

UNRAVELLING THE PALESTINIAN LEFT

*Adam Riaz Khan**

Introduction

It can be said that the nature of ideologies within modern Third World resistance movements have in many ways regressed from an internationalist, socialist and Marxist inspired ideology, dominant throughout the Cold War period, to a situation today where various forms of religious and cultural nationalism are rampant. Scholars, on what has been termed Thirdworldism, have noticed such a shift throughout much of the Muslim World. However, Neil Macfarlane maintains that there exists no unified Thirdworldist ideology and that it develops according to “national specificity and creativity in revolutionary doctrine.”¹ I will argue that Thirdworldism is traditionally a secular anti-imperialist socialist and Marxist inspired tendency which can be found in the ideas of the 1949 Chinese revolution, the 1958 Cuban revolution, Che Guevara, Franz Fanon and the Algerian FLN. Robert Malley’s research takes a similar position, using Algeria as a case study, documenting the transition from the FLN’s Thirdworldism in 1961 to the occidentalist fundamentalist tendencies of the ISF (Islamic Salvation Front) in 1992.² Keeping with the theme of Africa, it is clear that the socialist inspired Pan-Africanism of Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere in the 1960s and 1970s can be contrasted with the cultural nationalism of Robert Mugabe. In Egypt and other parts of the Arab World, the decline of a secular leftist Arab nationalist ideology has been replaced by a rising Islamist movement since the 1980s.

Viewed from this position, the Palestinian struggle seems no different. The lack of research on leftist manifestations within the Palestinian nationalist resistance movement is perhaps a reflection of the historical reality that the Palestinian struggle has been dominated by on the one hand by secular nationalism, embodied within the PLO and Fateh; and on the other by the Islamism of Hamas. In this context, the term left refers to socialist, Marxist-Leninist and communist tendencies and how they have manifested themselves ideologically and politically in the Palestinian struggle. I shall begin by discussing the theoretical and political dilemmas the radical left faces generally before focusing specifically on how this has effected Palestinian leftist revolutionary movements. I will, therefore, be documenting the history of the armed guerrilla groups of the PFLP and DFLP. But I will also attempt to widen the meaning of leftist in the Palestinian context to include not simply the agency of vanguardist ideological activists and guerrilla fighters; but the way radical progressive tendencies have influenced the Palestinian struggle through mass movements that are connected to the grassroots and work within the occupied territories and refugee camps.

Conceptualising the Crisis of Radical Leftist Politics

The Post-modern Age has ushered in a scepticism, which views the demise of the Soviet Union as proof that the metaphysical grand narratives and ideologies of the revolutionary left; are untenable. Indeed such discourses have created a sense of pessimism for grand aspirations for social change. Terry Eagleton quite correctly asserts that the Post-modern Age is suspicious of authoritarian vanguards; it is not enthused by eschatological and teleological discourses and is furthermore allergic to political purity, economic reductionism and class based politics. However, Eagleton at the same time reminds us that despite the fact that the object of this post-modern scepticism may indeed be leftist revolutionary ideologies, such as Marxist-Leninism, these post-modern scepticisms are also the central tenets of that same revolutionary ideology in question.³ The so-called Post-modern Age, therefore, both admires and rejects Leninism in this regard and, furthermore, the prospect for social change and the articulation of alternatives.

It is clear that the anti-idealistic pessimism and nihilism of neo-liberal globalisation has been proved redundant by social movements which have arisen sometimes with populist demands; to challenge transnational capital and the dogma of privatisation and deregulation of the global capitalist economy. The 1994 Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico, the 1998 Indonesian revolution, and the populist movements in Venezuela and Bolivia, which elected Presidents Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales, are some of the more famous examples which can help us understand the meaning of leftist radicalism in the

21st century. Nevertheless, those traditional Marxist-Leninist intellectuals and activists will argue that such leftist populism is simply not enough if social change is still a goal. In rejecting populism, Zizek highlights how,

One should remain faithful to the Leninist conception of politics as the art of intervening in the conjectures that are themselves posited as specific modes of concentration of the “main” contradiction (antagonism)⁴

Zizek’s support for a political focus on the “main” contradiction may seem vague but is nevertheless the essence of a distinction between “real” communist radical politics and the limitations of populism.

However, the emphasis on “real” radicalism and the “main” contradictions in capitalist society as a leftist obsession need to be deconstructed and re-articulated beyond Marxist dogma; and furthermore beyond vague statements especially after the intellectual inquiries of Post-Structuralism. Subcommandante Marcos, the spokesperson of the Zapatista movement has referred to these “real” radical ideas as “outworn and tarnished robes.” It is necessary, therefore, to briefly comment on the nature of Marxist-Leninism’s bankruptcy in the modern world on the theoretical, ideological and political levels. I use the term Marxist-Leninism rather than Marxism to highlight an important distinction between the politicisation of Marxism and its transformation into an ideology as opposed to Marxism as a social theory of analysis of capitalism. This subversion of the scientific socialism of Marx was achieved through Lenin’s political ideas and strategy, and ultimately the 1917 Bolshevik revolution implementing what Zizek calls “the politics of responsibility,” a strong rejection of a mere politics of opposition and its limitations. Lenin’s vanguardism, proposed the need for leftists to seize political power rather than waiting for historical development to usher in the right conditions for revolution. Therefore, from 1917 onward, this break with classical Marxism became a central ideological feature of all political parties, movements and revolutions self-defined as socialist or communist.

With regards to Palestine, there arises the question as to what extent is Marxist analysis relevant to that particular context theoretically let alone politically. The problem with the Marxist project, when applied to a context such as Palestine, are two extremely important inter-linked concepts of Marxist political and social theory which are ultimately Eurocentric; namely historical materialism and the revolutionary subject that is the proletariat. Post-Marxist scholars, concerned with Subaltern Studies, such as Gyan Prakash, have highlighted that “when Marxists turned the spotlight on colonial exploitation, their criticism was framed by a historicist scheme that universalised Europe’s historical experience.”⁵ For example, when Marx analysed colonialism in India, he did so by stating that British rule played “a double role in India, one destructive, the other regenerating” and that such a process would do away with the backwardness of “Asiatic society” and “Oriental despotism” thereby “laying the material foundations of Western society in Asia.”⁶ Therefore, for Marx, despite the crimes of British colonial rule, the latter had become “the unconscious tool of history.”⁷

The flaw in such an analysis is not as Said suggests; that it is an example of “pure Romantic Orientalism” or that Marx’s non-Orientalist mind was somehow in the end “usurped by Orientalist generalisations.”⁸ The problem with Marx’s position is that it views a Western European centered modernisation as a historical necessity for the rest of the world, making colonialism a positive regenerating force that ushers in new capitalist social relations, paving the way for the viability of socialism. Furthermore, Marx’s analysis is also incorrect in assuming that the colonial mode of production in India will introduce advanced capitalist relations. Nazih Ayubi maintains that the type of colonial imposed capitalism that emerged in Arab countries during the late 19th and early 20th centuries was of a dependent nature, relying on “classes and forces from the metropole” rather than domestic forces. Pre-capitalist modes of production, therefore, were not destroyed “but rather were subjugated to the requirements of capitalist accumulation”⁹ and were only challenged if they proved to be an obstacle to colonial plans. Pre-capitalist formations also often proved resistant and hostile to the capitalist transformation adopting anti-colonial positions¹⁰

The Case of Palestine and Marxist Analysis

It is true that in Palestine, Israeli colonisation had dramatic social effects, for example in 1931, 80 per cent of the Palestinian population lived in rural areas in comparison to 1948 when 30 per cent of Palestinians inhabited cities. By the end of the 1948 war, of the 170,000 Arabs who remained in Israel, 27 per cent were urbanised, however the war had displaced 700,000 Palestinians.¹¹ By 1963, the population of rural

Arabs living in Israel was 75 per cent, thus by 1973, 56 per cent of Palestinian Arabs living in Israel had become urbanised.¹² This obviously had a dramatic proletarianizing effect on the Palestinian population to the extent that in 1973, one-fifth of the Arabs, in the Israeli work force, were employed in construction. In Haifa, for example, 63.4 per cent of construction workers were Palestinian, either Israeli Arabs or from the West Bank.¹³ Elia Zureik maintains that Zionism brought in a “new cycle of colonialism” which superimposed a working class stratum upon a peasant society as opposed to the past British and Ottoman administrations.

A Eurocentric class reductionist approach, therefore, ignores two important issues; firstly, that this superimposed proletarianization transformed the Palestinian peasantry into what Zureik calls “a lumpen proletariat with a declassed status while at the same time diminishing the likely emergence of a viable bourgeoisie” of Palestinian origin.¹⁴ From a classical Marxist perspective, this social process would seem undesirable. Secondly, the Israeli colonisation of the West Bank created a situation of dependency where Palestinian peasants would look for work in the Israeli metropolis thereby distorting the demographics of the West Bank. Therefore, Zureik highlights how the Israeli creation of a natural occupational structure among its Jews was at the expense of “creating an unnatural Palestinian Arab class structure”¹⁵ which additionally fragmented, dislocated and displaced Palestinians as a national ethnic group. Despite the fact that a Palestinian working class may exist, the history of the Palestinian struggle requires more than a class analysis as it is clear that their social experience is a world away from the historical experiences of the European working class living under advanced capitalist social relations from which Karl Marx made his entire analysis.

Ted Swedenberg’s research can further elucidate this discussion as he highlights how the national signifier of the Palestinian resistance with regards to the latter’s cultural romantic symbolism has never been the working class but the Palestinian fallahin (peasantry). The fallah, who prior to 1948, was considered backward, and uneducated had suddenly become the epitome of an essentialised Palestinian life, of a people rooted to the soil and the landscape making them a viable revolutionary subject of which Arafat’s donning of the peasants’ kufiya (Palestinian head covering) politicised that cultural meaning.¹⁶ Swedenberg, much like Zureik, also maintains that proletarianisation did not create a distinct working class culture, but a “peasantariat” of Palestinian migrant workers from the West Bank who would work in Israel but were still connected to agricultural production back home.¹⁷ The uniqueness of the Palestinian “working class” meant that PLO activists often viewed the migrant workers, who were earning a wage in Israel, as traitors and furthermore left wing groups did not organise unions among this sector of Palestinian workers until the late 1970s. The labour movement, an important forum for any leftist organisation, in the context of Palestine, historically has always been organised in village communities. This creates a situation where a Pre-Capitalist peasant way of life is glorified in Palestinian nationalist discourse and thus the proletariat is not a suitable national signifier because “proletarianisation is seen as a product of colonial dependency”¹⁸ and in this situation, the Palestinian left would have to adapt to a national context as Marxist dogma had been negated by a romantic nationalist discourse. I shall be analysing the success and failures of the left in adapting to this social and political terrain; and also how the emergence of mass movements during the first intifada of 1987-1993 further negated this nationalistic romanticism.

If we apply Marx’s analysis of colonial rule in India, would a materialist analysis, therefore, view the decimation of Palestinians, by the modernising force of Israel, as a historical necessity? If the answer is yes, then Marxism as an anti-ethical scientism has no positive relevance whatsoever for a Palestinian. However, the viability of Marxist social theory today can be seen in its dimension as a theory which at least analyses the power relations of capitalism. Current Post-Marxist intellectual inquiries from post-colonial, post-structural and Lacanian influenced perspectives can at least help maintain the relevance of Marxism and Marxist Leninism through deconstruction and reformulation. Ernesto Laclau proposes that the basis of a reformulation in radical political thought needs to firstly divorce itself from an essentialist perspective which reduces politics (superstructure) to economics (base). Secondly, that there needs to be an acknowledgement that difference is irreducible and that social agents possess a “precarious identity” which implies that “we must reject the apriori determination of a privileged agent for the transition to socialism.” Finally, once essentialism is abandoned, and its commitment to a historical process and a specific historical subject; then it becomes “false to assume that the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production holds the promise of total human liberation.”¹⁹ For Laclau, therefore, the

rejection of the universal proletarian subject and its historical conflict with the Bourgeoisie is in favour of a reality where a new historical terrain has witnessed the multiplication of new identities and struggles.²⁰ The struggles of colonial subjects, immigrants, Black people, women, students, indigenous peoples are just some examples; being Palestinian is indeed another, and it is this particularism of the Palestinian struggle which deconstructs Marxist universalist claims. We must acknowledge that the Palestinian particularism also contains more even multi-faceted particularisms which incorporate their status not simply as the working class but their complications as the latter category, in addition to their experience as colonised peoples, refugees, women, students, Muslims and Christians.

However, Laclau's theoretical approach alone cannot explain the reasons as to why Palestinian leftist groups have failed to challenge the might of the PLO and Hamas. I have merely provided some background of current theoretical debates with leftist revolutionary politics, which can provide a framework to understand the dislocation of leftist formations all over the world. These concerns directly affect those that represent a leftist political formation in the Palestinian context. Indeed it is necessary to analyse the Palestinian left's history, ideology and political interaction with the Palestinian community before assessing its bankruptcy and in ability to articulate a new alternative in a situation of potential civil war between secular nationalists and Islamists.

The Social and Political Context for the Emergence of the Palestinian Left

The origins of the formation of Arab leftist parties and organisations can be traced to the development of Arab nationalism. Indeed both political forces shared an affinity for secularism and socialism, furthermore Arab socialists and communists often had to incorporate Arab nationalism into their discourses as seen with George Habash, the General Secretary of the Marxist Leninist PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine), who stated in an 1998 interview how he was inspired by the Vietnamese struggles and the teachings of Ho Chi Minh and, therefore, did not see any contradiction in being a socialist and an Arab nationalist at the same time.²¹ Indeed the majority of Third World nationalist resistances were dominated by an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist ideology which incorporated secular nationalism with socialism. Even if the struggle was led by a communist party, as in China (1949) or Vietnam (1945), nationalism was unavoidable.

Colonialism itself in the Middle East at first meant incorporating the Ottoman Empire into the emerging capitalist economy between the 16th and 18th centuries. Reformist policies of modernisation, adopted by the Turks and Egyptians for example in the 19th century as an attempt to keep the European encroachment at bay, had the opposite effect making them more dependent on the new European imposed global economic formation²², paving the way for the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 and the French occupation of Algeria in 1830, Tunisia in 1881, Morocco in 1912 and Syria in 1920 which severed Lebanon from Greater Syria. This was immediately followed by an implementation of economic liberalisation policies which the colonialists previously attempted to persuade and pressurise Arab countries to adopt.²³ Arab nationalism and Pan-Arabism, therefore, developed in this context, after the destruction of the Ottoman Empire, as a secular ideology greatly influenced by European nationalism and state formation. This ideology led to many diverse political manifestations; from Ba'athism in Iraq and Syria; to Nasserism in Egypt. It is true that Arab nationalism failed to create the Pan-Arab unity it professed, nevertheless a focus on such a failure fails to see its significance in rallying the Arab people in an anti-imperialist cause and in a context where there was a new colonial Zionist entity. Arab nationalism, therefore, was the first political experience for many Palestinians; for example studying in Arab states such as Egypt and Lebanon. In Lebanon, for example, the Arab Nationalists' Movement (ANM) was formed in the 1940s by a group of Palestinian students, involving George Habash, who were greatly inspired by the rhetoric of Gamal Abdel Nasser and supported him during the 1967 Six-Day War.²⁴ Yasser Arafat was greatly influenced by Nasser as a student in Cairo and previously participated in anti-British military activities in 1952.²⁵ In fact the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation) was formed in Cairo, during the third and fourth conference of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS), from 1963-64.²⁶

1967 is a watershed for Arab nationalism, a defeat symbolising its ultimate political failure in confronting Zionism. This led to a significant radical shift to the left and rise of Marxism across the Middle East, as seen with the communist National Liberation Front in the South of Yemen, and also the emergence of a

very vibrant and diverse leftist movement in the South of Lebanon which would play an important role during the civil war, and finally the emergence of the Palestinian PFLP and DFLP. Nazih Ayubi highlights how many of the Arab “radical” states in political practice were not socialist because they did not emerge from a movement intent on implementing socialist ideals. Socialism was not the initial concept of the movement and became an adjective that was incorporated into political discourse over time as part of the nationalist discourse²⁷ as seen with the ANM which incorporated socialism in reaction to Nasser.²⁸ Ayubi, therefore, defines the “socialist” credentials of Nasser or the Iraqi Ba’ath, in both rhetoric and practice as being populist and corporatist.

The significance of Ayubi’s analysis is that it explains how after 1967, the Arab revolutionary left in its different contexts was able to define itself as something new and distinct from Arab nationalism, Nasserism and Ba’athism. Ayubi does, however, fail to acknowledge that in addition to the Arab left’s independent political identity, the secular socialist slogans of Arab nationalism allowed the revolutionary left to develop as a product of the former of which George Habash’s conversion to Marxism, from a more pure nationalism after 1967, is an example.²⁹ With regards to the PLO, the latter was committed to the autonomy and political empowerment of Palestinian workers and women which can be seen with the PLO’s creation, in 1965, of the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) and General Union of Palestinian Workers (GUPW). The trade union activist, Husni Al Khuffash from Nablus even organised a mission to China in 1963 as head of the International Federation of Arab Trade Unions (IFATU).³⁰ Therefore, the Palestinian nationalist movement had indeed inherited the tradition of progressive secular leftist commitments from Arab nationalism and Nasserism, something which is absent from the Islamist discourse of Hamas.

The Politics of the Palestinian Left

Throughout the history of the Palestinian struggle there have been up to 13 organisations and factions of radical leftist, socialist and communist political persuasions³¹ not including the left wings of the PLO, Fateh and other nationalist, Ba’athist influenced organisations. However, I shall be specifically focusing on the most influential groups namely the DFLP, PFLP and the Palestinian Communist Party (PCP). Furthermore, I shall expand my notion of radical politics within the Palestinian context to include the mass movements of which the epitome is the 1987 *intifada*.

As indicated already, the PFLP grew out of the ANM in Lebanon after the 1967 Six-Day War. The PFLP was in many ways part of the dramatic shift to the left in the political outlook of the Palestinian movement from 1967-82 and the rise of guerrilla groups post-1967 after the Arab defeat.³² In 1968, the PFLP joined the PLO and became the second biggest faction and eventually became famous for its aircraft hijackings in the 1970s.³³ The DFLP began life as the PDFLP (Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine) a Maoist break away faction from the PFLP led by another ex-ANM leader Nayaf Hawatmeh. Indeed the political events in China during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) effected communist organisations all over the world thus the PFLP remained pro-Soviet. The DFLP also adopted armed struggle and was most famous for the 1974 Ma’alot attack on a Jewish high school on the Israeli border with the South of Lebanon, killing 20 teenage students who were also members of the Jewish youth paramilitary group Gadna.³⁴ The PFLP and the DFLP, therefore, were highly dependent on the Palestinian diaspora in Lebanon and prior to that Jordan. However, after the events of Black September in 1970, Lebanon became the base for the PLO and all Palestinian military operations until 1982 with the end of the war in Lebanon.³⁵ During the Lebanese Civil War, radical leftist movements were dominant in leading the resistance against Israeli occupation and Israeli backed Maronite forces through the Lebanese National Movement (LNM), a front which included the Organisation of Communist Action (OACL) and their close relationship with the PFLP and DFLP. The OACL was significant in radicalising the Southern Shia population and establishing solidarity links and military support for the Palestinian resistance.³⁶ However, the Palestinian leftist guerrillas would suffer two blows. Firstly, with the defeat in Jordan (1970), which allowed Fateh to emerge dominant by asserting the primacy of the PLO and Arafat.³⁷ Secondly, after 1982, when the PLO was expelled from Lebanon, the PFLP and DFLP also lost their bases of support from Southern Lebanon and furthermore the political focus became less upon Palestinians in Lebanon and Syria and more on those living in occupied territories.³⁸

A third political force, which is worth mentioning, is the Palestinian Communist Party (PCP) due to its more “pure” communist credentials unlike the PFLP and DFLP which still uphold Pan-Arabism. Nevertheless, much like the PFLP’s roots in the ANM, the PCP’s roots can be found in the nationalist National Liberation League (NLL) of the 1940s. Splits in the NLL, after the 1948 defeat, led to the creation of the Jordanian Communist Party (JCP) and the Palestinian Communist Party of Gaza (PCPG).³⁹ The uniqueness of these communist political formations was in the way they organised. For example, from 1967, these Palestinian communist activists had many differences with the guerrilla organisations such as Fateh, the PFLP and DFLP. Unlike the latter groups, the JCP was not dependent on the refugee diaspora in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon; rather the JCP’s supporters and cadres came from the West Bank.⁴⁰ However, much like the other leftist groups, the JCP had to recognise the PLO and their hegemonic role as representatives of the Palestinian people as seen with 1976 election of pro-PLO JCP members in the West Bank municipal elections.⁴¹ By the 1980s, the JCP transformed into the PCP as it had grown in size beyond Jordan and the West Bank to Lebanon and Gaza.⁴²

Despite the Palestinian left’s flirtation with nationalism and alliance with the PLO, ideological differences can be found in Habash’s analysis of the Palestinian movement in a 1985 interview where he separates the Palestinian national movement since 1948 into two camps; the rightist wing of the bourgeois nationalist policy, to revolution and the “leftist wing, representing the policy of the working and popular classes,”⁴³ reflecting a blatant Marxist analysis which would influence PFLP positions in its relationship with the PLO. Therefore, after 1982, the change in PLO policy, showing a willingness to adapt to American conditions, as well as opening up to the “reactionary regimes” of Egypt and Jordan, was condemned by Habash and the PFLP.⁴⁴ However, Rashid Khalidi is critical of the PFLP and DFLP’s alliance with Syria and highlights that with regards to the Jordanian option, the leftist opposition had failed to create an alternative leading to the meeting of the 1984 Palestinian National Conference in Amman without the PFLP, DFLP and PCP.⁴⁵

In contradiction to Khalidi, Sayigh highlights how, as part of the so-called “loyal opposition,” the PFLP and DFLP did not benefit from any working relations with Arab states unlike the PLO and furthermore came into direct conflict with Syrian policy in opposing the Syrian backed Lebanese Shia Amal militia alongside the PLO, which attacked the refugee camp in Shatila.⁴⁶ Sayigh also makes a distinction between the “loyal opposition” and the anti-Arafat “rejectionist” opposition which comes from various splits in Fateh and the PFLP and was blatantly supported by Syria against the much larger Palestinian factions.⁴⁷ The ultimate failure of the leftist “loyal opposition” to create an alternative to the PLO or to even challenge the appeal of Arafat and Fateh can be seen in the return of the PFLP and DFLP to the PLO Executive Committee at the 18th PNC meeting in 1987 and then in approving the political programme accepting UN resolutions 242 and 338 as the basis for negotiations and a commitment to a two-state solution.⁴⁸

Grassroots Alternatives

Perhaps the most successful aspect of the Palestinian left has been its ability to influence grassroots mobilisation which can be viewed as an alternative to armed guerrilla struggle. Here, it is important to analyse the leftist influence within the Palestinian Trade Union movement and also what can be called the women’s autonomy movement. The 1987 intifada, therefore, was a culmination of these two forces as the vanguard of the rebellion rather than armed groups which had been more dominant since 1967.

The Trade Union movement for example had always been a site of competition for the many different factions. Nina Sovich maintains that in the 1970s, the PFLP, DFLP and PCP maintained close relations with unions to organise popular movements, to the extent that Fateh had to adapt to this reality so as to maintain its constituency.⁴⁹ The Palestinian communists in the JCP from 1974 controlled various unions and women’s committees and by 1980, the communists were the most powerful group in the General Federation of Labour Unions which represented 35,000 workers in the West Bank.⁵⁰ The threat to Fateh’s hegemony was real enough for the latter to organise splits within the Federation in 1981 to contain the communist influence.⁵¹ The PCP differed from the leftist guerrilla groups in that it had more of an emphasis on grass roots organising rather than armed struggle which prepared them for the 1987 intifada when organising popular committees. During the 1987 intifada, the significance of the Labour movement was in the way it became fully subsumed in the struggle for national liberation.⁵² The PCP was already active within the labour movement and continued this during the intifada through the Progressive Workers

Bloc whilst the Palestinian guerrilla groups followed suit, such as the DFLP which was influential through the Workers Union Bloc and the PFLP which had control of the Progressive Unionist Action Front.⁵³ Such leftist union activists established workers committees and were well represented in the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) utilising industrial action against Israeli employers, promoting the refusal of paying taxes and boycotting Israeli goods which greatly damaged the Israel economy.⁵⁴ In the first nine months of the intifada, the Israeli construction sector lost \$200 million.⁵⁵

The uniqueness of the 1987 intifada was the mass participation of women and rise in women's activism. Women became active in the women's committees which were heavily infiltrated by leftists from the DFLP, PFLP and PCP. Such women activists became the vanguard of the intifada, confronting Israeli soldiers, providing services such as various production cooperatives and organising in villages and urban neighbourhoods.⁵⁶ Joost Hilterman's research on women's contribution to the intifada highlights how the work of the women's committees became indistinguishable from the activism of the popular committees represented in the UNLU.⁵⁷ The DFLP was particularly influential in the women's committees and was affiliated with the Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees (PFWAC) which was the largest and most influential of the women's groups. This highlights that much like the PCP, the DFLP was at least more committed to grassroots organising than the PFLP.⁵⁸ The DFLP developed a reputation as jabhat al niswan (women's front) due to the fact that women were dominant in the DFLP from the rank and file to leadership positions; furthermore, the work of the DFLP and PFWAC was undistinguishable.⁵⁹

The overall significance of leftist grassroots mobilising, during the first intifada, is that it challenged armed guerrilla vanguardism which had become so dominant after 1967. Frances S Hasso maintains that the proof of the DFLP's commitment to the grassroots can be seen in the unintended consequence of mass women's participation. Furthermore, she also highlights how women's active presence in the movement became symbolic for the left in presenting to the world, the Palestinians' commitment to progressive modernist values pleasing to Western audiences⁶⁰ something which has been absent from the Al Aqsa intifada. Nevertheless, the success of the Palestinian left via grassroots activism is that it enabled the resistance movement to transcend its nationalist objective, incorporating leftist concerns such as the workers' struggle through the mobilization of labour movements and more significantly feminist struggles for women's rights as seen in the way women's committees became so visible that it organised demonstrations on International Women's Day, for example in Ramallah in 1988.⁶¹

Conclusion: Failures and the Rise of Hamas

The victory of Hamas in the January 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, giving them 74 of the 132 seats in the legislative council and thus making them the dominant force in the Palestinian Authority, was not only a blow to the decades long hegemony of the PLO and Fateh in directing the Palestinian resistance, but was additionally a reminder that Palestinian leftist forces had failed to do what Hamas had achieved. Despite the grassroots mobilisation of leftist forces and their historical connection to Palestinian communities in the occupied territories and refugee camps from Lebanon to Damascus, the PFLP, DFLP and PCP have become more and more insignificant as a political force since the collapse of the USSR, the 1993 Oslo Accords and the end of the first intifada. The PFLP, for example, only won three seats in the 2007 elections whilst the DFLP, in alliance with the PCP, renamed the Palestinian People's Party (PPP) also only gained three seats.

Hamas has, therefore, successfully replaced the leftist "loyal opposition" and has become dominant enough to establish itself as an opposition force which has no need for loyalty to the historical hegemony of the PLO and Fateh. Hamas can go it alone so to speak, without the need of trailing the secular nationalists. Hamas' success, however, can be attributed to a number of factors. Hamas has traditionally functioned not simply as an armed guerrilla movement but as an alternative source of social services for the Palestinians. This was achieved through the so-called al-mujamma' al-Islami (Islamic Centre) which provided charity and subsidised welfare services: schools, medical clinics, education centres for women, sport and youth clubs.⁶² Palestinians are, therefore, dependent on Hamas for its non-political services which inevitably have political repercussions with regards to increasing support and sympathy for the Islamists. The PLO, on the other hand since 1993 and the creation of PA, had gained a reputation for being corrupt and for mismanaging funds so much so that when the Israelis withdrew from Gaza in August 2005, the PLO could not claim any credit with regards to their negotiations, rather the resistance

of Hamas on the Gaza strip was seen as decisive in driving the Israeli forces out.⁶³ Furthermore, Hamas would capitalise on the PLO's mismanagement of funds by criticising their financial irregularities.⁶⁴ The worsening of the quality of life of Palestinians, ever since the creation of the PA and withdrawal of Israeli troops from major Palestinian cities in 1993, created a situation where even Christians were voting for Hamas in Christian cities such as Bethlehem and Ramallah the latter of which was a PFLP stronghold.⁶⁵

Ideologically and internationally, the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the 1977 ascendancy to power of a right wing religious-nationalist coalition in Israel would create a viable atmosphere for Islamist ideas.⁶⁶ Later, the collapse of the USSR and the Islamist electoral victory in 1992 would help Hamas and Islamist movements globally in discrediting secularism, nationalism and Marxism. Economic crisis and mass unemployment, during the four years of the Al Aqsa intifada 2000-2004, would also benefit Hamas politically in discrediting the PLO and finally the support for Hamas from Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and various private donors in the West also gave the movement a leverage over the leftist opposition groups.⁶⁷ In reaction, attempts from both the DFLP and Palestinian communists to reinvent themselves have incorporated a self-criticism and abandonment of Leninist democratic centralism and other once popular Marxist revolutionary ideas.⁶⁸

However this is perhaps merely a reaction to changing political realities. In his book on Hamas, Zaki Chehab talks about his lack of surprise in the poor performance of the left in the 2007 elections, claiming that as a child in a Southern Lebanese refugee camp, the revolutionary symbolism of many of the leftist groups had little relevance to the lives of refugees.⁶⁹ With the Al Aqsa intifada, gone are the days of the PFLP's Mohammed "Guevara Gaza" Al Aswad and Leila Khaled and the disappearance of women from the resistance which had once been so active in the PFLP as fighters.⁷⁰ On the question of women's participation in the movement, women's rights and women's dress in Gaza, the secular left retreated, as women faced abuse as a result of Hamas' morality campaigns, due to a fear of alienating what Salim Tamari calls the "religious street."⁷¹ Tamari additionally highlights how the left's disarray, with regards to the PLO's peace initiatives with Israel also, affected leftist consensus between groups, achieved for example, during the first intifada or prior to that during the Lebanese civil war. Disagreements between the DFLP and PFLP and the latter's tactical alliance with the Islamists in the 1990s created further confusion with regards to Palestinian leftist political positions and marginalised leftist women activists, who were attempting to legislate a personal status code for women, in opposition to Hamas, which would guarantee women's rights in marriage, divorce, education and employment.⁷² Salim Tamari correctly highlights that if the Palestinian left truly wishes to attain any political relevance in the aftermath of the first intifada, it must, therefore, abandon completely its "reified notion of the 'masses' as a homogenous force, inherently religious and conservative, or inherently revolutionary."⁷³

Since the second intifada in 2000, both the DFLP and PFLP have struggled to maintain any significant presence in the resistance and have experienced a serious decline.⁷⁴ Indeed the second intifada, a militaristic emphasis on guerrilla warfare and the emergence of martyrdom operations, has eclipsed the grassroots mobilising efforts of the popular committees during the first intifada, which were heavily infiltrated by the leftist factions as already discussed. Instead of attempting to revive grassroots mobilisation and redefine the meaning of the left in the Palestinian resistance, the leftist factions have formed a vague military alliance with Hamas. The DFLP successfully managed to infiltrate an Israeli base in August 2001, killing three soldiers⁷⁵ whilst the PFLP, despite its secular and Marxist politics, has contributed to the phenomenon of suicide bombings via its Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades named after the PFLP Deputy Secretary General assassinated in August 2001.⁷⁶

The positive element of the Palestinian left historically was its internationalism. This meant that the DFLP, for example since 1969, always condemned anti-Semitic jingoism and formed links with the Israeli far left.⁷⁷ This is perhaps a strategy which the Palestinians could look into and repeat the historical alliance with the Lebanese left on Israeli soil, with Israeli radical leftists, whilst Hamas and the PLO, are in direct military confrontation. However, with regards to forming alliances with Israeli civil society, the DFLP disappointed many Palestinians and Arabs when Nayaf Hawatmeh shook hands with the Israeli President Ezer Weizmann at the funeral of King Hussein in February 1999⁷⁸ suggesting inconsistency. Hamas, however, can present itself successfully as the vanguard of the Palestinian resistance. In the civil war with Fateh and the latter's defeat in Gaza by Hamas in June 2007, it is clear that the PLO has become a shadow of its former self and can easily be seen as an ally of the US and even Israel. Indeed, the US

imposition of Mahmoud Abbas as Prime Minister against Arafat in 2003 was in many ways a Fateh putsch, and their compliance with the US in declaring a state of emergency after Hamas' electoral victory was extended by collaborating with Israel and the US with regards to the US and EU imposed embargo, the Israeli re-invasion of the West Bank and Gaza resulting in the kidnapping of a great number of Hamas parliamentarians and ministers.⁷⁹ In fact, it was under US pressure that Mahmoud Abbas refused to form a unity government with Hamas after their successful electoral victory.⁸⁰ The DFLP condemned the conflict between Hamas and Fateh in a statement on June 20, 2007⁸¹ and the PFLP has additionally remained neutral, calling for national dialogue.⁸² With the potential bankruptcy of the PLO and Fateh as representatives of the Palestinian resistance, the left has an opportunity to create an alternative.

Alain Badiou maintains that there exists "no stronger transcendental consequence than that of making something appear in a world which had not existed in it previously".⁸³ As events, the 1917 Russian revolution, the 1871 Paris Commune let alone the 1987 intifada may appear as strong singularities in history let alone for leftist revolutionary dreams. Unfortunately, it does seem that the PFLP and the DFLP are far from achieving this and have in fact acknowledged the need to postpone the class struggle for the national struggle, adopting a refusal to transcend their status as the "loyal opposition" which ultimately implies continued support for the position of the PLO in the Palestinian resistance and therefore Mahmoud Abbas. Marxist-Leninist ideology seems more and more irrelevant in a situation where the very survival of the Palestinian national struggle is at stake.

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* Mr. Adam Riaz Khan is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad.

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