained: "You couldn't just take a plane and leave, it wasn't so easy... we needed to be sure that there wouldn't be issues with the Italian government, and we needed passports, many couldn't make it."⁷⁸⁶ Abu Samra recalled that "I was supposed to leave with the second group just a few days later but then the mission was cancelled. I don't remember why but we received the order to stay."⁷⁸⁷ Qariuti, at the time a Fateh leader in Italy, reported that the decision to suspend the mission was taken for several reasons. Some members were worried by the lack of solid

⁷⁸³ Abu Samra.

⁷⁸⁴ Qariuti.

⁷⁸⁵ Sarhan Sarhan interviewed, in Nabulsi, and Takriti, eds., *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016.

<http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/uploads/sources/589aed5fdb353.pdf> (accessed 20/01/ 2020)

⁷⁸⁶ Qariuti.

⁷⁸⁷ Abu Samra.

coordination and preparation that would guarantee the safe arrival of students in Lebanon. It was reported that some students travelling from Eastern Europe were detained. Some started fearing Syria would attempt to control students' armed struggle. Qariuti reflected that

my personal understanding of those events is that even if at a very superficial and maybe still insignificant level, the dynamics that characterised student participation in the armed struggle in Italy, anticipated some of the tensions and fractures that after 1982 emerged within the Palestinian movement.⁷⁸⁸

Mohammad Ibrahim Awad, leader of the Fateh student bureau explained that the tasks given to students joining armed struggles were various:

We had students who believed in the inevitability of our return to Palestine and in restoring our rights through the Palestinian Revolution. These students were committed to the fight and to undertaking the military duties required of us during that period. Such military duties included guarding the camps, distributing statements, organising demonstrations and participating in the funerals of martyrs. We formed student military brigades all over Lebanon and recruited students studying all over the world. Students used to come and train in the military camps in Lebanon.⁷⁸⁹

Military commitment was understood in a broader sense: armed struggle and popular mobilisation were two complementary sides of the same coin. Both strategies were equally important and interdependent.

Al-Taher confirmed that student military work was supported by a moral code that prioritised the relation with the masses.⁷⁹⁰ Popular support was fundamental for the success of armed struggle. The way Palestinian students understood armed struggle recalls the analysis of Fanon when he argued that:

The armed combatants, the guerrilla fighters, are only centers of support, of encouragement, of organization for this massive movement that reaches into every nook and cranny of the population. For this reason, the power of each guerrilla fighter does not rest simply in himself, his weapon, and his army unit. He is the incarnation of the will of the people to struggle, of the resistance, of the anonymous and innumerable ways in which the people seek to harass and liquidate the oppressor and refuse to collaborate with him. This is the only "magic" the guerrillas have-that they are the representatives of a social force immensely

⁷⁸⁸ Qariuti.

⁷⁸⁹ Mohammad Ibrahim Awad interviewed, in Nabulsi, and Takriti, *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016. <http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk> (accessed 20/1/ 2020)

⁷⁹⁰ Elias Khoury and Nawfal Michel "Mouin al-Taher: Epics of Steadfastness in Lebanon" *Dirasat Filastiniya*, no. 94, Summer 2013 (pp. 85-117). Translated by The Palestinian Revolution, 2016.

superior to their own numbers and fire power, a social force that constantly encircles, attacks, and intimidates the enemy.⁷⁹¹

The student battalion was at the front line when Israel attacked South Lebanon in 1978. They contributed to Palestinian resistance despite the high casualties they suffered.⁷⁹² Students continued to contribute to the Palestinian armed struggle until they were forced to leave south Lebanon at the time of the PLO's forced departure from Beirut.

Conclusion

Abu An-Naml persuasively characterised the Palestinian resistance movement in its golden age:

The Palestinian body was very delicate but capable to dance on any stage to any music. It danced with the communists, the Islamists and so on, but it always remained a Palestinian body. And the movement was composed of several different sectors: students, workers, women, artists etc. That formed a whole body, one body, the beautiful body of Palestine.⁷⁹³

This chapter has outlined the impact of internal regional and international dynamics on student politics throughout the 1970s, highlighting both the dynamism of Palestinian internal politics as well as the tensions with regional state actors. It has analysed how GUPS operated in a new climate in which the PLO emerged as a recognised player, widely acknowledged as the representative body of the Palestinian people and a new symbol of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle. This chapter has analysed the mobilisation strategies and outreach activities of the Union, demonstrating how students acted as a bridge between the national leadership and the masses. Their contribution to the armed struggle was in line with its persistent and determined role of anticolonial organic vanguard.

⁷⁹¹ Fanon and Chevalier, *A Dying Colonialism*, 6.

⁷⁹² Khoury and Michel "Mouin al-Taher: Epics of Steadfastness in Lebanon".

⁷⁹³ An-Naml.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to understand how stateless people may manage to impact regional and international systems dominated by states. It began by addressing the limits of IR approaches to non-state actors, noting how the focus of scholarship has remained largely confined to the study of the role of transnational movements as Diasporas, or networks of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) within an international system dominated by state actors.

By studying the Palestinian student movement this thesis has aimed to contribute to existing literature, by addressing the role of transnational movements not simply as extensions of state-politics abroad, but as fundamental political actors in their own rights operating in state-dominated regional systems. The study has focused on the particular case of the Palestinian movement and its politics, examining specifically student transnational mobilisation at a time when, as now, the majority of the population was exiled and scattered through the region and across the globe as a consequence of the *Nakba*. Transnationalism, it has been argued, became a fundamental trait of the Palestinian social and political experience and shaped the way the anti-colonial struggle could be pursued. In this sense, the Palestinian struggle for liberation and assertion of the right to self-determination can be defined as a transnational nationalism for a people whose ambitions could only be expressed and fought for through transnational strategies in transnational spaces. In doing so, this study has explored how Palestinian transnational student movements contributed to the articulation of national political discourses and to the emergence and development of national institutions able to impact regional and international systems.

Two main questions have been addressed in this study:

- 1) How did Palestinian transnational student movements overcome the geographic fragmentation and lack of representation of their people in order to create and sustain a national

movement? 2) To what extent did Palestinian transnational student movements influence the national movement in developing its political platform and strategies?

In order to answer these questions, the analysis has focused on Palestinian activism in two fundamental periods of Palestinian political history: the post-*Nakba* period (1948-1964), characterised by the absence of a national movement; and from 1964 to 1982 during which time there was highly organised national coordination under the umbrella of the PLO.

Building on post-colonial approaches to IR, and particularly on Gramsci's notion of *organicità* and Fanon's theorisation of anti-colonial resistance, this study has argued that Palestinian transnational student movements emerged as "the anti-colonial organic vanguard" for a society geographically and politically fragmented.

The study of the student movement within the peculiar transnational dimension characterising Palestinian politics relied on the vast literature on Palestinian nationalism and the wider anti-colonial scholarship. However, as I have indicated, too often the literature on Palestinian nationalism has remained overly focused on state actors or on structural analyses that fail to grasp the internationalist and revolutionary dimension of the Palestinian struggle. I have thus taken the critical pedagogical approach advanced by *The Palestine Revolution* project as a fundamental methodological and theoretical framework of reference that situates ordinary Palestinians and their voices at the core of the analysis, focusing in particular on the salience of their collective agency in shaping their own history. By approaching the examination of Palestinian political history via highlighting the central experiences of the masses, their vision, strategies, narratives and discourses as they lived and recounted them, this thesis has argued for the relevance of analyses of IR that take into account ordinary people, the subalterns, as agents of history.

At the theoretical level therefore, this thesis has relied on a framework provided by postcolonialism. In particular, I have emphasised the contribution that Gramsci and Fanon can

bring to the analysis of the Palestinian student movement and its relation with the scattered society as well as understanding of their strategies of mobilisation. Having positioned the study within the domain of IR, this thesis has discussed the relevance of existing analyses of Palestinian student politics, focusing particularly on Burke's pioneering work examining Palestinian student activism through theories of social movements and contentious politics. While Burke's study provided a fundamental reference for my analysis, this research has further advanced the topic by focusing on the transnational character of the student movement and examining students' roles and contributions within the broader national movement. An overview of the role of student movements in anti-colonial struggles was provided to situate the analysis within the international historical context.

1. Students as anti-colonial organic vanguard

The main argument of this thesis has been that the Palestinian transnational student movement acted as an anti-colonial organic vanguard. This theorisation relies on a synthesis of three approaches: Leninist-Maoist theories on student revolutionary powers; Gramsci's notion of "organic relation" as articulated in his theorisation of "organic intellectuals;" and post-colonial studies on social movements (with particular reference to Fanon's analysis of anti-colonialism and understanding of mobilisation in liberation struggles).

While Leninist-Maoist theories on student movements provided a fundamental reference for the conceptualisation of students as a vanguard, this thesis has adopted a broader definition of student vanguardism, which is able to appreciate the role of students not only in the emergence of the national movement, but also in the articulation and implementation of national strategies within the national movement. Furthermore, student vanguardism has been defined as "organic", borrowing the concept from Gramsci: it was the *organicità* between students and their broader society that allowed them to act as a vanguard able to articulate the political ambitions of the

Palestinian people. Palestinian students were expressions of their society, coming from, and operating among, the people. The support they enjoyed among the Palestinian and Arab masses, the organic relation with them, allowed students to intervene in domestic and international political dynamics. In a colonial context this organicity is fundamental for the emergence and development of a national movement. In this sense, taking Fanon's theorisation of revolutionary movements as a point of departure, the student movement has been defined as anti-colonial. Student strategies of mobilisation among the masses, as well as the commitment to international solidarity and cooperation with Third World movements, were based on the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist principles and strategies. Students situated their struggle for self-determination within the international context of anti-imperialism and Third Worldism and were committed to a nationalist internationalism.

The study has shown how students acted as the anti-colonial organic vanguard of their society in different moments of Palestinian political history. In the aftermath of the *Nakba*, and in the absence of national institutions, students established unions and leagues that acted as representative bodies for their people. They established the first transnational union, inspiring other sectors to similarly mobilise and reorganise. This was a clear successful outcome of student vanguardism. The analysis in this thesis has demonstrated how students maintained this vanguard role even following the establishment of the PLO in the mid-1960s. GUPS was incorporated within the broader umbrella of the organisation and became an arena of internal mobilisation and a generator of international solidarity, a function that was pivotal for the articulation and development of Palestinian anti-colonial strategies. This transformation was key to the evolution of the national movement and allowed students to maintain a central role in the struggle.

2. Palestinian Student Movements in the Aftermath of the *Nakba*

The analysis of the post-*Nakba* period focused on student activism in three main cities in the Arab region: the PSU in Cairo, the *Urwa al Wuthqa* at the American University of Beirut and the CJS in Jordan. The study has pointed out that while there were differences in the framework and strategies of the three student groups, as they were shaped by the specific contexts in which they operated, they all acted as an anti-colonial organic vanguard able to advance new approaches and visions among the broader society. They were considered representative bodies of their communities. The experiences of students in Cairo and Beirut were central for the development of Palestinian political movements that shaped the course of the Palestinian revolution. In particular, the seeds for the emergence of Fateh should be found in the political engagement of students in Cairo that mobilised around a platform of Palestinian self-reliance. Similarly, the activism of Palestinian and Arab students at AUB in Lebanon was at the basis of the establishment of the Movement of Arab Nationalists, the formative antecedent of the PFLP. While the political vision and discourses of the two groups were different, they both had the pioneering role to criticise the regional political environment, challenge existing parties for their inability to find successful strategies of liberation and articulate new political discourses that shaped regional politics.

In the analysis of Jordanian student mobilisation it has been argued that political dynamics differed from those in place in Cairo and Beirut as students were not able to break with existing forces and, instead, were mobilised by existing parties. Nevertheless, they played a vanguard role in the specific setting of Jordanian politics as they were able to put the Palestinian struggle at the core of the radical opposition movement.

This study has demonstrated that, despite the different trajectories, these experiences shared the same fundamental traits. They were self-organised, collectively shaped and represented their own constituencies. These groups all implemented democratic elections that would guarantee them

legitimacy in voicing their people's ambitions well beyond student-related issues. The analysis of the PSU, *Urwa al Wuthqa* and CJS showed that students in the different locations invested efforts in community work, recognising the importance of cultural and social activities that could strengthen the social texture as part of political mobilisation and participation. This study has emphasised how armed struggle and resistance were central to the vision of the student movements in line with strategies of the anti-colonial movements of the era, most particularly that in Algeria.

A fundamental element that has been emphasised in the analysis of the PSU in Cairo is student investment in establishing international relations and cooperation with other revolutionary movements. The PSU engagement with IUS was the first, successful attempt to put the Palestinian question at the core of Third World internationalism within the anti-imperialist and revolutionary framework of the time.

3. The General Union of Palestinian Students

GUPS was the first transnational union to be established in the post-*Nakba* period, preceding the creation of the PLO.

Between 1959 and 1964, in the absence of a national organisation, GUPS emerged as the first representative body of the Palestinian people at the transnational level. Its political vision developed synergistically with the Palestinian popular parties and movements that were emerging in those years, working underground throughout the region; GUPS provided the training ground for their young militants. Interviewees have emphasised the interconnection between student militant engagement with parties and the Union transnational role of representative of Palestinian ambitions at the transnational level. The Union played a central role in the mobilisation of the masses and their participation in the reorganisation of the scattered society by encouraging the establishment of other sectoral unions. Significant in this sense is GUPS demand for the establishment of a national organisation well before the actual creation of the PLO in 1964. At the same time, the Union

lobbied for Palestinian students' rights and obtained scholarships that allowed young Palestinians to enrol in universities throughout the world. Along with this investment in grassroots mobilisation, students invested in international coordination, building on the international successes of the PSU. GUPS played a central role in the IUS and established contacts with political movements in the Third World.

The Union continued to voice people's ambitions even after the establishment of the PLO and within the Organization itself. Social and cultural activities, commemoration of national anniversaries remained central strategies of public mobilisation as well as the articulation and dissemination of political analyses and discourses based on anti-colonial and revolutionary frameworks. Booklet, posters, magazines were published and distributed constantly. The Union's branches were independent but highly coordinated at the transnational level. Locally they all engaged in their own way, with their own *modus operandi*, with the solidarity and revolutionary movements on the ground. At the transnational level GUPS continued to play the role of representative of the Palestinian struggle: the success of the 1965 International Seminar attests for the Union's ability to establish and reinforce its presence in international space and disseminate discourses that challenged the mainstream Zionist rhetoric on the Palestinian question.

A fundamental development in this period was student engagement in armed struggle. While GUPS did not have armed groups or a specific strategy how to implement violent resistance, in 1967 GUPS members from across the globe attended military trainings in coordination with the popular movements and parties in order to contribute to the resistance struggle.

Only when in 1969 the PLO became a truly revolutionary body, expression of people's anti-colonial ambitions, did GUPS fully integrate within the Organisation and modeled its *modus operandi* so to fit into and contribute to that of the PLO. The Union became an internal arena of mobilisation of the national movement. The coordination between GUPS and the PLO leadership

strengthened, yet students continued to privilege their direct relation with the masses and expressed criticisms or opposition to PLO decisions that were considered non-beneficial to the revolution. Most importantly, this was the case in 1974 when the Organisation issued its Ten-Point Program. Significantly GUPS kept defining itself as part of the Palestinian revolution rather than just a basis of the PLO.

However, the Union maintained the fundamental role of solidarity-generator at the international level, spearheading the PLO's diplomatic efforts to build relations and cooperation with international actors.

With the transformation of the PLO, students also found a concrete opportunity to contribute to the armed struggle. If students unions and leagues since the 1950s had insisted on the need to organise an anti-colonial resistance that could count on armed struggle as a central strategy, it was only in the 1970s that student battalions were established and GUPS members could get training and participate in military actions.

4. Avenues for Further Research

This thesis has limited its focus of analysis to the period of development of national institutions and subsequent robust national coordination. It has investigated the relation between the student movement and the national movement transitionally until 1982. The analysis of how this relation changed following the PLO's enforced departure from Lebanon in 1982 would undoubtedly add an important insight on how collective agency can be impacted by institutional crises as well as regional and international transformations in the context of anti-colonial struggle. The forced withdrawal from Beirut represented a turning point in Palestinian political organising. It has been argued that the PLO retreat from Lebanon accelerated a crisis of representation and mobilisation as the political institutions were then segregated far from their constituency, in Tunis on the other side of the Arab World. This political crisis also impacted popular unions and

organisations including GUPS, resulting in their paralysis and inability to maintain their historical role as the engine of social cohesiveness and political mobilisation at the transnational level. This change in terms in Palestinian popular organising merits further study and analysis. Approaching this analysis from a transnational perspective would contribute to the existing literature that has pioneered the study of Palestinian student movements during moments of national ruptures, a leading example being Burke's examination of the impact of the Oslo Accords on student activism.

This study has aimed to contribute to efforts aiming at understanding how previous generations built their institutions, reinforced their organic relation with their constituency and elaborated anti-colonial strategies. Further analysis on how these lessons are now being incorporated in the mobilisation efforts of contemporary generations would add another dimension to the role played by Palestinian transnational student movements, within what has become an extremely protracted, and far from complete national struggle.

FIGURES

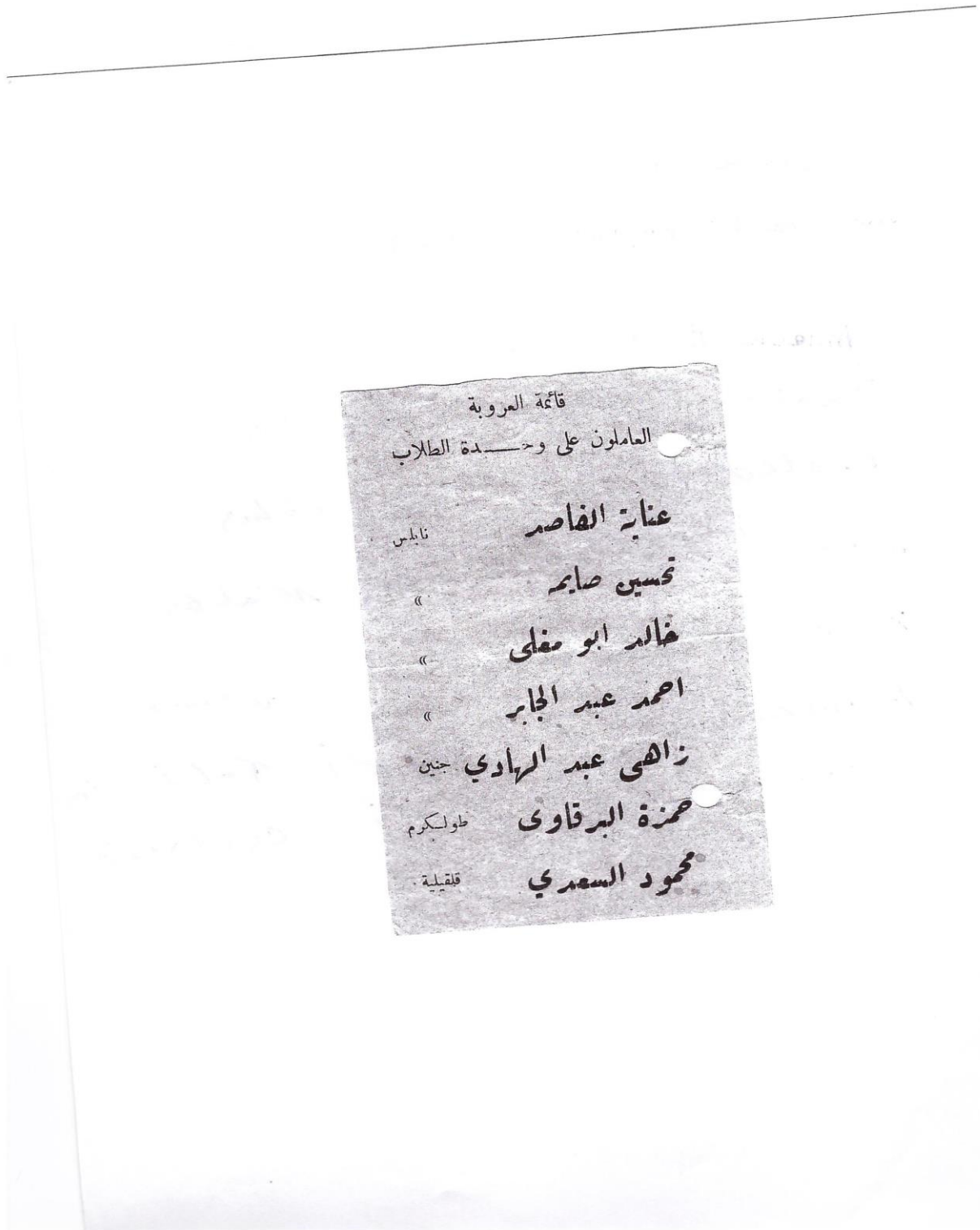


Figure 1: Al-‘Oruba list as it was presented at the first JSC elections. Kidly provided by Hamze Barqawi.

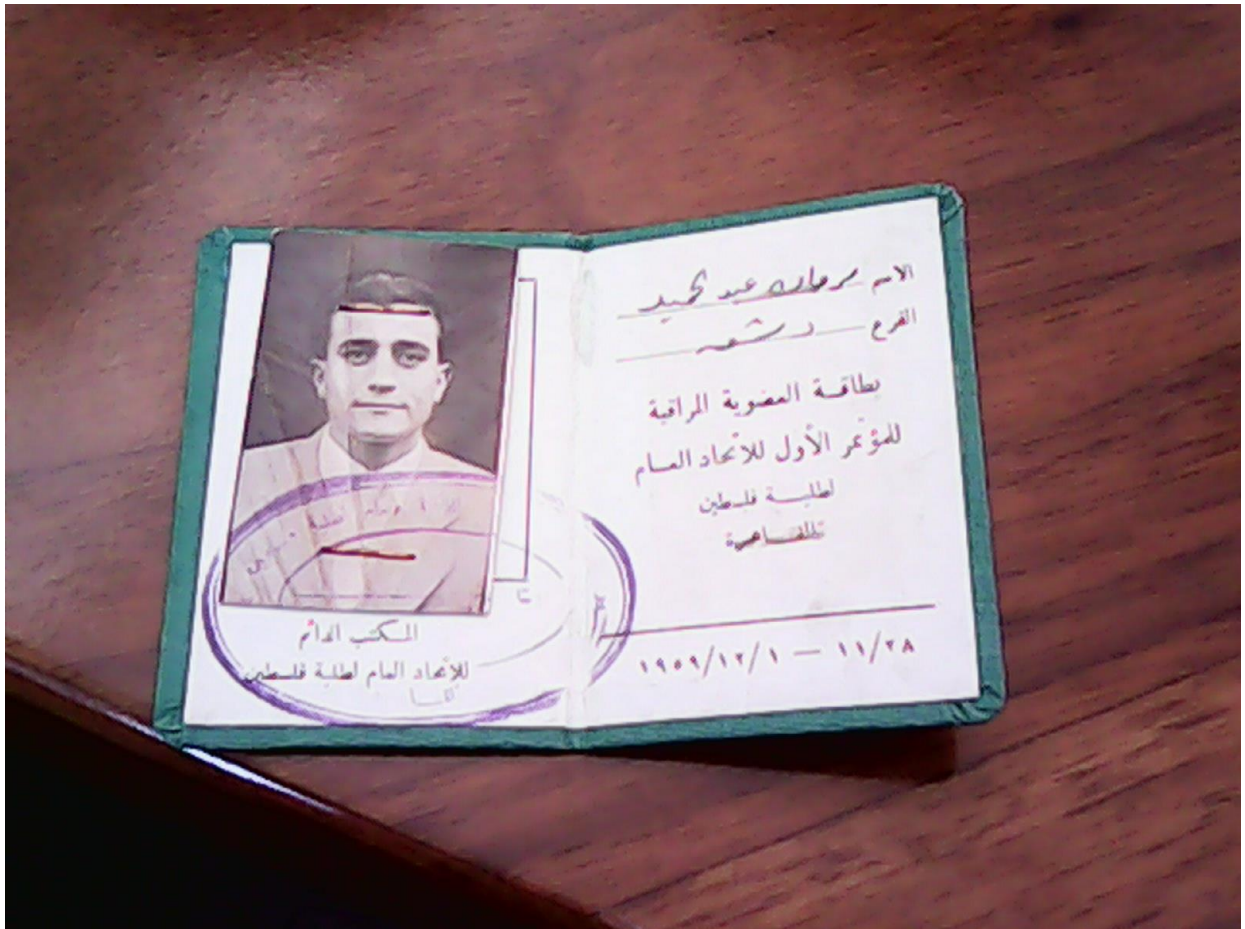


Figure 2: Marwan Abdelhamid badge to participate at the GUPS Foundational Conference in Cairo 29 November-1 December 1959. Kindly provided by Marwan Abdelhamid.

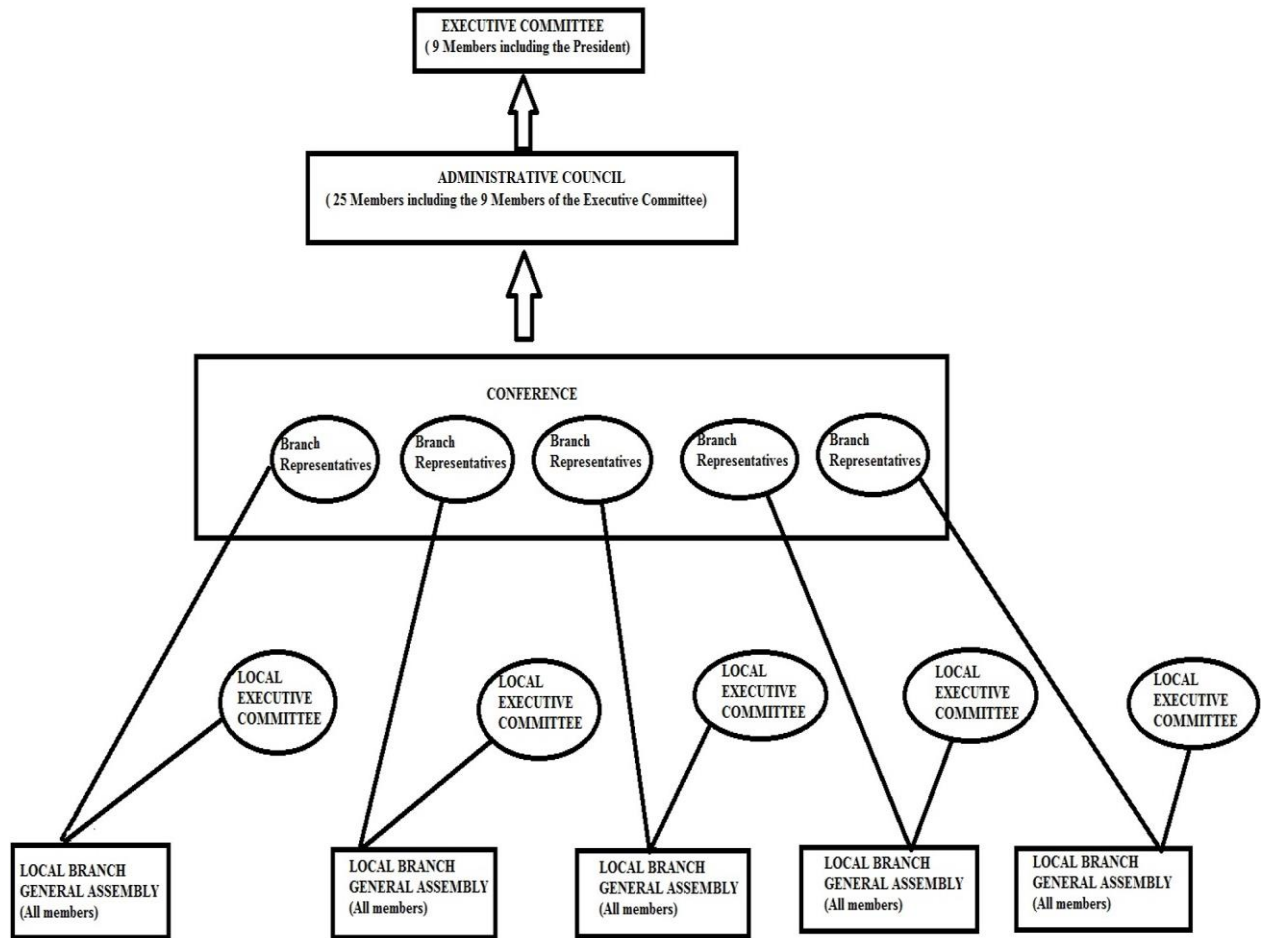


Figure 3: GUPS STRUCTURE, adaptation by the author.

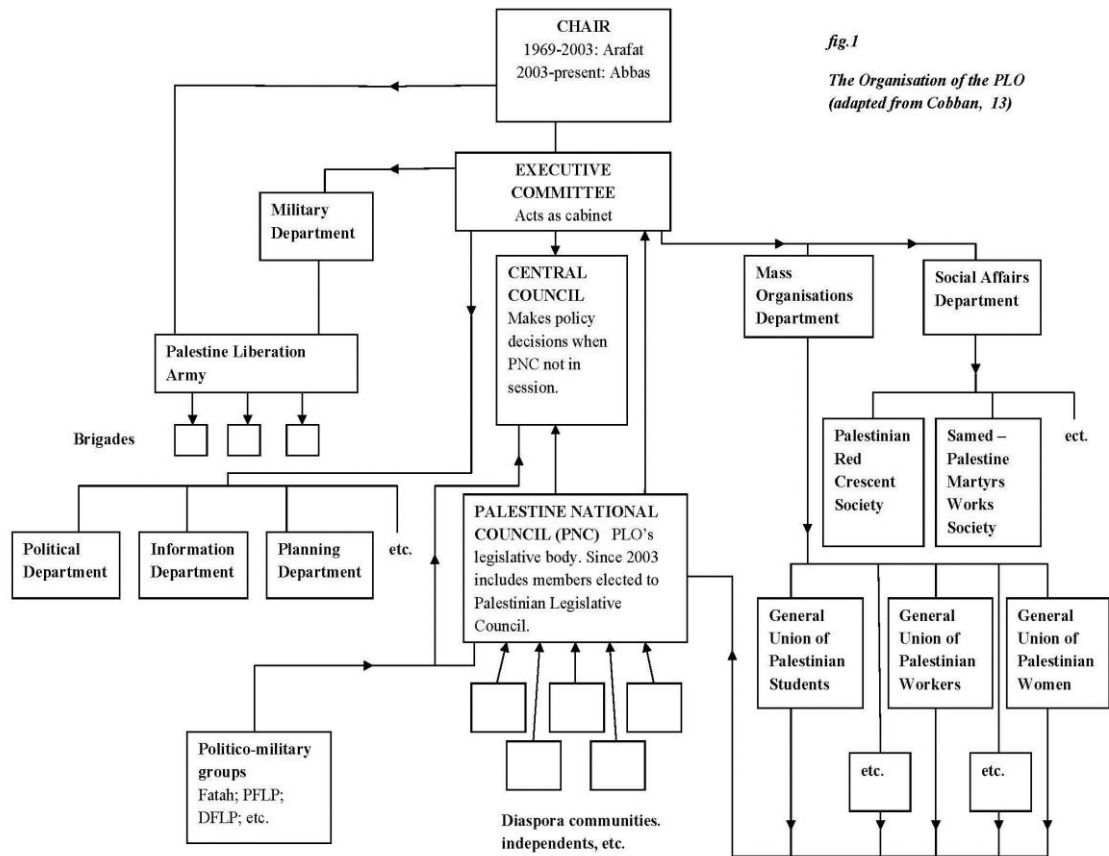


fig.1
The Organisation of the PLO
(adapted from Cobban, 13)

Figure 4: PLO structure as reported in Francesca Burke “Student of Resistance: Palestinian Student Mobilization at Home and in Exile” (2011): 371

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