

The Violent Rise of Palestine's Lost Generation

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ABSTRACT: *The Oslo-generation, the youth of Palestine born after the 1993 Oslo-agreement, is Palestine's lost generation. They have experienced a near complete exclusion from ordinary political participation, dominated by the elders of the Palestinian national movement. Their trust in the parent generation and the Palestinian National Authority has been undermined equally. The vacuum created by the weakened parental and national authority has been filled with youths following first and foremost their own age peers. The protests and knife attacks seen in the West Bank during the autumn 2015 were obviously a protest against the Israeli occupation. However, they were also an expression of a clash of generations and the rise of a lost generation.*

KEY WORDS: *Authority; Gerontocracy; Intifada; Israel; Palestine; PLO; Youth.*

Age increasingly has become a principle for how Palestinian politics is organized. Consider these two cases: First; in Bethlehem in March 2014 the Palestinian Central Council (PCC) had a meeting. PCC is an organ of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), the organization recognized through the Oslo-accords in 1993 by Israel and the international community as the 'sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.' During the PCC meeting, PLO veteran Asad Abdul Rahman announced that as he had now passed 70 years of age, the time had come for him to step down. Somebody from the younger generation should have his seat, Rahman said. Then, someone responded from the floor: 'But you are the youngest one among us.'¹

The second case is from Balata, the largest Palestinian refugee camp in the West Bank, located inside Nablus. In 2012 a worrying trend was observed among youth of the camp. Teenagers approached Israeli settlements apparently with no purpose, knowing that they easily

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¹ Author Interview with Bir Zeit professor Ahmad Hamad, Ramallah, March 2015.

could end up getting themselves killed. According to social worker Mahmoud Subuh, ‘They went to the settlement, and they were caught. the guards shouted at them: “What the hell are you doing here?” No guns, no explosives, nothing. They caught them, arrested them and a few days later we talked to some lawyers, and then they released them.’² Subuh has worked in Balata for decades, and he had never seen anything like it. A week later another three youths went. Three days after that, four others went to Itamar, then another three to Elon Moreh, both of which are Jewish settlements in the West Bank surrounding Balata and Nablus. Some youths afterward explained that that while suicide was illegal in Islam, it would not count as suicide if they were shot and killed. They would then become martyrs.³

In this article, I will argue that these two cases are related. The first case is of the gerontocratic and autocratic features of the Palestinian national movement. The second is of the Oslo-generation, today’s youth of Palestine who were born after the 1993 Oslo-agreement.⁴ If ever there was a Palestinian lost generation, it is this one. The Oslo-generation has experienced a nearly complete exclusion from ordinary political participation, dominated by the elders of the Palestinian national movement. As the trust of the Oslo-generation in the gerontocratic political order has eroded, legitimate political authority has all but collapsed in Palestine.

I will argue that the wave of ‘lone wolves’ knife attacks breaking out in the autumn of 2015 is a symptom of this. The vacuum created by the weakened parental and national authority has been filled with youth first and foremost following their own age peers. The violent protests and knife attacks were obviously a protest against the Israeli occupation. However, they were also an expression of a clash of generations.⁵

Evolution of PLO’s Gerontocratic Features

There is a deep crisis in Palestinian politics. The prospect of Hamas, controlling Gaza since 2007, and Fatah and PLO, controlling the West Bank, to reconcile their political differences

² Author Interview with M. Subuh, Balata, West Bank, April, 2012.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Amira Haas (2015) Abbas Can’t Control the Lost Generation of Oslo. *Haaretz*. October 15. Available at <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.679758> Accessed 12 December 2015 and K. Reddan (2015) The anger of Palestine’s ‘lost’ generation. Ma’an News Agency. October 16, 2015. Available at <https://www.maannews.com/Content.aspx?id=768277>, accessed October 16 2015.

⁵ Jacob Høigilt (2016) Fatah from Below: The Clash of Generations in Palestine, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43 (4), pp. 456-471.

seems meagre.⁶ According to a 2015 public opinion survey, an estimated two-thirds of West Bank Palestinians want the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, to resign.⁷ However, he has no political heirs. Abbas has accused Muhammad Dahlan, long considered his successor, of planning to stage a coup in Fatah and the Palestinian Authority, and even of murdering the late Yasser Arafat and six other opponents.⁸ Such accusations illuminate a movement that has failed to reform itself and failed to let members decide who their leaders should be. The young generation has simply been excluded from the decision-making structures as Fatah and the PLO has taken on more and more gerontocratic features.

When Fatah's first leader, Yasser Arafat, died at the age of 75 in 2004 he had been the Fatah-leader continuously for 45 years. Arafat was also the PLO's chairman for 35 continuous years. Following Arafat as leader of Fatah and the PLO was Mahmoud Abbas, who is 82 years old (as of January 2017). The general secretary of Fatah, Faruq Qaddumi, is 86 years old. The head of the Palestinian National Council of the PLO, Salim Zanoun from Fatah, is 83 years old. This gerontocracy may be regarded as the product of the PLO/Fatah internal organizational principles. Inside Fatah, the main faction of the PLO, the principle of seniority has been a premise for climbing the internal power hierarchy since its founding in 1959, with armed struggle not only as a method but as also as strategy, as its charter stated. Fatah's internal organization therefore was designed according to a military model and for its members to operate underground. At its base are three-man cells, which constitute local circles; the circles constitute wings, and then branches, district leaderships, regional leaderships all the way up to the central committee on the top. The most important criteria for climbing in this hierarchy was *seniority*. This was inscribed into the Fatah constitution: Each year of membership, earned one point, while each year in prison earned two points, etc. The older one got, the more points that could be accumulated. Those with most points were the ones to climb from one level of the hierarchy to the next one.

⁶ This article is about the political situation in the West Bank and the background for its knife intifada. Therefore the focus is on the internal crisis of the secular national movement of Fatah and the PLO, controlling the Palestinian autonomous areas of the West Bank, rather than on Gaza and Hamas.

⁷ Palestine Center for Policy and Survey (2015) Palestine Public Opinion Poll, pp. 56-58. <http://www.pcpsr.org/> Accessed 12 February 2016.

⁸ Amira Hass (2015) Internal rift rattles Abbas' Fatah (yet again), *Haaretz*, March 17; available at: <http://www.haaretz.com/news/features/.premium-1.580153>, accessed October 15 2015.

When Fatah changed its strategy following the Oslo agreement by recognizing Israel and abandoning the armed struggle, it did not reform its organizational structure accordingly. It remained organized as if it were an underground military movement, based on the initially adopted principles of seniority and democratic centralism.⁹ Thus, to attend Fatah's National Congress, its supreme political authority, members had to have enough points, mainly accumulated through their seniority. In reality though, the National Congress, which according to Fatah's constitution should convene every five years, effectively ceased to gather after the Oslo-agreement. Since the fifth Fatah congress in Tunisia in 1989 it took 20 years until the sixth congress convened in Bethlehem in 2009.

In the PLO itself the situation is even more alarming. The supreme authority of the PLO is the Palestinian National Council (PNC), its parliament where issues concerning all the Palestinian people are discussed and PLO's policy is formulated. Although the PLO constitution stipulates that members of the PNC should be democratically elected, the PLO never has arranged elections. When the Oslo Agreement was signed, the PNC did not convene to approve the agreement, in spite of this being the most dramatic decision taken in the PLO's history. In fact, an ordinary session of the PNC has not been called since the 20th congress in Algeria in 1991. Thus, there has been no renewal of the PNC for three decades.

In the absence of a functioning PNC, the executive committee (EC) of the PLO is its government, its functioning decision maker. The 18 members of the EC effectively represent the organization in all areas, not just its executive decisions. This has been the case since the 1969 takeover of the PLO by the guerillas (the PLO initially was created in 1964 by the Arab League). The EC came to be organized through some extraordinary principles. The main challenge for the PLO in exile was always to avoid infighting and defection and withstand co-option attempts by various Arab states. As a result, the EC developed an idiosyncratic form of decision-making: The principle of majority rule was abandoned in favor of rule by consensus. Majority rule could enable a bloc of members who had been outvoted to mobilize both external and internal support and thus threaten the PLO's claim to be the Palestinians' sole representative. Consensus rule entailed finding the lowest common denominator, which meant that the smallest Palestinian

⁹ Ilan Pappé (2004) *A history of modern Palestine: One land, two peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 192.

groups were granted disproportionate influence in the decision-making process.¹⁰ The question of political representation thus became a negotiable issue among the various factions, where the threat that one might leave the organization could threaten them all. This paved the way for the cementation of a quota system among the PLO members, where the constituent PLO groups were represented irrespective of their size or popularity among the Palestinian people at large. Through the quota system the guerrillas – not representatives of the Palestinian communities in various geographic areas – were given the power of decision-making within Palestinian politics. All guerilla groups should reach acceptable compromises, which, crucially, include how to allocate key positions in PLO departments and committees. Moreover, the quota system meant that the leaders of individual factions, responsible for negotiating their quota, were preserved as leaders of their respective factions.¹¹

Although other PLO factions periodically criticized Fatah for using undemocratic means, such criticism failed to impress Fatah because the other guerrillas themselves appeared to be marked by the very ills they were attempting to criticize, having undergone no changes in terms of internal leadership since their founding.¹²

Figure 1. Members of PLO executive committee 1969 - 2011¹³

	1969	1973	1974	1980	1983	1991	1996	1999	2009-
Fatah	4	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	5
Saiqa	2	1	1	1	1				
PFLP		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
ALF		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
DFLP		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
PFLP-			1	1	1				

¹⁰ Y. Sayigh (1997) *Armed Struggle and the Search for State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 679.

¹¹ J. Hilal (1993) PLO Institutions: The Challenge Ahead, *Journal of Palestine Studies*. 23(1), p. 55.

¹²Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, p. 634.

¹³ Based on Sayigh *Armed Struggle*, p. 634; Cheryl Rubenberg (1983) The Civilian Infrastructure of the Palestine Liberation Organization, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 12(3), p. 59, Helena Cobban (1984) *The Palestinian Liberation Organization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 269, N. Parsons (2005) *The Politics of the Palestinian Authority* (New York: Routledge), pp. 321-322; B. Rubin (1994) *Revolution Until Victory?*(Cambridge: Harvard University Press), pp. 216-218; Passia (2011) Jerusalem: Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs), pp. 9-10.

GC									
PLF						1	1	1	1
PPSF						1	1	1	1
PPP						1	1	1	1
FIDA						1	1	1	1
Indep.	5	4	7	8	6	8	7	8	5

The startling anachronism of PLO's executive committee composition was revealed in the elections for the legislative council, the PLC, of the Palestinian Authority, which is formally a sub-organ of the PLO, which was set up after the second Oslo Accord to administer what were designated to be autonomous areas (Area A) in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. A group of small parties that together gained 1.5 per cent of the PLC seats in the elections controlled a majority of the party seats of the Executive Committee (EC) of the PLO. Meanwhile, the party that had won the elections in the Palestinian territories in 2006 – Hamas – was not a PLO member.

<i>Party</i>	<i>Seats in EC</i>	<i>Seats PLC (per cent of votes)</i>
Fatah	5	45 (41%)
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)	1	3 (4 %)
Arab Liberation Front (ALF)	1	0 (0.4 %) ¹⁴
Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)	1	1 (1 % ¹⁵)
Palestine Liberation Front (PLF)	1	0 (0.3 %)
Palestine Popular Struggle Front (PPSF)	1	0 (0.7 %)
Palestine Peoples Party	1	1 (1 % ¹⁶)

¹⁴ ALF did not run, result is for the Palestinian Arab Front, which split from ALF in 1993.

¹⁵ Result for the Badeel coalition divided by three, from PLC elections 2006.

FIDA	2	0 (1 %) ¹⁷
Independents	5	4 (--)
Hamas	0	74 (44 %)
Third Way/PNI	0	4 (5 %)

The political decay- the inability to adjust to changing circumstances - of the PLO is epitomized by the fact that the Arab Liberation Front remains a member of PLOs EC. ALF was established by Saddam Hussein for the single purpose of the Iraqi Baath party to have influence in Palestinian politics.¹⁸ While the Baath party in Iraq has disintegrated, the ALF has kept their seat within PLO's EC, to the dismay of Hamas among others: 'There are many organizations with only five or six members, like the ALF, established by Saddam Hussein, how many members do they have? All these organizations would then have one seat each on the PLOs executive committee,' said Hamas veteran leader Mahmoud al Zahar in an interview.¹⁹

Since 2003, the PLO has become the ALF's only source of income, a situation that makes reforms and internal democratization a threat to its very existence. If PLO were to become representative and democratic, the small factions of the 1960s very likely would no longer be represented in the organization. 'They are happy with the status quo,' said Mahdi Abdel Hadi, director of the PASSIA research institute in East Jerusalem; 'its survival for them.'²⁰

The wave of knife attacks and the collapse of patriarchal authority

During the first Palestinian intifada (Dec. 1987-1993), studies on dreams – nightmares - of Israeli and Palestinian children emanating from the violence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict showed a revealing difference: Israeli children saw their fathers, family and army coming to their rescue in their dreams. In the nightmares of Palestinian children, however, their fathers were absent. In fact, nobody came to rescue them in their dreams.²¹ That neither fathers nor families were there

¹⁶Result for the Badeel coalition divided by three, from PLC elections 2006.

¹⁷Result for the Badeel coalition divided by three, from PLC elections 2006. FIDA gained 0.2 % in the PLC elections in 1996, when the party ran on a separate list.

¹⁸ Sayigh *Armed Struggle*, p. 236.

¹⁹Author Interview, Gaza, May 2015.

²⁰ Author Interview, Jerusalem, August 2011.

²¹ Don Peretz (1990) *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press), p. 116.

to provide security indicates how patriarchal ties have been eroded in Palestinian society. The ability to provide guidance and protection are essential sources of parental authority. Once these abilities are perceived as lost, fathers no longer have the trust of their offspring. One aspect of the massive mobilization of the first intifada and also the second from 2000 to 2004, was that fathers who tried to keep their children away from demonstrations spoke to deaf ears.

No factor correlates stronger with political violence than youth bulges. The bigger the youth bulge, the higher the risk for political violence.²² Palestine is one of the two Arab countries with the biggest youth bulges (the other country being Yemen).²³ This youth bulge is not expected to fall below 30 per cent for the next 20 years. More than 40 per cent of Palestinians in the West Bank/Gaza were below the age of 14 in 2011.²⁴ Youth become distinct political actors as a result of age group bonding, internalizing norms and values that make them different from other age groups, building their identities as they develop self-consciousness through other peers. When youth develop collective experiences, worries, norms and values, they also largely define themselves in opposition to previous generations.²⁵

This is relevant for the massive protests and unprecedented wave of Palestinian attacks with knives in the West Bank breaking out in the autumn of 2015. Also, during previous waves of violent confrontations, first and foremost the first and second intifadas, many parents would attempt to keep their children away from the streets. During earlier intifadas, however, youth, parents and grandparent all participated and shared a similar nationalist vision. During the wave of knife attacks, the youth and even children participants were outside the control of not only parents but also of the Palestinian nationalist factions. One aspect of the continuous wave of attacks thus was that two generational conflicts had coalesced: at the home sphere as well as at the political sphere. An arena where this has been observed are the Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank. This situation is evident with respect to internal developments in the Balata

²² Henrik Urdal (2006) A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence, *International Studies Quarterly* 50(3), pp. 607-629.

²³ Y. Courbage (2012) The Demographic Youth Bulge and Social Rupture, in S. Khalaf & R. Khalaf (eds.) *Arab Youth: Social Mobilisation in Times of Risk* (London: Saqi), p. 86.

²⁴ PCBS: Palestinian population 'youth bulge' (2011) *Ma'an News Agency*, July 11, available at <http://www.maannews.com/Content.aspx?id=404099>, accessed 21 January 2016.

²⁵ Asaf Bayat (2013) *Life as Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), pp. 107-110.

camp, the largest Palestinian refugee camp in the West Bank. Below, I analyze first the lack of legitimate governance structures in the camp, and second the socio-political processes leading up to the rise of violence among its youth.

Camps, Corruption and ‘Elections’

The 19 refugee camps in the West Bank never have had democratically elected leaderships. This situation has prevailed despite opinion polls showing that 90 per cent of the refugees want to participate in municipal elections from which they have been excluded.²⁶ The decision to exclude refugees from participating in local elections was not taken by the national Palestinian authorities. According to a representative from the PLO’s Department of Refugee Affairs (DORA): ‘It was from the popular committees of the camps.’²⁷ Popular committees were part of how the PLO factions had organized refugee camps under their control, first in Jordan until 1970, and then in Lebanon until 1982, based on the quota system referred to earlier: the factions that were members of the EC of the PLO should all be represented in the ‘popular committees’, reflecting the composition of the EC, while the various leadership positions of all the camps should be allocated equally to the various member groups of the EC. When the PLO returned to Palestine in 1994, it brought along this system of organizing the camps, although some of the small PLO factions had almost a comic lack of following in the camps. Nevertheless, an organization like the Arab Liberation Front, referred to above, should not only be represented in all the camp committees in the West Bank, but at least have two of the heads of the committees of the camps.

The PLO established the popular committees to increase their control over the camps. However, after 2009-10, UNRWA (the UN organization administratively responsible for the refugee camps) and others increasingly reported that some of the committees were corrupt. According to an official at the ‘UNRWA file’ in PLO’s Ramallah-based DORA:

²⁶ Sari Hanafi (2009) *Palestinian Refugee Camps in the Palestinian Territory: Territory of Exception and Locus of Resistance*, in A. Ophir, M. Givoni & S. Hanafi (eds.) *The power of Inclusive Exclusion: Anatomy of Israeli Rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories* (New York: Zone Books), p. 503.

²⁷ Author Interview, Ramallah, 2012. Interviews and participant observation for the article were carried out in Balata/Nablus in April 2012 and March 2015. Interviews also conducted in Jenin camp in April 2012, in the Aqbat al Jabr camp in April 2012 and April 2013, and in Ramallah in April 2012, April 2013 and March 2015.

Like UNRWA's job creation project. A committee would go to UNRWA and say, I have a list of 50 people, in need of work. We found that many of the people on the projects were not there. And they got \$450 a month for each name, but only paid each \$100.²⁸

The 'UNRWA-file' was a special unit that the PLO established to investigate corruption allegations in the Palestinian refugee camps. Because of the alleged widespread corruption, DORA proposed elections in the camps, to replace some of the corrupt leaders. But the PLO faced dilemmas in electing the camp committees. The camps had not been included in the municipal elections in the West Bank. PLO officials claimed that this was because local elections in camps would undermine the right of return principle and the temporary status of the camps.²⁹ More sensitive was the fact that PLO never had held elections for its own political bodies and that some of the small PLO groups were unlikely to get more than a handful of votes. When the elections finally were held, the PLO controversially decided to limit eligible voters in the camps. On April 8, 2012 elections were held for the popular committee of Balata. According to one camp resident: 'The PLO leaders, the leaders of the NGOs, of the Jaffa center, the youth center, the boards of the NGOs, the headmasters of the schools, the UN office, the *wujaha* - the elders of the large families, participated.'³⁰ 'You have maybe 25,000 people here and the people who voted, they are around 300, out of 25,000.' In the Jenin camp 100 out of 16,000 camp residents participated.³¹ In the Aqbar Jabar Camp, 120 out of a total of 8,000 camp refugees participated in the voting.³²

While some of those investigated for corruption later were jailed, the elections turned out to be counter-productive, being based on oligarchic principles rather than democratic ones and generating more frustration than relief in the camps. 'It is very controversial' said a man in Balata, 'the popular committee has been shot at many times. People say they are thieves.'³³ I do not claim that there is a causal relationship between corruption, the idiosyncratic attempts at

²⁸ Author Interview, Ramallah, April 2012. Name withheld because of the sensitive character of the information.

²⁹ Abu Sombol, head of PLOs Camp Committee, Aqbat al Jaber camp, West Bank. Author Interview, Aqbat Al Jaber camp, April 2012.

³⁰ Author Interview, Balata, April 2012.

³¹ Author Interview with the head of the camp committee, Jenin camp, April 2012.

³² Author Interview with the head of the camp committee, Aqbat al Jabr camp, April 2012.

³³ Author Conversation with Balata resident, Balata, April 2012.

electing a camp leadership, and later rebellion among youth in Balata and elsewhere in the West Bank. However, neither do I think that these are unrelated phenomena. In the power vacuum of camps without any legitimate authority present, the lost generation of Oslo has evolved, from extreme rootlessness, via internal rioting, to the wave of knife attacks.

The Internal Riots at the Advent of the knife-attack wave

As referred to above, in 2012 the youth of Balata refugee camp went to nearby Israeli settlements, unarmed, knowing that as they approached the settlements they risked getting themselves killed. The strange phenomenon continued until social workers of the camp mobilized to halt them from committing collective suicides. Three years later in Balata and eventually also other West Bank camps, youth again entered the limelight, but they were no longer unarmed.

In February 2015, the Nablus road to Ramallah was closed outside the entrance of Balata camp. Thick smoke from burning wheels limited drivers' visions, while youth pelted passing cars with stones. Inside Balata camp, chaos reigned. Mahmoud Subuh said: 'Who controls the streets? They are children. Who controls these 10 and 12 year olds? Do you think I dare to tell them not to throw stones? I don't. I am afraid of them. They are so scary. Not evil, but full of anger, and who is going to stop them? No father, no brother, no sister.'³⁴ For youth in the camp, it was not hairstyles or colourful outfits that now created the sources of belonging. It was being a comrade-in-arms. Being in an armed gang was what gained credit among local peers. The younger kids and teenagers were aligned with older peers, some of whom had been arrested during the second intifada. They had spent time in prison and consequently had their educations aborted. Because they had security files, these prevented them from being employed by the Palestinian authorities. They now emerged as gang leaders, recruiting kids and youngsters. The only new enterprise one could find in a camp, I was told in Balata, was underground arms factories.³⁵

Initially the Palestinian Authority pursued a strategy of avoidance, fearing that if its security forces entered camps to establish order or to arrest armed people, they would be drawn

³⁴ Author Interview, Balata, March 2015.

³⁵ Author Interview, Balata, March 2015.

into gun battles.³⁶ However, as the unrest persisted, the PA had to act. In March and April 2015, gun battles between PA security forces and armed youth groups in Balata paralysed the camp, spreading also to Jenin and other camps.³⁷ It was like a mini-war, including some of the youth of Balata firing grenades from hand-held grenade launchers.³⁸ These battles reportedly also were related to the division inside Fatah between President Abbas' faction and groups that his rival, Mahmoud Dahlan. However, this development should not overshadow the fact that some armed youth groups were virtually out of control in the camps. In total, 26 people were killed during the battles of spring 2015, according to the Al Monitor news site, including seven deaths in the Nablus area.³⁹

As for the Balata camp, what started with apparently un-political and non-nationalist risk behavior in the first phase, led in the next phase to riots and an increasingly bullying behavior. The wave of protests and knife attacks constituted, as I see it, another development of the same phenomenon: Youth bonding in the absence of parental and national authority.

'The Unadulterated Uprising'

The violent 'lone wolf' attacks and the wide-spread protests -- up to 200,000 demonstrators participated during the almost daily protests in the West Bank during the autumn of 2015 -- constituted an 'unadulterated uprising,' according to a Palestinian security official.⁴⁰ As such, it was unprecedented in Palestinian national history. The national movements always had been part of the national struggle. By December 2015, more Palestinian assailants had been killed than the

³⁶ A. Nofal (2015) PA isolates West Bank camps, *Al Monitor*, May 4. Available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/05/west-bank-refugee-camps-pa-israel-security-coordination.html>, accessed 21 January 2016.

³⁷ S. Eldar (2014) Jenin and Nablus Refugee Camps: Enclaves of Fear, *Al Monitor*, March 25. Available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/03/refugee-camps-jenin-nablus-west-bank-violence-armed-youths.html>, accessed 21 January 2016.

³⁸ Author Interview, Balata, March 2015.

³⁹ A. Abu Amer (2015) Security chaos in Nablus haunts PA, *Al Monitor*, September 17. Available at: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/09/west-bank-security-chaos-camps-palestinian-authority.html>

⁴⁰ S. Eldar (2015) Who's afraid of the 'intifada'? *Al Monitor*, November 30. Available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/11/terror-wave-third-intifada-hamas-idf-netanyahu-yaalon.html#ixzz3tFwhAnOM>, accessed 30 November 2015.

total number of suicide bombers during the entire second intifada.⁴¹ During the first half-year alone, 201 Palestinians⁴² and 34 Israelis were killed.⁴³ More than half of the Palestinian assailants were under 20 years old.⁴⁴ The knife attacks continued into 2016. In May and June more than hundred Palestinian attacks against Israelis took place each month, mostly lone wolf attacks. 13 Israelis were killed the first half of 2016⁴⁵ and 71 Palestinians.⁴⁶ There appeared to be no end to the violent, deadly attacks.

The Palestinian assailants were not only from the refugee camps. From the Palestinian village of Qabatya, near Jenin, four youths were killed during the Autumn of 2015. Each one went on his own to the Jalameh checkpoint, then attacked a soldier with a knife before being shot and killed. Similarly from Sair, next to Hebron, eleven youths were killed between October 2015 and January 2016, all in lone attacks on Israeli soldiers, half of them at the Beit Einun Junction, where Israeli soldiers control access to the town.⁴⁷

These incidents illuminate that, while the Palestinian attackers mainly acted alone, they all simultaneously were part of the same wave of youths imitating the behavior of their predecessors. The youths were not organized collectively and nor were any of them members of various Palestinian factions. However, they were largely from the same age cohort and shared the political culture-- the 'youthfulness'⁴⁸-- of their age peers. Three features distinguished their assaults: revenge, social imitation and the absence of authority in their social environment.

⁴¹ S. Eldar (2015) Is Palestinian public leaving its leadership behind?, *Al Monitor*, October 23. Available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/10/israel-palestine-intifada-young-generation-fatah-hamas.html#ixzz3tFxUgGcl>, accessed 30 November 2015.

⁴² Wave of terror 2015/16, (2016) *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, March. Available at <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Terrorism/Palestinian/Pages/Wave-of-terror-October-2015.aspx>, accessed 30 March 2016.

⁴³ Deaths and the Jerusalem Intifada (2016) *Memo.Middle East Monitor*. Available at <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/specials/intifada/>, accessed 30 March 2016.

⁴⁴G. Cohen (2016) After Six Months of Terror Wave, Attacks Decreasing, Says Israeli Army, *Ha'aretz*, April 1 2016. Available at <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.712123>, accessed 2. April 2016.

⁴⁵ Monthly Reports (2016) *Israel Security Agency*. Available at <https://www.shabak.gov.il/English/EnTerrorData/Archive/Monthly/Pages/default.aspx>, accessed 28 December 2016.

⁴⁶ Palestinians from the OPT killed in the OPT and Israel since 1 October 2015, (2016), *Al-Haq*, Available at <http://www.alhaq.org/publications/list.of.palestinians.killed.pdf>, accessed 28 December 2016.

⁴⁷ Palestinian Shot Dead After Alleged Attack Attempt near Hebron (2016) January 14. Available at <http://www.maannews.com/Content.aspx?id=769795>, accessed 21 January 2016.

⁴⁸ Bayat *Life as Politics*, p.109.

Revenge (*tha'r*) drove some youth, who wanted to revenge brothers or peers killed in previous attacks or demonstrations. For example, Israeli soldiers killed one youth from Beit Einun (see above) after he had approached them immediately after leaving the funeral of his friend for whom he had been a pallbearer.⁴⁹

The second aspect, social imitation, is central in all waves of youth non-movements. Similar to the youth going to the Israeli settlements with no obvious purpose, and to the internal rioting in the camps, youth tend to take inspiration from the acts of other youth. Even though some would not know those assailants who inspired them personally unlike the villagers referred to above did, they nevertheless would identify with them.

Finally, a third characteristic is that the assailants originated from places characterized by the strongest absence of authority in Palestine: Hebron, where a large part of the city is exclusively under the control of Israeli soldiers protecting Jewish settlers, East Jerusalem, where there is no presence of the Palestinian Authority at all, and finally as referred to above, the refugee camps where there is no municipal administration and where the popular committees that the PLO has established completely lack legitimacy.

Youth consciously build identities. They share experiences, worries, norms and values, as they develop their self-consciousness.⁵⁰ Simultaneously, youth need adult role models.

Adolescence is a critical stage in human development because it is the period when human minds are most impacted by social behavior of novelty seeking, social engagement, increased emotional intensity and creative exploration. Adult role models are crucial in this stage to sanction social behavior, ensuring that border transcending risk behavior does not develop. The weaker is the presence of adult role models, the stronger the impact of social peers.⁵¹

Conclusion

The fact that under Israeli occupation no Arab Spring developed in Palestine during 2011 largely has been understood as the result of Israel monopolizing the antipathies of the Palestinian

⁴⁹ A. Harel (2016) Jerusalem Terror Attack Stands Out From the Others, in *Ha'aretz*, February 4; Available at <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.701246>, accessed 4 February 2016.

⁵⁰ Bayat, *Life as Politics*, p. 50.

⁵¹ D. Siegel (2014) *Brainstorm: The power and purpose of the teenage brain* (New York: Penguin).

street and the Palestinian street never reaching as far as to take on their own leaders as long as the occupiers remain. This logic might be turned around. The dramatic outburst of violence and protest during the autumn of 2015 may be regarded as a clash of generations, as frustrated Palestinian youth took on Israelis for the misfortunes of Palestinian politics.

If ever there was a Palestinian lost generation, it is the Oslo-generation, born after the Oslo-accords of 1993. On the one hand, this generation is the most educated in Palestinian history, while on the other hand, it is the generation with the bleakest prospects of finding relevant work.⁵² In their politically formative years, this generation has experienced only internal Palestinian division and has witnessed the de-democratization of the Palestinian political order. The Oslo generation never has seen the PNC, the supreme political body in Palestinian politics, convene an ordinary session.

The more autocratic and gerontocratic the PLO has developed, the more the land of the West Bank that has been filled with Israeli settlers, and the more alienated the Oslo-generation has become. These youth still constitute a non-movement, non-collective actors who nevertheless participate in collective actions.⁵³ They find purpose and direction in rebellion, even if not ideologically based. As Herbert Moeller has noted, rebellion might be a way

to overcome the insecurity and hopelessness of a futile existence. The feeling of being able to cope with hardship and danger, the enjoyment of comradeship, and the acceptance of their peers is basic to a sense of identity in the young. Even belonging to an anti-social and destructive movement can have a salutary effect on the personality formation of a boy or girl, especially in times of social dislocation.⁵⁴

Basic political attitudes and beliefs are formed in adolescence.⁵⁵ Youth need adult role models, at the national stage as much as in the home sphere, to adjust, among other things, to risk seeking behavior. Perhaps the greatest loss for the Oslo-generation is the loss of such adult role models.

⁵²Courbage, *The Demographic*.

⁵³ Bayat, *Life as Politics*, p. 15.

⁵⁴ H. Moller (1968) Youth as a Force in the Modern World, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 10 (3), pp. 259-260.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

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