

The Political Characteristics of the Palestinian Refugees and the Shifting Politics of Their Representatives

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Abstract

The emergence of different political parties to represent the plight of the Palestinian refugees has resulted in notable shifts in the political outcomes. Under the representation of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) during the 1960s, the only political outcomes that were considered satisfactory included the liberation of all Palestine, the self-determination for all Palestinians, and the return of all refugees. The 1970s saw a dramatic shift in the political position of the PLO; namely, statehood as a political solution via accepting the ‘two-state solution’. This article explores the Palestinian refugees’ ongoing resistance to the occupation and active involvement in first and second intifadas.

Key words: Palestinian refugees, rights, political, conflict, representation.

Introduction

The political characteristics of the Palestinian refugees reflect the political environment within Palestine and the host locations. Since the Palestinian exodus of 1948 (*Al Nakba*), many events have significantly contributed to the formation of these characteristics. There is no doubt that regional and global politics and ongoing conflicts within the occupied territories have played an integral role. Indeed, the political realisation of dispossession and displacement has contributed to the development of the Palestinian national movements, which aim to resist the colonisation of Palestine and the Zionist movement in particular. Young and old have joined the political struggle to advocate the full and legitimate rights of the Palestinians and to call for the liberation of their historical land (Rosenfeld, 2004). This article argues that the concern of the Palestinian refugee right of return is represented as a symbol of the Palestinian national struggle and the subject of competition among different Palestinian political factions. The discussion is contextualised within the shifting political objectives sought by the political representatives of the Palestinian people.

This article has two sections; the first section discusses the political characteristics of the Palestinian refugees along with the political structures in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (the “Occupied Territories”). This section also provides an overview of the emergence of major political parties and significant political events (e.g. Intifadas) up to 2013. The second section highlights the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Palestinian Authority (PA) in relation to their shifting stance on the Palestinian refugee right of return. The shift from liberating Palestine to asking Palestinians to accept a state within 1967 borders was regarded by

many refugees and political parties within the PLO as a betrayal to the Palestinian cause (Chamberlin, 2012). Moreover, a further shift in the political landscape emerged during the 1990s when the political process transitioned to formal peace negotiations between the PLO and Israel leading to the establishment of the PA. Again, for some refugees and Palestinian political parties, this was further evidence of the PLO abandoning the true cause of the Palestinian people (Schulz, 2005). In light of these political machinations, this article aims to provide a deeper understanding of the primary political orientations and affiliations of refugees in the West Bank and the extent to which refugees support the PLO to negotiate for the right of return on their behalf.

The Political Characteristics of the Palestinian Refugees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

The political characteristics of the Palestinian refugees can be viewed through the lens of three perspectives: the pre-PLO context when refugees were without a political organisation; the PLO context from the 1960s to the early 1990s; and the post-Oslo PLO context following the establishment of the PA, the current governing body of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip created by the PLO. As a result, it is worth considering the political realities of the Palestinian refugees according to progressive eras throughout the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century.

Overview of the Palestinian Political Reality, 1948-1967

The declaration of the state of Israel on May 15 1948 had monumental consequences for Palestine. In response to the plight of the Palestinians, the Arab states entered the 1948 war to fight by their side. By the end of the war in January 1949, Israel had conquered 78% of Palestine, with Jordan and Egypt taking control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip respectively. During *Al Nakba* in 1948, more than 750,000 Palestinians fled their homes, the majority of whom were forcibly expelled (Masalha, 2001: 36-37). The remaining 22% of historic Palestine - the West Bank and the Gaza Strip - was conquered by Israel during the Six-Day War of 1967 (Pappe, 2011).

Al Nakba marked a significant turning point in Palestine's political landscape. Since this time, Arabs and Palestinians have been united in their efforts to defend Palestine against Zionists and their intent to colonise Palestine. Notably, Mohammad (1999) and Albert Hourani (2013) argue that the United Nations (UN) pushed Palestine into a new type of conflict in which Palestinians now depended on Arab states for their liberation. One key reason for Palestinians' dependency on Arab states is that they do not have military resources or an organised army to defend their land. Thus, Mohammad (1999) asserts that Palestinians have no choice but to depend on Arab states. Certainly, the period from 1949 to 1969 witnessed a number of

political movements throughout the Arab states and the occupied territories emerged on a platform of Palestinian autonomy. However, as Gerner (2018) points out, Palestinian nationalism was essentially muted and any voice of resistance towards Israel was expressed by the surrounding Arab states.

The representation of Palestinians by non-Palestinians reflects the marginalisation of the Palestinian refugees and the suppression of the Palestinian voice, pointing to the subsequent complexities to achieving a political solution. Indeed, Said (2001a) illustrates this point in his text, *Blaming the Victims*, where he argues that the lasting impasse in Middle Eastern politics to produce a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue is because the governments continue to deny to the refugees themselves the opportunity to voice their political aspirations.

The most prominent political party to emerge during the 1960s as the ‘political’ voice of the Palestinian refugees was the PLO, established in 1964. However, the complex nature of the political landscape in Palestine during the 1960s was also reflected in the emergence of other diverse political movements including the Muslim Brotherhood, Marxist Party, Baath Party, and the Arab Nationalist Movement (Banat, 2010). Although many political movements emerged in the Arab states and occupied territories between 1965 and 1967, most gained real traction as political voices for the Palestinian people due to the defeat of the Arab armies by the Israeli forces in the 1967 War (Mohammad, 1999). A number of these political parties remain effective to this day.

Most of the Palestinian political movements to emerge in refugee camps advocated the Palestinian right of return and the liberation of Palestine via military struggle (Banat, 2010; Mohammad, 1999; Suleiman, 2001). The emergences of these political movements were combined with the emergence of the Palestinian political identity. This identity was mostly shaped by the refugees’ experiences of military occupation and ongoing displacement (Mohammad, 1999). Indeed, dispossession, exile, and ongoing occupation paved the way for the Palestinian political movements to draw on the Palestinian political identity and to wrest control of the Palestinian struggle from the Arab states (Mohammad, 1999). This was particularly the case after the 1967 War and Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Gerner, 2018; Schanzer, 2008).

Overall, the emergent political parties adopted armed struggle as the primary strategy to liberate Palestine and to exercise the right of return (Suleiman, 2001). In other words, Palestinian political movements began to emphasise the Palestinian nationalist ideology rather than Arabism (Pipes, 1987). The Palestinian political movements assumed armed struggle to be the only way to liberate Palestine and resist the Israeli occupation (Schulz, 2005). In turn, the recruitment of members to the political movements during the late 1960s was largely undertaken to facilitate this aim (Farah, 2013). This phase was an attempt to unify the Palestinian people and offer an alternative to the defeat of the Arab armies. In addition, Palestinians were against having

their future decided by the Arab states (Cobban, 1984).

The defeat of the Arab armies during the Six-Day War paved the way for the PLO to lead the Palestinian cause and implement its political aspirations with only limited influence from the Arab states. This points to the importance of the formulation of the PLO and its mission.

The Palestinian Liberation Organisation "Munazzamat al-Tahrir al-Filastiniyyah"

The PLO was founded in 1964 as the umbrella organisation of the Palestinian resistance movements (Dumper, 2007). It formed as a result of the weak position held by the Arab states in response to increased demands by the Palestinians to form an independent political entity (Banat, 2010; Mohammad, 1999). Different resistance and revolutionary movements have joined the PLO since its establishment. For instance, the Fatah movement was launched in 1965 and other Palestinian movements such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) were launched in 1967 and 1969 respectively (Cobban, 1984). The political structure of the PLO closely reflects the quota system of representation based on the size of the political party (Khalil, 2013). Therefore, the Palestinian National Council seats continue to be gained by appointment rather than election (Khalil, 2013).

Upon its formation, the core mandate of the PLO was to mobilise the question of the Palestinian right of return (Said, Abu-Lughod, Hallaj and Zuriek, 1988). Dumper (2007) claims that the Arab League formed the PLO as a supine Palestinian body. In 1974, the PLO assumed its role in international relations to act on behalf of all Palestinians and was recognised by the Arab League as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people (Barahmeh, 2014: 10; Schanzer, 2008). Cobban (2012) argues that the PLO was developed based on the authority of the Arab League, and not - as with most anti-colonisation movements - as a result of the demands of the colonised people. Moreover, Barahmeh (2014) asserts that the struggle to politically represent the Palestinian people has dominated the history of the Palestinian national movement since 1948. Indeed, the cornerstone of these political movements has always been the liberation of Palestine (Bisharat, 1997).

The PLO focused on the creation of the political and civil institutions and the recruitment of supporters. The early development of the PLO also saw the creation of revolutionary symbols; one notable example being the figure of a refugee who is always ready to make sacrifices to liberate Palestine and to ensure the return of Palestinians to their original homes (Rosenfeld, 2004). The figure always emerged from the refugee camps speaking about the pre-1948 Palestinian narrative. The content of the narrative was firmly embedded in the past and was thus empowered by the memory of many generations of refugees who had endured exile and harsh conditions. Indeed, the PLO was successful in using the memories of refugees and their connection to



the land as a political tool to effectively characterise the steadfastness of the Palestinian resistance to the exile and displacement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. As such, the PLO continued to promote the strategy that the armed struggle was the only way to respond to the Israeli occupation and to bring about the liberation of Palestine (Gresh, 1988). It is worth noting however that the PLO was perceived by the United States (US), other Western States, and Israel as a terrorist organisation until the beginning of the peace process in 1991 (Strenger, 2007).

The political efforts of the PLO during the 1970s gained its legitimacy and support both regionally and internationally (Cobban, 1984). However, the increasing level of support paved the way for a shift in the politics of the PLO. According to Mohammad (1997), during the 1970s, the PLO shifted its political aspiration and declared its vision for a two-state solution. In fact, the PLO made this move during its 12th Palestinian National Council meeting in Cairo in 1974; the objective was to shift from liberating the whole of Palestine to liberating the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Gresh, 1988; Mohammad, 1997). In other words, the PLO sought to realign the balance between its old strategy to liberate all Palestine and its new strategy that called for a territorial search for statehood.

The political implications of the PLO's attempts to transition its strategy began to surface during the 1980s. In 1982, the Israeli army invaded Lebanon in operation of 'Peace for Galilee'. The aim of the military operation was to destroy the political and military infrastructure of the PLO (Cobban, 1984: 3). As a result, the PLO was forced out of Lebanon and was relocated in Tunis. This relocation created another form of displacement for the Palestinian and resulted in a disconnection between the Palestinians in the occupied territories and the PLO leadership in exile. In turn, Khaladi (2007) argues that the PLO was becoming distant from the people and less effective. Notwithstanding this sense of tension and disconnection created through displacement and exile, Palestinians nonetheless largely remained unified during the 1980s through their struggle to confront the Israeli occupation. Hence, the impact of the first and second *intifadas* in Palestine and their influence on the PLO's political agenda, along with the political affiliations of the Palestinian refugees during this time is of particular interest.

The Political Realities and the First and Second Intifadas

Forceful expressions of resistance by the Palestinian refugees in particular and the Palestinians more broadly emerged in response to the occupation of Palestine by Israel. A widely expressed point of view in the literature is that such occupation is both a hegemonic power display by Israel and a tool of subordination. In fact, when considered through the Said's Orientalism theory, one may argue that it is indeed a conscious and determined effort by Israel to subordinate the Palestinians and to legitimise its interests and enhance its power.

First Intifada

In December 1987, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip began the first *intifada* ("shaking off") - a non-violent uprising against the Israeli occupation. Through the simple act of throwing rocks at the Israeli occupiers as an overt sign of defiance to their occupation. The first *intifada* took the Palestinian issue to the international stage and resulted in both international peace talks and secret negotiations between Israel and Palestinian representatives.

According to Bowker (2003), refugees primarily from the camps initiated the *intifada*. In fact, the refugees felt resistance towards the occupation without external organised leadership to provide them with power. As Bowker (2003) asserts, the *intifada* produced in the refugee a new sense of pride and commitment to the cause, and a new form of decentralised popular leadership. Ashrawi (1992) seconds this view, asserting that the *intifada* was the voice of an oppressed people calling for their self-determination and freedom. There are, however, other interpretations of this event. For instance, Pappé (2004) argues that the *intifada* emerged as a result of the Israeli settlement projects in the West Bank and the immigration of thousands of Israeli settlers into the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In addition, some writers attribute the first *intifada* to the death of four Palestinian civilians by an Israeli jeep at a checkpoint in Gaza Strip, thus implying that the uprising was not formally organised by Palestinian political leadership (Karkar, 2007; Morris 2001). According to Chenoweth and Stephan (2011), Palestinians living in the occupied territories recognised that neither the Arab states nor the PLO would liberate them from Israel, and therefore they themselves led the *intifada*.

The first *intifada* paved the way for various political groups to emerge to lead the refugees from within the camps (Rosenfeld 2004). Prior to the first *intifada*, most Palestinian refugees were affiliated with major political groups such as the Fatah Movement, the PFLP, and the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP) (Rosenfeld, 2004; Said, 2003). However, in the wake of the uprising during the first *intifada*, other political and religious groups emerged in Palestine including the Hamas Movement (hereafter Hamas), which was established in 1987. This movement developed as an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim



Brotherhood and operated from within the refugee camps in Gaza Strip. Hamas then reached the West Bank after the peace process commenced in 1991. There was subsequently a decrease in the level of support for the PLO within refugee camps due mainly to the uncompromising and explicit spiritual position Hamas endorsed as the way forward to liberate Palestine.

The political groups conducted their work in secret to prevent being detected by the Israeli forces (Rosenfeld, 2004). In the refugee camps, parities of the PLO were in control; namely Fatah and the Leftist parties. The parties united to work against the Israeli government, but also pursued their own political agendas and initiated recruitment drives. In contrast to the PLO (the leader is elected by the Palestinian National Council), leaders of the affiliated political movements achieved their position by political activism, sacrifices and internal party elections (Rosenfeld, 2004). According to Khalidi (2007), the leaders of Fatah and the other major political movements were recruited from the wider community, and included diverse social and religious classes, notably, from the refugee camps. In addition, the political factions were led by individuals who had a history of resistance against the Israeli occupation and who demonstrated political awareness. Most faction leaders had also spent time in an Israeli jail (Rosenfeld, 2004). In essence, the parties were revolutionary in the sense that their core objective was to overthrow the Israeli occupier and to create an independent Palestinian state (Rosenfeld, 2004).

The relationships among different political party members continued to be positive throughout the *intifada*. Without doubt, stability within the relationships emerged as a result of the social coherence among the refugees. For instance, Pearlman (2011) asserts that the relationships among different political party members were the backbone of the first *intifada*. In addition, an institutional framework developed from the bottom up as the work and support of political parties reached every house and family (Pearlman, 2011). Moreover, Nasrallah (2013) suggested that the multi-party cadres during the first *intifada* galvanised Palestinian society, overcoming division among political factions, religious groups and social classes. Furthermore, the social coherence was reflected in the recruitment of party members. Joining members depended on individual or family activities and in most cases individual social reputation. In some cases, one family supported one political faction and another supported different political factions (Jarar, 2003).

The first *intifada* continued until 1993, when the negotiation of the Oslo Accords heralded the start of the “peace process”. However, refugees were divided as to whether they should support or oppose the agreement. Some resistance groups inside the refugee camps including the PFLP, DFLP and Hamas voiced their opposition to the Accord (Yambert, 2012). As a result, tension between Fatah

loyalists and the opposing groups emerged, leading to a breakdown in communication and clashes among supporters in the streets of the camps. One year later, the PLO adopted the Palestinian Declaration of Independence in Algiers. This declaration was followed by another proposal made by Arafat in Geneva calling for the PLO to support a solution based on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions 242 and 338. In other words, the PLO proposed a Palestinian state in line with the 1967 borders.

Second Intifada

The second *intifada* (*Al-Aqsa*) took place in Palestine from 2000 to 2005. It started in September 2000 when Ariel Sharon, the former Israeli Prime Minister made a visit to *Haram al-Sharif* (Said, 2001a; Schulz, 2005). Pressman (2003) points out that the continued Israeli occupation and the limited progress during the peace negotiations were the underlying causes. In contrast, some Israelis argue that Arafat had planned for the *intifada* and that Palestinian leaders were simply waiting for the right moment (Pressman, 2003).

The second *intifada* was extremely violent and involved gunfire and sniper fire from the Israeli soldiers during the invasions of Palestinian refugee camps and other cities. Helicopter gunship attacks in civilian areas also occurred. For Palestinians, resistance took place in the form of rock throwing, guerrilla raids, and suicide bombings both in the occupied territories and Israel. Indeed, it was people from within the refugee camps who once again led the *intifada*. Some of the martyrs, many prisoners and many suicide bombers came directly from refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Banat, 2010).

During the *intifada*, Palestinian civilians faced ongoing hardship as the economic conditions in the occupied territories deteriorated to “a disastrous level” (Rubenberg, 2003). The primary cause of the economic devastation included restrictions in places that limited the movements of Palestinian people and the movement of the products in and out of, and within, the occupied territories (Reinhart, 2003). The closures were enforced at checkpoints and roadblocks, and by curfews and a permit system (Rubenberg, 2003). In addition, the Israeli government confiscated vast amounts of Palestinian land to build Jewish settlements (Rubenberg, 2003). Thousands of Palestinian homes were destroyed, fruit trees were uprooted, and commercial and public facilities were destroyed.

In the wake of the second *intifada*, refugee camps maintained their status as the birthplace of the political struggle. In fact, the second *intifada* arguably returned to the Palestinian refugees the spirit of resistance that was lost following the Oslo Accords. During both *intifadas*, the majority of the participants were drawn from refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Their high level of participation in the *intifadas* in turn raised the question as to why Palestinian refugees continued to take part in the struggle on the ground despite

the political representation of the PLO. Perhaps it can be explained in light of the famous statement by the late George Habash, a former leader of the PFLP; “*Resist, you only lose the confinement and tent.*” Thus, with many refugees holding the view that there was nothing left to lose, their participation in the political struggle through their involvement in the two *intifadas* may be understood as a way to regain a sense of pride and to liberate Palestine.

Growing Political Disillusionment among Palestinian Refugees

The disillusionment felt by the Palestinian refugees both within and outside the occupied territories as a response to the shifting politics of the PLO is widely discussed in the literature. Many Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, for instance, regard the realisation of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 194 (i.e. the Palestinian right of return) to be the only acceptable political outcome to ensure their return to Palestine. In addition, the refugees who settled outside of Palestine (e.g. Lebanon) were also disillusioned by the PLO’s decision to shift from negotiating for the right of return to negotiating for resettlement (Shaaban, 1994).

Furthermore, one of the most significant political implications of refugee disillusionment towards the PLO was the emergence of Hamas. According to (Chehab, 2007), the political shift led by the PLO paved the way for Hamas to emerge as an alternative. As Lutz and Lutz (2004) explain, Hamas continued to call on the liberation of Palestine and showed strong opposition to any compromise on the right of return question. In addition, radical leftists and radical Islamists opposed the peace talks between the PLO and Israel because they excluded the refugees’ right of return and focused mainly on the West Bank and Gaza Strip as settlement locations (Schulz, 2005: 143-144). The emergence of Hamas as a political movement to challenge the legitimacy of the PLO as a political representative of the Palestinian people is thus worthy of further consideration. In particular, the changing nature of the political environment in which the Palestinian refugees are positioned as long-standing and emergent political parties vie for their support.

The Emergence of Hamas – The Islamic Resistance Movement "Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah"

Despite the support for the PLO by the Palestinians living in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and among those exiled before and during the first *Intifada*, Hamas emerged as a new political movement (Kimmerling and Migdal, 2009). Established in 1987 in Gaza Strip, Hamas was presented as a powerful movement based on religious and political ideologies (Schanzer, 2008). As Banat (2010) wrote, Hamas was presented as an alternative political force to the PLO in the struggle of the Palestinian people.



Indeed, Hamas remains the most militant opposition movement in the Palestinian political history (Nusse, 1998). The movement marked its beginning with strong attacks against Israel using guerrilla warfare including numerous suicide bombings (Gunning, 2007; Usher, 1995). This unique technique paved the way for Hamas to increase its support among Palestinians, particularly in refugee camps. Hamas promoted its political agenda to every Palestinian household and proceeded to build institutions, mosques, schools, hospitals and welfare organisations throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Gunning, 2007; Schanzer, 2008). Furthermore, the combination of political and religious platforms espoused by Hamas appeared to have appealed to refugees as many new recruits were drawn from some of the most disadvantaged groups.

Burton (2012) argues that Hamas also cultivated support from within academic institutions by promoting social development based on religious teachings and moral education. In fact, during the 2006 election, Hamas increased its legitimacy as an alternative to the PLO on the basis of its recruitment methods and social agenda. The 2006 election of the Legislative Council marked a new era in Palestinian politics when Hamas proposed the establishment of a Palestinian Islamic state (Kimmerling and Migdal, 2009). The ideology underpinning the proposal derived from Hamas' belief that Palestine is "a holy land" and therefore its liberation is a religious duty (Gunning, 2007). Indeed, Hamas perceives the conflict with Israel as a holy war and as such, argues that it is the duty of the movement and Muslims more broadly to fight for the liberation of Palestine (Nusse, 1998).

Hamas is also considered one of the main opponents of the Oslo Accords as it views the peace process as a way to undermine and ultimately eradicate the Palestinian right of return (Nusse, 1998: 129). As declared by Hamas; "No one has the right to give away the refugees' right of return; it is a holy and unchanging right" (Ma'an News Agency, 3 November 2014). As such, the leader of Hamas, Mohmud Zahar, urged Palestinian refugees to protest in response to a document leaked by Al Jazeera network which revealed that Palestinian negotiators had conceded the right of return (Haaretz, 2011).

Since its inception, Hamas has remained the subject of criticism by the PLO and PA based on its political and ideological agendas. In addition, Hamas continues to be criticised for its direct relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. This criticism intensified after the collapse of the Muslim Brotherhood to the level where Hamas was listed as a terrorist organisation by the government of Egypt and the governments in the West (Aljamal, 2014). As a result, the criticisms of and the regional pressures placed on Hamas have resulted in refugees developing quite disparate opinions on the movement. In fact, Kraizim (2013) points to some survey evidence showing that Hamas is viewed negatively among Palestinians for its inference in Egyptian politics. The latter resulted in the closure of the Egypt-Gaza crossing borders. The crossing represents Gaza's main contact with the rest of the world and its closure resulted in further hardships for the Gazan people (Frisch, 2010: 197). Notwithstanding these criticisms, Hamas maintains its position on the

issue of Palestinian right of return and continues to condemn the PA's position on this issue.

The right of return holds a central position in the Palestinian narrative. As such, any talk of compromise or movement away from the right by the political representatives may impact the way in which Palestinians regard the legitimacy of their political representatives.

Political Shift: The Change in the PLO Agenda

The 1988 Declaration of Independence proclaimed by the PLO officially endorsed a two-state solution (Massad, 2002). The declaration sought to make East Jerusalem the capital of the Palestinian state; a state wherein all Palestinian refugees would be returned to the land they occupied prior to 1948 (Massad, 2002). Massad (2002) asserts that the two-state solution, being espoused as an acceptable alternative to the Liberation of Palestine as early as 1974, was officially understood as the way to unify Palestine.

Notably, the Independence Declaration failed to include the rights of the Palestinian diaspora or Israeli Palestinians. In fact, the PLO's acceptance of a two-state solution signified a significant compromise in the Palestinian people's historical claim. The two-state solution clearly offers Israel control over 78 per cent of historic Palestine (Suleiman, 2001). As such, Palestinians are offered a state within the West Bank and Gaza Strip including East Jerusalem. Said (2001a) also claims that the UNGA Resolution 194 was not mentioned during the Oslo Accords and that the PLO bluntly ignored the issue of the Palestinian right of return and its application to the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Said, 2001b: 143).

The PLO also declared its willingness to recognise Israel's right to exist in peace. As a result, Israel and the PLO agreed to reach a permanent settlement in accordance with the UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338 (Said, 2001b). Resolution 242 calls on Israel to withdraw from the territories it occupied in the 1967 War, and to determine a *just* settlement for refugees (SC Res 242). Resolution 338 in turn calls for the implementation of Resolution 242 (SC Res 338). Neither of the resolutions mention the right of return for the exiled Palestinian refugees (Suleiman 2001). The opening paragraph of Resolution 242 states that the Charter principles can only be fulfilled through the 'establishment of a just and lasting peace' (S/RES/242, 1967). In turn, this is only achieved through the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the occupied territories and the acknowledgement of the 'sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area' (S/RES/242, 1967). On the basis of this description, the 'just' settlement in Resolution 242 clearly projects a different outcome to the right of return compared to Resolution 194. That is, there is a paradigm shift from liberating Palestine and returning Palestinians to their homeland to asking Palestinians to accept a state within the 1967 borders.

In response, Israel officially recognised the PLO as the political representative of the Palestinian people

(Kimmerling and Migdal, 2009). However, opposition to peace talks with Israel emerged within the PLO, led by the PFLP and DFLP primarily in refugee camps and in Diasporas (Talhami, 2003). Refugees were fearful their return to Palestine would continue to be postponed or forgotten altogether. As the dominant party in the PLO, Fatah ignored the concerns of the refugees and the left-wing parties, and continued the peace talks with Israel (Abed Rabboh, 1996; Rosenfeld, 2004). In response, the PLO appeared dysfunctional and failed to include the voice of the Palestinian Diasporas and major political parties. Robinson (1997) argues that the Oslo Accords enabled exiled PLO leaders to re-establish power bases in Gaza Strip and the West Bank by promising to end the popular struggle against the occupation rather than lead it. Moreover, Parson (2005) claims that the Oslo Accords facilitated the transformation of the PLO's bureaucracy and armed forces into the civil and military institutions of autonomy subordinated by the elite returnee.

In contrast, a range of authors point to the way in which the PLO benefited the Palestinian people. For example, Kirisci (1986) posits that the PLO gave Palestinians the opportunity to mobilise the Palestinian cause. In addition, Sayigh (1997) argues that the PLO unified the Palestinian question and gave Palestinians a sense of identity. According to El-Khazen and al-Ḥazīn (2000), the PLO policies and actions supported the Palestinians and offered them ongoing political, social, and financial support. Indeed, the writer argues that in Lebanon the PLO was able to influence unions, political parties, and the press, as well as mobilise student organisations to the benefit of the Palestinian people (El-Khazen, 2000: 372). With regard to the PLO's involvement in the signing of the Oslo Accords, Karsh (2004) asserted that it gave the PLO the opportunity to re-establish a presence in Palestine.

Notwithstanding the contrasting views of the PLO and its legitimacy as a political representative of the Palestinian people, it clearly initiated a shift in its political agenda towards establishing its national authority within Palestine through the creation of the PA. Notably, Khan (2004) asserts that there was no other option for the PLO as its funds were running out as a result of declining contributions from the Arab states due to the Gulf War, and because aid from Western states could not be trusted. The argument that the PLO was forced to form the PA as a governmental institution to maintain its function is thus in need of further analysis.

Palestinian Authority and Haq Al-Awda

Following the Oslo Accords in 1993, the PA was established in Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank by Fatah groups, members of the old social class, and well-known families like Alhouseni, Abed Alhadi and Aldajani (Bowker, 2003: 165; Zanotti, 2014). The establishment of the PA marked a new area in the Palestinian history. A different political reality emerged, leading to the creation of a new political elite with a strong bond to the new authority (Rubin, 2009). In addition, many political activists during the first *intifada* joined the PA and obtained political positions or other forms of employment (Bowker, 2003 and Rosenfeld,

2004). In accordance with the peace agreement between the PLO and Israel, the West Bank was divided into three zones: A, B, and C (Grinberg, 2009). Zone A was under the control of the PA; whereas, zones B and C were under the control of Israel (Banat, 2010). Although the PA excluded most PLO parties from its political process and institutions, it continues to function as an agency of the PLO.

The establishment of the PA and subsequent transformation of the Palestinian political system created further debate about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This resulted in greater political segmentation and views about how the Palestinian right of return should be resolved. Notably, Palestinian refugees in Jordan who participated in a study by Farah (2013) reported that the creation of the PA was a political betrayal of their cause. Nonetheless, the changed political landscape witnessed the formation of the Palestinian police, army, intelligence, and security services for Palestinian refugees to join. In fact, most refugee Fatah members joined the PA as a symbol of their loyalty. Hence, while the peace talks continued between the PA and Israel, refugees were increasingly becoming a core element in the fabric of the PA (Schanzer, 2008).

As the PA's influence expanded into major cities in the West Bank, however, Palestinian refugees began to voice their concerns about its progress and performance (Abed Rabboh, 1996). Indeed, some scholars assert that the policies of the PA contributed to hardships among people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and caused further division among returnees, Palestinian refugees, and non-refugees (Rubin, 2009). In addition, power divisions emerged among local young *intifada* leaders living in the occupied territories such as Marwan Bargouthi, Husam Khader and many others - and among elite leaders established before the first *intifada* including Hanan Ashrawi, Sari Nusibha, Faisal Hussein and Hidar Abdel-Shafi. This divided governance structure caused further division among Palestinian refugees as camp dwellers felt they were being marginalised socially and politically and that the PA had failed to acknowledge their suffering.

Despite growing awareness in the refugee camps of the failure of the peace process and the formation of the PA, political affiliation with the leftist parties saw a significant decline (Banat, 2010). Hence, the rejectionist voice was loud and, as a result, its work was limited by non-government organisations. In contrast, the support for the Islamic movement emerged due to its powerful campaign criticising the PA's management of the Palestinian right of return (Banat, 2010). Hamas, in particular, promoted the idea that the PLO and PA sold out Palestine and neglected the suffering of the local Palestinians (Milton-Edwards and Farrel, 2010: 70). This perception of the PA politics is reflected in Rubin's (2009) argument that the Palestinian political elite became less committed to the domestic population and performed poorly. As a result, Hamas became a source of hope for the Palestinian people after eight years of what some refer to as corrupt governance by the PA and elite members of the Fatah movement (Schanzer, 2008).

Indeed, Hamas' victory in the 2006 legislative election reshaped the Palestinian political landscape even

further. Hamas rejected the existence of the State of Israel and refused to pursue peace talks or to disarm its military wing (Schanzer, 2008). Animosity between the PA and Hamas continued after the election and resulted in a violent conflict, with street fighting between representatives from both sides resulting in the expulsion of Fatah members from Gaza strip and divisions in the PA (Schanzer, 2008). In the course of writing this article, the PA held power in the West Bank and Hamas continued to govern Gaza Strip.

The Refugee Consciousness of their Political Struggle

The Refugee political consciousness is a natural by-product of their daily interactions and living conditions. The camps are surrounded by militarised fences and settlements, and Israeli soldiers control their daily movements. In addition, refugees witness daily raids on the camps by Israeli forces, are subject to curfews, and know of arrests and killings of family members. While there is a clear link between the refugee political consciousness and reality on the ground, there is also a direct link between family members and activism, and this influences the refugee political identity. For me, when I was a child I felt that my father and brother joined the political struggle because they felt it was an obligation to fight for the Palestinian right to return to their homes. Therefore, struggle was inexorably linked to a return to Palestine. Stories of struggle continue to be shared among school students and younger generations, and travel with Palestinians wherever they go. Indeed, the idea of political struggle is embedded in the minds and hearts of the refugees because the notion of homeland is integral to the refugee narrative.

The narrative of homeland consumes the major political themes of the refugee resistance and political struggle. Therefore, it is rare to find a camp dweller who is not involved in some form of political activity, or who is not participating in the political struggle more generally. Indeed, the political struggle has given the refugee self-confidence, a sign of hope, and empowerment.

The political struggle of the Palestinian people has developed over many years, but it intensified in the late 1980s at the time of the first *Intifada*. Farah (2009) even argues that Palestinian camps emerged as national signifiers for the armed struggle. Despite the differences between the camps, the political culture of the Palestinian refugee is underpinned by the notion of a unified fight against the occupier and a return to their homeland. As such, when a refugee resists the occupation they feel that they continue to be faithful to the cause. In short, houses in refugee camps do not have numbers, but the streets carry the names of martyrs, cities, and towns in Palestine before the exodus. This demonstrates how ideas and actions related to the resistance against the occupation and continued political struggle have found their way onto the streets of refugee camps and the narratives of many generations.

Conclusion

Dispossession, exile, and ongoing occupation paved the way for the Palestinian political movements to draw on the Palestinian political identity and to wrest control of the Palestinian struggle from the Arab states. The political culture of the refugees calls for an end to the occupation and for the liberation of Palestine. These outcomes were long-associated with the PLO Charter, which called for the liberation of Palestine and the self-determination of the Palestinian people. However, there was a shift in the PLO's political agenda to pursue an independent state for the Palestinians (i.e. two-state solution), accepting that in the event of the West Bank and Gaza Strip being liberated, the state would be established there (Gresh, 1988).

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