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# Emergence of Palestine as a Global Cause

SUNE HAUGBOLLE and PELLE VALENTIN OLSEN

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**ABSTRACT:** *In the late 1960s, Palestine became an iconic signifier of solidarity and support for the Left, but also a transgressive tool that shaped and re-situated ideological positions at domestic levels. In this article, we attempt to answer why, how, and when this happened. Most research to date has stressed the global diplomatic offensive by the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization). Palestinian revolutionary thought and action are obviously the primary explanatory factors for the emergence of their cause internationally. However, a one-sided approach blurs the agency of the global revolutionaries and solidarity activists who helped elevate Palestine to a global cause. This article takes a comparative approach and uses Denmark and Norway as two illustrative examples of Palestine's transformation into a global leftist cause. Denmark and Norway are central cases because solidarity movements in Scandinavia developed early on, and because they exemplify how Fatah, in Norway, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), in Denmark, advanced different models of solidarity and cultural diplomacy. We compare these two cases with new evidence from other countries in order to summarize how a cultural transfer of symbols, interpretations, experiences, and ideological positioning took place in the 1960s and 1970s through meetings, translations, and organizational links.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Entanglement; Global 1960s; Palestine; Scandinavia; Solidarity*

*The question of Palestine is therefore the contest between an affirmation and a denial (...) In other words, we must understand the struggle between Palestinians and Zionism as a struggle between a presence and an interpretation, the former constantly appearing to be overpowered and eradicated by the latter.<sup>1</sup>*

From the late 1960s, the quest to affirm the existence of Palestine became a global cause for the Left, an iconic signifier of solidarity and support, but also a transgressive tool that shaped and re-situated ideological positions globally. In this article, we attempt to answer what allowed Palestine to assume the position of an iconic global leftist cause alongside other anti-imperial, decolonization and national liberation

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Said (1979) *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Times Books), p. 8.

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struggles, such as South Africa and Vietnam, and how it happened.<sup>2</sup> The making of Palestine as a global cause had world-historic ramifications and signaled a new form of transnational political solidarity. This process has been studied mostly as an effect of the global diplomatic offensive of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) and the state-driven diplomacy of the Cold War great powers.<sup>3</sup> Palestinian revolutionary thought and action were obviously the primary explanatory factors for the emergence of their cause internationally, and Chinese, Soviet and US diplomacy during the Cold War were highly significant.<sup>4</sup> However, state actors, diplomacy, and political history must be complemented with the social history of the global revolutionaries and solidarity activists who helped elevate Palestine to a global cause. By stressing the entangled nature of their relations, in this article we put forth a multi-sided historiography that requires us to read into various archives but also to take the dialogical nature of intellectual production seriously.

We take a comparative approach and use Denmark and Norway as two illustrative examples of Palestine's transformation into a global leftist cause. By comparing detailed analysis of these two cases with new evidence from other countries, we show how a cultural transfer<sup>5</sup> of experiences, ideological positioning, interpretations and symbols took place in New Left and student milieus in the 1960s and 1970s through meetings, organizational links and translations. These were part of a historical process of contestation, decontestation and recontestation defined by Michael Freeden as 'the process through which a decision is both made possible (accorded an aura of finiteness) and justified (accorded an aura of authority).'<sup>6</sup> While a complete decontestation of Palestine, which is to say the removal of ambiguity and alternative meanings, never could occur, the cultural transfer of the late 1960s and early 1970s laid the ground for solidarity movements that eventually forged a wider adaption of the cause in political parties. Such a transfer, we argue, could only take place because close personal relations developed between Palestinians and others. These people informed each other's views, bringing with them sensibilities and ideological interpretive frames from their respective national contexts.

Historians long have agreed that the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war was the key event that convinced many leftists around the world to support Palestine as a front-line cause in a broader Third World battle against capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, and U.S. hegemony, mainly because of its position in the oil-rich Middle East where foreign imperial interests were strong.<sup>7</sup> Having adopted a view of themselves as 'cosmopolitan revolutionaries'<sup>8</sup> prior to 1967, the PLO launched a global offensive that was partly

<sup>2</sup> Kim Christiaens has written extensively about the connection between international solidarity and unofficial diplomacy as well as the growing interest of historians in the phenomenon of international solidarity. See for example, Kim Christiaens (2020) Introduction: The Power, Borders and Legacies of international Solidarity in the Low Countries, in: Kim Christiaens (eds) *International Solidarity in the Low Countries during the Twentieth Century: New Perspectives and Themes* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg), pp. 1–23.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Paul T. Chamberlin (2012) *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of the history of the Palestinian revolution see Karma Nabulsi and Abed Takriti (2018) *The Palestinian Revolution*. Available at: <http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/>, accessed October 15, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Espagne & Benedicte Zimmerman (2006) Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity, *History & Theory* 45(1), pp. 30–50.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Freeden (2013) *The Political Theory of Political Thinking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 74.

<sup>7</sup> Fouad Ajami (1992) *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice since 1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 47; see also Yezid Sayigh (1997) *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

<sup>8</sup> Paul T. Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive*, pp. 20–22.

supported by The People's Republic of China, and which aided its integration into the Cuba-led Tricontinental movement. Palestinians consciously and successfully connected their struggle with the 'global revolution' and worldwide national liberation, which allowed them to tap into radical networks across the Third World and beyond.<sup>9</sup> In many ways, the academic emphasis on the June 1967 war is valid. The defeat was a setback (*naksa*) for Arab nationalism and certainly marked a turning point for Palestinian and Arab intellectuals, who now realized that the efforts of the Arab socialist regimes during the 1950s and 1960s had not created the changes necessary to liberate Palestine.<sup>10</sup> As a result, Palestinians resolutely took matters into their own hands.<sup>11</sup> From an institutional point of view, the PLO's global campaign gained steam powered by Chinese, Algerian and Cuban logistical and financial support. At a closer look, however, it becomes clear that the wider cultural translation that was necessary for globalizing Palestine required intellectual and cultural labor, not just a straightforward transmission of the Palestinian perspective. As we will show, some of this labor preceded the 1967 war.

In the entangled relations between Palestinian and local activists emerged a script for Palestine as a global cause. This social dimension of the emergence of the Palestinian cause globally largely has been overlooked by historians, who continue to favor diplomatic history.<sup>12</sup> Paul T. Chamberlain, for example, forcefully has shown how the diplomatic efforts of the PLO afforded Palestine with 'unparalleled resonance in the global community,' including in the United Nations.<sup>13</sup> A micro-sociological analysis of 1967-1973 – the period when most solidarity movements were established and when consensus about means and methods was less affected by factionalism – allows us to appreciate the multiple ways in which opinions, radical friendships, and personal connections formed at a local level and across national boundaries and borders. Studying these relations over time allows us to trace how different national processes of meaning making and alliance building converged to form a transnational consensus. This consensus was always brittle, as it necessarily had to overwrite inherent contentions over the interpretation of Palestine. Studying its emergence and decontestation allows us to appreciate the forces at play in forming a global consensus.

In order to understand how the Left in various countries came around to the Palestinian cause, and how they then established a global interpretation of the question of Palestine and the appropriate political response to the ethical challenge it presented, we adopt a micro-sociological approach that zooms in on the primary

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<sup>9</sup> Paul T. Chamberlain (2011) *The Struggle Against Oppression Everywhere: The Global Politics of Palestinian Liberation*, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 47(1), p. 38.

<sup>10</sup> Karoline M. Quenzer (2019) Beyond Arab Nationalism? The PLO and its Intellectuals, 1967–1974, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 21(5), pp. 690–707.

<sup>11</sup> Mjriam A. Samra & Lubna Qutami (2020) Alterity Across Generations: A Comparative Analysis of the 1950s Jeel al-Thawra and the 2006 Palestinian Youth Movement, *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 147, pp. 3–15; see also Nabil Shaath (2016) *Hayyati min al-Nakba ila al-Thawra* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq), pp. 165–205.

<sup>12</sup> Exceptions include Abdellali Hajjat (2006) Les comités Palestine (1970–1972): Aux origines du soutien de la cause palestinienne en France [On the origins of support for the Palestinian cause in France], *Revue d'études palestiniennes* [Review of Palestinian Studies], 98 (1), pp.74–92; and John Nieuwenhuys (2020) Belgium's Wider Peace Front? Isabelle Blume, the Peace Movement and the Issue of the Middle East (1950s–1970s), in: Kim Christiaens (eds) *International Solidarity in the Low Countries during the Twentieth Century: New Perspectives and Themes* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg), pp. 277–311.

<sup>13</sup> Chamberlain, *The Struggle Against Oppression Everywhere*, p. 28.

individuals involved in adopting and popularizing the Palestinian cause globally. This approach requires us to read into personal histories both from the Palestinian and the European side. We draw on the archives of Danish and Norwegian solidarity movements. When contextualized and read in tandem with Palestinian sources, these records can alleviate some of the gaps in the scattered, looted and destroyed Palestinian archives.<sup>14</sup>

### The Arab Debate over Palestine 1948–1967

Before the wider world adopted Palestine as a Third world battle against imperialism and colonialism, the question resonated deeply in an Arab context. In Arab publics, Palestine became a cause and a struggle for political actors seeking to legitimize themselves in the reorientation of the decolonizing era. For Arab nationalist, socialist, and communist groups – known from the 1950s onward as the Arab Left – the question of Palestine aligned with core concepts in their ideological arsenal and served to distinguish their positions vis-à-vis one another. All corners of the Arab Left agreed on the fundamentals: The loss of Palestine was the result of Zionist and Western colonialism in the region, and recapturing it required the mobilization of the Arab peoples. For Nasserists, recapturing Palestine would energize the unification of the Arabs. Consequently, Palestinian militants had to remain under Arab nationalist control, as happened when the Arab League founded the PLO in 1964. Arab communist parties took a cautious approach to Palestine, as the Soviet Union supported the 1947 UN Partition Plan and their allied Arab parties followed suit. Between the Communist and the Arab Nationalist line, a third position emerged. These young Marxist-Leninists saw Palestine as more than a pawn in Big Power rivalries or a step towards Arab unification. Equally critical of Moscow and the Arab regimes, they came to see Palestine as the condensation of the national and class contradictions plaguing the Middle East.<sup>15</sup>

In June 1967, many New Left militants who previously had supported Gamal Abdel Nasser turned fully against the idea of Arab leadership and instead embraced the idea of a popular struggle organized locally and embraced globally. This shift intersected with an ideological critique of ‘stagism,’ the notion that the national bourgeoisie had to gain power as a step toward the realization of a socialist system. Contrary to this, and initially inspired by the FLN (National Liberation Front) in Algeria, many Arab leftists began to favor organic organization from below, which was proving successful in Vietnam, Cuba, and other Third World anti-colonial liberation movements. The argument for a people’s war gradually was put forth from the late 1950s onward by critical Marxist thinkers breaking with the established Arab communist parties in publications such as the Beirut-based *al-Hurriya*. Many of them found common ground in the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM), which, although formally pro-Nasser,

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<sup>14</sup> Hana Sleiman (2016) The Paper Trail of a Liberation Movement, *Arab Studies Journal* XXIV(1), pp. 42–67.

<sup>15</sup> Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*; and Rosemary Sayigh (1979), *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Books); Walid Kazziha (1975) *Revolutionary Transformation in the Arab World: Habash and His Comrades from Nationalism to Marxism* (London: C. Knight); Rashid Khalidi (2007) *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (London: Oneworld Publications).

contained the seeds of dissent that would materialize after 1967 in the form of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP).<sup>16</sup>

Although Palestine remained contentious for Arab leftists, they agreed on certain things. They articulated the primary ‘near enemy’ as Arab reactionaries, personified by Western-aligned monarchs and the countries that formed the 1955 Baghdad Pact with Britain and the US. The ‘far enemy’ was initially Western imperialism writ large. As British and French power receded in the Middle East, Arab intellectuals began to associate imperialism with global American hegemony.<sup>17</sup> This shift crystallized during the early 1960s when the African-American struggle and the Vietnam War began to feature regularly in publications such as *al-Hurriya*.<sup>18</sup> In order to separate its liberation battle from the agenda of Arab regimes, a break was necessary at the ideological and institutional level. This break occurred when *fidayeen*, who had carried out attacks and incursions into Israeli territory since the early 1950s, were transformed into organized military units. The eventual integration of *fidayeen* groups into the PLO in 1968 marked the transformation of Palestine from a regional cause directed by Arab states to an international cause supported widely by the global Left. The aim was, as the Fatah intellectual Elias Sanbar later put it, to reverse Nasser’s plan of uniting the Arabs in order to secure the return of Palestine, and instead secure the return – with the Palestinians themselves as front troops and leaders – in order to unite the Arabs.<sup>19</sup> It is to the transnational dimension of this transformation that the article now will turn.

### The Suggestive Power of Palestine

Over the past decade, many new studies have shown how the Palestinian cause emerged and resonated around the world. In most countries, June 1967 truly marked the beginning of a more pro-Palestinian stance on the Left, but not everywhere. In Urdu poetry before and after 1967, themes of displacement, exile, the legitimacy of armed struggle, and the complicity of Arab reactionary regimes universalized Palestine as an emblem of both local and Third World struggles against colonialism, imperialism, and oppression.<sup>20</sup> Equally in Cuba, solidarity with the Palestinian struggle emerged already during Cuba’s socialist era in the early 1960s.<sup>21</sup> In Latin American countries with large Palestinian *mahjar* migrant communities, such as Argentina and Chile, leftists learned about the conflict from Levantine migrants in civic associations. This prepared the ground for the emergence of Palestine as a left-wing cause when the PLO appeared on the scene as

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<sup>16</sup> Laure Guirguis (2020) Dismount the horse to pick some roses’: Militant Enquiry in Lebanese New Left Experiments, 1968–73, in: L. Guirguis (eds) *The Arab Left – Histories and Legacies, 1950s–1970s* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

<sup>18</sup> Sune Haugbolle (2017) The New Arab Left and 1967, *British Journal for Middle Eastern Studies* 44(4), pp. 497–512.

<sup>19</sup> Elias Sanbar (2010) *Dictionnaire amoureux de la Palestine* [A Love Dictionary of Palestine] (Paris: Plon), p. 306.

<sup>20</sup> Shahab Ahmad (1998) The Poetics of Solidarity: Palestine in Modern Urdu Poetry, *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 18, pp. 29–64.

<sup>21</sup> Robert A. Henry (2019) Global Palestine: International Solidarity and the Cuban Connection, *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies*, 18(2), pp. 239–262.

the obvious liaison and object of solidarity in 1964.<sup>22</sup> Around the same time, Arab student groups in France began to merge with and influence the budding youth rebellion, leading to the adoption of a pro-Palestinian stance in organizations such as the Situationist International.<sup>23</sup> Communist bloc regimes kept close to the Soviet line, but in countries with some degree of openness such as Hungary, avant-garde intellectuals adopted Palestine on an even par with Vietnam.<sup>24</sup> In Vietnam, freedom fighters championed discourses of cultural, military, and political solidarity with the Palestinian struggle. Palestinians embraced and returned such discourses.<sup>25</sup> We also know that Palestine was introduced on the American progressive political scene early on, not least due to Malcolm X's visits to the region in the early 1960s. The Palestinian cause since has played a role in African American and Black Power activism and struggles for equality throughout the 1960s and 1970s. During this period, Palestine came to be seen by different actors – if by no means by the entire American Left – as either the vanguard in the fight against the global imperialist order or a threat to the democratic socialist values of Israel.<sup>26</sup>

In most Western European countries, the discovery of Palestine as a front-line cause happened through intense controversy and political struggle.<sup>27</sup> Palestine became part of internal struggles in Euro-communist movements, between Moscow-leaning 'oldies' and Third World-oriented New Left Marxists who embraced confrontation with social democratic and ossified communist parties. Everywhere, the questions of Israel, anti-semitism, and the Holocaust loomed large. In West Germany, Palestine was naturally deeply controversial and as such the perfect cause for far-Left student activists such as Ulrike Meinhof, who sought to confront both bourgeois society and the established

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<sup>22</sup> See for example, Jessica S. Mor (2014) The Question of Palestine in the Argentine Political Imaginary: Anti-Imperialist Thought from Cold War to Neoliberal Order, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research*, 20(2), pp. 183–197.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Wolin (2012) *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), pp. 22–67; Mjriam Abu Samra, (2020) The Palestinian Student Movement 1948–1982: A study of popular organisation and transnational mobilisation, PhD. dissertation, University of Oxford; and Yoav Di-Capua (2021) Palestine comes to Paris: The global sixties and the making of a Universal Cause, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 50(1), pp. 19–50.

<sup>24</sup> Zsuzsa László (2018) Limits of Solidarity – Hungarian Intelligentsia and the Middle East in the Cold War, in: *Mezosfera*. Available at: <http://mezosfera.org/limits-of-solidarity/>, accessed November 2, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Maha Nassar (2014) 'My Struggle Embraces Every Struggle': Palestinians in Israel and Solidarity with Afro-Asian Liberation Movements, *Arab Studies Journal* 22(1), pp. 74–101; Eryn Lê Espiritu (2018) Cold War Entanglements, Third World Solidarities: Vietnam and Palestine, 1967–75, *Canadian Review of American Studies* 48(3), p. 367.

<sup>26</sup> Michael R. Fischbach, (2018) *Black Power and Palestine: Transnational Countries of Color* (Stanford: Stanford University Press); Michael R. Fischbach (2019) *The Movement and the Middle East: How the Arab-Israeli Conflict Divided the American Left* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

<sup>27</sup> For a recent study of the Italian revolutionary left and Palestine see Luca Falciola (2020), Transnational Relationships between the Italian Revolutionary Left and Palestinian Militants during the Cold War, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 22(4), pp. 31–70. The emergence of Palestine Solidarity in Scandinavia has been tentatively examined in a PhD dissertation and three MA theses: K. S. Bjerregaard (2010) 'Et Undertrykt Folk har Altid Ret: Solidaritet med den 3. Verden I 1960'erne og 1970'ernes Danmark' [An Oppressed People is Always Right: Solidarity with the Third World in Denmark in the 1960s and 1970s], PhD dissertation, Roskilde University; J. Rasmussen, A. Tolstoy & M. Iversen (2010) Palaestina-Solidaritet: En Undersøgelse af Palaestina-Solidaritet på den Danske Venstrefløj fra 1967–1978 [Palestine solidarity: An investigation of palestine solidarity on the Danish Left, 1967–1978], MA thesis, Roskilde University; S. N. Fredriksen (2020), Discovering Palestine: How Norwegian Solidarity with Palestine Emerged in the Global 1960s, MA thesis, University of Oslo; T. Vågstøl (2007) Den Norske Solidaritetsrørsle for Palestina, 1967–1986 [The Norwegian movement for solidarity with Palestine, 1967–1986], MA thesis, Oslo University.

Left.<sup>28</sup> The strong presence of Palestinian students and organizations in West Germany played a key role in making this repositioning possible.<sup>29</sup> These struggles reflected a deep ethical and ideological repositioning. European socialists were haunted by the mass extermination of Jews during WWII and hesitated to view Palestine independently from the Jewish question. Doing so required them to transgress established norms of the Left. The alignment they had built with Israel as a socialist state was both institutional – through close cooperation and support between social democratic parties and labour unions – but also personal and affective.<sup>30</sup> Many European leftists spent time in Israeli kibbutzim and some of them came to appreciate Israel as a socialist experiment engaged in a struggle for survival. For others, as we will see, the kibbutz experience resulted in a moment of intense ideological reorientation and decontestation.

Two such people were the pioneers of the Norwegian Palestine Committee (Palestinakomiteen) Finn Sjøe and Peder Martin Lysestøl. Independently of each other, both spent time in Israel in the mid-1960s.<sup>31</sup> An early member of the Norwegian New Left Socialist People's Party (SF) formed in 1963, Lysestøl went to Israel in 1964 to study kibbutz socialism, but he ended up befriending Palestinian peasants near the kibbutz where he was staying. This triggered an interest in Arab politics, which he later pursued in Belgrade and Cairo. During his time in Cairo, Lysestøl also visited Gaza and became close friends with members of Fatah. Finn Sjøe traveled to Israel first in 1965 and again shortly after the 1967 war. A young law student from a conservative background, he still supported Israel at this point, but a chance visit to the Golan Heights with a group of American tourists made him realize that he was on the wrong team. As the tourists cheered at the sight of destroyed Syrian tanks, Sjøe remembers:

*this blond Norwegian began to feel unwell. What the hell am I doing here? A shrill reply came shortly after (...) 'Oh look, this is exactly what our boys are doing in Vietnam!!' (...) her cry was like a horse kick in the gut. What the US was doing in Vietnam was easy to understand. But now I realized that Israel was engaged in the same brutal kind of warfare. Targeted, raw occupation. Why had I not been able to see that before?*<sup>32</sup>

Personal stories from other European countries fit this picture of a gradual conversion rather than a sudden epiphany in June 1967. The Danish historian Morten Thing, who in the late 1960s became an important pro-Palestinian voice, describes a similar story of political reorientation in his memoir.<sup>33</sup> After returning to Denmark from a kibbutz stay, the increasingly radical Vietnam anti-war demonstrations, the June 1967

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<sup>28</sup> Joseph. Ben Prestel (2019) Heidelberg, Beirut, und die 'Dritte Welt': Palästinensische Gruppen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (1956–1972) [Heidelberg, Beirut, and the 'Third World': Palestinian Groups in the German Federal Republic (1956–1972)], *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 3, pp. 442–466.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 442–466.

<sup>30</sup> There are, however, exceptions to this general trend. Evelien Gans has shown that Dutch opinion became pro-Israeli mainly after the 1956 Suez crisis at a time when the Netherlands was growing bitter over its loss of influence over its former colonies in South-East Asia. See for example. Evelien Gans (2016) *Philosemitism? Ambivalences regarding Israel*, in: Remco Ensels (eds), *The Holocaust, Israel and "the Jew": Histories of Antisemitism in Postwar Dutch Society* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press), pp. 163–180.

<sup>31</sup> Et Akutt Behov for Solidaritet [An urgent need for solidarity] (2019), *Fritt Palestina* 2, pp. 6–19.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>33</sup> Morten Thing (2017) *Min Egen Historie* [My own story] (Copenhagen: Nemos Bibliotek).



Arab-Israeli war, and his work for the leftist journal *Politisk Revy* led him to adopt a radically different view of Palestine. Thing recalls feeling ashamed that he previously had supported Israel, which he now had come to view as ‘the last European colony in a long history of violent oppression and mass murder in Latin America, Africa, and Australia.’<sup>34</sup>

Palestine did not simply attract attention because of its strategic importance. It certainly fit the ideological matrix of New Left groups that were skeptical of Great Power-led internationalism and preferred to support resistance from below. However, Palestine also had an emotional draw that served to recruit and concentrate political sensibilities. The entanglement of the Jewish Question and the Question of Palestine made it a controversial topic for the Left, which fit well with the controversy of those on the New Left who felt that world politics had been misrepresented by their national media and should be reinterpreted through the lens of anti-imperialism. The Palestinian organizations and particularly the PLO enhanced and curated this draw in their ‘global offensive.’<sup>35</sup> The PLO set up foreign relations and arts and cinema units, circulated English-language magazines and other publications, and actively sought contact with solidarity groups around the world.<sup>36</sup> The PLO also formed alliances with other liberation movements, not least the FLN in Algeria which assisted with logistical and military support. Fatah sent soldiers to train and study guerilla tactics in North Vietnam as early as 1966.<sup>37</sup> The slogans of transforming Beirut into an ‘Arab Hanoi’ and making the Middle East ‘a second Vietnam’ resonated in student milieus around the world, including in Denmark and Norway.<sup>38</sup> This was not, however, a one-way communication. A crucial part of the labor that created the suggestive power of Palestine was done by Palestinians living in the diaspora as well as by solidarity activists. The latter’s gradual gravitation toward Palestine and ensuing entanglement with Palestinians, we argue, produced the ideological framework of Palestine as a global cause. It was curated, but also it was created organically through exchange, friendship, and travel.

The production of Palestine as a global cause happened unevenly and over time. It depended on differentiated experiences of oppression and struggle against systems of domination like imperialism, capitalism, and settler colonialism. Through adaptation, conversation, and exchange, Palestine became part of a wider dialogue on the global Left over the appropriate means to analyze and confront power. For indigenous movements, the question of Palestine that emerged between 1964 and 1973 clarified notions of unequal citizenship, such as the denial of property rights, movement, or settlement.<sup>39</sup> For European leftists, it aided their ability to transgress established, sensitive

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 132. See also A. Reimann, Letters from Amman: Dieter Kunzelmann and the Origins of German Anti-Zionism during the late 1960s, in: Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey (eds), *A Revolution of Perception? Consequences and Echoes of 1968* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), pp. 69–88.

<sup>35</sup> Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive*, 2012.

<sup>36</sup> See for example Dina Matar (2018) PLO and Cultural Activism: Mediating Liberation Aesthetics in Revolutionary Contexts, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, 38(2), pp. 354–364.

<sup>37</sup> Espiritu, *Cold War Entanglements*, pp. 352–386.

<sup>38</sup> On Beirut as an Arab Hanoi, see Fawaz Trabulsi (2001) De la Suisse orientale au Hanoi arabe, une ville en quête des rôles [From Switzerland of the Orient to Arab Hanoi: A city in search of roles], in: Jade Tabet (ed) *Beyrouth – La brûlure des rêves* [Beirut: The burning of dreams] (Paris: Autrement), pp. 28–41.

<sup>39</sup> David Lloyd & Laura Pulido (2010) In the Long Shadow of the Settler: On Israeli and U.S. Colonialisms, *American Quarterly*, 64(4), pp. 795–809.

narratives about the Middle East conflict. This transgression in turn carved out a new position where Palestine came to be seen as part of social revolutions promoted by the New Left. The very idea of settler colonialism, which since has become a leitmotiv for anti-imperialist struggle, emerged out of the Palestinian solidarity movement and first was formulated by the Palestinian thinker and activist Fayeze Sayigh, and then translated into a European context by the French Marxist academic Maxime Rodinson.<sup>40</sup> The fact that Palestine became emblematic of these multiple struggles, yet at the same time achieved a universal meaning can be ascribed to the globalization of political culture which in turn fostered novel forms of political mobilization. With this background, the article now moves to analyze two cases of how the question of Palestine emerged, developed and interacted with similar processes around the world during the crucial decade before and after the June 1967 war

### Finding Palestine in Denmark and Norway

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Danish and Norwegian solidarity with Palestine emerged out of New Left and student milieus and movements and the experiences that these groups had accumulated through their mobilization against the war in Vietnam and several other causes, including Algeria, Cuba and South Africa. They depended on personal contacts established by a few individuals, in the case of Norway primarily Lystøl and Sjøe, and in the case of Denmark, the Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani. Experiences from mobilization against the Vietnam War in particular translated into a repertoire of contention that included demonstrations, the publication of solidarity magazines, and new ideological positioning in the Palestine solidarity work. These experiences also gave the Left in both countries a more global and radical outlook. As a result, by the early 1970s, international committees and sub-committees devoted to particular causes had become *de rigueur* in all Left movements.<sup>41</sup> However, it was only after the 1967 war that Palestine began to emerge as a central issue. It would be another two years before support for the Palestinian struggle crystalized into an ideologically coherent and consistent phenomenon. In Denmark, this happened in 1969 and only after pioneer activists had established personal connections with Palestinian organizations. In Norway, a handful of committed activists set up Arbeidsgruppen for et Fritt Palestina [Working Group for a Free Palestine] in 1969. After participating in the Second World Conference for Palestine in Amman in September 1970, where they confirmed their institutional ties with Fatah, the Working Group founded *Palestinakomiteen* [the Palestine Committee]. The committee quickly began publishing the monthly journal *Fritt Palestina* [Free Palestine] and setting up local reading groups, participating in public debate, and inviting Palestinian representatives to Norway.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Fayeze Sayigh (1965) *Zionist Colonialism in Palestine* (Beirut: PLO Research Center). Maxime Rodinson (1973) *Israel: A Settler-Colonial State?* Translated by David Thorstad (Monad Press). Rodinson first articulated the notion of settler colonialism in an essay in Jean-Paul Sartre's famous journal *Les Temps Modernes* immediately after the June 1967 war. Rodinson likely had read Sayigh's work as the 1965 booklet was indeed translated into English, French and Swedish.

<sup>41</sup> Bjerregaard, Et Undertrykt Folk har Altid Ret, p. 377.

<sup>42</sup> Frederiksen, *Discovering Palestine* (2020). For more on the importance of the Amman conference see, for example, Sorcha Thomson, Pelle V. Olsen and Sune Haugbølle (2022) Palestine Solidarity Conferences in the Global Sixties, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, (51:1), pp. 27–49.

From the beginning, the Norwegian Palestine Committee leaned toward Fatah. Their leading members were Maoists, and through Lysestøl's initial Palestinian contacts in Cairo, a connection was made to Maoist factions in Fatah, particularly the intellectual PLO leader Munir Shafiq, who in the early 1970s became a close aide of Yassir Arafat.<sup>43</sup> When the committee invited Shafiq to speak in Oslo in May 1971, he was one of the first Fatah representatives to deliver a public lecture in a Western country. At a global level, Fatah dominated the influence over Palestine solidarity movements. In contrast, the PFLP only managed to control a few locations, including West Berlin, Chile, and Denmark.<sup>44</sup> Denmark stands out in this respect. From 1969 and well into the 1970s, PFLP was unrivaled in the landscape of Palestine solidarity in Denmark, primarily due to the early influence of Ghassan Kanafani who married a Danish woman, Anni Kanafani, in 1962, while some of his relatives took residence in Denmark. His cousin Nabil Kanafani made friends with New Left activists and writers like the Danish modernist poet Ivan Malinovski. Together, they translated the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish and published it in *Politisk Revy* and Danish newspapers. Solidarity activists visited the Kanafanis in Beirut and learned from the intrepid educator Ghassan Kanafani, who in addition to his influential literary work edited the PFLP journal *al-Hadaf* and made its offices an open house for foreigners interested in the cause. Interestingly, his own turn from a mainly Arab nationalist framework toward a Marxist-Leninist reading of the conflict was partly influenced by his brother-in-law, a member of the Danish Communist Party.<sup>45</sup> From these first connections, a small cluster of activists grew into a formalized group called Palaestinakomiteen [The Palestine Committee]. Like in most European countries, their agitation went up against popular opinion, and the sympathy and support for Israel that had characterized the Danish Left since 1948 remained strong. Therefore, Palestine literally had to be found, or 'invented' and decontested before a change of opinion could take place on the Left.

The gradual decontestation is visible in New Left magazines, most importantly *Politisk Revy*, published bi-weekly in Copenhagen between 1963 and 1987. Their reporting contributed significantly to the emergence of Palestine as a leftist cause after June 1967. In the early and mid-1960s, *Politisk Revy* published critical articles about the war in Vietnam and other Third World liberation struggles. When it came to Palestine, however, the magazine toed the pro-Israeli line that characterized all of the Danish Left. Even after the June 1967 war, several of the articles published in *Politisk Revy* continued to view the Israeli-Palestinian conflict separately from other anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles. An article from June 1967 proclaimed that to support Nasser would be the same as supporting 'the elimination of the Jewish state.'<sup>46</sup> The author of the article further argued that 'supporting Israel in the Middle East and opposing the US in Asia won't make you less of a leftist' since 'Israel is not an

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<sup>43</sup> A Maoist tendency inside Fatah crystallized between 1972 and 1974 in Beirut. It was made up of "Palestinians, Lebanese, Arabs, and Non-Arabs and its leading figures were Munir Shafiq, Muhammad al-Bahays and Muhammad Sultan al-Tamimi. See Manfred Sing (2011) *Brothers in Arms: How Palestinian Maoists Turned Jihadists*, *Die Welt des Islams* 51(1), pp. 1–44.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Talal Zoghby, former representative of the PFLP in Denmark, Copenhagen, 7. February 2020.

<sup>45</sup> Stefan Wild (1975) *Ghassan Kanafani: The Life of a Palestinian* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz), p. 22.

<sup>46</sup> *Politisk Revy*, 80, June 1967, p. 5.

imperialist state.<sup>47</sup> June 1967 marked the beginning of a more critical line. Gradually, this pro-Palestinian position replaced support for Israel and became synonymous with *Politisk Revy*, culminating in a special issue on Palestine published in 1970.<sup>48</sup>

### The Meeting

In spite of *Politisk Revy*'s 'discovery' of Palestine, the majority of its coverage remained dedicated to Danish culture and politics and other New Left and global issues. The first Danish publications to systematically express solidarity with the Palestinian struggle were *Kommunistisk Orientering* [*Communist Orientation*] and *Ungkommunisten* [*The Communist Youth*]. Both were associated with the small Maoist group Kommunistisk Arbejdskreds [Communist Working Circle]. Kommunistisk Arbejdskreds [KAK] was formed in 1963 when the Danish Communist Party excluded Gottfried Appel due to his Chinese loyalties. In 1968, Appel created Kommunistisk Ungdomsforbund [Communist Youth League], the youth wing of KAK, which was responsible for publishing *Ungkommunisten*, which became the main outlet for KAK's Marxist-Leninist views on Palestine. Both magazines were published by Futura, a small press in Copenhagen owned by Appel and subsidized by the Chinese embassy between 1964-1968. After 1969, KAK broke with the Chinese communist party over disputes about the role of workers in Europe.

When KAK turned its attention to Palestine, it offered radical and militant support for the PFLP. Already in the immediate aftermath of the 1967 war, *Kommunistisk Orientering* put forth an analysis that emphasized the contradictions of Arab bourgeois states and oil-rich countries on the one hand and Arab workers and peasants on the other as the main reason for the lack of a unified Arab revolutionary response to Israel. 'Soviet and Israeli Aggression,' was one of the first articles in *Kommunistisk Orientering* to discuss the situation in Palestine specifically. The article described the 1967 war as a coming together of American and British imperialism and Soviet revisionism in order to 'strangle the liberation struggle of an oppressed people.'<sup>49</sup> The article ended with a call for 'all Marxist-Leninists,' to support the Palestinians.<sup>50</sup> Due to their strict adherence to Marxist-Leninist ideology and analysis, *Ungkommunisten* and *Kommunistisk Orientering* eventually came to support PFLP unconditionally. Inspired by PFLP's political manifesto, the September 1969 issue of *Ungkommunisten* told its readers that 'it is necessary that we arm ourselves with a scientific and revolutionary ideology that belongs to the proletariat and finds support among the classes with nothing to lose and everything to win.'<sup>51</sup> As we saw above, Palestine was already on KAK's radar in 1967. It was not until early 1969, however, that Appel and KAK discovered PFLP through *al-Hadaf*, the organization's weekly magazine. Unlike the Danish Palestine Committee which, as we will see, was established through contacts and collaboration with members of the Kanafani family and other Palestinians living in Denmark, KAK discovered Palestine through their own already-formed political theory and strategy. While KAK did receive information via Palestinian workers in

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> *Politisk Revy*, 153, July 1970.

<sup>49</sup> *Kommunistisk Orientering* 11, June 1967, pp. 1-4.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> *Ungkommunisten*, 7, September 1969, p. 11.

Copenhagen and southern Sweden, it was their view of an imminent victory in Vietnam that made the group look for other liberation movements to support. Scanning the world through travels and reading, KAK began supporting the PFLP in Palestine, but also other movements in Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, Rhodesia, and South Africa.

In Norway, the ideological reading of the conflict that emerged at the preparatory stage of the Palestine Committee prior to September 1970 was similarly Maoist, yet more wedded to Fatah's formulations. Through Lysestøl's direct contacts, the group acquired Fatah pamphlets, which provided them with guidance and direction in their own 'crash course' in Middle East history and politics. At this point, there was no Middle East Studies program at any Norwegian university, and they therefore had to read up on their own. Like their peers in Denmark, they read Rodinson and Kanafani, and others like the Belgian Jewish Trotskyite and anti-Zionist Nathan Weinstock, who analyzed the Middle East conflict through the lens of class and race.<sup>52</sup> Through intense study group meetings, the small core of activists built their intellectual arsenal, while expanding their contacts with Fatah. By early 1970, Lysestøl openly advocated full support for the Palestinian cause in Norway, and in August 1970 he, along with colleagues from Denmark and Norway, participated in meetings with Fatah's central committee in Gothenburg, Sweden, to coordinate the effort regionally.<sup>53</sup> Henceforth, Fatah's representation in Stockholm became the organizational link for all of Scandinavia, albeit with ongoing tensions over PFLP's strong influence in Denmark.

From 1969 onwards, regular travel activity to the region, and visits by Palestinian activists the other way around, became part of the encounter and the solidarity work. In the late summer of that same year, members of KAK's youth wing travelled to Beirut to establish contact with the PFLP. They visited camps, received military training, and brought back PFLP publications and other materials, which were published in translation in *Ungkommunisten*.<sup>54</sup> During the summer of 1970, four other KAK members spent a month in Lebanon and Jordan where they again met with PFLP leaders, including George Habash.<sup>55</sup> A couple of months later, Appel and his partner, Ulla Hauton, travelled to Lebanon and Jordan where they took part in the second World Congress on Palestine. The congress was organized by the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS),<sup>56</sup> and both Lysestøl and Sjøe were present, although

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<sup>52</sup> Nathan Weinstock (1970) *The Truth about Israel and Zionism* (London: Pathfinder). In Scandinavia, the Swedish journalist Staffan Beckmann's work had a big impact on Scandinavian Palestine activists. See Staffan Beckmann (1969) *Palestina och Israel: En analys från vänster* [Palestine and Israel: An analysis from the left] (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren).

<sup>53</sup> There is no record of the meeting, but Lysestøl refers to it and comprehensive correspondence between the Norwegian Palestine Committee and Fatah's Scandinavia office in Stockholm throughout the 1970s indicate a closely coordinated partnership starting in September 1970. Interview with Peder-Martin Lysetøl, Bergen, 6 March 2020. The correspondence is in the Kjell Bygstad Archive, ARBAK, Oslo, Dcd -L0001.

<sup>54</sup> Sarah von Essen, Sebastian Lang-Jensen, Rasmus Mariager & Ditlev Tamm (2009). *PET's overvågning af den antiimperialistiske venstrefløj 1945–1989* [PET's Surveillance of the Antiimperialist Left 1945–1989] Copenhagen: Justitsministeriet. PET- Kommissionens beretning, Bind. 9, p. 152.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>56</sup> For more on GUPS, see Mjriam A. Samra & Lubna Qutami, *Alterity Across Generations*, p. 15; and Mjriam Abu Samra, (2020) "The Palestinian Student Movement 1948–1982: A Study of Popular Organisation and Transnational Mobilisation," PhD. dissertation, Oxford University.

neither of them remembers the meetings in details, and were socializing with the Danes.<sup>57</sup> In addition to liberation organizations from the Third World, a broad range of Palestine solidarity committees from Africa, South America, the USA, Europe and Asia also took part.<sup>58</sup> As part of the conference, the guests met with representatives of the Palestinian organizations, visited refugee camps, *fidaye* training camps, schools, and workshops.<sup>59</sup> During their visit, Appel and Hauton met with leading PFLP members George Habash, Wadie Haddad, Bassam Abu Sharif, and Marwan al-Fahoum, who became their main liaison.<sup>60</sup> It was most likely during these meetings that KAK decided to begin operating as a Danish undercover cell that would support the PFLP with money and through clandestine operations.<sup>61</sup>

The Norwegians had an equally eventful month of September in Jordan. Amman at this point was buzzing with interest in the Palestinian cause, drawing foreign volunteers, sympathizers, journalists, and spies to it like a magnet. Most of them were granted formal interviews, where Palestinian leaders could portray their struggle to the outside world, thereby helping to internationalize and galvanize support for their cause. Many of these interviews could be read in Western newspapers and magazines such as *L'Express*, *Life* and *Time* between 1967 and 1970. Meanwhile, spies sent reports back to their foreign ministries, detailing the challenges posed by guerilla organizations and speculating about the ability of such thought and action to spread in Western democracies.<sup>62</sup> Palestinians were therefore naturally apprehensive, also of the many solidarity activists. The Norwegians, however, they knew and trusted. Sjøe and Lysetøl were given privileged access to Fatah's military bases and even went on missions with Fatah fighters to the West Bank. Sjøe describes one of those trips in vivid detail in Lysetøl's 1973 book *Palestinerne* [The Palestinians]:

*The guerilla soldiers know what they are doing. The area is ingeniously equipped. The group leader pats an anti-aircraft gun contentedly. 'We don't have too many, the Israelis know that. But those we have do a good job.' We stop on a mountaintop. From the Jordan Valley far below, the occupied land rises. A small fellow in khaki comes up to us. 'This is Abu Saleh. 13 years old. He has crossed over six times.' I don't get it. 'Six times over in the Jordan Valley doing operations.' The little guy smiles, sensing what we are talking about. 'He was born in al-Karameh, the large refugee camp outside Amman from 1948. His brother was killed by the Zionists up by Lake Nazareth four years ago.' I have to ask the question: '13 years old, a hard and cruel life, doesn't the 'race-hatred' grow in youth like him?' The soldier has heard the question before and says something to the boy. The boy answers and the interpreter translates: 'He says that many of his age who are still wasting away in the refugee camp probably feel like that. But those who have attended the school of the liberation movement*

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<sup>57</sup> Authors' Interview with Lystestøl, Oslo, 6 March 2020; and Email correspondence with Sjøe, 13 November 2020.

<sup>58</sup> *Falastin* (1970), 5, p. 41.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>60</sup> Sarah von Essen, Sebastian Lang-Jensen, Rasmus Mariager & Ditlev Tamm, PET's overvågning af den antiimperialistiske venstrefløj 1945–1989 [PET's Surveillance of the Antiimperialist Left 1945–1989] Bind. 9, p.154.

<sup>61</sup> Bjerregaard, *Et Undertrykt Folk har Altid Ret*, pp. 410–411.

<sup>62</sup> Di-Capua (2021) *Palestine Comes to Paris*.

*and learned why we fight don't feel like that. We want to go home, use the houses and farms that our people were expelled from. We don't want to fight ordinary Jews. They are like us. They are being cajoled by the Zionists. It is the dangerous Zionists we are fighting against.' You always get this answer when you talk to children and youth in the liberation movement. The political education is solid. Racism is fought through political learning – and with a weapon in hand.*<sup>63</sup>

The above quote is indicative of the Norwegians' position. They observe, but also participate alongside Fatah. They accept some level of ideological political education, because it serves the cause of fighting racism and eventually liberating Palestine. Like their Danish peers, the Norwegians were convinced that the battle had to be fought at a popular level and that the role of outsiders was not to critique, but rather to convey the indigenous interpretive frame. The first issue of *Fritt Palestina*, published shortly after the formation of PalKom in September 1970, sums up their philosophy in four points. First, Palestine is a key conflict in the world today because '60% of all oil is produced here and about 20% of U.S. foreign profit comes from the Middle East. The day the people take over here the profit ends. That victory will be a decisive blow to the global exploitative system of U.S. imperialism. And the [Palestinian] victory will give power and strength to the struggle of other Arab peoples.' Second, the Palestinian struggle must be supported because it 'has reached a higher level than any other place outside of South East Asia.' Not just by 'spreading guerilla attacks against Israel, but through people's political work and the people's militia.' Third, as Christians the Norwegian people has a historical relation with Palestine, through schooling and socialization. They therefore pay attention. According to the article, 'Bourgeois propaganda' has used this alleged Christian solidarity and affinity with Israel to their advantage, but PalKom pledged to work toward turning the tide. Flanked by a Fatah logo, the article ends by asserting that PalKom will strive to forge solidarity in Norway with the Palestinian people's liberation struggle, fight the 'false myths,' and show that 'the powers that they [the Palestinians] are fighting against' are the same powers that exploit the Norwegian people. This equation between popular struggle across borders leads to four points that sum up their intentions:

1. Full support for the Palestinian people's national liberation struggle on their own terms
2. Full support for the creation of a democratic Palestine, where Jews, Christians and Muslims have the same rights
3. Fight U.S Imperialism and Zionist Israel
4. Fight all Great Power solutions that will guarantee the Zionist Israeli state's existence and crush the Palestinian people's liberation struggle.<sup>64</sup>

We see here the result of the entangled relationship between Maoist student activists and Fatah in condensed programmatic form. Palestine is part of a global anti-imperialist struggle, it is a people's war, and supporting it does not signify anti-Semitism but rather anti-Zionism, and whatever the Palestinian people (read: their legitimate

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<sup>63</sup> Peder M. Lysestøl (1970) *Palestinerne* (Oslo: Forlaget Oktober A/S), p. 199.

<sup>64</sup> *Fritt Palestina* 1, 1970.

representative in Fatah) decide is the correct interpretive frame; the U.S., European states, and the Soviet Union are all part of a scheme to break their struggle. Palestinians are valiant but they need help and protection. This help will serve Norwegians as well, because they are subject to the same global (capitalist) exploitation. Most importantly, the Norwegians and many other solidarity activists saw it as their mission to tell the truth about the historical and contemporary presence of Palestinians as well as to counter the interpretations that seek to deny Palestine and the Palestinians.

The reading implies a clear hierarchy of revolutionary knowledge production and transfer. Since Palestinians are the ones engaged in the struggle, they can teach the other side. Direct engagement is therefore a crucial part of solidarity work. On the Danish side, travel back and forth and meetings with PFLP continued. However, whereas the relations between the Norwegian PalKom and Fatah were out in the open, PFLP's contacts in Denmark split between an official partnership with the Danish Palestine Committee and a clandestine liaison with KAK, which continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In the late 1980s, the small KAK group made headlines as The Blekinge Street Gang when Danish police discovered an apartment they secretly had used as their headquarters. The 'gang' carried out a number of bank robberies throughout the 1970s and 1980s in support of the PFLP, and also compiled a list of pro-Zionists in Denmark which they handed over to the PFLP's Marwan al-Fahoum. These so-called 'Z-files' later caused great controversy when the story was covered in the Danish press, as most of the people on the list were Jewish, leading to speculations that it was indeed a hit-list of sorts. Thanks to the work of Danish journalist Peter Øvig Knudsen who got access to police surveillance records the story now is well documented, albeit in a somewhat one-sided way that privileges police records and leaves out Palestinian voices.<sup>65</sup>

The disproportionate attention given to the Blekinge Street Gang unfortunately has come at the expense of the much larger solidarity group established almost simultaneously and also based on personal encounters and connections with the PFLP, namely the Danish Palestine Committee, which students at the School of Architecture in Copenhagen and their friends, many of whom had close, personal connections to Palestinians living in Denmark, established in 1969.<sup>66</sup> Beginning in 1970, The Danish Palestine Committee began publishing *Falastin* (after 1972 *Falastin Bulletin*) every two months. Other than *Falastin*, very few sources about the committee are available. It is clear from *Falastin*, however, that the committee exclusively supported the PFLP and that it framed the Palestinian struggle as an anti-imperialist class struggle whose long-term goal was to establish a socialist and democratic state in Palestine.<sup>67</sup> The support was based on a combination of close personal connections and a stringent theoretical and ideological analysis of the situation in the Middle East. The first issue of

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<sup>65</sup> Peter Ø. Knudsen (2007) *Blekingegadebanden I: Den Danske Celle, Blekingegadebanden II: Den Hårde Kerne* [The Blekinge Gang I: The Danish Cell, The Blekinge Gang II: The Hard Core] (Copenhagen: Gyldendal). See also Bjerregaard, *Et Undertrykt Folk har Altid Ret*, pp. 86–87. For a critique of Knudsen's books written by former members of the Blekinge Street Gang, see, for example Niels Jørgensen, Jan Weiman, and Torkil Lauesen (2014) *It is All About Politics*, in Gabriel Kuhn (eds) *Turning Money into Rebellion: The Unlikely Story of Denmark's Revolutionary Bank Robber* (Montreal: PM Press).

<sup>66</sup> Rasmussen, Tolstoy & Iversen, *Palaestina-Solidaritet*, pp. 43–44.

<sup>67</sup> *Falastin* 9, 1970.



*Falastin* began serializing PFLP's political manifesto.<sup>68</sup> *Falastin*, like the two KAK publications, published a large amount of translated PFLP material. This fact clearly placed the analytical, theoretical, and practical expertise with the Palestinians. While members of the committee most likely travelled and met with PFLP members outside of Denmark, *Falastin* never reported about such meetings, probably to protect its members. The Palestine Committee worked closely with the Danish branch of the Palestinian Workers Union (PWU), which was established in Copenhagen in 1970. PWU was the largest Palestinian organization in Denmark and had close links to the PFLP, regularly hosting meetings in Copenhagen with leaders from Beirut.

The entanglement between Palestinians and the global Left did not take place solely through personal connections and friendships. In fact, most of the Palestinian organizations, including the PLO, Fatah, DPFLP, and PFLP meticulously organized their efforts abroad and viewed this work as essential to the Palestinian revolution. Part of this work consisted of translating pamphlets, brochures, and political and ideological programs from Arabic into English, Spanish, and other languages. Another part of the work centered on the publication of magazines targeting a global audience, often in English. Fatah's bi-weekly English language magazine, *Fateh*, appeared in October 1969. *Fateh* wrote extensively about global solidarity with Palestine, including meetings, conferences, and demonstrations, the history of the conflict, Fatah's ideology, Palestinian cultural resistance, and other anti-imperialist struggles across the world.<sup>69</sup> In addition to *al-Hadaf*, PFLP's foreign relations committee began publishing the English language quarterly *PFLP Bulletin* in 1970.<sup>70</sup> Like *Fateh*, *PFLP Bulletin* spoke to a global audience and described the Palestinian struggle as part of wider Third World struggles. The publication of foreign language magazines was part of a concerted effort to internationalize the Palestinian cause.

In 1973, PFLP's internal magazine, *al-Munadil al-Thawri* [*The Revolutionary Fighter*], published by the organization's foreign relations committee, dedicated a special issue to PFLP's foreign relations. The special issue reported on the outcome of PFLP's third conference on foreign relations held in April 1973. Attending the conference were PFLP representatives from Algeria, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Italy, the Soviet Union, The United States, West Germany as well as several other countries.<sup>71</sup> The special issue outlined PFLP's strategy and future goals.<sup>72</sup> In Western Europe, the PFLP saw their strongest allies as the communist groups, workers' unions, New Left movements and organizations, and Palestinian students and workers.<sup>73</sup> In particular, the program emphasized the importance of revolutionary organizing among North Africans in France and Palestinians and Jordanians in West Germany and Scandinavia: 'Arab workers in Western Europe are an essential part of the socialist Arab revolution that must not be neglected. Therefore, our organizing abroad seeks to build party and union cadres armed with revolutionary proletarian class ideology.'<sup>74</sup> As part of their new international strategy, PFLP sought to increase the number of official visits, travels, and delegations both to and from the Middle East. In addition, PFLP hoped to use

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<sup>68</sup> *Falastin* 1, 1970, p. 2.

<sup>69</sup> *Fateh* 1, October 1969; *Fateh* 2, October 1969.

<sup>70</sup> *PFLP Bulletin* 8, December 1973; and *PFLP Bulletin* 9, March 1974.

<sup>71</sup> *al-Munadil al-Thawri* 6, July 1973, p. 5.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84–85.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26, p. 35.

their foreign offices and contacts with unions abroad to build support for their cause.<sup>75</sup> Last but not least, PFLP decided to continue the publication and translation of ‘revolutionary culture’ (*al-thaqafa al-thawriyya*), news and analysis in Arabic and foreign languages, including *al-Hadaf* and *PFLP Bulletin*.<sup>76</sup>

### Entanglement and Decontestation 1967–1973

The entanglement that occurred between Palestinians and Danish activists, as a result of the personal encounters that took place in the late 1960s, meant that the Palestinian struggle came to represent the vanguard of Third World liberation struggles and was made the host for global revolutionary ambitions for the Danish Left. In this process, PFLP emerged as the single most important Palestinian organization, even if it became an increasingly controversial partner after the group’s hi-jackings, kidnappings, and involvement in attacks on Israeli citizens. In contrast, the Norwegian PalKom embraced Fatah, viewing it as a representative of the people’s war in Palestine. Like in other parts of the world, the partnership and ensuing formulation of solidarity depended on the physical presence of particular Palestinians, Danes, Norwegians, and others at particular times and places. Equally, national debates and sensitivities mattered for the penetration of the decontestation process beyond the hard left. Ghassan Kanafani ensured the ubiquity of the PFLP in Denmark, but it was the receptivity and adaptation of Danish activists that made the organization relevant in Denmark. Equally, Lysestøl may have provided a direct link to Fatah that shaped the future direction of PalKom, but it was through the extensive Maoist student milieu and their organizational and intellectual labor that it found its political expression. These engagements spread from small vanguard circles in the late 1960s to the core of most parties to the left of the Social Democrats (which, like in most of Western Europe, remained largely pro-Israeli). In the process, disagreement arose within both Palestine Committees, leading eventually, from 1975 onwards, to the formation of competing Palestine solidarity movements, in addition to a large number of sub-committees devoted to Palestine within leftist parties and movements. Unlike in Denmark, beginning in 1976, medical solidarity became a cornerstone of Palestine solidarity in Norway. Relying on activists to organize donation campaigns and using their informal recruitment networks at hospitals across Norway, between 1976–1985, PalKom sent more than 200 Norwegian nurses and doctors to Lebanon where they worked with both PCRS (Palestine Red Crescent Society) and Fatah Medical Service. For the members of PalKom, medical solidarity was seen as part and parcel of their political commitment to and support for the Palestinian revolution and the PLO.<sup>77</sup>

Diverging theoretical approaches had consequences for the appropriate repertoire of contention. The activists around KAK stood for a radical line and were skeptical of demonstrations and other forms of solidarity work, which they deemed ineffective and

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 76.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, pp. 70–71.

<sup>77</sup> Authors’ Interview with Eldbjørg Holte, Oslo, November 23, 2021; authors’ interview with Ebba Wergeland, Oslo, November 18, 2021; E. Fosse (2013) *Med Livet I Hendene [With Life in my Hands]* (Oslo: Gyldendal); *For PLO i Libanon: Brev fra Palestina Komiteens Helseteam 1979–78* [For the PLO in Lebanon: Letter’s from the Palestine Committee’s Medical Team 1976–78] (Oslo: Palestinakomiteen, 1980).

often criticized.<sup>78</sup> The Danish Palestine Committee also called for ‘unconditional support for PFLP’<sup>79</sup> and publicly encouraged their readers to donate to their ‘Maskingevaerer til Palaestina’ (Machineguns for Palestine) campaign which they advertised in *Falastin*.<sup>80</sup> Unlike KAK, which toned down its contacts with Palestinians living in Denmark and the legal solidarity groups due to security reasons and fear of infiltration by agents and informers, the Palestine Committee attempted to mobilize the Danish Left more broadly, worked closely with other solidarity groups in Denmark and abroad, and frequently organized demonstrations and other public events.<sup>81</sup> In the first issue of *Falastin*, the committee described their primary aim as ‘increasing solidarity with and knowledge about the revolutionary liberation struggle of the Palestinian people. We hope to spread knowledge [about Palestine] since we find that the treatment of Palestine by the Danish press, TV, and radio has been both subjective and emotional.’<sup>82</sup> Just like their Norwegian namesakes, committee members actively mobilized knowledge production to document the existence of Palestine. In working toward this end, they devoted a large number of articles in *Falastin* to correcting what they saw as misinformation spread by the Danish press as well as to articles about the history of Palestine and the Palestinians.<sup>83</sup>

While *Falastin* almost exclusively published material related to Palestine and PFLP, the committee was part of the larger anti-imperialist milieu in Denmark and elsewhere in the world that mushroomed in the early 1970s. Working with Chile, Cuba, Vietnam and other solidarity committees, they often connected Palestine to these struggles in their work. In 1971, when the committee organized a Palestine Week and a Gaza Day, they did so in collaboration with several other solidarity groups and leftist organizations and parties.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, at demonstrations, teach-ins, lectures, and film screenings organized by the committee, guest speakers from other groups and countries often were invited. These included PFLP representatives, Connie Mathews, a member of the American Black Panther Party living in Copenhagen,<sup>85</sup> and Lars Bonnevie from the Danish Vietnam Committees.<sup>86</sup> As part of their efforts to put Palestine on the map, the committee also ran a bookshop in downtown Copenhagen that sold magazines published by other solidarity movements, including the British *Free Palestine*, the Swedish magazines *Folkfronten* [The People’s Front], *Arabisk Front* [Arab Front], *Journal of Palestine Studies*, as well as books about Palestine published in European languages.<sup>87</sup> A part of the committee’s work directed specifically at the Danish public was their continuous attempts to destabilize the Danish Left’s ingrained fascination with the Israeli kibbutz movement. Under the slogan ‘Kibbutz-friend, you’re being screwed,’ several articles directly targeted the Danish organization ‘Danish Kibbutz Friends’ (DAKIV).<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> *Kommunistisk Orientering* 9, 1969.

<sup>79</sup> *Falastin Bulletin* 6, 1973, p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> *Falastin* 10, 1971, p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Bjerregaard, *Et Undertrykt Folk har Altid Ret*, p. 415.

<sup>82</sup> *Falastin* (1970) 1, p. 2.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>84</sup> *Falastin* (1971), 8, p. 4.

<sup>85</sup> *Falastin* (1970), 3, p. 25.

<sup>86</sup> *Falastin* (1971), 8, p. 4.

<sup>87</sup> *Falastin* (1973), *Bulletin* 7.

<sup>88</sup> *Falastin* (1970), 3, p. 13.

The Palestine Committee emerged at a time when the PFLP already had gained international attention because of the hijacking of several planes and other attacks executed in Israel and abroad. *Falastin* praised these actions and attacks as politically motivated and successfully executed. After the attacks on the airport in Lydda in Israel in May 1972 and the Olympics in Munich shortly afterwards, which claimed many civilian lives, *Falastin* insisted that revolutionary violence ought to be understood scientifically rather than morally.<sup>89</sup> Following both attacks, *Falastin* published official PFLP statements emphasizing that the terror of imperialism, Zionism, and Arab reaction could ‘only be fought through organized revolutionary violence.’<sup>90</sup> After the Lydda attack, which was carried out by the Japanese Red Army (JRA), the statement published by *Falastin* made it clear that the attack needed ‘no justification, no apology, and no explanation’ and that it ‘was yet another example of the strong bonds that exist between the revolutionary movements in Palestine and all over the world.’<sup>91</sup> At *Politisk Revy*, however, while PFLP was never condemned morally, several writers began questioning the effectiveness of violence as a strategy after 1972.<sup>92</sup>

## Conclusion

Solidarity, as David Featherstone has argued, is a crucial way to articulate and universalize political discourse.<sup>93</sup> Faced with powerful counter discourses, solidarity movements must engage in decontestation across a variety of ideological and cultural registers, changing not just the way causes are articulated ideologically, but also the way causes are watched, felt, heard, and engaged with. As we have shown, during the late 1960s and well into the 1970s, a combination of Palestinian diplomatic efforts, personal connections, encounters, and ties to movements of global revolutionaries and activists elevated Palestine to an iconic cause for the global Left. This entanglement aligned ideological registers of anti-imperialism with the lived experience of popular struggle and managed, for a while, to override sensibilities and sympathies toward Israel. However, as Freeden points out, decontestation is an ongoing effort. It is subject to continuous reformulation over time and space, which must be marshalled ‘in order to remain in the competition over the control of political language.’<sup>94</sup> In the period after 1973, the forces and movements that had established Palestine as a global cause began to witness internal splits. As a result, the consensus described throughout this article weakened. Borrowing from Freeden, we might say that Palestine was recontested even among the New Left. In Denmark, Norway, and elsewhere, Palestine committees and groups began to splinter along ideological lines which often reflected splits within and between the Palestinian organizations. Palestine obviously remained, and remains, a cause for much of the Left globally. However, its registers changed from a revolutionary vanguard worthy of emulation to an object of development, aid, and assistance. Whereas the first solidarity groups founded in the late 1960s

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<sup>89</sup> See for example *Falastin Bulletin* (1972), 1, 2, and 3, 1972; and *ibid*, 3, p. 8.

<sup>90</sup> *Falastin Bulletin* (1972), 3, p. 13.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 1, p. 5.

<sup>92</sup> *Politisk Revy* (June 1972), 200, p. 3; and *Politisk Revy* (September 1972), p. 5.

<sup>93</sup> David Featherstone (2012) *Solidarity – Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism* (London: Zed Books), p. 38.

<sup>94</sup> Freeden, *The Political Theory of Political Thinking*, p. 83.

unreservedly supported armed revolution and struggle, toward the end of the 1970s, the meaning and materiality of solidarity had changed. Over the past four decades, Zionist groups have, with increasing success, linked Palestine solidarity to anti-Semitism, culminating with attacks on the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement in Germany and other countries. International solidarity with Palestine mounted again following the second Intifada in 2002, but often as a solidarity that exposed and pressured Israel without a wider ideological or strategic vision. Today, a new generation of Palestinians are creating links to protest movements around the world, in ways that may open up to new decontestation, not only in the framework of 1970s Third Worldism and anti-imperialism, but also in a global critique of neoliberalism and racism.<sup>95</sup> With that in mind, a deeper historical engagement with the making of solidarity locally and globally seems more important than ever.

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<sup>95</sup> A. S. & L. Qutami, *Alterity Across Generations*, p. 15.