

Political and Ideological Factors of Conflict in Palestinian Society

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1. Introduction

Palestinian society is very fragmented. There are three main categories of Palestinian communities that comprise what is usually conceived as Palestinian society. There are many Palestinians living, mostly as refugees, in Arab countries, such as Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Although this group of Palestinians live in different Arab countries and face different circumstances, they share the same history and experience of exile. Another Palestinian community is composed of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Yet another relatively large Palestinian community is that living in Israel since 1948 and having Israeli citizenship status. Notwithstanding the differences between these communities, they compose what is usually called Palestinian society, despite the fact that the concept of society known to us from the sociological literature may not be valid in this particular case.

Palestinians have lost their shared geopolitical sense of belonging to the same place and space in the 1948 war. They were displaced and scattered all around by the ferocious events of the Nakba. These events have resulted into new circumstances for all Palestinians. Each community has had to face different social, political and economic conditions that determined its view of Palestinian reality and aspirations. Despite the fact that the Palestinian national movement managed to homogenize some of their political aspirations and lead the populations of the various communities to solid belief in their just struggle for liberation and return to their homeland, the circumstances under which the different Palestinian communities live have lead to differences on various matters including national ethos and strategies and means to achieve common goals. These differences emerged not only among the different Palestinian communities, but also within each of them. In each of the three main communities mentioned above we witness differences of views and perspectives regarding national goals and strategies and tactics to achieve them. There are also structural differences, such as class, place of residence and gender.

The complex conditions under which Palestinians live make any analysis of Palestinian political dynamics and sources of conflict a complex task to achieve. One has to determine which of the three earlier-mentioned communities to address to

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ensure that the analysis is not arbitrary and incomprehensible. Therefore, addressing the structural factors of conflict within Palestinian society has to submit to this condition in order to be of any validity. In the following pages I draw some attention to the Palestinian community in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in order to clarify the structural factors of conflict within that community. I chose to focus on this particular community for several reasons, the central of which is the fact that this community has turned out to be the center stage of Palestinian politics, at least in the last two decades. Furthermore, the Palestinian community in the West bank and Gaza Strip forms a stage of struggle for interests rooted in the other two communities. A process of state building has been taking place in the West Bank and Gaza Strip led by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). This process instigated by the Oslo Accord between Israel and the PLO has turned the Palestinian community in these areas into the main social core of what is understood to be Palestinian society. Although I am not in favour of limiting the social reference of Palestinian society to the community in the West Bank and Gaza Strip only and recognize that such an act may assist in promoting such a political aspiration, which is usually sought by either enemies of the Palestinian people or unconscious scholars, nevertheless it seems that analyzing this community separately could have positive implications if we seek clarity and comprehensibility. This reasoning may be supported by the mere fact that the Palestinian communities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have faced similar circumstances as a result of Israeli occupation since 1967, which turned it into a rather unique one. The Palestinian experience under occupation, and especially the long struggle against the occupation has turned this particular community into the central Palestinian community relevant to the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to political and economic stability in the region. Furthermore, the other two communities - the refugees in Arab states as well as the Palestinian citizens of Israel - have chosen other means to face Israeli policies and as a result have become secondary to the Palestinian community facing Israeli occupation on daily basis.

The following discussion of structural factors of conflict in Palestinian society will be limited to the sources of fragmentation and conflict among Palestinian elites only. This limitation is due to the difficulties that any broader analysis may face when seeking to encompass all of Palestinian society into one analytical frame. Understanding structural sources of conflict in Palestinian society can be made more apparent and clear by concentrating on the central splits within Palestinian political elites. Therefore, in the following pages I concentrate on the main axes of split within the Palestinian political elites, splits which are cross-cutting rather than parallel. This means that there is much overlap between them, enabling us to shed light on limited number of splits in order to explain the dynamics of conflicts rooted in them. This task will be facilitated by utilizing a theoretical model on elite structure and formation and their relationship to political stability and competence in achieving common goals. This paper will demonstrate that Palestinian elites are

disunited, a characteristic leading to a deep crisis in Palestinian politics and to an impasse in Palestinian progress towards independence.¹ Before I move to the concrete analysis of the main splits in the Palestinian elites, I present a theoretical framework in order to facilitate our understanding of the complexities of Palestinian politics.

2. Political elites, stability and conflict

Study of the disunity among Palestinian political elites corresponds with a growing tradition of scholarly work influenced by Gaetano Mosca that assumes a causal relationship between the structures of the “ruling class”, political stability and regime types.² Recent scholarly explorations of the relationship between elites and regime types have demonstrated that regime type is a dependent variable of elite (dis)unity and differentiation, especially in situations of transition and state building.³ In this context, Burton, Gunther, and Higley considered elites to be “persons who are able, by virtue of their strategic positions in powerful organizations, to affect national political outcomes regularly and substantially.”⁴ According to this definition, elites are the principal decision makers in the largest or most resource-rich political, governmental, economic, military, professional, communicative, and cultural organizations and movements in society. Notwithstanding this understanding, I do not consider elites to be limited to those people holding official positions. Elites should not be identified with governing persons. People who wield power and influence based on their active control of a disproportionate share of society’s resources are part of the elite, even though they may not have an official position or not even be visible.⁵ Not all influential people are visible and directly involved in decision-making. Some have intermittent influence--indirect and limited to specific issues pertaining to the organization and movements in which they are located.

¹ Yezid Sayigh, “The Palestinian Strategic Impasse”, *Survival*, vol. 44, no. 4, (Winter 2002), pp. 7-21.

² Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class*, trans. Hannah Kahn, ed. Arthur Livingston (New York 1939); Eva Etzioni-Halevy, *The Elite Connection: Problems and Potential of Western Democracy* (Cambridge 1993), pp. 34-50.

³ On the relationship between elite unity and regime type see: John Higley and Richard Gunther (eds.), *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe* (Cambridge 1992); John Higley, John Pakulski and W. Wesolowski, (eds.), *Post-communist Elites and Democracy in Eastern Europe* (London, 1998).

⁴ Michael Burton, Richard Gunther and John Higley, “An Introduction: Elite Transformation and Democratic Regime”, John Higley and Richard Gunther (eds.), *Elites and Democratic Consolidation*, p. 8.

⁵ Etzioni-Halevy, *The Elite Connection*.

Mosca called these people “the second stratum,”⁶ and Dogan and Higley speak about “shadow elites.”⁷

The broader understanding of elites utilized in this paper reflects the notion that power is not concentrated in a limited group of people, emptying most of society from any influence.⁸ We must differentiate between the power elite-- as a general term that includes all those who have influence on public life as a result of special merits, material resources, or other sources of power-- and the “governing elite” or “ruling minority”. The concept of the “power elite” follows Pareto’s distinction between the governing elite (comprising those who directly or indirectly take part in government), the non-governing elite (comprising all others with power but who are not part of the governing apparatus), and the majority of people, who have little if any, access to power, especially in non-democratic systems.⁹ Since the sources of power are diverse, groups of people utilize various resources in different circumstances in order to promote their interests. This makes society a dynamic entity structured by power.

Palestinian society is no exception. The existence of different types of elites is a major source of struggle for power and the ascendance of one elite marks, at least partially, the decline of another.¹⁰ The struggle for power among elites in Palestinian society has taken different forms. The exact form that this struggle has taken was dependent on many factors, mainly the measure of unity among these elites and the extent to which they were differentiated socio-economically.

A basic notion that stems from elite theory and the extensive literature on elites is that they are rarely homogeneous. But the extent of unity and disunity as well as differentiation is crucial in determining the modes of political conduct of elites. Elite theorists have demonstrated the relationship between the socio-economic composition of elites and modes of domination and control. Furthermore, Pareto, Mosca, Mills and others have demonstrated a causal relationship between elite structures and the rise and fall of different forms of political power.¹¹ Domhoff, Marger, Etzioni-Halevy, Putnam, and others have demonstrated the centrality of elite structures for the consolidation of state power in democratic states.¹² The

⁶ Mosca, *The Ruling Class*.

⁷ Mattei Dogan and John Higley, (eds.) *Elites, Crises, and the Origins of Regimes* (Lanham 1998), p. 15.

⁸ Charles Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (London 1959).

⁹ Vilfredo Pareto, *The Mind and Society*, trans. ed. Arthur. Livingston, 4 vols. (New York 1935); Mills, *The Power Elite*, p. 20.

¹⁰ Vilfredo Pareto, *The Rise and Fall of the Elites* (1986), p. 36.

¹¹ Pareto, *Elites*; Mosca, *The Ruling Class*; Mills, *The Power Elite*.

¹² William G. Domhoff, *The Power Elite and the State: How Policy is Made in America* (New York 1990); Martin Marger, *Elites and Masses* (Belmont 1981); Etzioni-Halevy, *Connection*; Robert Putnam, *The Comparative Study of Political Elites* (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ 1976).

structure of the elite is especially important in situations of crisis and political transformation.¹³ In most societies, elites compete continually for advantage, never uniting fully. Nevertheless, the cohesiveness of the elites is crucial. The more disunited the elite are, the more we witness competition and rivalry among its factions. Therefore, unity or disunity has substantial influence on the ability of elites to promote grand projects, such as national independence and state formation.

Recent scholarly works have indicated a direct connection between elite unity and differentiation and regime types.¹⁴ Consensual elites are viewed as strong and able to attain common goals relatively successfully. Fragmented elites are internally competitive and are less concentrated on common goals. The greater the fragmentation and disunity within elites the less chance there is to coordinate common goals and operate in concert. Competition for power among elites leads particular elite factions to view their interests as opposed to others. In such situations, the likelihood is enhanced that one elite faction will seek to dominate the state. Many scholars contend that a disposition toward compromise, flexibility, tolerance, conciliation, moderation, and restraint among elites is the *sine qua non* of democratic rule.¹⁵ Using Giovanni Sartori's language, for democracy to develop and flourish, elites must engage in "politics-as-bargaining" rather than "politics-as-war."¹⁶

The unity or disunity of the elites has two dimensions: normative and interactive. Higley and Lengyel claim that the "normative dimension is the extent of shared beliefs and values, as well as more specific norms – most of them informal and uncodified – about political access, competition, and restrained partisanship."¹⁷ The interactive dimension "is the extent of inclusive channels and networks through which elite persons and groups obtain relatively assured access to key decision-making centers."¹⁸ Elite differentiation means the extent to which "elite groups are socially heterogeneous, organizationally diverse, and relatively autonomous from the state and from each other."¹⁹

¹³ Dogan and Higley, *Elites*.

¹⁴ John Higley and Michael Burton, "Types of Elites in Postcommunist Eastern Europe," *International Politics*, 34 (June 1997), pp. 153-168; Field Lowell and John Higley, "Imperfectly Unified Elites: The Cases of Italy and France" in Richard Tomasson, (ed.), *Comparative Studies in Sociology* (Greenwich, CT 1978); Alan Knight, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, (Baltimore 1996); Hoffmann-Lange, *Eliten*; Higley, Pakulski and Wesolowski, *Postcommunist Elites and Democracy*; John Higley and Gyorgy Lengyel, (eds.) *Elites After State Socialism* (Lanham 2000).

¹⁵ Higley and Burton, "Types of Elites", pp. 153-168; Lowell and Higley, "Imperfectly Unified Elites".

¹⁶ Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems* (Cambridge 1976), pp. 224-6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Based on the unity and differentiation continuums, Higley and Lengyel delineate four possible combinations of elite structure and their different implications for regime type.²⁰ The four prototypes of relations between members of the elite are consensual, fragmented, ideocratic, and divided.²¹ First, where the elite are very united but highly differentiated, the higher the chances that they will seek accommodation and compromise in order to agree on goals and promote common interests. This improves the chances to establish democratic rule. Second, when the elite are united and narrowly differentiated, they become a front or a junta that operates in a highly coordinated manner. This fits the model of totalitarian regimes. Third, when elites are deeply divided and narrowly differentiated, the likelihood of aggressive competition among them is enhanced. This increases the likelihood that one faction will seek to dominate and impose its interests on other elite fragments and on the society as a whole. In such situations, the probability of an authoritarian regime is high, but disunity is likely to undermine the regime's stability. Fourth, when disunity among the elite is combined with wide differentiation, there is no agreement among them. Nonetheless, one faction can impose its power. In such cases, continuous competition and the rise of clientelism and patrimonialism are likely, as the dominant elite faction's control remains loose and its fear of losing power encourages informal institutionalism in which bribery and nepotism are the norm.

This paper claims that the composition of Palestinian elites is oscillating between the third and fourth options proposed by Higley and Lengyel. Palestinian elites are highly divided. There is growing differentiation, which has a major impact on Palestinian politics. This complex reality is a major structural source of conflict in Palestinian society, leading to extensive competition for power and to the unwillingness of the dominant elite to give up its control of the emerging state structures and reach a compromise with its opponents. The combination of disunity and increasing differentiation causes instability and competition, despite the fact that the current circumstances, especially the crisis in the peace process and the Israeli assaults on the PNA, may change some of these dynamics.

3. The hegemony of elites in palestinian society

Elite formation and the relationship among different political elites have always played crucial roles in the development of the Palestinian national movement. The centrality of elites is reflected in most studies of Palestinian politics, although the topic has not been addressed systematically. Despite the elitist twist in the study of Palestinian politics, it is still relevant for the study of the whole Palestinian society. Since elites have always deeply dominated Palestinian politics, spotlighting their

²⁰ The combinations indicated are based on Higley and Lengyel's model. See Higley and Lengyel, *Elites*, p. 7.

²¹ Higley and Lengyel, *Elites*, p. 2.

dynamics will help one understand much of Palestinian internal conflicts. This notion is true for the pre-1948 period, which attributes the inability of the Palestinian national movement to achieve its goals to the divisions among the different political elites that formed during the British Mandate in Palestine.²² Many scholars of Palestinian nationalism point out that the competition between supporters of Haj Amin Al-Husayni and those of Raghib Al-Nashashibi paralyzed the national movement and prevented coordinated mobilization against the Zionist movement in the 1920s and 30s.²³ Although prominent Palestinian leaders have warned of repeating the experiences of the pre-1948 period, factionalism and disunity have continued to characterize the Palestinian national movement.²⁴

The continuous fragmentation process among Palestinian political elites has been marked by constant competition among different belief systems, a lack of shared ethos, and reciprocal distrust and suspicion. Elite fragmentation has been a source of instability that has prevented the routinization of Palestinian politics into commonly accepted procedural patterns. The disunity of Palestinian political elites can be traced to generational, ideological and political factors. Two central axes of elite disunity characterize Palestinian politics. The first is the split between the PLO elite in exile (or those who became known as “returnees” after the establishment of the PNA), and the national elite that grew up under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The second axis of elite disunity is the gulf between secular-national and religious-Islamic elites. These two splits contain other ones, such as the one in class between wealthy and poor, the ecological one between refugees and townsmen and the gender split between men and women. The two main axes of splits within Palestinian elites have managed to absorb other socioeconomic and sociocultural factors and submit them to their own logic. As a result it is hard to delineate a clear class split in Palestinian society since it is completely absorbed into the nationalist-Islamist or the returnees-local ones. In both the national and Islamist camps we find wealthy and poor as well as men and women fighting the same battle. The same is also true for the second main split between returnees and locals.

The two splits indicated above have been major determinants of Palestinian politics in the last decade and of the regime type that began to emerge in the Palestinian territories between 1994 and 2000. The fragmented elite structure has had nega-

²² Bayan Nuwayhid Al-Hut, *Al-Qiyadat wa al-Mu'assasat al-Siyasiyya fi Filastin, 1917-1948* (The Political Leadership and Institutions in Palestine, 1917-1948), 3rd ed. (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1986).

²³ Al-Hut, *Al-Qiyadat*; Issa Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine: Arab Factionalism and Social Disintegration, 1939-1948* (Albany 1991); Sadiq Al-Azm, *Dirasa Naqdiyya li Fikr al-Muqawama al-Filastiniyya* (A Critical Study of the Thought of the Palestinian Cause) (Beirut 1973).

²⁴ Salah Khalaf with Eric Rouleau, *My Home, My Land, A Narrative of the Palestinian Struggle* (New York: Times Books, 1981).

tive repercussions with respect to the development of a common Palestinian strategy for a satisfactory peaceful settlement of the Palestine question as well as the tragic deterioration of the Palestinian situation in recent years. This depiction does not skip the major Israeli influence on Palestinian politics and the breakdown of the peace process. Israel has been the central player responsible for developments in Israeli-Palestinian relations, especially because of its hegemonic military, economic and political role. Notwithstanding, one should not avoid shedding some light on Palestinian internal dynamics.

4. Disunity and power struggle in the national elite

Scholarly work on Palestinian nationalism has already focused some attention on Palestinian political elites. This literature is enlightening and informative. It explicates many unknown dimensions of Palestinian politics and points to some changes in the organization of the Palestinian national movement. Some studies devote attention to the split between Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) as a central example of the disparities and fragmentation of the Palestinian political elites during the 1970s and 1980s.²⁵ Others focus on political developments, especially the elites of the West Bank and Gaza Strip,²⁶ while still others emphasize institutional and organizational developments in these areas.²⁷ Recent studies have focused on the post-Oslo period and pointed to the tension between “returnees” and “locals” as the main factor influencing Palestinian elite formation. Of special importance are the studies conducted by Palestinian political sociologists Jamil Hilal and Khalil Shikaki.²⁸ Both, each in his own way, focus on the split between the ruling elite of the PA, mainly the “returnees,” and the local population of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

²⁵ Alian Gresh, *The Struggle Within: Towards a Palestinian State* (London 1985); Walid Kazziha, *Revolutionary Transformation in the Arab World: Habash and his Comrades From Nationalism to Marxism* (London 1975).

²⁶ Glenn E. Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State: The Incomplete Revolution* (Bloomington 1997); Emile Sahliyyeh, *In Search of Leadership: West Bank Politics since 1967* (Washington DC: Brookings Institute, 1988); Moshe Maoz, *Palestinian Leadership on the West Bank: The Changing Role of the Arab Mayors under Jordan and Israel*, (London 1984); David Aaron Miller, *The PLO and the Politics of Survival* (New York 1983).

²⁷ Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for Statehood: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993* (Oxford 1997); Hillel Frisch, *Countdown to Statehood: Palestinian State Formation in the West Bank and Gaza* (New York 1998).

²⁸ Jamil Hilal, *Al-Nizam al-siyasi al-filastini ba'd Oslo: Dirasah tahliliyah naqdiyah* (The Palestinian Political System after Oslo: An Analytical Study) (Ramallah, Muwatin, 1998); Jamil Hilal, *Takween al-Nukhba al-Filastiniyya Munth Nushu' al-Haraka al-Wataniyya ila ma ba'd Qiyam al-Sulta al-Wataniya* (The Formation of the Palestinian Elite: From the Emergence of the National Movement to the Establishment of the National Authority) (Ramallah and Amman: Muwatin and al-Urdun al-Jadid, 2002); Khalil Shikaki, “Palestinians Divided”, *Foreign Affairs* (January-February 2002), pp. 89-105.

Shikaki proposes a major shift of power alignments within the dominant national elite. Limiting his analysis to the post-Oslo period, he claims that the failure of the Oslo process undermined the power and legitimacy of the Old Guard in Palestinian society. By 'Old Guard' Shikaki means both the political and military hierarchies in the PA and the leadership of the main political party, Fatah. In his view, the loss of the "monopoly over the use of force" by the ruling elite during the second intifada marked a shift in the balance of power between the Old Guard and a Young Guard within the national elite. Shikaki claims that the Young Guard derives its power from "its alliance with the Islamists, the overwhelming public dissatisfaction with the peace process of national reconstruction," and the support the public gives to the use of arms against the Israeli occupation forces and the settlers."²⁹ Public support for the Young Guard thus neutralizes the Old Guard's tools of coercive force and, under certain conditions, renders them almost irrelevant.³⁰

Hilal, on the other hand, maintains that there is a historical and sociological continuity in the composition of the national elite and earlier PLO elites and that there has been little change in the membership of the top echelons of power over the past decades.³¹ Nevertheless, Hilal identifies a myriad of new power relations in Palestinian society in the post-Oslo era. In his view, these power relations derive from the office of the PNA president, which he describes as an omnipotent political force and a central source of authority. However, this depiction still does not clarify how presidential decision-making relates to the contending factions and competing loyalties within the ruling elite. Hilal does not explain how the internal hierarchies within the national ruling elite were constituted.³² He claims that these hierarchies are a function of the president's office. In other words, he sees the PNA president as the undisputed authority, not because all factions of the national elite agree with and support his policies, but rather because he is the only common denominator that holds the system together. This reality turns his potential disappearance into a central issue that has not been discussed openly in the Palestinian public agenda. The appointment of Mahmud Abbas as prime minister in early 2003, the death of Arafat in December 2004 and the election of Abbas as PA president a few months later put Hilal's, as well as Shikaki's, analysis in a new perspective.

The two almost opposing accounts of the Palestinian political elites presented by Shikaki and Hilal pose interesting questions. Both scholars focus on the top echelons of power in the national elite. The opposing views of the relationships within the dominant Palestinian national elites of the PA calls for further exploration of

²⁹ Shikaki, "Palestinians", p. 95.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 95.

³¹ Hilal, pp. 78-79.

³² This critique echoes the critical position of Salim Tamari, another Palestinian sociologist, who was disturbed by the firm positions taken by Hilal in this regard. See his review essay: Salim Tamari, "Who Rules Palestine?" in *Journal Of Palestine Studies*, xxxi. 4 (Summer 2002), pp. 102-113.

Palestinian elite formation. In light of the importance of these contributions to the understanding of Palestinian politics, their narrow focus on the governing national elite renders them rather partial. The complexity of Palestinian political reality makes it clear that elites cannot and should not be equated only with those who have direct control over official power structures. Contending elites may not have less power than official elites, if we consider their ability to present an alternative political formula or produce control mechanisms that undermine official power structures, such as the developments in Hamas' power and its influence on Palestinian politics demonstrate.

Hilal and Shikaki do not address the Islamist elite and their impact on internal Palestinian relations. However, an understanding of the power of the Islamist elite and their influence on Palestinian political reality expands our understanding of political elites and of the sources of tension and the dynamics of political life in Palestinian society. Furthermore, the narrow focus on the division between the Old Guard of the PLO and the Young Guard of those leaders who grew up in the West Bank and Gaza Strip renders the Palestinian political reality dichotomous and schematic. Palestinian political reality, especially the circulation of elites, is too complex to be described in dichotomous terms. The political coalitions of returnees (Old Guard) and locals (Young Guard) in the 1996 elections and later in the PA in addition to coalitions established between nationalist and Islamists during the second intifada make the picture much more complex and render indispensable the need for multifaceted explanations. Furthermore, the understanding of current developments cannot be separated from their historical background.

Understanding the dynamics of Palestinian elite formation requires looking at the historical and institutional constitution of the relationship between the different elites. It is true that until the mid-1980s the political elite in exile made most of the crucial decisions within the Palestinian national movement. This elite managed to marginalize the political elite of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and subordinate it to the political center in exile. However, the outbreak of the first and second intifada created new dynamics in which a new generation of national and Islamist elites from the West Bank and Gaza, who are rooted in the lower social class and in the refugee community, began to assert more pressure to gain power and influence in Palestinian politics. This change was motivated by the rise of a new generation of Palestinians who had lived under and fought against Israeli occupation, something that added to the social differentiation of the Palestinians active in the national struggle and reached influential political positions. The new generation did not manage to transform the balance of power with the dominant national elite. The governing elite in exile retained its hegemony. Nonetheless, new coalitions between the external governing elite and national leaders from the occupied territories began to emerge bridging some of the gaps that existed from the 1970s and 1980s and reshaped Palestinian politics, without altering the dominant power structure. This process marked attempts to consolidate a coalition of elites to promote a major

shift in the Palestinian national movement and altering its strategy from struggle for liberation to struggle for state formation. This shift was manifested in accepting the Oslo formula and the establishment of the PNA. This shift has been rooted in the efforts to maintain the hegemony of the dominant elite of the PLO and re-institutionalize its power in a new power structure based on the new international and regional circumstances on the one hand and on the intensive socio-political developments in the West Bank and Gaza Strip on the other hand. The matrix of power that emerged with the Oslo process did not satisfy all parties in the national elite. It was challenged by a growing number of people from a wide and diverse social spectrum. Many, especially local leaders, expressed their dissatisfaction with the growing authoritarianism of the governing elite, manifested by Yasir Arafat's centralization of power, which promoted the influence of the returnees. Arafat, who was the main source of authority in Palestinian politics and whose power was based on a circle of loyal leaders from the old guard of the PLO, quickly managed to establish his authority as the central figure in the PNA. The dominant elite of the PLO, which sought to guarantee its domination, enforced Arafat's authoritarian decisions, enabling him to appoint his loyalists to central positions and intervene at all levels of decision-making.³³ A good example of this tendency was Arafat's authoritarian interventions in order to influence the list of national candidates for the elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council in early 1996.³⁴ Not satisfied with the results of the internal primaries in the Fatah movement, which led to the marginalization of some of his loyalists, Arafat dropped young elected candidates and added others who had not managed to be elected. His intervention was perceived as anti-democratic and caused much dissatisfaction among young local leaders, who were determined to fight for their place. Several of them ran as independents and were elected to the PLC. Arafat's aim was to marginalize locally popular and partially autonomous Fatah leaders and strengthen his own loyalists.³⁵ Sara Roy followed this process of appointing traditional, old-guard types to key positions in Fatah and claimed that "such appointments are at the expense of Gaza's younger Fatah activists, who enjoy substantial grassroots support and who are seen as having paid their dues through long years in prison. Many believe that Arafat's aim ... is to marginalize Fatah's younger political leadership so as to diminish the challenge they inevitably present".³⁶ Arafat's personalization of politics de-institutionalized collective action. He tried to empty the political structures established by the local political elite in the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the strug-

³³ Rex Brynen, "The Neopatrimonial Dimensions of Palestinian Politics", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 25, no. 1 (Autumn 1995), pp. 23-36.

³⁴ Asa'd Ghanem, "Founding Elections in Transitional Period: The First Palestinian General Elections," *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 50, no. 4 (Autumn 1996), pp. 513-528.

³⁵ Robinson, *Palestinian State*, pp. 178-181.

³⁶ Sarah Roy, "The Seeds of Chaos, and of Night: The Gaza Strip after the Agreement," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 23, no. 3 (1997), p. 86

gle against occupation of any political role.³⁷ He did not want to commit himself to the existing civil organizational infrastructure, established by the local elite during the struggle against occupation and instead promoted the establishment of new institutions connected to him and led by people who were personally loyal to his leadership.

Arafat's measures were explained by him as necessary steps to bridge the gaps between the local and the returning elites. The returning PLO rank and file changed the social fabric of Palestinian society in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.³⁸ The returnees were suspected by the local residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. They represented an authoritarian political culture and sought high-ranking positions with special prestige in the PA at the expense of the local political elite. The returning political elite in turn viewed the local population as conservative and provincial.³⁹ Nevertheless, it was clear to the PLO elite that political survival compelled them to cooperate with the existing socio-political balance of power. Social integration and political consolidation were promoted for political purposes.⁴⁰ As a consequence patronage politics became an indispensable phenomenon.

The establishment of new governmental organizations opened the door for political leaders to create their own circles of political supporters. Since the new political structure had to be established quickly, the patterns of recruitment familiar in Arab society were the most available. Neo-patrimoniality, where benefits are distributed according to familial affiliation, soon became evident. Social groups that did not establish political coalitions found themselves unable to obtain access to public resources or be part of policy-making processes. As a result, the boundaries of public role and private interest became blurred. Bureaucrats turned their jobs into power positions and sought private interests using public titles for that purpose. This process has deepened the split between those who managed to penetrate the PNA structure and those who did not. A local lawyer commented on this issue saying: Since the establishment of the Authority, most of the big families began to reunite themselves in order to operationalize their quantitative quality in order to achieve personal interests and goals. These efforts concentrated mostly around getting as many positions in the PA as possible, overlooking the professional or practical qualities that these positions demand.⁴¹

³⁷ Robinson, *Palestinian State*, pp. 175-200.

³⁸ Salime Tamari, "The Local and the National in Palestinian Identity," in Kamal Abdel-Malek & David C. Jacobson, *Israeli and Palestinian Identities in History and Literature* (New York 1997), pp. 3-8.

³⁹ Hilal, *Al-Nizam*, p. 138.

⁴⁰ Khalil Shikaki, "The Peace Process, National Reconstruction, and the the Transition to Democracy in Palestine," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 25, no. 98 (1996), pp. 5-20.

⁴¹ Saed Ahmad Sidqah, *Al-Quds*, October 12, 1995.

Although the once-exiled governing elite (the returnees) still occupy central positions in the PA, local personalities of different social origins have sought and some have even managed to gain considerable influence on the new power structure. Whereas, during the first three years of the PNA the returnees seemed to establish their hegemony by capturing almost all of the crucial junctures of power in the PA, the 1996 elections and later the second intifada provided indicators of the ability of national oppositional local forces to disrupt social and political stability and undermine hegemony. Local tribal and familial leaders as well as political activists from the young generation of nationalists that grew up under occupation increasingly sought to influence political developments. The clash of interests between local tribal leaders and young national as well as the incapacity of the governing elite to translate its political program into beneficial results caused the public to be dissatisfied, frustrated, and disappointed. Local national leaders, especially from the lower ranks, began mobilizing society against the PA's dominant social, economic and political elite in an attempt to influence public agenda and gain more power.

As a result of the disappointment with the policies of the PNA's dominant elite, a new generation of leaders has had a growing impact on political developments in Palestine, especially after the outbreak of the second intifada. However, one has to note that we are not talking about a homogeneous Young Guard that operates in a cohesive manner opposing the Old Guard. The nationalist New Guard is not a unified group of leaders, but rather a heterogeneous group that has been seeking to gain influence either by integrating into the emerging power structure or by disrupting it. The competition among leaders of the security forces as well as among different factions within Fatah, the dominant party in the PNA, illustrates the dynamics within the national elite and its internal disunity. Any homogeneous account that ignores these internal differentiations within the national elite is consequently partial.

Internal differentiation within the national elite does not mean that there has been a total change in the composition of this elite. As Hilal has shown, there is some continuity in the structure of the dominant national elite. The process of coalition-making between returnees and locals during the 1996 elections empowered traditional leaders. The leaders of the PLO ruling elite who returned to the occupied territories and sought to be elected to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) had to establish their electoral social base. The only way to do so was to strike deals with local leaders. Many returnees sought to gain votes in exchange for providing jobs and other resources to local leaders of clans and tribes, who sought positions in the bureaucratic and military structures of the PA. These recruitment policies rendered clientalism and patronage politics indispensable. These patterns of political recruitment were behind the reemergence of the local traditional elite in the PNA and the emergence of political monopolies that protected the governing elite in the PNA but kept its base of support rather narrow. Although the new loyalty

networks ensured the domination of the returnees, they were also a source of weakness. The governing elite established what Nazeh Ayubi has called a “fierce state.”⁴² This misuse of authority led young Fatah cadres and the Islamist elite to oppose the attempts to marginalize them, which contributed to the outbreak of the second intifada. This intifada represented a clear rejection of the emerging political order, not only opposition to Israeli policies.⁴³

Clientalist political recruitment was, at least partially, behind the dissatisfaction of many members of Fatah’s youth movement, al-Shabiba, with the political conduct of the PA’s ruling elite. This put the young generation of leaders in a dilemma: should they support the emerging political order and defy attempts made by the Islamist elite to undermine the peace process or join the latter in its resistance against Israeli occupation and thereby display their mistrust of the national ruling elite? Based on the outbreak of the second intifada and the high participation of Fatah’s youthful Tanzim in operations against Israeli occupation, it is clear that many members of the younger generation of national leaders turned away from support for negotiations as the main means to promote national interests. They accepted the thesis promoted by the Islamist elite that negotiations were not a productive means to end the occupation. In particular, they defied the position of the PNA governing minority that continued to pursue negotiations and sought to prevent the escalation of the intifada. The dynamics of the second intifada, which has in the meanwhile calmed down, following Arafat’s death and the election of Mahmud Abbas as PA president, demonstrate that the younger generation of national leaders, especially members of Fatah’s Tanzim, has managed to hijack the national agenda and set new rules of the internal Palestinian political game. The hijacking of top police officials and leaders of the security forces in Gaza few months ago clearly indicate not only the chaos in the occupied territories, but also the power struggle taking place among the national elite, which still dominates the Palestinian political field today.

5. The national-islamist split and the struggle over authenticity

In a short comment on Palestinian politics two years after the establishment of the PA, the Palestinian sociologist Salim Tamari remarked, “just as the ‘peace camp’ has lost its earlier euphoria about the glorious prospects of impending independence, so has the opposition lost its agenda to annul the PLO-Israeli agreements. In many ways, all opposition in Palestine today – secular and Islamist – deals with the Oslo and Cairo accords as *fait accompli*.” This comment of Tamari reflects the crisis of Palestinian politics at a very early stage. The PA’s governing elite invested most of its political resources in buying legitimacy and imposing

⁴² Nazeh Ayubi, *Over-Stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London 1995).

⁴³ Rashid Khalidi conveyed a similar view in a paper presented at the Middle-East Studies Association (MESA) annual conference, Washington D.C., November 2002.

control over Palestinian society in the West bank and Gaza Strip. The PA's elite sought to establish its political and legal order as the only possible model of state building. The lack of sovereignty and the continuation of Israeli occupation have made this task more difficult to achieve. But the diplomatic process which began in Oslo did lead to the establishing of the PA, mobilizing a wide range of oppositional forces in Palestinian society, both in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and in exile.

Before Oslo, contentious Palestinian politics concentrated on opposing Israeli occupation, a goal shared more or less by all the different political factions. After Oslo and the establishing of the PA, protest and contention were directed against the PA as much as against Israeli authority in areas that remained under direct Israeli rule. As a result, Palestinian contentious politics was split between an anti-colonial struggle and oppositional politics within a pseudo-state system. In many cases there has been an overlapping between the two types of opposition since the PA was understood by several oppositional groups as representing Israeli indirect rule. The structure and forms of opposition became more complicated. Fatah became a state-party and despite some internal opposition most of Fatah's leaders got involved in building the ruling state apparatus. The opposition, mainly the PFLP, the DFLP and Hamas began establishing themselves as "loyal" opposition despite the rhetoric regarding the illegitimate status of the PA.⁴⁴ After several months of harsh opposition to the idea of the PA, the opposition – secular and Islamic – became more focused on the performance of the PA apparatus.

In the early months of the PA, the leadership of the secular factions of the PLO in exile opposed its mere existence as legitimate representative of the Palestinian aspirations and viewed its leadership as traitors.⁴⁵ The elite of the two Fronts – The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine - in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which had lost most of their power to either Fatah or Hamas, diverted their energies to establishing an NGO infrastructure that forms a nucleus of counter public opposing the PA's political system from within. Being in the middle of changes, the leaders of the PFLP and DFLP in the occupied territories could not follow the policy of their compatriots in exile. Instead of getting involved in the PA's political system and thereby legitimating it, they viewed civil society as a secure locus in which they could anchor their opposition to Fatah's hegemonic endeavors. The elite of the two Fronts became part of a broader trend according to which the NGO sector was conceived as a counterweight for the institutionalization process led by the governing elite of the

⁴⁴ The leaders of both Fronts opposed establishing any organization on national scale that could or would challenge the representative status of the PLO and insisted on reforming this institution only.

⁴⁵ For such a position review Al-Hadaf and Al-Huriya, the mouthpieces of PFLP and DFLP respectively in the period between September 1993 and September 1995.

PA.⁴⁶ Since the Palestinian civil sector has not been very influential in the elite struggle, I would rather turn to addressing the differences between the national and Islamist elites.

The Islamic elite had its own institutional infrastructure in the West Bank and Gaza. Opposing the PA was translated into challenging the PA over the control of the Palestinian street, while the struggle against Israeli occupation in areas outside PA's direct control continued. These opposition types brought new political patterns to the Palestinian national scene that influenced the PA's capability to lead a coherent campaign against Israeli policies. The PA's efforts toward power centralization and its attempts to balance between its will for monopoly over the means of violence and the endeavors to avoid a civil war opened the door for increasing challenge to its authority.⁴⁷ The Islamic opposition exploited the weak position of the PA in facing Israeli policies in order to delegitimize the peace process and set an alternative strategy of armed resistance.⁴⁸ The differences between the PA and Hamas and the latter's armed resistance were utilized by Israel to justify its military policies in Palestinian areas including those under full PA control, something that weakened the PNA elite and strengthened the Islamist elite as an indispensable player in any future peace negotiations.

The Islamist elite, which was marginalized by the nationalists, began establishing a new organizational infrastructure in the early 1980s. It engaged in what came to be known as the "war of institutions"⁴⁹ against PLO supporters in order to protect its power. This pattern of contention, the competition between Fatah supporters and the Islamist movement at the universities, in the villages, towns, and refugee camps, turned Palestinian politics into a whole new ball game. Whereas the competition between Fatah and the leftist factions had taken place within the framework of the PLO, the Islamists challenged the representative character of the organization as a whole. The Islamist political elite sought not only to block the PLO elite from dominating Palestinian politics, but also to counter PLO and later PNA power and to extend its own control over society and subordinate political priorities to its worldview.

⁴⁶ Riad Malki, "The Opposition and its Role in the Peace Process", in Mahdi Abdul Hadi (ed.), *Dialogue on Palestinian State Building and Identity* (Jerusalem 1999), pp. 3-10.

⁴⁷ On the ways Hamas exploited the weaknesses of the PA see: Mishal and Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas*, pp. 83-112.

⁴⁸ Rubin, *Palestinian Politics*, pp. 114-137.

⁴⁹ For more information about the real meaning of this expression, see Amal Jamal, "Zivilgesellschaft ohne Staat? Das Beispiel Palästina," in *Probleme der Zivilgesellschaft im Vorderen Orient*, Ferhad Ibrahim & Heidi Wedel (eds.) (Opladen 1995), pp. 165-179; Salim Tamari, "The Palestinian Movement in Transition: Historical Reversals and the Uprising," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2 (Winter 1991), pp. 57-70; Muhamad Muslih, "Palestinian Civil Society," *Middle East Journal*, vol. 47, no. 2 (Spring 1993), pp. 258-274.

The central turning point in the emergence of the Islamist elite in the occupied territories came with the establishment of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas. Hamas was the organizational articulation of a long process of political mobilization of religious Moslem Palestinians who believed faith to be the best strategy for resistance to Israel. Despite the fact that Hamas was a new organization, its roots go back to the 1920s.⁵⁰ Therefore, the organization did not articulate a sudden change, namely the rise of fundamentalist worldviews, in Palestinian politics. Nevertheless, the establishment of Hamas was a significant development. It marked changes in the community of faith of the Moslem Brothers' community in the Gaza Strip and it articulated shifts in the balances of power within Palestinian society.

The Moslem Brotherhood Society, which until the beginning of the uprising believed in Islamic education as the appropriate strategy of resistance and education of the *al-Jihad* generation, began to face internal demands for mobilization spearheaded by a group of young leaders. This generation of young leaders became more powerful in the Islamist religious establishment as a result of their capacity to mobilize a rising number of Palestinians to adopt religious belief as the correct ideology with which to face the political reality of occupation. The availability of religious organizational infrastructures in the form of charity organizations and educational systems made the shift towards Islamism much easier for those segments of society that had always practiced Islam, but never as a political ideology. This has been especially apparent in the conservative and traditional rural areas of the West Bank. In these areas Islamism, especially what has been called popular Islam, has been an integral part of the way people conceive their identity.⁵¹

Islamism has always been an important marker of Palestinian society, although it became more visible in the 1980s. Of particular importance was the establishment in 1973 of al-Mujamma' al-Islami (Islamic Complex) by active religious leaders from a lower middle class background. The Mujamma furnished the organizational infrastructure of the Hamas movement. It was the first organization, among several others that were established in the 1970s, to carry out the plans of the leadership of the Moslem Brotherhood to expand and influence developments in Palestinian society under occupation. Among the most important organizations was the "Islamic Foundation," established in 1976, and the "Islamic University," founded in 1978. This organizational change marked the rise of a new generation of religious leaders

⁵⁰ For details of the early history of the Moslem Brotherhood in Gaza, see Ziad Abu Amr, *Guthur al-Harakat al-Siyasia fi Qita' Gaza 1948-1967 (The Roots of the Political Movements in Gaza Strip, 1948-1967)* (Acre 1987), pp. 61-84.

⁵¹ The data supplied by Mohammad Shadid and Rick Selzer in their 1986 public opinion poll support the line of thought developed here. See Shadid and Selzer, "Political Attitudes of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip," *Middle East Journal* 42, no. 1 (Winter 1988).

that was to become involved in politics and to seek to influence the political reality in Palestine.

In contrast to positions taken by the traditional leadership of the Islamic Brotherhood, the new generation of religious leaders, who had never been students of religious jurisprudence, became less and less reluctant to take an active militant stand against occupation. In less than a decade – from the mid seventies to the mid eighties – the socio-political transformations in Palestinian society engulfed Islamist organizations. The transformation of the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israeli authorities from sporadic confrontations to a continuous and comprehensive revolt in December 1987 raised tensions between the younger generation of the Moslem Brotherhood Society, who were enthusiastic about participating in the uprising, and the older generation, who argued that the time had not yet come.⁵² Representatives of the older generation claimed that the Brotherhood was still in the phase of educating the Moslem generation in preparation for the restructuring of the Moslem community. The representatives from the younger generation were aware of the changes that were taking place among Palestinian youth in general and the Islamist youth in particular. Resisting occupation was seen by the young generation as an opportunity to empower the Islamist movement in society and to move its leaders to the forefront of the Palestinian political stage.⁵³ Among the issues raised in meetings of the Moslem Brotherhood leadership was a concern that the PLO, especially its Fatah leadership in exile, might manipulate the intifada for its own political purposes and regain its power by promoting a political settlement in exchange for ending the “civil revolt” in the occupied territories.⁵⁴

In a meeting held on 9 December 1987 in the house of Ahmad Yassin, the charismatic founder of al-Mujamma' al-Islami, a group of activists in the Moslem Brotherhood decided to draw up a new strategy for the society. This meeting was perceived as a triumph of the new generation of Islamist leaders over the traditional leadership. The new generation of leaders differed from the traditional leadership in class and political ideology. The traditional leadership tended to be urban, upper-middle-class merchants who established relationships with conservative Arab regimes, such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Jordan. The socio-economic composition of this leadership and its political interests led it to support the *status quo*. The new generation of leaders consisted of university-educated people from lower-middle-class, non-merchant origins who come from rural and refugee camp backgrounds. These middle-stratum activists believed in a more active religious ideology. Therefore, one of the decisions taken at the meeting in Sheikh Yassin's house was to found a resistance movement that engaged in planning, organizing and carrying out

⁵² Khaled Abu al-Omreen, *Hamas: The Islamic Resistance Movement, its Roots, Emergence and Political Thought*, (Cairo: Arab Cultural Center, 2000), pp. 257-260.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

activities against occupation.⁵⁵ Seven people participated in the meeting: Ibrahim al-Yazuri, Muhammad Hassan Shama'a, Abdel fatah Dukhan, Salah Shehadeh, Issa al-Nashar, Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi, and Ahmad Yassin.

The social and generational background of the participants sheds some light on the socio-political composition of the emerging middle stratum activists of religious leaders. Six of the participants were refugees from 1948 Palestine, which may explain the strong position Hamas takes regarding the refugee question. Four of the participants came from rural origins and two of the three participants who came from an urban background came from very small towns, such as al-Majdal and Rafah. Only one participant was originally from the Gaza Strip. Four were from the older generation of the Moslem Brothers Society and three were in their thirties or forties. Despite the fact that this group is not large enough for one to draw conclusions, it is representative of the generational change that took place in the religious establishment in the occupied territories.

The social profile of the movement's leadership may add to our understanding of the social origins of the Islamist elite that has emerged over the last two decades in Palestinian society. Most leaders of Hamas are educated and have white-collar professions and most have utilized their academic profession to promote their political activity. Similar to leaders of other Islamist movements in the Middle East, a majority of the list comes from applied professions such as engineering and medicine.⁵⁶ The prominence of the intelligentsia among the leadership supports the thesis promoted by Michael Waltzer that, "while classes differ fundamentally from one revolution to another, vanguards are sociologically similar. They are recruited from middling and professional groups."⁵⁷ Most people listed above were from lower middle class villages or were refugees who were recruited at the university. The predominance of educated people in the Islamist political elite of the West Bank and Gaza Strip is clearly a result of the increasing centrality of education in Palestinian society under occupation since the late 1960s. The number of students in local universities on the West Bank and Gaza Strip has steadily increased. Student enrolment at university more than tripled between the years 1985 and 1999.⁵⁸ The number of students graduating from Palestinian universities in the West Bank and Gaza increased from 20 students in 1974/75 to 8,380 students in the year 1998/99. The total number of graduates in these years rose from 20 in 1974/75 to 46,717 in 1998/99. This change has affected all realms of social life in Palestinian

⁵⁵ Ziad Abu Amr, "Hamas: A Historical and Political Background," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, no. 88 (Summer 1993), pp. 5-19.

⁵⁶ John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, (N.Y. 1998).

⁵⁷ Michael Waltzer, "A Theory of Revolution," *Marxist Perspectives* 2:1 (Spring 1979).

⁵⁸ Web site Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education, www.mohe.gov.ps/main/factsfgrs.htm

society. Many of these students were active in the Islamic student blocs at the universities and were responsible for the success of the Islamist movement in mobilizing society and in involving a growing proportion of people in the activities of the movement. Since universities enjoyed “greater” autonomy under occupation than political organizations or even mosques, they were conceived as a central field for mobilization by the Islamist movement.⁵⁹ The Islamic University in Gaza took on a central role in educating a new generation of believers. Other universities, national and secular, were successfully integrated into the project of mobilizing support for the Islamist movement.

Support for Islamist ideas among students at Palestinian universities was revealed in a 1986 poll taken by Mohammad Shadid of al-Najah University and Rick Selzer of Howard University. They found that 30 percent of the Palestinian students questioned responded that the future Palestinian state should be based exclusively on Islamic law. Another 30 percent preferred a Palestinian state based on a combination of Islamic law and Arab nationalism. These numbers show that 60 percent of society in the mid-1980s supported the idea of an Islamic element in the identity and the system of governance of the Palestinian state to be established. These numbers correlate with later surveys made in the mid 1990s. In a 1995 public opinion survey taken by the Jerusalem Media and Communication Center, 40 percent of the Palestinian adult population responded that the best political system was Islamic, compared to 26.2 percent who thought that proportional representation would be the best political system.⁶⁰ These numbers indicate that Islamism was and remains an important part of the self-perception of a large portion of Palestinian society. The rise in the number of the educated from rural and traditional areas has translated into more political power for the Islamist student blocs at the universities and more support for the Islamist movement in society in general.

If we return to the leaders and symbols of Hamas, we find that the majority of the leaders of the Islamist movement are young. Most of them were born after 1948. This fact reflects the mobilization of the generation of Palestinians who grew up under occupation. In this sense, the supporters of the Islamist movement do not differ from their counterparts in the PLO factions. A growing number of Palestinian youth were joining the Islamist organizations that were active in the Palestinian society at large. This process resembled other movements within the Arab world, where the Islamist movements were attracting more and more young people coming from the lower social classes and who had less opportunity to obtain higher education.⁶¹ Looking at Hamas’ rank and file one will find that the new leaders in

⁵⁹ This idea was articulated to Robinson by Dr. Ali Jarbawi, a professor at Birzeit University. See Robinson, *Palestinian State*, p. 138.

⁶⁰ Public Opinion Poll, no. 6, May 1995, www.jmcc.org.

⁶¹ Hamied Ansari, “Islamic Militants in Egyptian Politics,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 16 (1984).

Hamas, especially those in the military wing, came from refugee camps or villages, were less well educated and are younger than the political leaders.

An important feature of the 'social profile' of the leaders and supporters of the Islamist movement is the large proportion of those who grew up in refugee camps. Despite the fact that some of them managed to leave it, the experience of living in a camp during their formative years is of crucial importance. Therefore, in contrast to the minor significance that other scholars assign to this experience, this exploration in Palestinian elite structure supports the stance that the refugee-background plays an important role in explaining which political position and form of resistance one adopts.⁶² It does not accept the differentiation made between socially conservative Moslems and political Moslems, since this differentiation essentializes and freezes the social process. The mobilization of Palestinian society in general and the Islamist movement in particular, has covered over these differentiations, as the list of leaders and symbols presented above indicates. An even better illustration for the unfoundedness of this differentiation can be found in the list of Islamist activists deported by the Israeli government to Marj Al-Zuhur in Lebanon in 1992. Included among the 415 Palestinians who belonged to Hamas and Islamic Jihad were villagers, refugees, and city dwellers. All were identified with the Islamist elite that had emerged in the occupied territories, though some of them were active on different levels in the organization and in the execution of resistance activities against occupation.⁶³ Despite the fact that the list cannot be considered as totally representative, it is still a good indication of the social profile of the Islamist elite in the occupied territories in the early 1990s.

In brief, a new generation of religious leaders emerged in the occupied territories during the 1970s and 1980s. This generation was spearheaded by a religious political elite that was male, educated and had experienced being a refugee or came from a rural environment. This elite has, since its emergence, been involved in political activity that has had great influence on Palestinian internal balances of power and on external relations.

Since the religious elite of the West Bank and Gaza Strip share the same socio-economic background with the national elite, class differences cannot provide an

⁶² Robinson claims that the fact that "Palestinian Islamists tended to be from refugee camp, not cities," is less important than it might seem. He explains that, "[m]any refugee camps in the West bank have been absorbed by neighboring cities." This claim is not well founded. The fact that refugee camps were absorbed by cities did not change the difference in status between city dwellers and refugees. This is especially true when it comes to owning land, finding a job, or having support of the family in higher education. Majid al-Haj found that there are still differences between refugees and "locals" in Arab villages in Israel after almost 40 years. See: Majed al-Haj, "Adjustment Patterns of the Arab Internal Refugees in Israel," *Internal Migration*, 24, (September 1986).

⁶³ For a complete list of the deportees see: Said Ma'alawi, *Nusur fi Marj Al-Zuhur (Eagles in Flowers Valley)* (Lebanon 1994).

answer to the controversies between them. The disparity between the national and the Islamist elites is principally ideological and political. The cultural framing of the Palestine question in religious terms has been a major foundation of power for the Islamist elite. Therefore, the Oslo process intensified the tension between the national and the religious elites and turned them into fierce rivals, something that has been taking a new form since the assassination of central Hamas leaders--such as sheikh Ahmad Yassin and Abdel Aziz Rantissi--by Israel, and since Arafat's death.

The Islamist elite's challenge to the PA's governing elite has taken different forms. Hamas leaders, for instance, expressed their views clearly against the peace talks and later against the PA. They sought to undermine the PNA's negotiation strategy on ideological and practical levels. But they were cautious not to press for an open confrontation with the PA's security forces. The Islamist elite adopted a dual strategy. It fought Israel as if the peace negotiations with the PLO and later the PA did not exist and criticized the latter's policies as if its resistance activities against Israel were taken for granted. The Islamist elite, especially that of the Hamas movement, sought to achieve two goals: First, to assert itself as a movement with a clear position towards occupation and the way to fight it; and second, to challenge the PA on a ground that could win the sympathy and support of most, if not all, Palestinians.

The Islamist elite criticized the peace strategy adopted by the PNA and sought to undermine the peace negotiations by continuing its resistance against Israel in areas that remained under Israeli control. One of the goals of the Islamist elite was to provide evidence that peaceful negotiations could not lead to Palestinian independence. Palestinian independence, claimed Islamist leaders, could be achieved only through struggle.⁶⁴ An editorial of Hamas' weekly newspaper from 6 May 1999 articulated an Islamist position regarding the peace negotiations and the exclusive domination of the PA leadership in determining the future of the Palestinian people: "We need to embark upon the battle of establishing our state on our land. This battle could be long and cruel and demands strong people - physically and mentally - in order to achieve victory, meaning to free man from cruelty, submission and discrimination. This is the first condition to liberating the land, for the nation that lifts up its men has the right to exist whereas the nation that kills its men has no right to live...This battle can only begin with the strong side relinquishing its attempts to impose by force its positions on the minds and thoughts of others...Then should come another more important step, namely to involve everyone in making the fateful decisions of the Palestinian people in a brotherly dialogue that is founded on the national interest and a strong political will.... In this form of con-

⁶⁴ Azzam S. Tamimi, "The Legitimacy of Palestinian Resistance: An Islamist Perspective," paper presented to the Seventh Annual Conference of the Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine, Washington D.C., September 11, 1998.

duct which stems from our pure will, we will be able to make the state and impose it on the world.... Those who like it are welcome and those who do not like it, can keep saying no. No power in the world can invade the walls of our will and firm unity and our state will become a reality instead of being a dream to be expected from the enemies!!”

The editorial cries, “[I]t is worth asking if it is possible that the [Palestinian] state could be given as a gift wrapped in an envelope from the White House or from the Israeli Knesset... Is it possible that the enemy be the juridical guarantor for a Palestinian state?” The Islamist elite was firm that violent resistance is the only viable strategy to achieve statehood. It did not leave any doubt that the movement is determined to pursue the course of struggle whether the PA allows its or not. These languages became even clearer a year later, after the pull out of the Israeli army from Lebanon. An editorial from 25 May 2000 in the weekly *al-Risalah* expressed again the set of mind that determines Hamas’ strategy⁶⁵: “The dramatic change that south Lebanon witnessed this week reflects the centrality of resistance and jihad in making history, defeating occupation and achieving the desired victory no matter the differences in the balance of power on the ground as long as the people and the nation have a strong will.... The timing of the Israeli army exit from Lebanese territory, its surroundings and waters – in this degrading and humiliating manner – expresses an important and strong message to Arab leaders and negotiators: Israeli power is an imagined power.... It is a power made of paper as one Israeli military observer portrayed it when describing the pullout from Lebanon. It is a power that cannot remain still in the face of popular will and resistance. The path that Hezbollah adopted is good for the Arab nation to continue its march to regain the rest of its lands and to encircle the physical expressions of occupation until they give up and flee our Arab land.”

This language of the Islamist elite has fueled the disparity and tension between nationalist and Islamist elites - something that has caused instability in the Palestinian political system. The wide process of differentiation in Palestinian society has added to this parity. The new generation of Fatah and Hamas activists is composed of people who are locals and come from the same socio-economic background. This has been the main source of tension, especially in a situation where the “returnees” still dominate most, if not all, official junctures of power. However, with the current changes in the area, it may turn out to be a source of compromise and power sharing. Since the intifada has abated, and the confrontation with Israel has taken a new course, it is hard to determine how the national-Islamist split will develop, especially if the process of state building is restarted after a cease fire has been achieved. One thing is clear, the negotiations in Cairo between the Islamist elite and the PNA leadership, under the auspices of Egypt, indicate that the two elites are not willing to fall into the trap of civil war as long as the confrontation

⁶⁵ *Al-Risalah*, May 25, 2000.

with Israel continues. Whether this will remain the case in the future is hard to tell. The attempts by Abu Mazen to incorporate Hamas into the PA and the willingness of the Islamist elite to share responsibility and power with the national elite are promising and may lead to a new form of politics in Palestine.

6. Conclusion

As has been shown, we have to consider two central axes of elite disunity if we are to understand Palestinian politics. There have been and still are major splits between the PLO elite in exile or those who after the establishment of the PA became known as “returnees,” and their partners from the occupied territories, on one hand, and the growing number of “youth generation” national activists who emerged under occupation and became increasingly dissatisfied with the power structures emerging in the PA, on the other. The dispute between these segments of the national elite has been channeled primarily towards resisting the continuation of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. The second intifada has brought an important articulation of the externalization of the internal Palestinian tensions between the dominant minority of the PA and the middle-leadership strata in the Fatah movement. The middle command of the Fatah movement, which had been the backbone of the PA, turned its frustration first towards the Israeli army and later towards civilians in what came to be known as the al-Aqsa intifada.

The second axis of Palestinian political elite disunity is the gulf between the secular-national and the religious-Islamic elites. The competition between Fatah and Hamas for loyalty of the Palestinian public and the attempts of the former to promote a pragmatic political solution to the Palestinian question as well as the efforts made by the latter to frustrate these efforts, became a central characteristic of the dynamics of Palestinian nationalism. The Islamist elite, which has always been part and parcel of the Palestinian political scene, grew stronger with the outbreak of the first intifada in 1987. Its capacity to challenge the national elite increased when the former embarked on a peace deal with Israel that compromised traditional national claims, considered unacceptable by the Islamist elite. This elite fused its political position with that of the refugees from the 1948 war against the Oslo agreement. Late in 1980s, a young generation of Islamist believers challenged the veteran traditional leadership of the Moslem Brotherhood Society adopting a combined strategy of political and military means to resist Israeli occupation and subverted attempts of the national elite to close a political deal with Israel that would have rendered the Islamic movement marginal.

In accordance with the theoretical model developed in the introduction, there is continuous differentiation within each of the components of the Palestinian political elites. The disunity between the veteran nationalists and the young generation of both the Fatah movement and the Islamist movements is deeply connected to the differentiations within each political elite. There has been a continuous increase in the number of political leaders in the Fatah movement that came from rural and

refugee background. Political leaders from the lower socio-economic social strata entered the political stage and began seeking to capture influential positions in the emerging PA bureaucracy. In order to reach their goals, some established coalitions with veteran leaders of Fatah who returned to the occupied territories after Oslo. Lacking a social base in the new social environment, the latter utilized their political resources to generate support among the local population. The common interests of veteran and young leaders led to co-optation of the latter into a complex system of patronage and clientalism.

The impact of the differentiation processes in Palestinian political elite and the growing disunity did not result in major changes in the balance of political power. They did not lead to major socio-political changes in political society in general. The changes were incremental and gradual, so that new social forces were incorporated into Palestinian political society, thereby affecting the composition of the elite. But, the incorporation of new forces and their representation within the political elite remained subordinate to patronage and clientalist systems feeding the neo-patrimonial political structure established with the foundation of the PA in 1994.

The Islamic movement was transformed by the rising power of the young Islamist leaders in the occupied territories. The establishment of Hamas grew from the rising power of the young generation of believers that combined religious belief with an active strategy for jihad and resistance. The increasing number of young Islamist activists and their adoption of armed resistance as a genuine strategy of struggle against Israeli occupation turned the Islamic movement, especially the Moslem Brothers Society, from a religious movement with broad social and welfare infrastructure into a community of fighters. The adoption of suicide bombings as a common tactic by Hamas accelerated the internal differentiation between the political establishment of the movement and its military arm.

The growing disunity between Fatah and Hamas marked the gulf between the national and Islamist elites. The disparities between the two elites created a complex picture of elite structure that could not be explicated in dichotomous terms. This study has demonstrated that the two splits within the Palestinian political elites have been major determinants of the main characteristics of Palestinian politics and the regime type that began to emerge in the Palestinian territories between 1994 and 2005. The fragmented elite structure also had negative implications for the development of a common Palestinian strategy towards a satisfactory peaceful settlement of the Palestine question and contributed to its tragic deterioration in the last years. The mounting disunity between the two main components of Palestinian elites has been a major source of the growing disillusionment of an increasing number of Palestinians with the chances of establishing a Palestinian state with a democratic political order. This has led to increasing critique from liberal and democratic civil organizations that warned against drifting into a civil war and wasting Palestinian resources on narrow particularistic interests, instead of devoting energies to ending occupation. Many Palestinian have also warned that the disunity

within the Palestinian elites continues to be exploited by Israel to promote its strategy. This policy is most evident in the way that Israel has set the national and Islamist elites in opposition to one another, utilizing the ambiguities of the Oslo Accords and the obligations that the national elite took upon itself in exchange for symbolic sovereignty.

The disunity and competition between the different elite segments have caused more fragmentation, disintegration, and internal fighting. Disunity between Fatah and Hamas elites and the internal differentiations within them have blocked any elite group, including the dominant minority of the PA, from establishing its hegemony in society. Although, it has not always been possible to measure the exact impact of the unity or disunity of elites on achieving particular national goals, this study has made clear that the Palestinian experience of the last three decades matches recent scholarly works that demonstrate a direct connection between elite unity-differentiation and regime types.

As I indicated earlier consensual elites are usually viewed as strong and are able to attain common goals more successfully. Fragmented elites, on the contrary, are internally competitive and are less concentrated on common goals. The more extensive the fragmentation and the disunity became between the national and Islamist elites, the less the chances were to coordinate common goals and operate in concert. The failure of all national unity meetings in the last two years is only one proof of this claim. Fatah and Hamas fought each other for public attention and loyalty, each utilizing its power sources to promote its interests. The coupling of Fatah with the PA and the unwillingness of Hamas to respect the rules of the game established after Oslo led the two movements to split on every possible issue. They were not even able to agree when it had become clear to all parties that their competition harmed their common efforts to confront Israeli occupation, something that has been taking a new course in the last few months.

Elites' competition for power usually leads particular elite factions to frame their interests in exclusive terms, opposing other political players' participation in major political processes, such as state building. In such situations of major political change, the chance for fierce elite competition and the dangers of one elite attempting to take over exclusive control of state institutions and impose its domination become greater when the elite structure is fragmented and when there is no agreement on the overall goals of the national movement. Since the disposition toward compromise, flexibility, tolerance, conciliation, moderation and restraint among elites is a *sine qua non* of consolidated democratic rule, this competition for power and domination becomes a major source of authoritarianism.

It has been made clear that deeply divided and narrowly differentiated elites increase the chances for aggressive competition over power. In such cases the chance that one camp seeks to dominate and impose its interests on the other elite fragments and on the rest of society becomes higher. The chances for an authoritarian

regime also become higher. As a result of the deep disunity between the elites, however, the regime could not be stable for any length of time. In situations of elite disunity, none of the elites manages to impose its hegemony over others, especially when disunity is combined with extensive internal differentiations within each of the elites. In such cases, the chances of continuous competition and the rise of clientalism and patrimonialism are higher, the control of the dominant elite remains loose, and the fear of losing power encourages an informal institutionalism, in which bribery and nepotism become the norm.

The common historical experience and the similar socio-economic background of young Fatah and Hamas cadres in the occupied territories have raised expectations for further cooperation between the two. The outbreak of Al-Aqsa intifada in September 2000 established some patterns of cooperation between the different Palestinian political factions known from the first intifada. For some time, especially during the second intifada, the cooperation between Hamas and Fatah, as well as among other small factions, has remained on the level of active military units and limited to local tactical calculations. Activists in the dominant Fatah party joined opposition groups in the military struggle against Israeli occupation only when such cooperation was necessary from a tactical point of view. Thus, cooperation between military personnel of the different political movements was not based on a shared political vision or a common strategy. Fatah viewed military operations in tactical terms. Hamas, for its part, operated militarily based on its strategic opposition to the peace process.

Despite the fact that the cooperation between Fatah and Hamas marked the breakdown of the political frameworks established in Oslo they, nevertheless, did not mean changes in the existing balances of power and modes of elite formation in Palestinian society. The killing of three students, who participated in a demonstration against the American attack on Afghanistan, in Gaza on 8 October 2001, by the Palestinian police reminds us of the gaps that exist between the dominant national elite that controls the PA and the Islamic movement that seeks to legitimate its world-view as a viable alternative to national thinking.

This study has demonstrated that, notwithstanding the changes that occurred in Palestinian society during the second intifada, the matrix of power in the PA, established in its initial years, is under serious attack but remains intact. The ruling minority of the PNA still controls political reality, despite the fact that most of its symbolic leaders are under direct surveillance by the Israeli army and, maybe because of that, Arafat's followers in the national elite remain the legitimate leaders of the Palestinian people. As long as Arafat was alive he managed to centralize power around himself through a complex system of patronage and clientalism. He managed to transplant the modes of political communication, familiar from the PLO, into the structure of the PA. He turned himself into the main source of authority, suppressing opponents and marginalizing all those who did not accede to his mode of political rule. The patterns of institutionalization in the PA served the

narrow interests of the ruling minority that had returned from exile and their allies in the occupied territories. The changing geo-political and the social circumstances after Oslo did generate some new modes of elite circulation but did not introduce new structures and patterns of domination and power.

The developments unleashed by Arafat's death, especially the changes in Hamas' political strategy (caused, as well, by the assassination of Hamas' leaders) and the geopolitical changes in the Middle East, as a result of the repercussions caused by the American occupation of Iraq, have established new grounds for co-operation between the national and the Islamist elites. It seems that the new Palestinian leader, Mahmud Abbas, despite his lack of the charisma and authority that Arafat had, is managing to convince Hamas to enter official Palestinian political structures, something they had opposed so far. Hamas has announced its willingness to participate in the elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council, something that would institutionalise its power in the PA structure. If this change in Hamas' strategy takes place, which seems very likely unless Israel and the US set a serious veto, Palestinian politics will be entering a new stage. The relationship between the national and the Islamist elites will take a new form in which they will be contained within the emerging constitutional framework in Palestine. Such a change will strengthen Palestinian democracy and lead to politics of ballots instead of politics of bullets.