The Evolution of Islamism in the Palestinian Territories: Historical and Ethnographic Analysis

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Introduction
The democratic election of Hamas as the governing power of Gaza in spring 2006 has ushered in a new era of the Israel-Palestinian conflict. This watershed event and its larger historical and sociopolitical context indicate that national resistance to the Israeli occupation grounded in Islamic discourse will remain a dominant cultural narrative and political rallying point for many Palestinians. For unfamiliar Western observers, trying to make sense of this development is puzzling at best.

Recent academic attention has focused by and large on analysis of Hamas’ political and military activities at a regional or organizational level. Sources such as Tamimi or Mishal and Sela traditionally assess the organization’s founding ideological principles, tactical debates within its leadership, the evolving use of violence, and changing participation in local elections. This work should not be counted in this category. While these goals are certainly valuable, this work argues that such an abstract focus on ideology and tactical maneuvering do little to explain perhaps the most puzzling aspect of Hamas’ rise to power: its consistent popular support among everyday Palestinians. What is missing from much current analysis of the conflict is coverage of Palestinian rank and file actors, those who might applaud paramilitary operations, seek out Islamic social institutions provided by the organization, and cast a ballot in favor of Hamas. Most importantly, such analysis must consider these actors not as a blind supporters but as whole persons, each with a life history, social and cultural interactions, independent mind, and moral values that change over time.
As an example of a macro-scale analysis that glosses over individual agency, consider the following illustrative quotation from *The Palestinian Hamas*, a book authored by prominent Israeli scholars Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela that falls within the politics and tactics category described earlier. Discussing Hamas’ rise to power in the early 1990s, they write, “Hamas’s existence was secured by the steady stream of followers from which new activists were enlisted or emerged spontaneously, becoming spearheads of the movement’s violent and political activities” (56). Without picking on this quote too much out of context (overall the book presents a very intricate and coherent analysis), some basic assumptions come into question. Do passive followers really become enlisted activists at the snap of a finger? Do new activists really emerge “spontaneously”? A careful observer should be hesitant to answer either of these questions affirmatively. This line of reasoning builds up to suggest worthwhile goals and accompanying methodology for this work.

**Goals**
This work seeks to explain the origins and evolution of the popular support behind Hamas’ rise as a dominant political player in the Palestinian landscape. However, within the critical framework suggested above this work takes a step back from an exclusive focus on Hamas to examine broader shifts in Palestinian religious and political identities. How has political Islam and nationalist resistance evolved within the Palestinian context? What attracts Palestinian individuals to this ideology? What factors and institutions mediate and mobilize an individual’s transition from the outside of the movement (e.g. passive onlooker) to the inside (e.g. activist involvement)?
The ultimate goal of this work is to elucidate why individual Palestinians gravitate toward Islamism in the modern age, with a special focus on the 1980s and early-1990s as a crucial transition point for the movement. I argue that Islamism within the territories should not be considered a monolithic, uncritical, and unchanging ideology bent on senseless violence, as such simplifications drastically misrepresent the diverse trajectories Palestinians experience within the Islamist milieu. Instead, I seek to understand Palestinian Islamism in the context of the broader political landscape of resistance and expose the rational, critical perspectives of many rank and file adherents. My findings highlight the discriminating, carefully chosen path of agreement many interlocutors express when participating within the Islamist milieu as well as the fluid nature of these beliefs and practices over time. Both results contradict the brainwashing or indoctrination explanations offered by many observers. This deeply situated analysis will humanize an ideology whose members have been demonized as fanatics or worse within popular Western discourse. Humanization remains an important prerequisite for fruitful evaluation of recent and future events involving Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the future of the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

As an overarching goal, I hope to explain how individual Palestinians from before the creation of Israel to the mid-1990s came to understand, condone, and accept Islamist ideology and practice, especially the nationalist-Islamism espoused by groups like Hamas. Specifically, I hope to dissect and unravel how historical events, cultural narratives, family ties, and personal experience cause an individual to reject secular or pluralist values and instead consciously adopt Islamist beliefs and ways of conduct as a carefully considered process. Within pursuit of this objective, I will reject an essentialist view of Islamism and highlight the diverse changes the
Islamic movement in Palestine has undergone from the 1920s to the post-Oslo period, especially its interactions and tensions with other organizations espousing leftist, secular, or multi-confessional approaches. Concentration on exchanges (constructive, neutral, or violent) between organizations and milieus provides particular insight into how and why individuals choose between the diverse ideological options available in the highly politicized territories.

**Terminology**

Before embarking on this investigation, it becomes imperative to define precisely some key terms and language that will shape analysis.

First and foremost, the distinction between the terms “Islam” and “Islamism” must be addressed. “Islam” and “Islamic” generally refer to the monotheistic religious system based on the teachings of Muhammad as articulated in the Quran and other tradition. In contrast, “Islamism” is generally defined as the *political* expression of the Islamic movement. Scholars distinguish between practitioners of Islam the religion and supporters of Islamism the political ideology because they are not inherently related. Many Palestinian Muslims regularly pray, fast and uphold other beliefs and practices associated with being a devout Muslim, yet profess a secular or multi-confessional political orientation. In contrast, other Palestinian Muslims complement their religious practice with a comprehensive political perspective derived from Islam. The label “Islamist” is usually assigned to devout Muslim individuals or organizations seeking to establish “an Islamic state, a political and social order … that makes no distinction between religion and state” (Roy 163). The legal and ideological basis of the prototypical Islamist state is based upon the Quran and the Sunnah, the recorded sayings and actions of the prophet Muhammad.
This concept of Islamism as a religio-political force can be further refined and problematized on several fronts within the Palestinian context. Sara Roy correctly observes that the term “Islamist” can apply to movements that have not only political but social and economic facets as well (Roy 163). As an additional critical observation, Gunning points out that what exactly is an Islamic belief and what exactly are the Islamic laws remain contested among adherents even within Hamas (Gunning 56-57). Finally, Lybarger reminds us that while Islamism is often a label applied to social and political movements in diverse nations such as Algeria and Egypt, “the Palestinian case is different” and deserves to be recognized as such (8). The most salient difference is that while other Islamist movements usually situate themselves as ideologically opposed to an already established, postcolonial nation-state, for Palestinians the “struggle for statehood remains unfinished” (Lybarger 9). The interaction between Islamism and liberation politics is a central theme within the Palestinian Islamist milieu. In this work, I will use the term “Islamist” with these considerations in mind, mindful that the actors involved are Palestinian and the precise beliefs and practices implicated are fluid and likely contestable. Similarly, the term “Islamist milieu” implies the broader ecosystem of institutions, social networks, and cultural community which profess Islamist values.

Before proceeding with this definition, readers should recognize that while Islam stands as the dominant majority religion in Palestine, populations following other religions also exist and their beliefs and practices can also influence cultural, social, and political movements. For example, a significant minority (roughly 8% in the West Bank) of the Palestinian population are Arab Christians. These groups can exert notable control, especially in certain concentrated locations such as Bethlehem. While this work will not investigate the Arab Christian influence on
Palestinian identity in any detail, readers should not conclude that Islam is the only religious influence for the Palestinian people.

To further develop the language that will assist our critical analysis of evolving cultural and political paradigms, the terms “secular” and “secular-nationalist” deserve attention as well. Following Lybarger, in this work these terms refer to an ideological orientation that views the Palestinian national collective as a community based upon shared usage of the Arabic language, common experience in historical events such as 1948 and 1967 wars, and ancestral residence within the territory of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Israel proper (1). For secular-nationalists, the nation “includes adherents of multiple religions: Muslims and Christians, primarily, but even Jews” (Lybarger 1). This orientation does not seek to repress or restrict religion (although left-secularists might) but instead pursues “integration within a multi-confessional framework” (Lybarger 1). The state articulated by adherents of this framework is usually democratic in character. Throughout this work the “secular milieu” and “secular-nationalist milieu” refer to the ecosystem of institutions and cultural communities under this umbrella. As with the Islamist milieu, its tenets may evolve over time and members may disagree about significant components of its belief structure.

**Methodology**

The question of understanding the evolution of Islamist identity undoubtedly requires a detailed investigation into Palestinian history, culture, politics, and the role of religion. Careful choice of the questions to ask, assumptions to make, and evidence to accept all contribute to the conclusions this investigation will draw. To identify an appropriate methodological approach, I borrow from the recent work of two rising scholars in Palestinian studies: Jeroen Gunning and
Loren Lybarger. As will be shown below, Gunning makes a strong case for viewing political Islam as a movement that is capable of rapid change, contradictions, and diversity of opinions. Gunning suggests this flexibility requires scholars to problematize inherent assumptions and view movement members as rational humans worthy of intense scrutiny via firsthand observation. Lybarger complements this humanizing vision with an emphasis on ethnographic study focused on how individuals, generations, and social institutions respond to and help recreate the ideological and cultural milieus they move through as living, breathing members of a constantly evolving political ecosystem. Examining these approaches in parallel will help inform the analysis I embark upon in this work.

Jeroen Gunning argues for a careful, scholarly approach to dissecting political Islam in his work ‘On Studying Hamas’. He calls this approach a “critical methodology” in which scholars become “self-consiously self-reflexive about methods and assumptions” (Gunning 4). He emphasizes first and foremost a rejection of “static” or “essentialist” analysis that sees Hamas as unwieldingly fanatical, incapable of contradiction, and solely dedicated to the annihilation of Israel (Gunning 3-5). Instead, Gunning advocates a view of Hamas that embraces its transformation over time and investigates contradictions rather than dismisses them. In his own studies of Hamas, Gunning writes that he seeks “to engage with my research subjects with the purpose of ‘humanizing the other.’ This means moving beyond the images dominating the Western press … to try to understand what motivates Hamas members. It means trying to live into their situation… taking Hamas’ own discourse and explanations seriously before subjecting them to critique” (Gunning 5). In this work, I hope to extend this humanizing vision to all Palestinian interlocuters, regardless of cultural or political affiliation.
A second contribution of Gunning’s approach is his advocacy of primary sources, arguing that relying on secondary sources can be dangerous, since “much of what is written about terrorism … is written by people who have never met a terrorist, or have never actually spent significant time on the ground in the areas most affected by conflict” (O’Leary and Silke, quoted in Gunning 5). Gunning suggests firsthand research based on interviews and observation as the primary evidence for forming conclusions. Finally, Gunning encourages Western analysts to problematize inherent assumptions about Islamism. For example, Gunning suggests that the “secularization credo” – the ingrained belief that modernization and democratization must be accompanied by an absence of religion in the public sphere – should be questioned in non-Western contexts such as the Palestinian territories.

The ethnographic and analytical approach employed by Loren Lybarger in Identity and Religion in Palestine neatly complements Gunning’s “critical methodology.” Lybarger’s work interrogates the evolution of Palestinian political and religious identity from the start of the Israeli occupation, with an emphasis on the rise of Islamism in the 1980s and 1990s. Lybarger conducted fieldwork visits to the Palestinian territories on three occasions (1980s, early 1990s, and 1999-2000). Based on his interviews and observations, Lybarger rejects a simplistic grouping of Palestinians into “pragmatic” and “radical” camps, and similarly rejects a naïve view of Palestinian identity as irrevocably either secular or Islamist. Perhaps the most important contribution of Lybarger’s work is carefully chosen unit of analysis. Rather than scrutinize organizations like Hamas, Lybarger concentrates on studying individual Palestinians growing up in the territories. He provides dozens of detailed life histories as told through interviews and
observations, providing the reader with a valuable collection of evidence for how interlocutors move between ideological groups.

Based on interviews with these subjects, he also analyzes broader trends within “generational units”, aggregates of individuals evolving within a similar time period toward self-consciously similar ends. To understand Lybarger’s focus here, I must clarify the term and explain why generations act as vehicles that produce change in collective ideological orientation. Lybarger draws on ideas from the prominent sociologist Karl Mannheim to argue that generations represent a coherent social group localized within a unique combination of “demographic and historical factors” (Lybarger 17). As the collective youth of a particular society come of age, they gain a shared experience through which they interpret previous generations’ lives as well as their own. Lybarger notes that when destabilizing historical experiences occur that undermine connectedness with the previous generation, a crisis results in which “received ideals and those who support them face the possibility of rejection and replacement” (Lybarger 18). A destabilized generation can thus redefine the beliefs, practices, and institutions it inherits from its ancestors. However, Lybarger notes cautiously that generations capable of redefinition are rarely ever homogenous, “especially in the Palestinian case” (Lybarger 19). Conflict can occur between “generational units”, where each unit articulates a specific cultural, political, and ideological program. According to Lybarger,

“The concept of generational units enables us to develop a more coherent theory of change within social movements by linking structural processes (network formation, institutional location, large historical events) to cultural ones (interpretation of symbols, articulation of discourses, authoring of...


narratives). Generational units are the vehicles for culturally reimagining and institutionally reconstituting movements and milieus” (Lybarger 19).

This framing of generational units as vehicles of change will help explain transitions in Palestinian culture and Palestinian institutions examined throughout this work.

Synthesizing lessons from both Gunning and Lybarger, my critical investigation adheres to three methodological purposes: an appreciation for broad historical context for shifts in political, cultural, and religious identity, a detailed ethnographic focus on individual life stories, and a multi-dimensional analytical framework that builds an evidence-driven model for identity formation out of this complicated process.

**Roadmap**
Armed with the goals and methodology defined above, a multi-dimensional investigation into the rise of Islamism within Palestinian society can commence. I take two complementary approaches to this study: a macro-scale historical analysis and a micro-scale ethnographic analysis. **Part I** of this work provides a thorough exploration into how Palestinian political, cultural, social, and religious identity evolved from before the creation of Israel in 1948 to Hamas’ recent electoral victory in 2006. The emphasis here is a combined sociological, political, and cultural approach that studies the progression of “generational cohorts” through history. This section provides an overall sense of the ideological tides as well as enabling organizations and institutions that inform the formation of Palestinian identity. Building on this context, **Part II** follows with detailed discussion of how individuals in the 1980s and 1990s came to associate themselves within the Islamist milieu, particularly the nationalist-Islamism espoused by Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The primary unit of analysis here is the *individual*. This section will analyze life stories
from several Palestinians across the Islamist spectrum to understand personal motivations, life histories, and enabling social interactions and institutions that inspired gravitation to Islamism. Taken together, Parts I and II hopefully provide a coherent evidence-driven model for explaining how and why Palestinians of the intifada generation gravitated towards Hamas and similar organizations.

**Exploring Palestinian Identity: Divisions, Tensions, and Interactions**

Before beginning a detailed interrogation of history, a step back to note common threads that run throughout the story of Palestinian nationalism will be beneficial. The Palestinian territories offer perhaps one of the most dynamic and fascinating case studies in the evolution of political, cultural, and religious identities. In the course of untangling the complex process in which Islamism rose to prominence, awareness of the larger Palestinian political and militant landscape can prove invaluable. Before I embark on the analysis, some attention should be given to the overarching social hierarchy that shapes identity as well as prominent tensions that push and pull individuals across the ideological landscape.

Political, religious, and cultural divisions within the Palestinian territories have played a significant role in identity development since the beginning of the twentieth century. Of course, the obvious division to focus on for this work is the distinction between secular and Islamist milieus. However, many other divisions play significant roles, at times far more significant than the distinction between religious groups. For example, tensions between Israeli government actors and Palestinian institutions are fundamental concerns. Family and clan loyalties frequently divide Palestinians, as do distinctions between urban and rural residents, refugees and their non-refugee counterparts, and finally “insiders” who continue to live within the territories under occupation and “outsiders” who live in the diaspora community in neighboring Arab states.
Geographically, the isolation of the Gaza Strip from the West Bank results in two remarkably different communities under different regional spheres of influence. Cross-generational splits can also result as youth and elders differ on questions of religion, culture, and politics. Gender can also play a decisive function, confining the cultural and political roles possible for an individual within socially acceptable norms. Within specific ideological milieus, geographic, cross-generational, or inter-class differences all play a significant role in the evolution and support of the belief structure and its associated symbols and narrative. Most significant for this analysis, however, is the notion that a split between groups along a particular axis does not confine these separate groups to conflict and tension. Instead, the historical analysis of the ensuing chapter will highlight many cases of interaction and cross-talk that fundamentally inform a movement’s evolving ideology. The bottom line is that nothing within the Palestinian ecosystem remains static.

In pursuit of improved understanding of how exactly political Islam and nationalist-Islamism rose to prominent stature in the Palestinian political landscape, it is necessary to achieve a thorough grounding in the broader historical context through which Palestinian political, cultural, and religious values and practices have evolved. This chapter intends to provide this grounding.

Thesis: Why History and Context Matters

The thesis argued here is that the roots of modern Palestinian Islamist movements such as Hamas are deeply set in history, reaching back farther even than establishment of Israel as a state and the resulting expulsion of Palestinians into the outlying territories. Rather than view Islamism as a stand-alone movement, I argue that its beliefs, behavior, and popular support must be studied in context, as part of the grander story of Palestinian cultural identity and national struggle for liberation. This multi-generational contextual view has two fundamental lessons to offer scholars of Palestinian identity.

First, it adopts a *evolutionary* approach which recognizes that behaviors and beliefs within a particular milieu in the Palestinian ecosystem are far from static. Each successive generation of Palestinians inherits values, institutions, and practices from parents and promptly reconfigures these in response to changing conditions and transformative events in both personal and collective experiences. While many values and behaviors within a milieu are shared across time, a particular belief or practice can see its expression and level of popular agreement fluctuate significantly. Thus, rather than speak of Islamic beliefs in the abstract, instead careful analysis must situate beliefs within a particular time and place and study the processes shaping their evolution.
Second, this broad contextual view emphasizes how cultural milieus, political organizations and social movements are fundamentally *intertwined*. Especially within the Palestinian ecosystem, no movement is an island. Instead, milieus co-evolve in intricate ways at many scales. In the realm of ideas, movements can exchange, steal, and synthesize new values and beliefs. At an institutional level, organizations can issue declarations of cooperation, compromise, or conflict. Even among individuals, members can voluntarily shift sides or be forced out by social stigma, crossing over to merge values and practices into a new configuration. All of these modes of interaction are possible in the Palestinian ecosystem, and recognizing their influence provides insight for how Islamism spreads.

Mindful of these lessons, this section shall investigate the wide-angle view of Palestinian cultural and political evolution in the twentieth century. To acquire an overall appreciation of the primary themes and events, I first offer a high-level narrative that attempts to tell the essential Palestinian story. Following this overview, we will embark on a detailed trace of each generation which provides more scholarly detail and nuanced analysis of significant cultural, religious, and political developments within and across milieus.

**The Brief Story of the Palestinian People: 1920-2000**

Even before the creation of the state of Israel, the Arab residents of Palestine articulated shared cultural heritage and a desire for national independence under the British Mandate authority from 1920-1948. Palestinian society at this time centered on customs and traditions from agricultural village life, with patriarchy and clan loyalty dominating social norms alongside traditional practice of Islam. However, the rapid influx of Jewish immigration in the 1930s pushed Arabs toward conflict over land and authority. While these struggles produced no immediate gains, they established a cultural virtue of heroic resistance to oppression still felt to this day.
Meanwhile, this era saw widespread popular support for the Muslim Brotherhood as a cultural and social organization, although political activities of this group were minimal.

The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and the resulting expulsion of Palestinians to the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza marks a critical transition point for modern Palestinian identity. For Palestinians, this event is collectively remembered as the *nakbah*, or “catastrophe” in the collective narrative emphasizing dispossession of land and loss of political autonomy. Following the *nakbah*, a period of almost twenty years followed which Khalidi refers to as the “lost years” (178). In this period, Palestinian society was dramatically reorganized. Refugees crowded the West Bank and Gaza where economic prospects were bleak. Meanwhile, traditional land-owning elites lost social and political capital in the *nakbah*, thus surrendering influence to neighboring states. In short, a significant power vacuum emerged at this time.

With the political playing field wide open, Egypt and Jordan acted as dominant spheres of ideological influence over Gaza and the West Bank respectively. Egypt gave Gaza a strong strain of pan-Arabism and leftism, and its dictatorial authority pushed the Muslim Brotherhood into hiding and out of contention. Meanwhile, Jordanian influence in the West Bank subordinated Palestinian nationalist efforts to broader moral concerns. In this time of class restructuring and vacant leadership, middle-class youth were welcomed into Arab universities, a development which facilitated a renewed awareness and political activism in that generation. The vanguard of this transformation went on to fill the gap in Palestinian leadership, founding organizations like Fatah and PFLP whose membership would come to be a *de facto* prerequisite for claiming Palestinian identity.
The Israeli army seized control of the Palestinian territories after a short war against Arab states in 1967. From 1967 onward, the occupational authority became the most significant player in the Palestinian ecosystem. Significantly, under Israeli occupation an economic boom in the territories catapulted society out of the poverty of the “lost years.” However, the economic opportunities were generally found as transient day laborers in Israel and failed to build sustainable growth in the local Palestinian economy. Nevertheless, the boom catalyzed a renewed sense of agency in the territories and the generation growing up under occupation pursued university and political activism in unprecedented numbers. Politically, pan-Arabism and leftism gave way to distinctly nationalist movements such as Fatah and the PFLP. These groups captured collective admiration through daring guerrilla operations against Israeli forces, establishing heroic resistance as a primary virtue of the Palestinian collective. However, most Palestinians were content to let the PLO handle political affairs and a general attitude of quietism in the territories prevailed.

In parallel to the rise of heroic nationalism in the 1970s, an Islamic religious and cultural revival took place in the territories. Led by Sheikh Yasin and other members of the Muslim Brotherhood, this grassroots movement sought to deeply integrate Islamic values and practices into daily life. The movement doubled the number of mosques in the territories and established closely-associated schools, clinics, youth centers, and other social institutions. Focusing on a message of personal spiritual renewal and commitment to the world-wide Islamic community, this movement lacked the political punch of nationalism but nevertheless lay a groundwork capable of vast cultural change.

As history marched on into the 1980s, a notable transition from gradualism to activism became apparent in Palestinian life across milieus. Increased empowerment combined with a lack of
political opportunity and an increasingly repressive occupation sparked a move toward demonstrations and nationalist resistance. This move toward a youth-driven active resistance, often informed by Fatah and the secular-leftist milieu, culminated in the transformative event of the 1987 intifada. This watershed marked the first instance of widespread popular resistance to the occupation, largely in the form of demonstrations and stone-throwing.

The widespread nationalist militarism of this generation gave rise to Islamic activism with a particularly nationalist bent. The guerilla splinter group Islamic Jihad was first to embody this evolution when it entered the scene in 1981, with a focus on paramilitary operations. Later, Hamas’ founding in 1987 marked the entrance of a hybrid of political Islam and nationalism to mainstream Palestinian discourse. Significantly, this rise of Islamism happened largely because of the sharp focus on these groups on Palestinian national liberation rather than more cultural or pan-Islamic political concerns characteristic of the revival movement in the 1970s. Islamist activism played a relatively minor role in the intifada compared the secular-leftist milieu, but it quickly became a permanent presence in the Palestinian political landscape.

Quickly following the intifada was the 1994 Oslo peace process, which brought limited autonomy to some parts of Palestinian territories but sharply divided the Palestinian populace. The Palestinian Authority, a new organization led by Arafat and other Fatah members, gained direct political authority over some of the territories, though Israel retained overall sovereignty in the region. Rejecting this compromise, Hamas and other Islamist took an adversarial stance to the Oslo agreements as unable to produce true resolution to the conflict. Motivated by the continued occupation, Hamas led a wave of mid-1990s suicide bombing within Israel which helped it capture some of Fatah’s heroic resistance credibility. Moreover, Hamas inherited and extended the social services infrastructure of the 1970s Islamic revival, thus straddling
ideological positions as a trustworthy caretaker of the people and the heroic vanguard of an uncompromising liberation. In this period, popular support for Hamas hovered at less than 20%, making it a notable player but leaving Fatah an uncontestable dominant status within Palestinian politics (Roy 303). Hamas accepted this position, staying out of elections and concentrating on military actions and social progress.

As the 1990s came to a close, however, dissatisfaction and disillusionment became the dominant attitudes of Palestinian society. Contributing factors included the lack of progress toward greater autonomy, continued oppression under Israeli rule, and a growing sense of corruption within the PA. In 2000, a renewed wave of grassroots militant violence erupted in the second intifada. In contrast to the first intifada, this one was markedly more violent and factionalized, with a variety of organizations from both Islamist and secular-leftist milieus leading guerilla operations. Meanwhile, power struggles within Fatah and the PA damaged Palestinian secular unity. Many saw Arafat’s leadership as power-hungry cronyism and felt hurt by the increasing socioeconomic divide between PA leadership originally from the diaspora and native residents of the territories.

The decade following the Second Intifada saw several Israeli military actions within the territories which dramatically heightened the occupation’s interference into the eyes of Palestinians. The construction of a security fence around Israel’s border with the West Bank starting in 2002 was one such development. For Palestinians, the wall severely restricted their mobility, prevented access to educational opportunities and medical care, and served as a symbol that Israel intended to be a permanent authority over Palestinians in the region (Makdisi 28). Additionally, Israeli military invasions of Lebanon in 2006 and Gaza in 2009 produced many civilian casualties and further catalyzed radical militarism among Palestinians.
It was within this increasingly polarized ecosystem of the 2000s that Hamas rose to political power, especially in Gaza. Hamas as an organization rose to power capitalizing on two significant sources of credibility. First, its militant activist track record struck a chord with the nationalist liberation sentiment common to Palestinians, especially under the increasingly harsh conditions of the occupation. Second, its credibility as a productive, honest, and trustworthy social services organization grounded in Islamic virtue gave it a much-needed boost over Fatah, which had gained a reputation of corruption and willingness to compromise on issues related to Palestinian independence. These two overarching themes certainly set Hamas in a favorable position relative to Fatah, but somehow fail to provide the full story. As Sara Roy notes, if widespread disillusionment with the PLO was a sufficient criteria for the political election of Hamas, it could very well have occurred around 2000 as the Oslo process was in decline (Roy 220). Thus, I caution that this simplistic narrative of Palestinian identity highlights important results of the process but fails to precisely locate their root causes and mediating mechanisms.
Motivation for a Deeper History

The concise story outlined above captures essential events and themes related to the evolution of Palestinian identity. Thematically, note how important symbols and narratives are to establishing identity and providing a selective lens for understanding events. Recognizing the multitude of actors capable of instigating change in these symbols and narratives produces a long list: states like Egypt and Israel, parties like Hamas or Fatah, as well as institutions like local mosques and universities. Clearly the mechanisms at work to transform collective identity are multi-dimensional, crossing milieu boundaries as well as generations. However, overall a careful reader should be largely unsatisfied with the above story, as it fails to identify exactly how certain changes occurred. Does building mosques automatically initiate a cultural revival? Does declaring your religious cause a national one automatically garner popular support? A further exploration is necessary, one that studies mechanisms and actors in scholarly detail, combining evidence with critical analysis. This is the intent of the remaining chapters in this section.

But what goal should this contextual analysis pursue? Perhaps the most significant observation a reader interested in the evolution of Islamism can take away from this brief story is the recognition that the 1980s were significant turning point for both secular and Islamist milieus. In this decade, a confluence of professionalization through education and wealth as well as oppression under Israeli occupation forged a widespread ethic of political agency and (to a lesser extent) violent militarism focused on national liberation. This transformation appears especially true of the Islamic milieu, which underwent a radical redefinition of its goals, roles, and values. Studying the precise causes and mechanisms which facilitated this transformation at societal, cultural, and institutional scales will be the goal of the following chapters. These take a more in-
depth look at each successive generational-cohort growing up in the twentieth century Palestinian ecosystem, culminating in the intifada generation.

These chapters seek to provide a thorough context for this transformation grounded in scholarly evidence and crisp analysis. This thorough investigation should illuminate the root causes that enabled the transition to activism that lies at the center of the Palestinian story. Additionally, it should hopefully help readers appreciate the extraordinarily sophisticated and intertwined political ecosystem which Palestinians of each generation navigated. Unfortunately, due to limited scope a more thorough evaluation of the most modern period of the conflict (mid-1990s through the present in 2010) will not be investigated in this work. Please refer to the Further Reading chapter for more information on this period as well as references for many other available sources.

Overall, the highlight of this chapter will be the conclusion that the beliefs, values, and tactics used among all parties in the conflict are constantly in flux. As an example of a common perspective this work seeks to correct, observers concentrating on the last twenty years of conflict may be tempted to conclude that militant violence has always played a significant role in the resistance strategies of both Islamic movements and Israeli forces. This is far from the truth. As Sara Roy observes, violence used in the modern conflict is in many ways new (Roy 57). Even as far back as 1993, Roy remarked that “consistent attacks on [IDF] army units by Hamas activists are as new as the use of anti-tank missiles against civilian homes by Israeli army” (Roy 38). Remember throughout this analysis that only through understanding of the conflict’s entire evolutionary history, particularly the radical ideological and socioeconomic shifts of the 1980s, can the modern observers hope to explain the current state of affairs and begin to seek solutions.
**1900-1948: Mandate Palestine**

Although in many ways activist resistance and political Islam are relatively new phenomena, crucial components of Palestinian national identity and cultural narratives were established before Israel became an official state and the resulting *nakbah* expelled Palestinians into the West Bank and the Gaza strip and provided the seeds of resistance identity.

During this period, Palestine existed as a territory governed originally by the Ottoman Empire and then, after World War I, the British under a Mandate from the League of Nations. For a thorough investigation of this period, historian Charles Smith provides a thorough political history which interested readers can consult. Rashid Khalidi’s account of Palestinian cultural identity in the Ottoman period is also helpful. Both are documented in the Further Reading chapter. For the purposes of this work, however, I will focus on three crucial developments happening during the Mandate period. Two of these happened within mandatory Palestine: the development of a Palestinian national consciousness and the advent of resistance to Zionist attempts at colonization. Third was the formation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, an Islamic organization that became a precursor to the spread of Islamism among Palestinians. In the background of these developments, everyday life in mandatory Palestine remained rooted in patriarchal tradition, family and clan loyalty, and a talismanic approach to Islam. Understanding how each of these key events played out against this cultural backdrop remains crucial to analyzing Palestinian political identity even today.

I begin with analysis of the cultural and socioeconomic backdrop. In mandatory Palestine, several land-owning elite Palestinian families ruled over landless peasants in a primarily agricultural economy. Two of the most powerful factions were led by Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the British appointed mufti of Jerusalem, and Raghib al-Nashashibi a former mayor of Jerusalem.
with ties to the British as well. For most Palestinians, however, peasant village life was the focal point of identity. Social networks were mostly restricted to the local village and clan or family loyalties predominated over nationalist or other ideological identities. Islam was widely practiced, although as Lybarger points out the population was mostly illiterate and had little university education (Lybarger 87). Lybarger thus considers the practice of Islam in mandatory Palestine to be mostly talismanic in character, meaning practitioners took to praying and fasting as supernatural spiritual duties that brought emotional comfort and social acceptance. Illiteracy and a lack of higher education generally created an environment with significantly lower level of religious intellectualization than would be seen later in the century.

Patriarchal social structure had a strong cultural foothold at this time. According to Lybarger, this meant the structure of social authority was such that men, usually older men, “monopolize public prestige and power, and women’s social honor and life opportunities derive from child rearing and maintenance of the domestic sphere.” (134). Arranged marriages were the cultural norm and women usually had large families and rarely participated in extradomestic activities. However, even in this time some strong, vibrant female role models existed. For example, Lybarger writes of a West Bank mother who was well known in her village as a woman who frequently rode horses, smoked cigarettes, and fired guns. She was known for her abilities to provide advice to neighbors and mediate conflicts (a traditionally male role), and later as a grandmother during the occupation would often stand up to Israeli soldiers during home invasions (Lybarger 38). Overall, however, a strong undercurrent of “customs and traditions” coursed through the social fabric of mandatory Palestine, with significant value placed on clan or family loyalty, talismanic religious practice, and adherence to socialized gender norms.
Against this traditional backdrop several key historical developments fundamentally changed Palestinian identity during the Mandatory period. First, Jewish immigration and Zionist land acquisition shifted the balance of power in the region and ignited tensions between Jews and Arabs in the region. Second, several armed resistance efforts, some more organized than others, inspired nationalist passions among the Arab Palestinians that would lay groundwork for a new, broader ideological affiliation claimed by this group for the rest of the century and beyond. Each development is discussed in some detail below, although readers are encouraged to consult primary sources in Further Readings for more nuanced discussion.

The huge wave of Jewish migration into Palestine under Mandate authority fundamentally changed the balance of power in the region. At the start of British rule, the 1922 Mandatory census found the Palestinian population to be 78% Muslim, 11% Jewish, and 9.5% Christian (Table 1). Over the next two decades, this overwhelming Muslim majority shifted significantly because of Jewish immigration, with a net influx of over 216,000 Jews in the 1930s alone (see Table 2). By 1942, almost 30% of the Mandatory population claimed Jewish heritage compared to 61% Muslim and 8% Christian (see Table 1). The shifting demographic fabric combined with the successful land purchases of Zionist organizations inspired a need for collective organization and activism among Arab Palestinians.

Table 1: Population of Palestine, 1922-1942, adapted from Wolf 1995.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Jews</th>
<th>Christians</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(No.)</td>
<td>(No.) (%)</td>
<td>(No.) (%)</td>
<td>(No.) (%)</td>
<td>(No.) (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922 Census</td>
<td>752,048</td>
<td>589,177 (78.34)</td>
<td>83,790 (11.14)</td>
<td>71,464 (9.50)</td>
<td>7,617 (1.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year or period</td>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>Emigration</td>
<td>Net immigration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>Non-Jews</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>Non-Jews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>4,944</td>
<td>1,489</td>
<td>6,433</td>
<td>1,679</td>
<td>1,324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>4,075</td>
<td>1,458</td>
<td>5,533</td>
<td>666</td>
<td>680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>9,553</td>
<td>1,736</td>
<td>11,289</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>30,327</td>
<td>1,650</td>
<td>31,977</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>42,359</td>
<td>1,784</td>
<td>44,143</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>61,854</td>
<td>2,293</td>
<td>64,147</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>29,727</td>
<td>1,944</td>
<td>31,671</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>10,536</td>
<td>1,939</td>
<td>12,475</td>
<td>889</td>
<td>639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>12,868</td>
<td>2,395</td>
<td>15,263</td>
<td>1,055</td>
<td>716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>16,405</td>
<td>2,028</td>
<td>18,433</td>
<td>1,019</td>
<td>972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>222,648</td>
<td>18,716</td>
<td>241,364</td>
<td>6,517</td>
<td>5,128</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Emigration data unavailable for this period.
A dramatic sign of Palestinian political consciousness during the Mandate period was the rise of militant resistance to Zionist efforts and the British authority. Throughout the late 1920s, a series of spontaneous clashes between Arabs and Jews erupted in Jerusalem and elsewhere. Later, a more concerted guerilla-style effort was mounted by Shaykh Izz al-Din al-Qassam, a respected Palestinian elder, against the mandate authority itself in 1935. Qassam gained prestige as head of the Haifa branch of the Young Muslim Men’s Association (Mishal and Sela 16). Through his charismatic leadership, he began to lead an activist resistance group that specialized in assassination attempts on local Mandate leaders in the early 1930s. He soon led a more overt armed clash in the mid-1930s. During the revolt, al-Qassam was killed, but his leadership “touched a deep chord in the popular imagination” of Palestinians (Khalidi 189). His death was portrayed as martyrdom within cultural narratives and inspired a nationwide strike in 1936. Although this revolt produced no lasting concessions from the mandatory authority, it found resonance in the Palestinian consciousness that can still be felt in the modern era. Al-Qassam became a cultural hero for standing up to an oppressive authority, and his name is often invoked in political discourse. For example, Hamas’ military wing is named the “al-Qassam brigades” in honor of his watershed activism.

While Palestinian political identity gained collective support and its first activist hero in al-Qassam, Islamic movements within the territories did not play a major role in political developments under Mandate authority. However, during this time the foundations of Islamist ideology were laid by an Egyptian schoolteacher named Hassan al-Banna. Al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 in response to his belief that a widespread lack of Islamic zeal was a primary reason for the decline of Islamic civilization, as exemplified by the colonization of Muslim peoples by European powers and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (Gunning 26).
The Brotherhood became a dominant political and civil player in Egyptian society and gradually spread into Mandatory Palestine.

The first Palestinian branch of the Brotherhood opened in Jerusalem in 1945, with close affiliation to the mufti of Jerusalem al-Husseini, one of the powerful elite in Mandatory Palestine (Mishal and Sela 16). The organization became a prominent feature of Palestinian society in the mid-1940s, with major branches established as lower class Palestinians gained political power and zeal, inspired among other factors by the revolt of al-Qassam (Gunning 26-27). By 1947 the brotherhood boasted over ten thousand members spread across 38 branches throughout Mandatory Palestine, drawing from lower classes and the traditional elite (Gunning 28, Mishal and Sela 16). Unlike its Egyptian counterpart, the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood focused on cultural or religious educational activities and supported only rare political or paramilitary enterprises. For example, in the 1948 war for Israel’s independence, the only significant recorded activity of the Brotherhood’s armed resistance occurred around Jerusalem in the mufti’s sphere of influence (Mishal and Sela 16). Before Israel’s independence, the Brotherhood’s popularity in Mandatory Palestine reflected the deep-seated cultural affinity for the Islamic message that resonated both with a tradition of talismanic Muslim observance and a hesitation to accept Western values and authority.

As the mandatory period came to a close, Zionist immigration, land acquisition, and political legitimacy within the international community became firmly established. Israel officially became a Jewish-majority nation in 1948, an event made possible after neighboring Arab powers like Egypt and Jordan lost a short war contesting the project. This war and its aftermath saw the exodus of many Palestinians into the territories of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and a dismemberment of political and social infrastructure. For example, the creation of Israel
disrupted the operation of three quarters of the branches of the Muslim Brotherhood, scattering members as refugees throughout the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and neighboring Arab territories (Gunning 28). Even as lives were uprooted and support structures scattered, however, the pre-1948 cultural backdrop of peasant traditionalism, patriarchy, and clan loyalty carried through, as did the activist spark and nationalist passion inspired by al-Qassam’s revolt. As noted scholar on Palestinian identity Rashid Khalidi observes, “Most elements of Palestinian identity – particularly the enduring parochial, local ones – were well developed before the climactic events of 1948, although they continued to overlap and change both before and after that date” (Khalidi 21). This foundational understanding of life in Mandatory Palestine will fundamentally inform subsequent analysis of Palestinian political and religious identity.
1948-1967: Lost Years
The 1948 *nakbāh* upended the socioeconomic structure of Palestinian village life. In the “lost years” period that followed, though, the cultural values of traditional peasant life continued to provide a foundation of a shared group identity. It also inspired a new political activism born from the middle class. The primary competing ideologies arising in this period were the secular nationalism of Fatah and the pan-Arab leftism advocated by Nasser and others. Symbols, traditional beliefs, and styles of dress from village life were leveraged by these groups to claim cultural legitimacy. Meanwhile, the Muslim Brotherhood at this time was a minority movement with only a few thousand supporters (stronger in Gaza than the West Bank) that remained confined to the cultural sphere.

The formation of the state of Israel in 1948 caused a severe tear in the underlying social, political, and cultural fabric that held traditional Palestinian peasant society together. Fleeing the Zionist armies, hundreds of thousands of residents fled as refugees to the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and surrounding Arab countries. Some 250,000 fled to Gaza alone (Gunning 27). Dispossessed of land, the unskilled agrarian laboring class struggled to make ends meet. In the West Bank, for example, estimates indicate that “more than 50% of the labor force was fully unemployed in 1954, and a further 20% was seasonally unemployed” (Abed 71). Moreover, many traditional landowners lost social and political capital because they had sold land to Zionist organizations (Khalidi 114). Though some elite retained influence in more traditional political circles, their days were numbered.

Following the creation of Israel, political authority over the refuge Palestinian territories fell to neighboring Arab states. Due to geographical proximity and cultural affinity, the fates of Gaza and the West Bank were split as each was taken into separate custody. The Egyptian military
took over custody of Gaza and its residents, while the Kingdom of Jordan accepted the West Bank. In many ways, these two divergent spheres of influence shaped political identity, attitudes, and events in ways that are still evident today. Neither country took full measures to incorporate Palestinians into its citizenry and society. One reason for this is likely that the need to maintain a legitimate claim to return to the land now called Israel prevented incorporation into another nation-state, and neither Arab power was willing to concede this to Israel. However, Jordan took steps to integrate Palestinians into its political scene, but Egypt’s more militaristic custody did not.

Jordan officially annexed the West Bank in April 1950 (Mishal and Sela 17). The refugee population became tenuously integrated with the Jordanian political and cultural scene. Under the regime of King Hussein, Jordan was relatively tolerant toward Palestinian political participation and allowed several competing parties space to grow. For example, the regime allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to participate in local and municipal elections. Mishal and Sela attribute this as a cooperative challenge to the rising tide of leftist, pan-Arab nationalism that threatened the traditional Hashemite leadership (17). However, despite political incorporation the role of the West Bank Muslim Brotherhood was relatively modest at the time, as its 700-1000 members in the years after the *nakbah* were easily overshadowed by the active roll of 2300 communists (Gunning 28). Importantly, the Brotherhood in the West Bank was integrated tightly into the Jordanian brotherhood, which tempered the nationalist potential of its Palestinian members in favor of championing Islamic religious morals and anti-imperialist themes (Gunning 28). The strong network building between the Brotherhood in Jordan and the West Bank would guide thematic emphasis and (later) financial support for Islamic mobilization for decades to come.
Egyptian rule of Gaza was far less permissive towards Palestinians. Egypt itself at the time saw fierce ideological competition between a much more militantly active Muslim Brotherhood and leaders advocating secular unity for all Arab people (pan-Arabism). The early 1950s saw the rise of secular pan-Arab commander Jamal abd Nasser as the country’s leader, and his administration took a tough line against Muslim Brotherhood activism both in Egypt and Gaza following assassination attempts within Egypt. For example, in 1965 following a failed coup Nasser’s regime arrested thousands of Brotherhood activists and executed several leaders, including noted Islamist theorist Sayyid Qutb (Mishal and Sela 17). This hostile military presence prevented overt political participation by members of the Muslim Brothers in Gaza and forced the organization to operate underground by the 1960s. Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, the future leader of Hamas, was one of the Brotherhood members arrested while in Egypt in what must doubtlessly have been a formative experience (Mishal and Sela 17). The ideological rivalry between secular and Islamic milieus in Gaza has much of its origins during this period.

Politics aside, life in Palestinian camps remained a reflection of the traditional cultural and social practices of Palestinian village life. A heavily patriarchal system governed by family and clan loyalties as well as an affinity for traditional values and beliefs reigned. However, other social dynamics changed as traditionally scattered villagers with ancestral homes in Israel were suddenly packed together in refugee camps with thousands of neighbors.

One of the most transformative structural changes at this time was the sustained opportunity for enrollment or employment abroad. Education and labor migration became prominent within Palestinian society, especially for unskilled refugee populations that lacked employment opportunities. Moving abroad was seen as perhaps the only mechanism for upward mobility and a way out of the refugee camps.
Palestinian students with the right factional connections could find scholarships and welcoming programs in universities in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and those with communist affiliations had offers to study in the USSR or Eastern European countries. The university experience proved to become a pivotal one for many students and Palestinian society as a whole. The university scene in Arab states at the time was heavily contested and various political organizations on campus provided opportunities for students to gain grassroots leadership experience. Moreover, studying abroad extracted the student from traditional clan roles and socioeconomic barriers, allowing encounter with mentors and fellow students from across the ideological spectrum and fostering the synthesis of new cultural values and political strategies.

In testament to the transformative power of the Arab university experience, the leaders of the two most significant Palestinian political factions of this generation honed their politics in diaspora universities. First, Yasser Arafat, future founder of the secular nationalist organization Fatah, studied engineering at Cairo University in Egypt. The son of a middle class merchant family, Arafat became president of the Palestinian Students Organization in Cairo in 1952. As a student, he made key contacts with others in the nascent nationalist movement such as Khalil al-Wazir (Lybarger 30). This experience laid the groundwork for his later charismatic leadership of Fatah for nearly forty years. George Habash, the future founder of the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, gained similar experience as a student activist at the American University in Beirut (Lybarger 22). Intellectual engagement and activism at universities throughout the Arab world thus enabled middle-class Palestinians coming of age in the “lost years” to become primary agents of cultural and political change during the future occupation.

Overall, the primary result of the “lost years” was a divided people with limited political autonomy and scant economic opportunities inside the territories. Despite a wounded elite class,
patriarchy and traditional customs formed the bedrock of daily life. However, the increasing availability of university education to middle-class Palestinians hinted at a rising sense of agency and activism among the population. Moreover, the political subordination of the Muslim Brotherhood by pan-Arabists in Gaza combined with the moral temperament acquired by the Brotherhood under the Jordanian sphere of influence paved the way for a focus on religious revival that would transform Palestinian social society in the 1970s.
1967-1980: The Occupation Years

Amidst the changing cultural landscape of post-Israel Palestine that saw the subordination of the Brotherhood and clashes between pan-Arabism and secular nationalism, war broke out in 1967 between Israel and neighboring Arab states. Israel’s conclusive military victory over six days saw it rout Egypt and Jordan and move in to occupy the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This occupation proved to be a transformative event that shifted Palestinian political and cultural identities in ways far more complicated than simply increased political repression and the daily hazards of life under occupation. When the dust settled after the war, Nasser’s defeat was widely seen as the defeat of pan-Arab leftism, which left room for other ideologies to find currency.

In the decade or so that followed 1967, four sweeping trends transformed the Palestinian ecosystem. First, opportunities for wage labor in Israel and the booming Gulf states transformed the Palestinian economy, provided a surge in disposable income and a dramatic increase in standard of living that helped level the playing field for displaced classes to become political agents. Second, Palestinian nationalism displaced broader pan-Islamic or pan-Arab concerns as the dominant political force. Of course, advocates of Palestinian liberation came in many flavors. Secular nationalist organizations like Fatah and leftist-nationalist organizations like the PFLP each rose as dominant influences on the political and paramilitary scene. As coalition members of the PLO, these groups sparked new political discourse, welcomed women into political participation, initiated a wave of militant violent resistance within the territories, and crucially redefined the cultural meanings of activism and resistance.
Meanwhile, the minority of Islamic movements remained confined from Palestinian politics due to its repression in Gaza and integration in Jordan during the lost years. However, Israel’s efforts to repress the surging secular nationalist movement saw relaxed restrictions on the activities of Islamic groups. The third trend crucial to our analysis is the resulting grassroots Islamic revival initiated at this time, which established societal institutions and social networks which allowed Islamic values to permeate society at unprecedented scales. Finally, the Israeli occupation in this period, while not nearly as restrictive as it would become the next decade, restricted Palestinian political and economic possibilities and inspired the activism of many youth.

Overall, the confluence of these four trends of leveling social hierarchy, the rise of nationalist politics, the resurgence of Islamic social structure, and the growing oppression under Israeli authority made the Occupation Years a pivotal time in Palestinian history. Examining each in detail can illuminate exactly how these transitions came about and how they enabled a rising amount of political agency in the territories.

**Economic transformation pushes democratization, opens channels for activism**

Historians and politicians across the board take note of the dramatic transformation that occupation wrought on the Palestinian economy. A combination of wage labor opportunities in Israel, growing opportunities for work abroad in surging Gulf states, and the seizure of Palestinian agricultural land propelled both West Bank and Gaza away from agrarian base and towards alternative paths that, at least in the short term, dramatically increased the earning possibilities of Palestinians. Improvements to Palestinian quality-of-life resulted mostly from Palestinians finding work in Israel. Israeli industries, especially construction, sought low-wage labor and found many Palestinians willing to work, especially refugees in Gaza and rural residents of the West Bank. The chance for a 10 to 100 percent increase in wages compared to
the occupied territories enticed many to make the commute (Gordon 66). By 1983, more than a third of the Palestinian labor force crossed into Israel proper every day for work, and by 1987 this number was nearly 50% (Wasserstein 60, Gordon 152). According to occupation scholar Neve Gordon, “The fact that Palestinians from different segments of society, and not just the lower classes, were integrated into the Israeli workforce, and that all the workers were treated with equal contempt, helped alter social stratification within Palestinian society” (Gordon 89). As Palestinian workers gained wages, they demanded a say in local politics and helped weaken traditional village leadership (Gordon 55). The net effect was an increased empowerment among Palestinians that helped erase perceived inter-class differences and heighten confrontation with the Israeli occupation.

Although standards of living demonstrably rose during this period for almost all sectors of the Palestinian economy, scholar Sara Roy is careful to emphasize that the rise in personal or family economic fortunes did not inspire society-wide economic reform. Roy contends that instead of classifying the Palestinian economy as developing or even under-developed at this time, its condition should properly be characterized as “de-development.” She argues that although personal incomes and standards of living rose almost unanimously in Gaza, the continued occupation of Israel prevented systematic growth of institutions and infrastructure to sustain a vibrant, independently-viable economy within the territories (Roy 33). Israeli authority within the territories prevented growth of indigenous business through the permit system and other bureaucratic measures. Without the ability to grow businesses within the territories or advance careers beyond wage labor within Israel, the Palestinian economy was essentially hostage to Israeli economic fortunes.
Rising Fatah and Leftist Counter Elite Transform Political Discourse and Group Charisma

A significant development in Palestinian politics following the occupation was the transition of both leadership and values in the liberation movement. The turning point came in 1969 when Yassir Arafat’s Fatah party took over the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). As the umbrella organization at the forefront of Palestinian liberation movement, the PLO was originally run by traditional diaspora-based Palestinian elite of landowners, village heads, and “men of religion” hailing from Mandatory period (Lybarger 32). However, Arafat’s charisma and bold nationalist advocacy won political capital amidst the falling fortunes of pan-Arabism and helped establish Fatah as new counter elite in Palestinian politics.

Fatah got its start as a group of young university activists from middle class backgrounds. They rejected the pan-Arabism of Nasser in Egypt as well as the Marxist flavor articulated by the Movement of Arab Nationalists (M.A.N.) as unable to solve Palestinian problems. Instead, Fatah sought to pursue a deliberately Palestinian national liberation struggle through independent armed action against Israel. Favoring pragmatism, Fatah emphasized “the liberation of the Palestinian homeland above all other dogmatic considerations” (Lybarger 34). Arafat and his followers sought to bring together all descendants of mandatory Palestine under a multi-confessional canopy. Lybarger observes that in this view, its constituents included “Muslims and Christians and even Jews, villagers and townspeople and refugees, members of different clans, Jerusalemites and Hebronites, Gazans and Galileans” (Lybarger 34). The unifying element for this diverse people was its common peasant heritage and struggle to overcome dispossession.

Of course, multi-confessional rhetoric alone did not inspire widespread support for this group of upstart activists fresh out of university. Fatah’s primary source of credibility came from its paramilitary actions against Israeli forces. One of Fatah’s most vivid acts of heroism in the eyes
of Palestinians occurred in the 1968 battle for Karama, a Jordanian border town. In the aftermath of the 1967 war, the Israeli army sent a huge contingent to overtake the guerillas stationed at Karama. Despite warnings of their outnumbered situation, Fatah guerillas at Karama refused to vacate. Supported by Jordanian artillery positioned in nearby hills, the guerillas engaged the IDF directly in armed combat and forced the advancing Israeli column to halt and eventually retreat, leaving damaged vehicles behind in a fierce battle that left heavy casualties on both sides (Khalidi 197). While Arab side suffered far greater damage overall, the Israeli retreat served as a symbolic victory for the guerilla resistance. At the end of the day, Fatah could claim it had repelled the IDF when entire Arab armies had failed to do so the previous year. In analyzing how Fatah was able to reap credibility from this action, Khalidi emphasizes how this story become mythologized and quickly spread throughout the Palestinian territories, “a case of failure against overwhelming odds brilliantly narrated as heroic triumph” (Khalidi 197). Such stories circulating among Palestinian youth at the time inspired many to join the guerilla forces. Significantly, Khalidi observes that such heroic narratives rarely mentioned the high losses sustained or evaluated what Palestinians could have done differently (Khalidi 196). Instead, the Palestinian public became captivated by the against-all-odds, peasant-turned-guerilla heroism embodied in the revolutionary militarism of Fatah.

Alongside the rise of Fatah’s liberating vision of multi-confessional Palestinian nationalism, a more overtly secular nationalist movement blossomed with the communist party and the emergence of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in the first decades of occupation. Although leftist Palestinian groups rarely capture the attention of journalists or academics after the second intifada, the role of these groups in the 1970s and 1980s cannot be underestimated, as they exercised dominant influence in the cultural and social institutions of the
time. Indeed, according to activist Tawfik Abu Khousa, during his formative years in the 1970s the Gazan communist party was “the largest party in the Gaza Strip” (Gordon, Gordon, and Shriteh 49). In the West Bank, communist groups also received popular support, especially along the Ramallah-Jerusalem-Bethlehem urban corridor (Lybarger 144). By 1982 the separate communist groups of the West Bank and Gaza joined forces to become the Palestinian Communist Party. Like the Muslim Brotherhood, the communist groups of the era eschewed militant politics and focused on educational, cultural and social activism.

In contrast to the social orientation of communists, a complementary leftist political movement with a more direct anti-occupation theme emerged with the PFLP. During the late 1960s the pan-Arab leftists within the Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN) recognized the demise of Nasserist sympathies within the territories and searched for an effective ideological repositioning. Led by George Habash, a West Bank Palestinian of Christian heritage, several former MAN members rebranded and rebuilt their organization as the PFLP. The group retained a leftist vision of equality and justice for all Palestinians based on ideas from Marxism, Maoism, and other mid-twentieth century revolutionary ideologies. However, its immediate goals focused exclusively on liberation of Palestinian territories through armed struggle. Members were drawn to the organization due to its commitment to freedom, equality and justice, especially for refugees. Moreover, the PFLP carried out dramatic paramilitary activities which soon rivaled Fatah’s claim to against-all-odds heroism. Through daring guerrilla raids against IDF forces and high-profile airplane hijackings, the PFLP established itself as the vanguard of the resistance movement and attracted young recruits across the territories (Lybarger 23).
Lybarger reports a striking comparison made by one Palestinian interviewee, Abu Thair, which neatly distinguishes the popular perception of differences between Fatah and PFLP. According to Abu Thair, “In my eyes, to be Fatah was to say you smoked. To say you were Popular Front, however, was to say you carried a weapon, that you were ready for action and sacrifice” (Lybarger 147-48). The crucial observation here was that Fatah’s multi-confessional, “liberation before ideology” approach found currency across the Palestinian spectrum, much as smoking cigarettes became a habit almost any Palestinian (especially males) enjoyed. However, it was clear to Abu Thair and many others that the true vanguard of the revolutionary struggle belonged to the PFLP. Alongside Fatah’s mainstream resonance, the leftist PFLP articulated an uncompromisingly activist charisma that fundamentally transformed Palestinian resistance identity.

The ascendancy of a new PLO dominated by Fatah but informed by ardent leftists transformed Palestinian political and cultural futures in three significant ways. First, its leaders reinterpreted and reimagined Palestinian identity through new symbols and discourse. Second, it expanded the role of women within society, eroding some patriarchy and providing new career opportunities. Third, the resistance activities of its member groups inspired activism from fellow Palestinians and expulsion from Israeli officials, forcing leaders into exile abroad while confining safe operations within the territories to quietist politics.

The blossoming of Fatah from a counter movement of university students to a successful takeover of the premier political organization of the Palestinian people inside and outside the territories meant that it resonated deeply with Palestinian identity at the time. According to Loren Lybarger, the PLO under Fatah successfully leveraged both symbols and discourse within the Palestinian imagination to connect the movement to shared history and position it as a
primary vehicle for achieving nationalist dreams. A new nationalist symbol created by the PLO was the image of the courageous peasant turned guerilla fighter, carrying a rifle and masked by a checkered scarf *kufiyā* (Lybarger 24). This image, immortalized on resistance posters while also materialized in the daily militant activities of the group, helped solidify armed struggle as a virtuous endeavor among the Palestinian people, who connected the scarf to peasant cultural traditions and historical ownership of the land now called Israel. Another iconic symbol of the time is the image of a Palestinian peasant woman dressed in ankle-length embroidered dress of village matriarch, rooted to the land with children by her side. These images helped Fatah capture approval by resonating with customs and traditions nearly universal among the Palestinians within the territories while channeling the feelings of dispossession and degradation under the Israeli boot. Especially in the West Bank, with its high rural population at the time, these symbols and discourse lent the nationalists considerable political currency.

Together, the leaders of Fatah and the PFLP worked cautiously together as members of the PLO and cultivated a monopoly on activism and resistance to the occupation. Counterbalancing extreme political desires, the groups forged a uniquely Palestinian organization with considerable power (Lybarger 23). Lybarger sums up the umbrella group’s public influence as such in stating that by 1980, “to identify as Palestinian was to be a supporter, passive or active, of the PLO” (Lybarger 25). Of course, exactly which faction and ideology one supported when voicing support for the PLO was ill-defined, but the common denominator was resistance to the occupation.

The second critical development related to the PLO’s virtual monopoly on Palestinian identity is the organization’s empowerment of women via career opportunities and social infrastructure. A central ethic of the PLO at the time was the establishment of a meritocracy that allowed women
some chance to step out of the traditional domestic role and enter a career as a PLO bureaucrat (Lybarger 24). The PLO encouraged women’s education in vocational and university programs, and factions such as Fatah and the PFLP helped students find financial support for their studies. The political acceptability of females working outside the home, especially unmarried young women, did not happen overnight. Women activists frequently worked alongside with young unmarried men (shabab), which was often source of shame and ridicule for older generations (Lybarger 38-39). Additionally, Lybarger noted that activism frequently damaged a young female’s marriage prospects, especially if she sustained injuries or spent time in prison (Lybarger 39). However, the increasing acceptability of women’s public agency within PLO member factions helped counter the traditional role of women as matriarchs and child-bearers confined to the domestic sphere. This trend acts as one of many pushing democratization within the territories during this period.

The final development resulting from the PLO’s rise to power was the Israeli response of repression and exile to vanguard activists. Israel targeted these groups in attempts to upset and derail the paramilitary resistance movement. As part of its total control of Palestinian civic life, the Israeli civil administration regulated institutions and organizations with inflexible policies and a Byzantine bureaucracy. Sara Roy remarks that institutions “had to obtain permission to hold a meeting if it was to consist of three persons or more” (Roy 140). The occupation regulated membership, elections, funding, and property of all institutions and organizations in the territories, forcing the resistance movement to move underground or face arrest. Given this limited freedom of movement, most leadership figures such as Arafat lived and worked from abroad. The limited opportunity for action in the territories meant that most Palestinians in the 1970s were content to support liberation efforts but leave the day-to-day political work to the
Observers of Palestinian politics in the first years of the occupation should note that the diaspora-led PLO gave little practical attention to social services within the territories. While communist party servants often filled this role, a significant opportunity for institution building and cultural expansion was left unmet by the dominant political organizations at the time. This gap was recognized by key visionaries within the Islamic milieu, and their efforts to fill the void proved to be a transformative event of the 1970s Palestinian landscape.

A key enabler of this transformation was the Israeli occupation’s complicity with the religious revival movement. Part of Israel’s efforts to supplant the PLO was a permissive attitude toward alternative social organizations within the occupied territories. After occupation, the Muslim Brotherhood found itself weak in power (especially in the West Bank) but eager to expand its cultural and religious mission. Israel recognized this group’s authentic quietist, cultural reform message as a natural antidote to the militant resistance advocated by the forefront of the PLO, and thus turned a blind eye to the expansion of Islamic cultural activities within the territories, especially Gaza. In a crucial 1978 decision, the Israeli military allowed the Islamic Collective to register as an official charitable organization (Lybarger 82). This decision gave considerable preference to the Islamic movement, as PLO social service organizations were banned. Official recognition allowed both the uninhibited building of a monopoly on social services and civil infrastructure but also the influx of financial resources from Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and other...
Sunni Muslim donor-states (Lybarger 82). Israel’s tacit support for the growth of this movement should not be neglected in understanding how it rose to power and later transitioned to militant activism.

Of course, Israel’s tacit support of Islamic movement enabled its expansion but hardly caused it to happen. The leader of the effort to rejuvenate Palestinians with a renewed commitment to Islamic values and practices was Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, a former school teacher and crippled paraplegic who saw a potential for grassroots activism as a way to restore Palestinian virtue in the Gaza Strip. Starting in the early 1970s, Yasin played the role of charismatic leader of the religious movement, organizing cells of three members each throughout Gaza in order to reach every neighborhood with the message of religious education (dawa). In 1973, Yasin and colleagues founded the Islamic Center in Gaza (al-Mujamma al-Islami, or Mujamma for short), an institution which became the base of educational operations for years to come. The Mujamma coordinated preaching and outreach services, welfare and charity, religious educational activities, health clinics, sports for youths, and conciliation services for local families or clans in disputes. At a time when the Israeli military occupation offered few social safety nets and dominant political parties like the PLO had little invested in community institutions, the Mujamma slowly began to fill a much needed gap in Gazan society.

Significantly, the grassroots revival upended the leadership and financial structure of Islamic institutions in the territories. Until the activism of Yasin and his colleagues, Palestinian religious institutions were the responsibility of the Department of Islamic Endowments, a centralized organization of traditional elite from the Mandatory period that oversaw mosque operations and drew funding from a public Muslim trust fund called the waqf. This public endowment structure
was the classical model for providing employees, funding, and infrastructure maintenance throughout the Islamic world over several centuries. However, this traditional approach no longer captivated the attention of Yasin and his followers, who set up an alternative, activist approach to Islamizing Gaza that included establishing alternative collection of the traditional Muslim charity tax (*zakat*) that diverted funds from the *waqf* into the Mujamma’s pockets. The organization also established new mosques independent of the *waqf* establishment in Gaza (Mishal and Sela 21). In the time from Israeli occupation in 1967 to the outbreak of the intifada in 1987, the number of mosques in Gaza doubled from 77 to 150, with most new mosques under private leadership (Mishal and Sela 20). In fact, by 1986 the Brotherhood controlled forty percent of Gaza’s mosques (Roy 166). Significant to this mosque building and organization expansion was Israel’s tacit approval of the Mujamma as a potential counter to PLO activism, since no building or organizational permits would have been issued without consent of the military authority in the strip.

Through mosque-based outreach as well as its existing Mujamma infrastructure, the traditional roles of Muslim institutions expanded into comprehensive social and cultural organizations. The Mujamma offered kindergartens, schools, blood banks, clinics, education centers for women, and sports clubs (Mishal and Sela 20). All of these activities served as opportunities to reach youth and under-served populations to spread the Islamic message of cultural revival. Crucially, the Mujamma gained substantial social authority by becoming an arbiter of clan and family conflicts. Mishal and Sela note that before the occupation Palestinians had no history of civil courts or formal conflict resolution processes. Disputes between clans or families were often decided by village elders and without formal process individual favoritism could decide conflicts unjustly. As new entrants into the civil dispute realm, the Mujamma’s elders could “inject greater equity”
into the dispute resolution process and gain support of the indigent and disposed in Gaza (Mishal and Sela 21). Overall, Yasin’s organization expanded the reach and prestige of Islamic message of justice and equality through Gaza in a short decade. A critical mark of the Mujamma’s central role in Palestinian social infrastructure came in 1981 when a storm wreaked havoc on the Gaza Strip. The Mujamma helped rebuild over 1000 homes after this disaster, cementing their place as a reliable, productive civil and cultural institution within Gaza (Gunning 32).

Looking beyond Gaza, the Islamic cultural activists in the Mujamma were also successful in expanding into the West Bank and Jordan in the late 1970s. This was largely possible due to Israel’s permissive “open borders” policy and the desire within the integrated West Bank-Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood to expand its influence. Close ties to Jordan’s Islamic networks allowed the formation of relationships with institutions in Saudi Arabia, which provided “generous financial aid” for the Mujamma’s activities throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Mishal and Sela 21). Indeed, the influence of larger trends in the Muslim world at this time should not be ignored, for they provided direct and indirect boosts to the Islamic revival in Gaza. Chief among these are the Islamic revolution in Iran, which sparked political activism throughout the Muslim world, the rise of Saudi Arabia as a supporter and donor to regional Islamic organizations, and the Islamic character of the Afghan militant resistance to Soviet invasion. These trends sparked an increase in both direct monetary support to the Mujamma’s activities but also sparked a perceived need for Islamic activism in the as-yet-untouched political and military spheres within the territories.
In addition to groundbreaking roles in primary education, welfare, and conflict resolution, the Mujamma also gained prestige by assisting Palestinian students in attending Arab universities (Mishal and Sela 21). The organization cultivated future leadership through scholarships and financial aid programs that enabled lower and middle class youth from across the territories to gain professional skills. It should not be understated that much modern support for Hamas comes from professional groups like doctors and lawyers, individuals who were probably first exposed to Islamic activist benevolence as students.

Israeli authority undermines municipal elections, shifts arenas of ideological contestation

The concurrent rise of Palestinian education and individual economic power alongside the increasing prestige of the PLO and its paramilitary member factions within the territories produced an atmosphere of increasing political involvement. Prior to Israeli control in 1967, electoral politics at the municipal level (they highest level truly available to Palestinians) were a primary arena for political discourse and rivalry. In Gaza, for example, four municipalities each had control over zoning, building permits, water usage, and other significant civil infrastructure (Roy 141). These elections were largely dominated by traditional land-owning elite that operated on a patronage-like system (Gunning 144). After occupation, however, the socioeconomic democratization of the territories coupled with increasingly repressive Israeli civil authority, a nascent national resistance charisma, and an increasingly educated Palestinian constituency meant that the local elections could become referendums for resistance groups. For this reason, the Likud party in control of Israeli politics developed a habit of suspending Palestinian municipal elections during this period (Gunning 33). The cancelation of the 1976 municipal elections proved particularly significant. Without local authority to contest, Palestinians lost
significant control of their day-to-day infrastructure as well as the ability to set an agenda for that
control.

Gunning observes that the result of this intervention was a post-1976 shift in the primary arena of
political contestation from municipal politics and local governance to control of universities and
professional unions (Gunning 32). This marked a retreat to social politics whose electoral
consequences had less far-reaching effects outside of the particular union in question. However,
the expanding political role of the university scene meant that students were increasingly
subjected to slogans and contact from all political factions, an environment that forged the
identities of many future activists. Accompanying this shift was the rapid growth of the
Palestinian university sector, which mushroomed from 0 universities at the start of the
occupation to 6 a decade later (Gunning 32). These new institutions (detailed in Table 3) were
situated across the ideological spectrum and provided ready battleground for political debate
within the territories.

**Concluding Thoughts on the Occupation Years**

In total, the Occupation Years provided a catalytic environment in which the intifada generation
spent childhood. Most of the activists who would come to throw stones at Israeli troops or
participate in secular or Islamist rallies were shaped by the broad trends of democratization,
heroic nationalism, Islamic revival, and political restriction. The confluence of these trends at
the close of this period would soon help ignite the impassionate grassroots activism that
characterizes our next historical period, the Intifada Years.
Table 3: Palestinian Universities in the 1980s. Source: Tamimi (p. 39),

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year Established as University</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birzeit University</td>
<td>Birzeit, West Bank</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>arts and sciences; highly ranked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethlehem University of the Holy Land</td>
<td>Bethlehem, West Bank</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Catholic co-educational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Najah University</td>
<td>Nablus, West Bank</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Formerly a secondary school since 1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Khalil University</td>
<td>Hebron, West Bank</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Islamic and sharia studies; arts and sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic University</td>
<td>Gaza City, Gaza</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Had significant relations with Ikhwan since founding by Sheikh Yasin and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestine Polytechnic University</td>
<td>Hebron, West Bank</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Vocational, primarily two year degrees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1980-1994: The Intifada Years
As the path of history entered the 1980s, the political and cultural landscape of Palestinian territories became poised for transformation. The previous chapter highlights four critical trends leading toward an upheaval. First and foremost, entering the 1980s most Palestinians (even refugees and rural residents) had emerged from poverty to become agents capable of and interested in societal engagement and change. This is due to a rise in income courtesy of wage labor possibilities in Israel and the Gulf states as well as the availability of higher education. Second, by 1980 the vast majority of Palestinians interested at all in politics had identified either passively or actively with a nationalist resistance where Palestinian freedom, not broader Arab or Islamic or Communist togetherness, was the primary objective. However, most Palestinians remained content to support this approach and leave the dirty work to the leadership outside the territories or various guerrilla movements within. Third, the grassroots mobilization of Islamic religious and cultural forces had established a social counter-movement to the mostly-secular nationalism of the PLO with a wide geographical support base. Finally, the Israeli occupation was seen as increasingly oppressive on a daily basis, removing the possibility of political freedom even at the municipal level and rapidly expanding settlements and other instruments of exclusion.

The confluence of these trends made the territories of the 1980s a hotbed for ideological competition and resistance activism. Palestinian youth were primary agents of change in this decade. Perhaps the most significant part they played is the reimagination of cultural and political identities as well as societal roles. Youth at universities across the territories viscerally experienced both secular-nationalist resistance and Islamic ideas and synthesized these to create a fundamentally new take on Islamic activism that called for direct political and military
involvement in the nationalist struggle for freedom. Youth inspired by the Fatah movement and guerilla activism of the PFLP founded the *shabiba* movement and catalyzed massive protests as well as the activism behind the Intifada.

This chapter will discuss these developments in four sections. First, I examine the background political and occupation-related developments to help explain the rise in frustration and increasing popular support for mass demonstrations and active military resistance within the territories. Second, I will cover the rise of the youth movement within the secular-leftist milieu and showcase its reimagination of cultural values and political roles. Third, I examine the counter evolution of the agenda of the Mujamma and other Islamic groups which turned from eschewing politics and militarism to valuing and fostering a nationalist resistance ideology. In this section, I pay special attention to the role of youth as well as universities, which served as arenas of ideological experimentation and contestation. Finally, I will look at the Intifada as a popular resistance movement that mobilized massive grassroots involvement as a result of these trends.

**Political and Occupation Developments: Propelling activist resistance within the territories**

*The Occupation worsens within the territories*

The daily interactions between Palestinian wage laborers and their Israeli superiors were a primary fuse for the rise of popular activism. Laborers often reported being cheated of wages or suffering verbal or physical harassment by Israeli employers (Gordon 152). Palestinians crossing border checkpoints also suffered abuse. This happened frequently, especially to younger workers
and students, and for many Palestinians this abuse was seen as a way to “demonstrate who was in charge” (Tamimi 13). This created an atmosphere of fear and anxiety which was only compounded by the humiliation of working on construction projects for the occupying power. It should not be understated that a great majority of those arrested after the outbreak of the intifada had held jobs in Israel and listed associated grievances as major factors in their involvement (Gordon 152). Thus, personal interactions served as a primary fuse that sparked an activist resistance movement.

In addition to daily patterns of confrontation for the Palestinian workforce, the occupied population as a whole felt increasingly under attack throughout the years leading to the first intifada. The right-wing Likud party took control of the Israeli government in the late 1970s, and the years under its rule saw a distinctly more invasive and overt Israeli presence in the West Bank and Gaza. Before 1977, Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza were located away from population centers and had a slight rate of growth. However, after the regime change, the number of Israelis who lived in the settlements exploded from 5000 to 55000 by 1987 (Smith 413-415). Many new settlements were constructed, and these were deliberately planned to encroach upon Arab villages. Moreover, the Israeli government provided weapons to the settler population and tacitly endorsed the harassment of the local population. Documented acts of settler violence include vandalism, ambushes, and invasions of armed militias into Palestinian schools and refugee camps (Gordon 140-142).

This harassment inspired an increase in demonstrations as well as violence by Palestinians in the territories, especially by the young. Protests were met by aggressive Israeli retaliation. Arrest and
detention were common Israeli responses, and could often include beating or torture (Smith 421). As historian Charles Smith reflects, the most influential factor in spreading Palestinian resistance from a movement of disaffected youth to a collective endeavor of the middle classes was the Israeli response that was equally aggressive toward the entire population. According to Smith, "you were beaten because you were a Palestinian, regardless of your status or what you happened to be doing at the time a demonstration began" (Smith 422). Even advocates of a two-state solution to the conflict found themselves arrested. For example, Smith relates an account of two Palestinian lawyers incarcerated after a presentation advocating two-state peace in Tel Aviv (Smith 422). Overall, the occupation’s hostility to any challenge of its authority in the region inspired the increasingly politically active Palestinian society to mobilize in widespread demonstrations and resistance activities.

*The Expulsion of PLO Elite Leadership*

Amidst the increasingly oppressive conditions within the territories, Arafat and others in the PLO leadership were fighting their own diplomatic battles. Until the 1980s, the PLO had operated safely from neighboring states such as Lebanon. However, in 1982 Israeli forces expelled the leadership team from Lebanon as part of a broader campaign against resistance movements, forcing the leadership to flee and regroup in Tunisia and Algeria, far away across the Mediterranean Sea. For many Palestinians, this expulsion was strong evidence that the strategy of waiting patiently for the “outside” PLO leadership to liberate the “inside” residents of the territories was fruitless and ineffective (Smith). The suffering within the territories was seen by many, especially among the youth, as a problem that the sufferers had to resolve for themselves via demonstrations and activism.
The Rise of the Shabiba: Palestinian Youth Activism becomes Dominant virtue

For many Palestinian youth born and raised under Israeli rule, the daily harassment and increasing presence of the occupation signaled that the time for patience was over. They witnessed the capitulation of neighboring Arab states and questioned the efficacy of a PLO that looked increasingly weak. For these youth, endurance and fortitude that characterized the mainstream gradualism of the 1970s amounted to nothing more than submission and capitulation to the Israeli authority (Smith 414). Seeing no other viable options for salvation, these youth organized a resistance movement based on heroic activism that brought some limited results and, more importantly, a newfound sense of hope for the Palestinian people.

As increasing members of the younger generation sought power and encountered humiliation, they organized to provide a forum for issues of political, economic, and social concern. In the early 1980s, young Palestinian activists primarily inspired by Fatah and the leftist factions founded the Shabiba youth organization. While its long-term goal was the end of the Israeli occupation, the movement’s short-term actions were primarily educational and organizational. Members set up programs to educate other high school and university youth about Israeli oppression and soon branches spread throughout both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Shabiba ran activities to empower youth as agents of societal change, organizing community clean-up efforts and helping local farmers with the harvest. Activists also planted olive trees on land owned by Palestinians in order to prevent its confiscation and development by Israelis (Gordon, Gordon, and Shriteh 53). Initially the movement was both independently organized and voluntary, with little financial support. Through grassroots networking, the Shabiba were able to organize massive demonstrations. In late 1983 thousands of Palestinian youth from across the territories converged in Jerusalem to march in support of Arafat, a demonstration that resulted in teargas and arrests from Israeli police (Gordon, Gordon, and Shriteh 54). This event signified
that the Shabiba youth had reached critical mass as a political force in the territories, and so the organization formally aligned with Fatah around this date.

By 1984 the Shabiba were by far the largest youth organization in the Gaza Strip (Gordon, Gordon, and Shriteh 55), and similar claims could certainly be made about the West Bank. Significantly, in addition to leading protests and organizing strikes, members of Shabiba also took on efforts to “preserve public and national morals” by curtailing drug dealing, prostitution, and similar issues in the West Bank’s Balata refugee camp (Collins 28). The youth movement thus not only inherited the mantle of the resistance but the power to enforce societal norms, a role scarcely imaginable for Palestinian teenagers decades before.

The success of the youth movement’s activism turned the Balata camp into a “liberated zone”, where fierce resistance kept IDF forces away throughout the mid-1980s (Collins 2004 p. 28). Most interestingly, Collins describes how older residents of Balata took up the mantle of activist resistance when an IDF round-up of camp instigators caught the Shabiba off-guard in late 1987. As IDF troops cornered suspects in the schoolyard, local women assembled and began confronting the troops en masse. Inspired, handcuffed suspects began rising and pressing their chests into Israeli rifles in defiance. Frightened by this collective uprising, the Israeli command recalled the troops (Collins 29). This victory provides a dramatic example of how the youthful defiant charisma became adopted successfully and willingly by the wider Palestinian society during confrontation with Israeli forces.

Following the rise of youth as powerful agents of change, cultural narratives among Palestinians began to glorify youth as the against-all-odds underdogs that could rescue the nation. This change in discourse celebrated youth as harbingers of national salvation and imbued them with
heroic, larger-than-life qualities (Collins 40). Local legends circulating at the time demonstrate how cultural narratives emphasized the illusory “best” qualities of the heroic youth to create cultural cohesion. On November 25, 1987 a young Palestinian PFLP commando used a hang-glider to carry out a suicide operation on an Israeli camp that left six IDF soldiers dead. Collins describes how this “story of the flying boy” spread through Palestinian schools as a dramatic example of youthful courage and ingenuity overcoming tremendous obstacles. Significantly, in reality the mission was not a solitary operation but instead one carried out alongside an older, less-successful commando. However, the legend that schoolchildren told emphasized the solitary glory of against-all-odds youthful heroism (Collins 42). Within this narrative, I can see how Palestinian discourse selectively mixed reality and fantasy to promote the key virtue of fearless resistance driven by youth within the territories, signifying a dramatic change in the cultural fabric of the Palestinian ecosystem.

Youth catalyze the entrance of Islamic movement into activist resistance
A crucial development that resulted from the rise of the youth movement and activist resistance within the territories was the synthesis of the Islamic cultural milieu and nationalist political efforts into a uniquely Palestinian nationalist-Islamist activism. This transformation, catalyzed by young disaffected members of both Fatah and the Mujamma and then supported by Islamic movement elders as a vital path forward, marked a watershed event. This transition in values and reappropriation of goals led to the birth of militant and political organizations such as Islamic Jihad and later Hamas. Examining these events and transformations in detail exposes the crucial social and cultural reagents that produced these organizations and enticed Palestinians to make the transition to this new counter-culture of resistance.
Three primary factors stand out. First, a growing sense of corruption within the PLO leadership combined with a sense of the movement’s distance from traditional values caused many in the secular-nationalist-milieu to reevaluate their affiliations and consider a more Islamic orientation. Second, the social stigmatization of gradualism propelled many younger members of the Islamic movement to feel ashamed for inaction of predecessors and advocate militant nationalism. Finally, the university scene proved to be a primary platform of political contestation in which many young Palestinians were mobilized toward Islamism by personal contact with activists and conflict among factions that often turned violent.

1) *Fatah members drawn to Islamic Outlook and bring activism with them*

Perhaps the most significant Palestinian factor pushing the Islamic movement towards a new urgency for political activism was an influx of fledgling and seasoned Fatah activists dissatisfied with their organization’s lack of grassroots military involvement, growing disconnect from Palestinian customs and traditions, and apparent corruption. Part II of this work will interrogate at an individual level how these political converts navigated their ideological trajectories through nationalist and leftist milieus before arriving at an original merger of Islamic values and political activism. However, the broader societal and institutional enabling factors and resulting products certainly deserve some attention.

One radicalizing influence on the Islamic movement from Fatah came in the form of splinter guerrilla movements. In the early 1980s, a group of Islamic-oriented Fatah members embarked on an independent guerilla campaign against the Israeli occupation. Targeting both settlers and IDF troops, the members of Saraya al-Jihad al-Islami established hideouts in the West Bank and began a series of militant operations. The group gained notoriety in 1980 when rooftop
commandos opened fire on a column of Jewish settlers entering the city of Hebron, killing six and wounding seventeen (Tamimi 44). Saraya al-Jihad later collaborated with Islamic Jihad in several future operations. Another famous attack in 1986 wounded around 70 Israeli military personnel visiting the Wailing Wall holy site in Jerusalem. The group collaborated with Islamic Jihad on several occasions, and its well-known operations against Israeli forces bolstered the rising penchant for violent resistance among young Palestinians dissatisfied with the Brotherhood’s cultural approach (Tamimi 44). In testament to the militarizing influence of activists transitioning from Fatah to the Islamic milieu, one former Hamas member recalls that during the intifada, a “majority of Hamas activists who went to jail were from other parties, esp. Fatah” (Lybarger 94). The influence of these cross-over individuals on the charisma of the Islamic milieu should not be underestimated in understanding how the Islamist charisma evolved.

2) Islamic gradualism stigmatized and humiliated as incompatible with heroic virtue

In concert with the outside-in addition of Fatah activists seeking a militant liberation movement more connected to religious values, pressures felt within the Islamic movement also caused its leadership and grassroots members to increasingly consider adding activism and paramilitary activities to its repertoire. Social stigmatization of the gradualist, culturalist attitudes prevalent throughout the revival movements of the 1970s proved to a primary mobilizing factor. Lybarger describes one interviewee who in the early 1980s dismissed Muslim Brotherhood activists as disinterested parties who “played soccer” while demonstrations and arrests occurred around them (Lybarger 93). Many outside observers thus saw the Islamic movement as irrelevant to the struggle for independence. Tamimi vividly highlights how many Ikhwan students during the 1980s felt ashamed for running from the street-fighting of the militants and taking the quickest
route home, an activity described by several Ikhwan members as “hiding indoors like the harem” (Tamimi 48). Their self-reported association with the harem, probably one of the lowest possible social associations in Arab culture, provides important evidence of how much social stigmatization was at work here.

This stigmatization was especially valuable in motivating Islamists into militant action against Israel. As Tamimi chronicles, through the early 1980s many Islamic-leaning youth began to question this passive stance as the occupation grew more oppressive. Militant leftists and secularists frequently taunted Ikhwan students for their inaction, and this stigma stuck (Tamimi 48). Many young Ikhwan members internalized this blame and as a result recast the Islamic struggle for justice as compatible with the new heroic charisma, and began advocating open resistance. A crucial turning point came as the Islamic faction at Birzeit University organized a protest rally in 1986. At the rally, demonstrators clashed with IDF troops, leaving 22 casualties and 2 dead. According to Tamimi, “at last, the Islamic movement had martyrs to take pride in and to boast about” (Tamimi 49). For the young Islamists in this case, activist charisma held a monopoly over the emotional reward that comes from being Palestinian. A nationalist resistance ethic enforced daily through stigmatizing interaction with rival factions thus allowed young members influenced by the Islamic cultural movement to reimagine the role of Islamic revival as both compatible and inseparable from Palestinian nationalism.

One of the first organizational indications that the role of Islam had been reconceived as inspiration for a deliberately militant activity was the founding of Islamic Jihad in the early 1980s. Dr. Fathi Shiqaqi led this break-away organization that merged disaffected members of
the Islamic Collective, Muslim Brotherhood, and Fatah (Lybarger 83). Composed of elite, highly-educated activists, this group called for an immediate and uncompromising nationalist militant movement that leveraged Islamic values, symbols, and discourse. They saw Islam as both a dominant cultural frame which was necessary to mobilize the Palestinian masses and as moral inspiration to undertake a just struggle against oppression (Lybarger 83). The group became well-known among Palestinians for daring, sensational attacks against Israeli troops. During the 1980s, Islamic Jihad gained recognition for several high-profile grenade attacks at IDF checkpoints and even assassinated an Israeli army captain in broad daylight (Lybarger 84). Significantly, Islamic Jihad never intended to compete with PLO for political leadership. Instead, it delineated its role as a purely guerrilla resistance characterized by a “confrontational, outcome-oriented tactical style” (Roy 48). Nonetheless, Islamic Jihad gained social capital by expressing the widespread Palestinian virtue of heroic resistance and helped push the mainstream Islamic movement toward militant activism of its own.

3) University scene erupts in factional violence as Islamists and Fatah clash

As explained earlier in coverage of the 1970s, increasing Israeli interference caused a shift in the field of political contestation from municipal government to universities and professional organizations. Interestingly, the increasingly significant university arena was a primary locus for the rise of a politically active Islamist movement. A close look at shifts in institutional leadership and student politics within Palestinian universities throughout the 1980s shows that both saw the rise of Islamist-nationalist resistance involvement. The most notorious battleground for this ideological shift was Islamic University in Gaza, which saw a takeover within its leadership and student political landscape.
Founded in 1978 following Egypt’s decision to deny Palestinian students access to its universities, the Islamic University was initially supported financially and politically by the PLO (Mishal and Sela 24). However, the expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon in the early 1980s led to an overall decline in the organization’s ability to influence and fund institutions within the territories. As a financial shortfall became evident, carefully positioned Mujamma activists were there to pick up this slack, funded primarily by the Islamic movement in Jordan (Mishal and Sela 24).

The political leanings of students also saw dramatic change at this time. In 1981 Muslim Brotherhood affiliated students earned a stunning victory in eight of ten student union elections across the territories (Gunning 34). This huge gain in support held more or less consistently throughout the 1980s, with Gazan student unions dominated by a majority Brotherhood leadership and one-third of the vote of West Bank students casting support for Islamic Bloc groups as well. This strong support base at universities throughout the Palestinian territories indicated how effectively the religious and cultural revival of the 1970s, with its institution building and grassroots outreach, had catapulted Islamic concerns to the forefront of collective activity. Combining these values with the potent vision of national liberation, these students served as the vanguard for the nascent nationalist-Islamist movement.

One result of the inside-out and outside-in transformation of the Islamic milieu into an increasingly political and militant movement was a dramatic rise in violence between Palestinian political factions throughout the 1980s. In January 1980, Islamic activists set fire to a Palestinian
Red Crescent office, a well-known stronghold of leftist groups. Sporadic violent clashes between Mujamma members and the PLO over control of the Islamic University in Gaza became common by 1983 (Mishal and Sela 23). March 1985 saw a verbal disagreement between Islamist students and the Fatah-aligned Shabiba about politics within the Islamic University ignited further violence. According to a firsthand Shabiba witness, the violence “spilled into the streets” and raged on for over two weeks with both Shabiba and Islamic activists wielding iron bars and swords (Gordon, Gordon, and Shriteh 56). Mishal and Sela conclude that, “Campus clashes between the Mujamma activists and the nationalist factions were a microcosm of the mounting tension and political struggle between the two currents” (24). Universities and other social institutions thus became the primary battlegrounds for shaping ideological affiliations and tensions for an entire generation of Palestinians growing up under occupation and seeking ways to channel their discontent.
Conclusion to Contextual Historical Analysis
Throughout Part I, I embarked on a detailed trace of several generations of Palestinians across historical periods, showcasing how Palestinian concepts of shared cultural and religious identity, nationalist resistance, and political attitudes evolved over time leading up to the intifada generation’s shaking off of passive gradualism across secular and Islamist milieus. Changes in these variables were wrought both by external stimuli from the occupation and the broader Arab and global cultural and socioeconomic spheres but also by conscious agency and interpersonal interaction within the Palestinian territories.

Specifically, the Islamic movement began with a culturalist, pan-Islamic orientation in Mandatory Palestine and remained more or less a minor movement in the territories until the grassroots revival of the 1970s, when Sheikh Yasin and colleagues expanded the civil and society roles of the Brotherhood via the Mujamma collective. In the 1980s, increasing ideological interaction with nationalist resistance groups as well as a growing desperation under the Israeli boot propelled a dual “outside-in” and “inside-out” transformation of the Islamic movement into a new political hybrid that melded Islamic beliefs, discourse, and symbols with nationalist political aspirations. This reimagination of the role of religion in society was fundamentally new, crafted as a unique response to the Palestinian context that harnessed the best of Islamic social credibility and the narrative and symbols of heroic virtue. The resulting wave of activism spawned both the Islamic Jihad movement as well as Hamas. These organizations continued to leverage their resistance credibility and social institutions throughout the Oslo period and into the tumultuous 2000s, becoming bedrock features in the Palestinian landscape. This multi-dimensional contextual history thus provides an important basis for understanding the goals, values, and actions of Hamas and similar organizations even in 2010.
Part II: Life Story Narratives on the Formation of Islamist Identities within the Intifada Generation

Part I demonstrated that a new breed of Islamist-nationalist arose in the territories in the 1980s and 1990s, a by-product of increased interaction between nationalist groups such as Fatah and the PFLP and Islamic cultural revival groups like the Brotherhood and the Mujamma as well as the events of the time. On a macro-scale, many factors contributed to this reimagination of Islamic identity, including violent interaction with Fatah, successful institution building within charities and universities, and a growing collective charisma attached to youth heroism and activist resistance to the occupation. Attending to this work’s original emphasis of self-conscious individual agency at the heart of every Palestinian, however, these broad developments considered alone are insufficient to fully explain exactly how and why young activists operating within the Islamic milieu were so willing to reinvent, advocate, and fight for a new ideological position. The goal of this section is to fill in the crucial gaps in this reasoning: What kind of individuals made a conversion to Islamist activism? How were they inspired? What shared processes influenced their transition, and how did all pieces of the Palestinian ecosystem (family, clan, cohort, faction rivals, occupation) fit into this decision?

This section will be devoted to presenting life story narratives of several Palestinians who lived their formative years during the 1980s and 1990s and acted within the Islamist milieu. This work will introduce subjects who differ across many significant dimensions: men and women, teenager and adult, refugee and middle class, Islamic Jihad or Hamas. Each has a different but important story to tell about how they came to accept Islamism as a preferred ideology in the 1980s and 1990s and how this influenced their beliefs, interactions, and activities. These stories
come from the ethnographic work of Loren Lybarger, whose insightful original presentation and analysis of these stories this work can only hope to build upon.

Throughout all these stories, a few common themes emerge. First and foremost, I emphasize the ability of each interlocutor to transcend cultural and religious milieus as well as traditional customs and traditions to form a unique ideological trajectory via self-conscious rational agency. None of the subjects’ notion of identity or allegiance remained static. Each had a complex path that often included initial forays with secular or leftist groups, indicating the porous boundaries between milieus as well as the ideological experimentation common in the territories of the time. Additionally, each interlocutor offers critical interpretation of the movement’s positions, often willing to criticize beliefs and actions they deemed counter-productive to their own goals and values.

Second, by distilling these stories of individual agency, careful analysis can extract a model for why this transformation took place. In doing so, this work highlights the diversity of reasons for assenting to nationalist-Islamist orientation: some spiritual and some practical, some individually-motivated and some community-oriented. Recognizing the spectrum of motives can help analysis move away from monolithic conceptions of Islamism and instead understand how the movement continues to attract a following with diverse, perhaps even conflicting motivations.

Finally, this section intends to identify how these individuals came to be personally mobilized into the Islamist milieu. By investigating the institutional involvement, social interactions, global happenings, and personal events which facilitated the transition to Islamism, this work can improve understanding of how individuals make the transition from outside onlooker to activist
insider. Remember of course that their trajectories are far from static once individuals enter the Islamist milieu, although this work will focus on how interlocutors entered the milieu in the first place.

Overall, the goal of this chapter to build up from individual life stories to develop and refine a complex model for how Palestinian individuals coming-of-age in the 1980s transitioned into the nationalist-Islamist milieu. The many stories offered here certainly differ, but retain common elements and patterns that are crucial for understanding the origins of the Islamist movement in Palestine. After presenting several life stories with brief intermittent analysis, this section will conclude with a synthesized model that helps explain the structures and processes at work in the 1980s ideological landscape which mobilized a new nationalist-Islamist charisma.
Mujahida: Inherited values reconfigured as nationalist-Islamist moral struggle

The life story of Mujahida, a Palestinian female born in the West Bank in the 1960s, offers a foundational template for understanding the rise in nationalist-Islamism among the generation who came of age in the 1980s under the increasingly repressive occupation. Coming from a large landowning clan adopting traditional styles of dress and formulaic religious practices, Mujahida merged her generation’s educational activism with her father’s history of national resistance to synthesize a fundamentally new approach to Islam as a political ideology. Inspired by this transformation, she eventually joined Islamic Jihad in the early 1980s. Through understanding her family’s historical background, parents’ ideological orientations, her interactions with the older generation, and her own coming-of-age experiences, the factors and patterns that shaped her transition to the vanguard of the nascent Islamist movement become clear.

Mujahida was born into a refugee camp outside of Bethlehem, part of a clan who owned significant amounts of land before the 1967 occupation. Her father and uncle both fought in the guerilla resistance to Israeli independence in 1948. When Mujahida was growing up, her father ran a dry goods store in the refugee camp, and her mother tended nearby fields. Her parents described themselves as traditional observant Palestinian Muslims. They practiced regular prayers and met their fasting obligations, because these behaviors were simply required of faithful Muslims. Accompanying this traditional practice, her mother dressed in modest but colorfully embroidered ankle-length dresses characteristic of the traditional Palestinian village style, complementing it with a gauzy white scarf. Lybarger acknowledges that Mujahida’s mother was illiterate, likely unable to read the Quran except for memorized passages.

As a child, Mujahida looked to her parents as role models. Her father’s revolutionary activities in the 1948 war and regular narrative of dispossession had profound effect on Mujahida’s outlook,
instilling a nationalist “revolutionary consciousness from an early age” (Lybarger 86). Significantly, although her parents were religiously observant the political orientation articulated by her father was largely pragmatic and secular, focused mostly on the injustice of the nakbah and the ongoing occupation. This laid a foundation for Mujahida’s childhood years, reinforced by fellow refugees she encountered in schooling and her community at large, that her foremost activist objective as a Palestinian should be liberation. However, it is important to note that neither of her parents was active politically during her childhood or teen years.

At the age of thirteen or fourteen, however, Mujahida’s life took a significant turn. At this time, her brother died due to severe beating at an Israeli checkpoint, just one of the many casualties of the increasingly repressive Israeli occupation in the late 1970s. Traumatized by this loss, Mujahida became despondent. Her mother urged her to seek refuge in recitation of the Quran, hoping her daughter might find comfort or solace. Taking her mother’s advice, Mujahida began a daily practice of reading passages which both soothed her and slowly began to reshape her political orientation. Mujahida recalls in one interview that she felt the steady rise of a “faith force” within her as she read. As a newly active scholar of the Quran, she internalized its lessons on justice and moral struggle as a guide for facing and confronting the occupation that confined her life and had taken so much from her. According to Lybarger, she began to “reinterpret her life in Quranic terms as a struggle for Muslim Palestine” (Lybarger 87).

With her evolving religious orientation, it may be surprising to note that Mujahida’s first activist involvement was under the auspices of the communist party in Palestine. Mujahida recalls that she simply saw this organization as the best way to do something good for her nation, not necessarily out of total ideological alignment. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, before Islamist organizations had fully taken an activist turn, leftist organizations offered opportunities and
slogans that “coincided with what you felt inside,” according to Mujahida’s own testimony (Lybarger 96). However, her brief flirtation with this organization did not last long, though no particular reason was given for ending this involvement.

Soon Mujahida drifted toward involvement with proto-Islamist institutions in the territories. Inspired by her growing religious convictions, Mujahida began attending a neighborhood study circle for women intended as a place for discussion and engagement with Islamic texts. There, Mujahida met a woman who would become her spiritual mentor. This woman, a teacher at a secondary school for girls, facilitated Mujahida’s growing Islamic consciousness through practical actions. She lent Mujahida books to read and invited her over often for further discussions. However, her mentor’s personal actions left the strongest mark on Mujahida’s memory. As Mujahida recalls, she witnessed her teacher and mentor struggle daily to uphold her Islamic beliefs at work, where the left-leaning headmistress of the school prohibited her from wearing her head-covering scarf in public. Rather than give in to orders from above, Mujahida’s mentor continued to wear the scarf even when the headmistress attempted to have her fired. Eventually after some time the headmistress backed down and withdrew her threat. Mujahida’s mentor apparently lost eyesight due to the stress of this battle, but her dedication and conviction prevailed (Lybarger 97). In the interview reported by Lybarger, Mujahida reflects on this action as an inspirational moral victory and confirmation that just action in the world based on stoic Islamic convictions can triumph over adversity. Her mentor served as role model, teaching that “the deed or action is what speaks” (Lybarger 97). Her later involvement with organizations like Islamic Jihad is likely inspired by this lesson in confronting challenges to Islamic values.

A crucial observation to make in this story is that Mujahida synthesized a fundamentally new political orientation out of the ideology and religion handed down to her, and she did so of her
own conscious agency. To Mujahida’s illiterate mother, religion was supernatural and almost magical. The Quran was a book whose verses offered divinely-inspired emotional comfort but whose critical interpretation was left to religious scholars. She referred Mujahida to the Quran because “it was a talisman, a source of extrahuman power that would bring Mujahida comfort” (Lybarger 87). However, Mujahida was an educated youth who would later graduate from university. For her, the Quran was a text she could study and reinterpret as an individual. She found its verses a source of power not only for spiritual comfort but also because they made rational judgments about the morality and injustice of occupation. She took the loss of her brother as a vivid personal confirmation of her father’s narrative of dispossession, but added to the consequent nationalist fervor a moral focus on confronting injustice inspired by the Quran as well as the direct lessons of her mentor’s struggle. Her own generation’s newfound activism and agency likely played a role as well in encouraging this synthesis.

Lybarger notes that the most striking thing about Mujahida’s reinterpretation is that she framed it as connected across generations with the customs and traditions of her parents and her clan’s village roots (Lybarger 87). Many significant differences existed between Mujahida and the previous generation. Mujahida graduated from university, but her mother couldn’t even read. Mujahida joined activist political factions, while her parents were content to adopt the gradualist, external-salvation perspective common to their generation. Mujahida dressed in stripped-down, soberly modest skirts, while her mother wore colorfully embroidered dresses and gauzy scarves. Mujahida found the Quran and related texts a rich source for critical moral reflection, while her parents followed its prescriptions and sought its comforts without apparent self-consciousness for how it should be interpreted. Mujahida remained unmarried and politically active into her late twenties, while her mother married early and her activities outside of the domestic sphere of
parenting are unmentioned. Mujahida deliberately sought out other women to hold intellectual discussion on religious issues, while her parents rarely intellectualized religion at all. Despite all of these differences, however, during interviews Mujahida repeatedly emphasized continuity with her parents’ traditions and beliefs rather than a departure (Lybarger 87). She embraced nationalist-Islamism as a natural extension of her Palestinian heritage.
Hakim: Renegade rejects corruption, seeks Islamist consciousness

Of course, not every rising nationalist-Islamist activist saw their political affiliation as a natural continuity from the previous generation who came of age before the 1967 occupation. In contrast to the life story of Mujahida, a different logic presents itself in the story of Hakim.

A glance at Hakim’s family history and his opinions of it can be instructive in understanding his position. Generations previously, Hakim’s family found work as sharecroppers in the West Bank during the British mandate. During the 1960s, his father found work as a construction worker in Iraq, one of many Palestinians forced to find work outside of the territories during this time due to widespread unemployment. Later, the family returned to a refugee camp in Amman, Jordan, where Hakim was born in 1970. Hakim reflects that growing up his parents prayed and fasted only occasionally, reflecting adherence to traditional customs more so than deliberately Islamic behavior. He suggests that his parents “lacked Islamic consciousness,” as they were unable to justify their religious activities beyond their prescription by God (Lybarger 89). Alongside this religious traditionalism, Hakim remembers his father as unmotivated by the political resistance, striving instead just to get by. His father frequently shared his distrust of Arab leaders to resolve the conflict, but Hakim blames his lack of action on being “afraid of the Jews” (Lybarger 89).

Overall, Hakim’s interviews indicate that his father embodied the sort of gradualism characteristic of his generation, albeit with perhaps less trust of Arab leaders than may have been popular.

This passive perspective toward religion and politics stands in sharp contrast to Hakim’s evolving views growing up. Hakim spent his early years living in Amman, Jordan before returning to a West Bank refugee camp near Bethlehem at the age of twelve in 1982. This move catalyzed the emergence of a nationalist consciousness. As one particularly transformative event,
he recalls hearing radio broadcasts describing the Shatila and Sabra massacres of Palestinian refugees in southern Lebanon during the Israeli invasion of that region soon after Hakim’s move. At this young age, this tragic story and its resonance within Palestinian discourse instilled two new feelings in Hakim: solidarity with those fellow refugees and desire for independence from occupation. In high school, he joined demonstrations against the occupation and later saw his best friend shot dead right next to him during a stone-throwing episode in the first intifada. At this time, his tentative political support went to the PLO. Hakim saw Arafat and other leaders as larger-than-life heroes and admired their peasant-turned-guerilla credibility as well as their brave confrontation of the Israeli occupation. Like so many in his generation, he adopted the “nationalist feeling” and internalized this at the core of his political identity.

In tandem to this nationalist ethic, Hakim also adopted a strong religious persuasion. As a child, Hakim claims to have attended mosques alone simply because he enjoyed going, remarking that “no one really influenced me … I liked going there, by myself” (Lybarger 90). Through regular prayer attendance at this mosque near Bethlehem, Hakim encountered mentors among the Muslim Brotherhood who helped shape his worldview. As a boy, he participated in mosque drama events that reenacted critical events in Muslim political history. For example, Hakim recalls organizing a production that dramatized the expulsion of the Moors from Spain in the fifteenth century, often seen by fervent Islamists as the turning point in history where Muslim empires began to weaken and recede (Lybarger 97). Crucially, Hakim’s testimony indicates that he was a conscious agent behind this production, not just a willing follower. He wanted to help fellow Palestinians understand the reasons for the “current sorry state of Muslim societies” (Lybarger 97). As a vibrant part of his mosque’s cultural and religious activities, Hakim
internalized the modern Islamist narrative of dispossession and gained a lens for viewing other critical events in his own lifetime, such as the Shatila massacres.

In contrast to the passive religious observance practiced by his parents, Hakim began to view Islam as a complete way of life that was a deliberately conscious decision. In his interviews, he claimed to have studied the Quran and other authoritative sources closely, with almost scientific rigor, and then assented to those beliefs on a rational basis. He found that all aspects of his life, from politics to economics to personal relationships, could be guided by the core principles of Islam. This maturing viewpoint was also grounded in Hakim’s activities at his local mosque, where he joined a study circle to discuss his ideas with fellow believers.

Around the mid-1980s, Hakim remained dedicated to the nationalist feeling but began to question support of the PLO and Fatah, who had formerly been his larger-than-life heroes. The first turning point came even before the first intifada, when Hakim heard “disturbing” rumors about the PLO leadership. Among the most bothersome was the revelation that the leaders of Fatah and the PLO were not religious and did not believe in Islam (Lybarger 98). Hakim recalls listening to radio messages on the “Voice of Jerusalem,” a leftist political broadcast out of Lebanon, which indicated the prevalence of corruption within the PLO and suggested plans to negotiate with Israel. He began to question the integrity of PLO leadership and soon demoted these former heroes to the same untrustworthy status his father had assigned to Arab heads-of-state (Lybarger 98).

Guided by a growing dedication to Islam as well as a general sense of nationalism without allegiance to the PLO, Hakim became involved in the first intifada, at first as a mostly unaffiliated demonstrator. Because of his activities, he spent five years in an Israeli prison. While
imprisoned, he continued to gravitate toward Islamism and by 1990 had formally joined Hamas after giving up on Fatah’s corruption and rejecting the leftists as opposed to religion (Lybarger 98). After his release in 1994 he became an Islamic Bloc leader at Bethlehem University campus, where he studied computer science and mathematics. He dreamed of working for Microsoft in Seattle, where his brother had moved, but saw this path unlikely due to his track record as an activist and Israel’s strict travel prohibitions.

Although his story of growing up religious is likely not unusual, several aspects of Hakim’s story are worth unpacking. First of all, his acceptance of Islam was facilitated primarily by his local mosque and the mentors he found there among the Brotherhood. While this may seem unremarkable, it is worth observing that this period in the 1970s saw a tremendous growth in the number of mosques in the territories as well as a transformation in their leadership from the traditional establishment to the Mujamma’s more active regime (as detailed in Part I). It may be unlikely that Hakim would have had this access to mosques and mentors without both the grassroots proliferation of the Mujamma and the tacit approval of the Israeli civil administration. Second, before it appears too likely that Hakim was simply brainwashed from an early age, note the remarkable level of education Hakim achieved, his hesitation to commit fully to one group until his imprisonment, and his self-evident dedication to personal reflection. Attending a university would have been much more difficult a generation previously, and indeed Hakim was the first of his family to attend college (Lybarger 90). As part of the rising professional middle classes in the territories with newfound agency, Hakim took ownership of his experiences from an early age. He rejected the traditional customs of his parents and adopted Islam as a complete alternative rationality in a way that was fundamentally internally-driven. The confluence of these two trends: proliferation of Islamic institutions and the mobilization of a professional class
empowered by education to control their own destiny, can be seen as doubtlessly powerful in forming the identities of Hakim and many others of his generation.
Taqi: Villager finds hope in Islam’s moral guidance for community life

Thus far, the stories of Mujahida and Hakim highlight two facets of Islam that attracted the professionalized generation coming of age in the 1980s: a sense of moral comfort and a rationally determined holistic worldview. Both of these facets are profoundly centered on the individual, describing how they reappropriated religious symbols and narrative in a way that helped reconcile personal struggles. A contrasting motivation can be found in the story of Shaykh Taqi al-Din, a Hamas leader and mosque preacher born in 1970 in a village south of Bethlehem who became an Islamist activist because the ideology offered guidance not only for individuals but for an entire community of Palestinians.

Like many village families in the West Bank in the mid-twentieth century, Taqi’s family found itself situated in the lower economic strata with income derived from skilled labor. His father worked as a blacksmith and construction worker growing up. Taqi describes his father reverently as a pious, caring man. He built up his blacksmithing trade in Israel respectably so that Taqi’s older brothers inherited this employment when they came of age. Taqi admiringly called his father a “simple man” who faced religion not as an intellectual exercise but as a moral approach to daily life. He taught his sons “right from wrong”, “not to steal”, and “to be honest” in all dealings, among other basic moral lessons (Lybarger 92). This moral foundation handed down from his father would be a cornerstone of his future Islamist identity.

Unlike his brothers who inherited the blacksmithing business, Taqi pursued higher education. Coming out of secondary school, Taqi emerged successfully from the “scientific stream” with an 82% on his exit examination, which made him eligible to attend any university of his choosing. Instead, he chose to pursue religious studies in college and eventually became an imam (mosque leader).
His personal interviews indicate that he pursued religious leadership because of a desire to revive and attain the authentic peasant past of Palestinian identity, as handed down from his father. Taqi describes historical village life as an ideal period in which “daily life was itself an expression of basic Islamic values” (Lybarger 91). In his view, a truly Islamic society allowed individuals to internalize basic moral practices so completely that no compulsion by threat or force was necessary in the community. Reflecting on his memories of village life growing up, Taqi claimed that perhaps only five or six residents out of hundreds touched alcohol, and that residents often left cars and homes unlocked and unattended without fear. This was the case for decades, Taqi emphasized, without a reliable police force and in very unstable economic and political situations.

The source of this collective harmony, according to Taqi, was that all villagers had internalized the ways of Islamic law and found moral and spiritual guidance therein. He thus saw this memory of village life as a quintessential model for organizing communities. Rather than emphasizing politics, Taqi sought to help others discover that the moral and spiritual guidance provided in Islam was guidance for all aspects of life, from inheritance disputes to how to use the Internet (Lybarger 92). For him, Islam represented an ideal way of life for the entire Palestinian community.
Ibn Fadlallah: Activist driven from Fatah by persecution and prison violence
Thus far several stories have seen Palestinian youth first affiliate with some secular or leftist organization and only later transition to Islamist ones. Mujahida first worked with communists, while Hakim idolized Arafat and others in Fatah. To uncover more about why individuals with religious inclinations may have drifted from the secular or leftist milieus to participate in Islamist organizations, we now investigate the story of Ibn Fadlallah, a former Fatah member whose fifteen years in prison politics placed him at the forefront of an ideological transition.

Ibn Fadlallah, the son of a West Bank taxi driver, joined Fatah’s militant resistance in the early 1980s. His family background was self-described as pious and traditional, but his testimony indicates that resistance against the occupation was the dominant goal in his mind at the time. He was attracted to Fatah because its multi-confessional orientation was not hostile to religion and allowed members like himself to practice their faith freely as individuals. Most of all, Ibn Fadlallah bought into the idea of a unified, multi-confessional Palestinian struggle against occupation. He received weapons training but quickly found himself in jail after Israeli authorities uncovered his militant cell. His subsequent fifteen years in prison placed him squarely in the middle of the internal transformation of Fatah and the rise of an Islamist break-away movement.

As noted earlier in Part I, Israeli prisons were hotbeds of Palestinian political activity, served to mobilize nonaligned members and radicalize those already committed to an organization. Activists made social connections and debated courses of action. Groups of prisoners reportedly organized joint study sessions to raise political and cultural awareness, spending as much as five hours a day on educational activism (Gordon, Gordon, and Shriteh 58). They even had reliable methods of communicating with leadership outside prison walls. The awareness of these
activities among Israeli authorities is difficult to assess, but firsthand accounts indicate that apparently such activities were not actively prevented throughout at least the early 1980s.

In this vigorous political environment, Ibn Fadlallah found himself confronted by a rigorous internal debate about the role of religion in Fatah. Early in his prison years, Ibn Fadlallah joined an effort among Fatah rank and file to revise the movement’s discourse and narrative. Thus far the PLO’s attempt to import leftist concepts was considered a non-starter by most traditional Palestinians like Ibn Fadlallah. Aware of both the pervasive traditionalism in Palestinian culture and the recent success of the 1979 Iranian Islamic revolution, many in Fatah, especially members of the Student Brigades, began suggesting that Fatah shy away from its third-world secular revolutionary rhetoric and adopt Islamic symbols and discourse to describe its goals (Lybarger 98). According to Ibn Fadlallah, this was an effort to provide language that resonated with the majority of Palestinians so that the struggle against occupation could rise from a minority militant vanguard to become widespread across the territories. Perhaps most indicative of this effort’s nationalist rather than religious aims is the fact that its leader was a Palestinian Christian, according to Ibn Fadlallah. Despite Ibn Fadlallah’s best efforts, however, this suggestion caused a split within Fatah rather than a concerted movement toward widespread resistance. The hostility between factions became so severe that Ibn Fadlallah eventually left Fatah and began working with Islamic Jihad when he was released from prison.

The catalyst for his abandonment of Fatah was the dismissive and repressing reaction from Fatah’s “old guard” leadership toward those suggesting a revised Islamic rhetoric. Apparently, the “head of the movement’s leadership in the prison … was completely hostile toward religion” (Lybarger 99). According to Ibn Fadlallah, after the suggestion fell flat the social environment in prison became increasingly hostile toward religion. He recalls that, “when a new prisoner would
arrive they would prevent him from speaking with you about prayer” (Lybarger 99). Fatah leadership in prison also stepped up monitoring efforts over the rank and file, which made Ibn Fadlallah fell as if “there were some police unit keeping tabs” on daily activity (Lybarger 99). Despite his group’s self-professed constructive efforts to convince the leadership to acknowledge the traditional religious context of their target audience, the leadership dismissed their ideas and initiated attempts to discredit this Islamic-leaning upstart faction of Fatah. As Ibn Fadlallah reflects, “Word went around that this Islam we were advocating was dangerous and insidious” (Lybarger 100). Perhaps the most destructive rumors were those that compared the Islamic faction to Israeli sympathizers and cast them as opponents of Fatah and the nationalist struggle. Ibn Fadlallah recalls being confronted with the question, “Israel does not recognize the PLO, so why is it that you all do not recognize the PLO?” (Lybarger 100). These rumors turned to violence, and prisoners on both sides began carrying knives on a regular basis, signally an irreparable shift in affiliation.

This evolution from rank and file member attempting constructive suggestions to neglected, ostracized, and finally demonized outsider compelled Ibn Fadlallah and others to give up and “feel that Fatah could never embody our aspirations” (Lybarger 99). This was not the multi-confessional Fatah he had signed up for, but instead one that was hostile to those who wished to make Islam part of the political discourse to achieve overtly nationalist objectives. This personal experience compelled Ibn Fadlallah, like many in his generation, to see Fatah as narrow-minded and corrupt. What makes this story significant is it emphasizes how this perception was shaped by repeated face-to-face social confrontation rather than second-hand rumors or macro-scale events portrayed in the media. In the hotbed of ideological competition in the 1980s, personal interactions across milieus were the primary mechanism facilitating the evolution of identity.
**Amal: Leftist wears the Islamist veil to find social respect, moral consistency**
The Palestinians of the intifada generation who gravitated to Islamism pursued a variety of objectives. Most were motivated by nationalist-Islamist concerns about the occupation and the necessity for militant resistance. Others sought spiritual community guidance and worldwide moral justice. To complete the spectrum of motivations, we will examine the history of Amal, a Palestinian woman growing up in the 1980s for whom interpersonal respect and moral consistency were primary motivators. Rather than seeking a program that prescribed proper actions and demanded action to confront the occupation, Amal simply sought an environment in which she was treated with respect and she could take refuge from the hostile world around her. Initially a hesitant supporter of Fatah, Amal grew to despise its focus on votes and politics over paying attention to its constituents. She came to accept an Islamic orientation that matched her early religious education and desire for respect and interpersonal morality.

Amal grew up in the West Bank in a refugee camp, where she remembers being religious from very early on in life. She looked up to her father, who in addition to keeping prayers and fasts would often converse with her about “the idea that we needed to love god and fulfill his requirements for this love” (Lybarger 152). This bedrock of religious conviction remained the foundation of her relationship with her father and her attitudes toward others. However, growing up in her camp, she inherited strong prejudices against Islamists, particularly after violent clashes between PFLP members and Brotherhood in 1985 (Lybarger 153).

During high school, Amal remained unaligned while supporting generic intifada activism such as sheltering youngsters running away from Israeli soldiers. As a young hesitant university student, Amal faced strong recruitment before initially aligning with the secular-nationalist Fatah movement at her father’s advice. However, she soon became disillusioned with the
organization’s hunger for power above other objectives. She came to believe that she was simply a pawn in their electoral game, and that her views and opinions did not matter unless it was an election season. Amal was appalled that the camaraderie of the popular intifada was supplanted by a tit-for-tat system which rewarded supporters with jobs or university admission and punished dissent with social ostracism (Lybarger 155). Amal severed her affiliation during her second year and refused to participate in the elections. She later began drifting toward the Islamic Bloc.

In contrast to Fatah, Amal found the students in the Islamic bloc to be principled, honest and sincere. On national issues, Amal saw them take a strong stand against compromising with Israel on the right of return to lands seized in the 1948 war, which from her perspective was a starkly favorable contrast to Fatah’s willingness to compromise. Within interpersonal matters, Amal reflects that the sincerity shown to her by fellow Islamist students helped her become further convinced about their positions and practices. Perhaps the foremost example of this was her interactions with male activists over whether she should adopt the headscarf as a sign of religious modesty. According to her memory, an activist approached her one day saying “Amal, we truly and sincerely hope as a sign of commitment to your religion, you will change your clothing” (157). For her, this gesture was neither a threat nor a condemnation, but a “heartfelt expression of concern for her moral well-being” (Lybarger 157). This interaction and several follow-up gestures helped catalyze an internal transformation for Amal.

Motivated by the sense of solidarity and respect shown by the Islamic Bloc, Amal began a gradual process of questioning her religious convictions and personal identity. Through Quranic reading and prayer, Amal struggled to reconcile how to align her inward religiosity and outward behavior. She did not want to appear backward and assent to patriarchy by wearing the scarf, but neither did she want to open herself up to the manipulative nature of the secular milieu. Slowly,
she came to the realization that by wearing the veil she could take ownership of her appearance and project herself as a confident and independent but nevertheless strictly Islamic woman. In her own words, she decided to signal that “my body belonged to me” (Lybarger 157). Helped by her older sister, who had already made the decision to wear the hijab, Amal acquired scarves but spent almost a year with these scarves in her closet. Finally, she decided to take the leap and wear the hijab in public full-time.

After her adoption of the hijab, Amal received complements and statements of support from fellow members of her party. She reflects that “the hijab brought me a greater degree of respect” (157). Ultimately, for Amal the transition to an aligned inward faith and outward appearance forced her to overcome perceptions of the veil as “backward” and instead see it as an enabler for equality between men and women. She saw secularism as a society in which “women have no rights at all”, while wearing the hijab and jilbab allowed her to overcome what Lybarger describes as the “vulnerability and anomie she felt within the secularist milieu” (158). Through the veil and her membership in the Islamic Bloc, Amal found a way to connect the respectful religion of her father with her reconfigured notions of equality and justice without the manipulativeness and crudeness of the surrounding secular society.

This transformation was enabled by many factors worthy of discussion. First, Amal’s foundational Islamic values passed on by her father and reinforced by her sister provided the underlying conviction to make this transformation. Her disillusionment with secular politics provided a vision she did not want to be a part of, while the Islamic bloc offered both ideological and interpersonal comfort and encouragement. Finally, Amal’s own educated mind weighed options carefully at all stages of her evolution, eventually striking a balance of involvement that suited her values best.
Hamdi: Leftist ethics realigned with Islamic salvation, even as an adult
Many stories related so far highlight individuals with strong religious convictions from childhood or young teenage years. Most reveal a strong nationalist undercurrent as motivation for shifting identity. The next story of Hamdi, a West Bank refugee from a staunchly communist family, is significant in two ways. First, it describes how a fully-grown adult can be transformed from one entrenched within the secular-leftist milieu to one that becomes a devoted practitioner of Islam, albeit a more tolerant form. Secondly, Hamdi’s testimony indicates that spiritual rather than nationalist issues were at stake, indicating that resistance charisma does not have everything to do with Islamism’s mobilizing power. Although his story is perhaps unusual, it nevertheless highlights significant factors at play in the mobilization of Islamic practice.

Hamdi’s family affiliation with the communist party formed the foundation of his political and cultural identity. According to Hamdi, “from the moment I first opened my eyes to the world I have been with the Communists” (Lybarger 163). His uncles were politically active in the organization and its affiliates. His cousin was a representative of leftist organizations within the United National Leadership during the first intifada. Persuaded by this cousin’s convincing speech and admirable leadership, Hamdi began participating in party activities and served as a party leader during university, although he later left politics disgusted with the back-stabbing and power-grabbing involved.

Religiously, Hamdi’s household kept five daily prayers and fasted during Ramadan while he was growing up. Although his older sister drifted away from these practices to become an avowed atheist as she aged, Hamdi retained his belief in God even as an adult. He remained unaffiliated with devout Islamic institutions and political Islamist activism, though, as he was predisposed to
distrust religious leaders as men who “just grew their beards long to make a show in front of people” (Lybarger 166).

Instead, he derived his sense of conviction and morality from the leftist milieu, describing communists as the most “ethical” of Palestinian groups. He valued the organization’s commitment to the poor and each member’s readiness for sacrifice to uphold their ideals, even under Israeli imprisonment. Importantly for Hamdi, the group also upheld the customs and traditions of Palestinian village and camp life. They were honest in commercial dealings and did not allow unsupervised interaction between unmarried men and women (Lybarger 164). In many ways the leftist groups of the time found currency with Hamdi and others not just because of their emphasis on the poor but their successful integration with peasant cultural norms.

Unmotivated by nationalist activism, Hamdi remained uninvolved with the intifada. Instead, after graduating from university in 1987, he took a job as a refugee affairs assistant with the United Nations Refugee Works Agency (UNRWA). His ideological position as a staunch leftist sympathizer remained relatively unremarkable until the mid-1990s when two catalysts pushed him in the Islamic direction. First, his marriage to a devout distant cousin from Saudi Arabia provided a constant force within his home encouraging more diligent religious observance. Second, a new colleague at work who turned out to be a Hamas leader provided a stunning counter-image to Hamdi’s preconceived notion of Islamism.

Hamdi’s colleague proved to be a primary force in his shifting identity. This fellow UNRWA refugee worker resisted all stereotypes Hamdi had assigned to Islamists. Rather than an out-of-touch, intolerant old man with an ostentatious beard, his colleague turned out to be young, clean-shaven, and tolerant. Confronting young women who did not conform to religious dress codes,
Hamdi was surprised to find that his colleague “didn’t tell them that they needed to cover up and begin praying or else they would face hellfire” (Lybarger 166). Instead, the man believed that the best advocate of religion was exemplary behavior, not coercion. His friendliness and tolerance drew many questions from his coworkers, who were eager to discuss “basic points of doctrine and practice” (Lybarger 166).

Hamdi’s natural curiosity compelled his involvement in these conversations with increasing frequency. He began peppering his colleague with religious questions and following him around on his rounds to complete conversations. These discussions sparked a growing sense of crisis within Hamdi about his lack of regular prayer, motivated by his belief that “On the Day of Resurrection our Lord will ask us about our prayer. If you were praying in life, then this was evidence of your faith. If not, then that was that. It was either A or B.” (Lybarger 166). Hamdi struggled to muster the conviction to commit to regular prayer over many months, but finally began the daily practice during Ramadan in 1997. Islam thus became a core part of his conscious identity, and he “began to study it methodically and became convinced of it in a scientific way” (Lybarger 167).

We note carefully, however, that Hamdi’s leftist take on Islamic practice may be at odds with the expected behavior of most devout Muslims. For example, Hamdi felt content to shake hands with an unmarried woman so long as he internally repressed sexual desire, while most devout practitioners would shun the practice of handshaking entirely. Additionally, he believes that his kind-hearted atheist friends will be elevated on judgment day because “god works through them” (Lybarger 168). For Hamdi, religion became primarily a question of inner motives. In this unique synthesis, he found a self-satisfactory alignment between his ethics and his need for religious devotion. While he never became politically active within Hamas and indeed can
hardly be said to uphold the Islam of the Islamists, Hamdi’s story nevertheless highlights how Palestinians from diverse backgrounds and ages can be enticed the actors and institutions of the Islamist milieu even without an overtly militant nationalist inclination or devout traditional approach to religious values.
Synthesis: Can ethnography explain the rise of Islamism in the 1980s?
Reviewing the narratives of individual trajectories through the ideological milieu of the 1980s and early 1990s, we might first notice the stark contrasts that make each unique and interesting in its own right. However, a detailed examination reveals that many narratives have much in common both in the sequence of events or milestones each individual traversed in the course of shifting identity as well as the mechanisms that facilitated this evolution. In this section, we shall explore the possibility of distilling an abstract model of the pathways that many Islamist-leaning Palestinians of this generation traced.

Patterns in Sequence: Initial Path > Crisis > Synthesis > Resolution
First, we review patterns in the sequence of events. Where did individuals of this generation begin their ideological trajectories? We can observe that few of the individuals studied began squarely in the Islamist milieu seeking a separate Palestinian state based on the sharia. Rather, most had complicated beginnings that often saw them articulate a leftist, secular, or multi-confessional orientation that often (but not always) included commitment to the national struggle for liberation. For example, Hamdi was firmly situated in a communist context, while Ibn Fadlallah and Hakim expressed clear sympathies for Fatah. Although each interlocutor reflected familiarity with traditionalist Islam and at least some exposure to devout practice, none can be said to have been exclusively Islamist. These divergent initial paths are characteristic of the intifada generation, enabling eventual synthesis of values from across milieus into the umbrella of Islamism.

After engaging with this initial track for some time, each interlocutor encountered a crisis of identity that inspired active internal reflection. The form and magnitude of this crisis certainly differs. Mujahida found the personal grief associated with her brother’s death unbearable, while Amal struggled to find solidarity and respect among the power hungry university students in
Fatah. Taqi found that scientific careers and modern urbanization did not yield the quality of communal life found in his quintessential village. Despite the varieties of form and intensity, however, an internal crisis appeared necessary for all interlocutors to seek a transition towards an Islamist or national-Islamist orientation.

To confront the impending crisis, each interlocutor spent time in a period of reflection and synthesis. This period often required input from Islamic sources such as the Quran, contact with Islamic mentors and study groups, and original thought. A common theme that emerged in many narratives, such as the stories of Mujahida, Amal, and Hamdi, is the gradualism with which they adopted Islamic beliefs and practices. Resolving a crisis of identity can hardly be said to happen overnight. Rather, the process requires time to synthesize input and make internal judgments about charting a new course.

Finally, each story’s final step can be seen as finding some sort of resolution to the crisis through their newly adopted beliefs and practices. Amal found that wearing the veil gave her increased interpersonal respect as well as protection from the selfish manipulation she encountered in secular politics. Hamdi found inner peace by reconciling his worries about the afterlife with his leftist virtues. Taqi found a calling in educating villagers in the peaceful ways of his ideal Islamic communities. Of course, some stories achieved more tenuous results and individuals rarely completed the transition completely crisis-free. For example, Hakim found heroes worthy of admiration and unstained by corruption, but found his support in conflict with his professional goals of emigration. This crisis resolution framework, however, appears a useful way to characterize how the intifada generation refashioned inherited ideas and interpreted lived-in events in new ways, and it likely extends to other generations in other contexts as well.
As a final note on the sequential pattern of crisis resolution that emerges from these stories, we can certainly observe that each individual’s narrative is only partially told and some important details have likely been lost in both Lybarger’s original reports and my own. Each individual has likely shifted a great deal since Lybarger’s original interviews in the 1990s, but each shift was likely motivated by a crisis of some sort. Remembering that individual ideology is constantly evolving and subjected to interacting influences from across many milieus should also temper any conclusions here. Overall, however, we note that the Islamist and nationalist-Islamist ideas of the time offered attractive and authentic solutions to many different crises across moral, personal, social, and community concerns.

Patterns in Mechanisms: Institutions, Personal Relationships, Events and Experiences

As a broad template we have identified the sequence of events that compelled many Palestinian individuals to drift toward the Islamist milieu. However, perhaps the most important result that can come of ethnographic investigations is uncovering the *how* behind this transition. At each stage of every interlocutor, we should ask, what personal experiences, global political events, social interactions, cultural narratives, and community institutions facilitated the process of creating a crisis of identity and later resolving it? This section attempts to identify the key mediators in the crisis to reflection to resolution process.

**Personal Experiences**

Although the broader context of history can no doubt be important to an individual’s life path, personal subjective experiences lived along the way can hardly be ignored as a fundamental stimulus of an individual’s crisis. If we look carefully at the trajectories of our interlocutors, we can observe that a crucial life event often single-handedly catalyzed their crisis. This was the case for Mujahida, who at the age of thirteen lost her brother to death at an Israeli checkpoint.
Other monumental events can contribute to a more gradual crisis, as with Hakim watched his best friend gunned down next to him during the first intifada but kept more composure following the event than Mujahida. These lived-through experiences of oppression under Israeli power seem to be more common in those who expressed a nationalist sentiment and advocated active resistance, as we might expect.

**Social Relationships**

In most cases social relationships proved to be fundamental in determining original trajectories, crises, reflections, and resolutions. The original course of involvement for Palestinians is often set by family and clan ties, but mediated through a close mentoring process. Amal’s father helped build a deep sense of loving faith within her heart from a young age. Hamdi’s cousin in the leftist milieu captured his admiration and provided a model for moral resistance. Simple lessons on honesty taught by Taqi’s father left a lasting impression of moral conduct for the future Hamas leader.

Social interaction can also catalyze a crisis of identity. Many negative experiences with leftist and secular actors pushed interlocutors away from their initial involvement. Ibn Fadlallah, for example, found that his suggestions for improving Fatah’s rhetoric caused ostracism and rumor-mongering rather than constructive dialogue. Amal became disillusioned by Fatah student organizations’ focus on power rather than solidarity and sincere interest in the issues at stake. Positive experiences also serve as an impetus for change, as when Hamdi encountered the unexpectedly open Hamas leader who changed his spiritual life.

During the reflection and resolution process, a strong relationship with a mentor proved instrumental in many stories. Hamdi’s contact with his religious colleague allowed him to
reconfigure his views of Islam. Mujahida’s mentor modeled Islamic perseverance under unjust persecution in a vivid and timely fashion. In making the decision to wear the veil, Amal found her sister a source of encouragement and patience. Interpersonal contact within and across milieus stands out in all stories, signaling that ethnographic evidence has much to contributed to understanding an evolving Islamist movement.

Societal Institutions

Beyond one-to-one social relationships, the broader presence of various social institutions should not be neglected in assessing identity transformation. While factors like social relationships and personal experience have some timeless qualities to them, the influence of institutions like mosques, universities, workplaces, and prisons at this time was profoundly situated in the unique political and cultural context of the 1980s.

Mosques, as one might expect, served as a meeting space and interaction site for many interlocutors drifting toward Islam. Hakim found comfort in attending prayers and youth dramas at his local mosque from an early age, while Mujahida was able to seek mentors at a neighborhood study group when her intellectual needs exceeded the resources available in her home. We recall from Part I that the proliferation of mosques as well as the revivalist focus of their cultural agendas was unheard of before this generation. It should not be underestimated that this confluence of proselytizing revivalism unhindered (and at some points encouraged) by the occupation enabled many in this generation to consider and experience alternate ways of Islamic thinking.
The rise of Palestinian universities is also profiled in great detail in Part I, and it should be no surprise that these last remaining battlegrounds for ideological competition in the occupied territories were primary sites for individuals to experience multiple milieus and change direction. Amal, for example, encountered Fatah’s disinterested politics as a student as well as the sincerity of the Islamic Bloc. A secondary role for higher education is the empowering of previously neglected groups into political agents. Mujahida’s education enabled her to remain unmarried and act as a decision maker within Islamic Jihad. Without her university experience, she would have been hard pressed to acquire the opportunity to have this level of political autonomy.

Prisons, finally, emerge in the story of Ibn Fadlallah as another battleground of ideology. His stories of the power struggles and rumor spreading involved among Fatah factions in the 1980s indicate how important prison events were to shaping movement goals as well as membership. Without this close network of rank and file competing for personal favors as well as shared goals, the factional split from Fatah that fueled the rise of Islamic jihad as the first militant proto-Islamist actor may never have happened.

Global Trends

At the broadest point of view, we can observe several political, economic, and cultural trends which facilitated the rise of nationalist-Islamism in 1980s Palestine. Perhaps first among these is the empowerment of women and refugees enabled by the parallel economic boom of occupation and the growing cultural acceptability of activist women within the PLO. The stories of Amal and Mujahida require agency and opportunities that would have been far from the reach of Palestinian women even a decade or two before.
Additionally, the increasingly widespread accusation that the PLO was corrupt and compromising facilitated the rise of a counter-resistance springing from the Islamic movement. Hakim recalls how vividly rumors of leaders lacking Islamic virtue and broadcasts highlighting corruption led him to reject his former larger-than-life heroes and instead seek out mentors at his local mosque. Similarly, the widespread stigmatization of collaborators with the occupation allowed Fatah’s prison leadership to deflect criticism for Ibn Fadlallah and drive this potentially transformative movement out of the PLO umbrella to rise on its own.

Overall, the important mechanisms that facilitated a shift toward Islamist identity in the 1980s represented interactions between individuals and entities across personal, community, and global scales as well as across generations and ideologies. Fundamentally, we must remember that the center of each trajectory was a rational mind that carefully weighed evidence provided by each mediator at each step and chose the best course of belief and action to resolve a personal crisis based on personal history, beliefs, and needs.
Conclusions and Recommendations
This work offers a tour of two complementary approaches to scholarly analysis of Palestinian identity. On one hand, a historical investigation focused on how each successive generation reconfigures values, symbols, and narratives and responds to evolving events and institutions illustrates how important evolution across time and interaction across milieus are to understanding collective identity changes and their associated cultural, social, and political implications. On the other hand, an ethnographic focus on individual life stories from a single critical generation brings the mechanisms behind these changes into precise clarity through distinct, multi-dimensional narratives. Running through this entire analysis, of course, remains the thesis that Palestinians are not helpless creatures buffeted by the events of history and trends of culture, but conscious, rational agents capable of complex synthesis and careful consideration when choosing to enter and support a particular milieu. This argument and its supporting evidence acts as an important corrective to naïve analyses which cast Palestinian actors as either helpless victims or irrational radicals.

What then can readers conclude from this investigation? I argue that two primary threads of thought should echo out of these pages, one analytical and the other methodological.

Analytical Conclusions
Analytically, I claim that this work provides an informed understanding of how and why individuals cross milieu boundaries to gravitate to Islamism. By giving emphasis to both a wide-angle view of contextual history and microcosmic ethnographic narratives, I hope readers realize that Islamic movements are fundamentally experienced by individual agents, but aggregate beliefs and actions both internal and external to the movement act as powerful influences. While
the reasoning processes and mechanisms outlined here are certainly specific to the Palestinian case, they seem likely to apply in many other contexts as well.

At a generation-wide scale, the primary driver for synthesizing new cultural values, goals, and norms appears to be interaction between milieus mediated by a complex, multi-dimensional amalgamation of socioeconomic upheaval, societal institutions, cultural narratives, and historical events. Focusing on the 1980s intifada generation, we can trace the rise of activism to each of these factors, all acting at the intersection of secular-nationalist and Islamic milieus. Without the socioeconomic and educational boom following occupation, the penetration of literacy and critical thinking skills available due to education would likely have not reached as wide an audience, preventing the intellectualization common to this generation that was crucial to forging new identities. Without institutions such as universities and prisons, the exchange of ideas and conflict for control between the Brotherhood and Fatah at this time would have had no battleground on which to take place. Without the value of against-all-odds nationalist heroism traceable to narratives about the battle of Karama in 1968 and the martyrdom of al-Qassam in the 1930s, the appeal of liberation through armed struggle would find little currency. All of these factors have significance, and none stands alone.

At an individual level, the crisis, reflection, synthesis process appears to drive most life stories of the individuals who cross over between milieus. All the generation-wide mechanisms work at this scale too, although the highly significant influence of interpersonal relationships and personal experiences must be added. It is hard to imagine Mujahida turning to Islamic Jihad without both the traumatic death of her brother inspiring Quranic meditation or the heroic example of her teacher mentor courageously standing up for Islamic beliefs in the face of opposition. Similarly, we can hardly imagine Taqi becoming a religious leader without the moral
influence of his father, while Hamdi’s return to Islam as an adult relied heavily on his daily conversations with his enigmatically tolerant Hamas colleague. These stories bring the individual self, the experiencing, interacting conscious being to center stage, an observation that readers should carry forth as a lens for viewing any mechanisms that act on political, religious, and cultural identity.

As a final observation, we must emphasize that the agency of Palestinian actors as well as the influence of broader cultural, historical, and societal trends are all universally confined by the Israeli occupation. While Palestinians certainly define their own cultural, political, and even military responses, Israel retains the dominant hand in the region and has rarely failed to exercise it. Through officially sanctioned interventions such as permanent security barriers, random checkpoints, and closures, Israel retains a tight grasp over Palestinian socioeconomic fortunes. These interventions leave little room for constructive development, causing two-thirds of Palestinians to live on less than two dollars a day as recently as 2007 (Makdisi 6). More violent acts such as IDF invasions and settler violence cause death and damage that further paralyze Palestinian civil society. The scholarship of Neve Gordon and Saree Makdisi (highlighted in Further Reading) provide outstanding coverage of the diverse strategies and tools this authority has employed to exert control and confine Palestinian options. Thus, when considering the evolution of Palestinian milieus at both individual and societal scales, we must always be mindful of the “background music of the occupation,” to borrow Makdisi’s turn of phrase.

Methodological Conclusions

Alongside an increased ability to answer questions about the evolving beliefs and actions emerging from the Islamist milieu, this book has tried to illuminate how one should study and explain Islamist movements such as Hamas. A central observation of this work is that the
method employed to draw conclusions can be just as important as the conclusions themselves. I owe this focus on a critical methodology to Gunning, whose work on understanding Hamas’ politics makes a strong case for an intensely reflective approach aware of culturally biasing assumptions (see Further Reading). As a result, Gunning advocates rejecting any essentializing position which purports that Hamas is monolithic and unchanging. Instead, as critical observers we must problematize inherent biases and seek to understand contradictions and tensions within the movement rather than dismiss them. This is especially valuable in the Palestinian context, as so many different reasons for participation in the Islamist milieu exist and most individuals can demonstrate a remarkable capacity to critically evaluate the movement and outspokenly reject tenets and actions he or she finds unacceptable.

As a complement to this critical view, the ethnographic work of Lybarger offers a rich and detailed picture of Palestinian life within secular and Islamist milieus that can hardly be replicated in macro-scale analysis. Through individual life stories annotated with critical analysis, the entire spectrum of multi-dimensional factors acting on individual identity can be illuminated through a coherent narrative. Perhaps most importantly, this approach can be a powerful way to humanize its actors as complex beings who live and breathe a life outside of the political and religious world. Given the “Otherness” quality commonly assigned to Palestinian Islamists in Western discourse, humanization via ethnography can be an essential prerequisite to understanding how and why individual Palestinians join and participate in the Islamist milieu.

Perhaps the greatest recommendation this book can issue is a call for several more ethnographic studies in the tradition of Lybarger. Having conducted his interviews with twenty-somethings in the mid- to late-1990s, Lybarger’s work provided a watershed of understanding focused on the intifada generation. At the time of this writing, however, over ten years have passed since
Lybarger’s last interviews. Radical new developments, such as Hamas’ election in 2006, the factional violence that followed, and Israeli military raids on Gaza in late 2009, have transformed the Palestinian landscape several times over. Understanding the perceptions and trajectories of the generations growing up in this more hazardous and fragmented era will crucially inform future developments in the region. Ethnographic studies analyzing the rank and file of social and political organizations evolving in the last decade is desperately needed to provide an intricate, humanizing picture for analysts everywhere.
References

Abed, George T. The Palestinian economy: studies in development under prolonged occupation. Routledge, 1988


Further Reading
Finding good sources of scholarship on topics related to the Israel-Palestinian conflict can be a

time consuming task. Here, I have provided annotated bibliography for a number of sources that
I found particularly informative and insightful for this investigation. These are organized under
the following topics: Conflict History, Palestinian Socioeconomics, Palestinian Identity, Hamas
and Islamism, The Occupation.

Conflict History
Several works seek to recount the major political and social developments of the Israeli-
Palestinian conflict over the course of several decades to establish a broad context for further
study. Among these works, I recommend:

Charles Smith’s Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict

Smith provides a contextual analysis that stretches from the late 1800s to the present, covering
the military conflict as well as related political and social developments within Israel, the West
Bank, Gaza, and neighboring states. Coverage is fairly balanced and the prose is largely
accessible. For a broad survey of the trends and happenings that led to the current state of affairs,
I have not found a better resource.

Palestinian Socioeconomics
Several scholarship efforts have been devoted to characterizing the demographics and economics
of the Palestinian territories under occupation. I recommend

Anything written by Sara Roy

Sara Roy is widely-regarded as the foremost American expert on economic and political affairs
in Gaza. Since the 1980s she has conducted fieldwork in the Gaza strip to document the impacts
of occupation. Roy’s work is characterized by well-reasoned arguments driven by a mix of statistical evidence (e.g. World Bank figures) and fieldwork driven qualitative observations.

Roy’s best known observation about the conflict is her “de-development thesis”. Essentially, Roy argues that Israel’s continued occupation exists not for economic reasons, but for political and ideological ones. The imperative of Jewish sovereignty over the entirety of Biblical Israel has driven the modern state of Israel to enforce a state of structural and institutional fragmentation throughout the Palestinian territories which prevents sustained growth of the indigenous economy. Although living standards in the Gaza strip increased dramatically after the 1967 occupation, this was mostly due to wage laborers crossing into Israel or leaving for work in the Arab Gulf states. The occupation actively prevents the emergence of home-grown industries through closures, travel restrictions, and an impenetrable bureaucracy. Thus, the Gazan economy (both financial and political) is not “underdeveloped” (as we might consider sub-Saharan Africa to be), because what prevents its growth is not lack of investment and resources but a political regime explicitly hostile to growth. Hence the term “de-development”.

**Palestinian Identity**
Recently, increasing scholarly attention has been given to describing the cultural and social factors that shape what it means to be Palestinian. Among these sources, I suggest

**Loren Lybarger’s Identity and Religion in Palestine**
Dr. Lybarger is an Assistant Professor of World Religions at Ohio University-Athens. This book is a critical analysis based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted during three visits to the Palestinian territories (1980s, early 1990s, and 1999-2000). This work leverages interviews with
everyday adult Palestinians who grew up either pre-intifada or during the First Uprising to explain how individuals navigate the multidimensional “milieu” of secular-nationalist ideology and Islamist orientation. Lybarger combines authentic story-telling and critical analysis to explain how historical events, class structures, societal institutions, family and clan ties, and personal experience all come together to shape personal identities against the backdrop of conflict and occupation.

One of Lybarger’s most cogent observations is that the secularists and the Islamists have a long history of ideological and personnel exchange and that each individual active in the Palestinian political scene has been profoundly shaped by both. He offers accessible accounts of the various political trends from the 1948 beginning of conflict to the second intifada, offering key insight into how Islamism transformed from a “black sheep” minority in the 1970s to a modern force that for many Palestinians offers the most authentic vision of political and cultural identity. A major contribution is his analysis of life story trajectories through the “milieu” of competing political and religious reference frames. His many interviews indicate the extensive politicization of modern Palestinian society as well as a widespread attachment to a simpler, peasant past and its associated “customs and traditions”.

**Rashid Khalidi’s Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness**

Dr. Khalidi is a professor of Middle Eastern Studies at Columbia University, well-known as a pre-eminent scholar of Palestinian modern history. In this work he traces the origins of Palestinian national consciousness to well before the events of 1948 nakbah and the 1967 occupation. The evidence he provides is mostly his own historical analysis (this is not an ethnographic work). His primary contribution is a well-supported thesis that Palestinian
nationalist aspirations did not emerge from nothing in the 1960s with the creation of Fatah and the PLO. Instead, the Arabs who resided in present-day Israel, West Bank, or Gaza Strip have for well over a hundred years identified the land stretching from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River as their cultural, political, and religious home.

Khalidi provides rich analysis of religious and social dimensions of this identity’s evolution and competition. Khalidi provides a historical grounding for Muslim claims to Jerusalem (al-Quds) as an essential spiritual center reaching back to the middle ages. He also exposes clan and familial structures as powerful forces that have shaped Palestinian identity and politics since the early 1900s, when elitist ruling families were caught in internecine struggles that prevented a unified opposition to the growing Zionist presence. This familial factionalism remains powerful today, so Khalidi’s history will provide solid grounding for understanding this phenomenon.

The Occupation
When asking questions about how the Israeli occupation has changed over time in response to internal politics and Palestinian resistance, I suggest the following sources:

Neve Gordon’s Israel’s Occupation

Gordon offers an insightful review of how the occupation has changed over its forty year history from 1967 to the late 2000s. His analysis weighs detailed statistical facts alongside a keen awareness of politics and social context to explain why the occupation emphasized different politics and different responses to resistance over time. His framework heavily relies on the work of Foucault and other theorists of political power to explain the occupation’s actions as well. Definitely the most thorough and insightful work on the subject that I have found.
Saree Makdisi’s *Palestine Inside Out: An Everyday Occupation*

Saree Makdisi, a professor at UCLA, conducted extensive fieldwork in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza after Israel’s construction of the security barrier around 2002. His account is one of the most recent and most thorough dissections of how this barrier (as well as many other obstacles erected by the occupation) shape the everyday lives of Palestinians. He traces individual stories of the farmer who must travel over an hour one way to reach his fields on the other side of the wall and the man with kidney failure who died after a checkpoint denied his trip to a hospital. These stories and many others help the reader understand just how much of a Palestinian’s mobility and economic livelihood are restricted by the occupation.

Makdisi’s account highlights two important features of the present occupation: the bureaucratic permit system and the settler violence that Palestinians must contend with. Makdisi highlights the many hurdles residents must put up with to own livestock, vehicles, and cross into the next town. Makdisi also describes several graphic accounts of Jewish settlers invading Palestinian homes and threatening residents with knives and guns. Overall, his combination of statistics, legal reasoning, and interview-driven stories create a rich, vivid picture of the occupation in the 2000s.

**Hamas and Islamism**

When seeking information about how Hamas and Islamism has changed over time, what its goals and motivations are, and how its diverse wings (militant, political, charitable) function, I suggest the following sources:
Jeroen Gunning’s “On Studying Hamas”, Hamas in Politics

Dr. Gunning serves as an international politics lecturer at the University of Wales. The insightful first chapter of his book exposes many flaws in mainstream Western analyses of Hamas (and Islamism in general). He categorically rejects a “static” or “essentialist” analysis that sees Hamas as unwieldingly fanatical and incapable of rational action and solely dedicated to the annihilation of Israel. Instead, Gunning advocates a view of Hamas that embraces its transformation over time and investigates contradictions rather than dismisses them. Gunning encourages the use of primary sources when possible to avoid *a priori* demonizing of the “other”. He calls this approach to Islamism students a “critical methodology.” Most interestingly, it encourages Western analysts to problematize inherent assumptions such as the “secularization credo” – the ingrained belief that modernization and democratization must be accompanied by secularism and an absence of religion in the public sphere.

The rest of the book is also recommended. Gunning conducted extensive fieldwork with Hamas leadership to put forth a thorough account of the movement’s vision for government, the reasoning behind its electoral participation, and its evolving use of violence. Gunning employs his critical methodology throughout to help the reader appreciate the intracacies of Hamas’ responses and exposes how and why different constituents disagree on certain beliefs and actions.

Tamimi’s Hamas: a History

Dr Azzam Tamimi is a British-Palestinian who directs the Institute of Islamic Political Thought (IIPT), London. He appears regularly on al-Jazeera and other Arabic and English language
television stations, and frequently publishes opinion pieces in the *Guardian*. Tamimi is a strong advocate for the Palestinian people and a well-known supporter of Hamas (even advising the organization on revisions to its charter).

His book charts the origins of Hamas among the Muslim Brotherhood and details its internal structure and political objectives. He particularly focuses on the leadership involved (providing biographical sketches of the actual people in charge in addition to insight into the group’s decision-making processes).

This book offers a view of Hamas’ internal structure that is about as close as I could get to an “insider” perspective. Most important for my work was the chapter on the transformation of mainstream Islamism from gradualist to activist leading up to the first intifada. Especially important, Tamimi highlights how Muslim Brothers were teased and bullied throughout the early 1980s for being the last ones to demonstrate against the occupation – this is a far cry from the modern perception of the organization and shows how much the organization has shifted in ideology over the years.