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MITRA4095 – Master's thesis in Modern, International and Transnational History

# Discovering Palestine

## How Norwegian Solidarity with Palestine Emerged in the Transnational 1960s

Sigvart Nordhov Fredriksen

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Department for Archaeology, Conservation and History

University of Oslo

## Abstract

The thesis analyzes the emergence of Norwegian New Leftist solidarity with Palestine between 1967 and 1970. I argue that transnational encounters and exchanges between Norwegian New Leftist activists and the Palestinian national movement saw Palestine emerge from obscurity, shaping a distinct conceptualization of Palestine as a nation embroiled in an armed struggle against colonialism and imperialism. Up until the 1967 Six-Day War, the Norwegian Left's support of Israel had gone unchallenged since 1949. However, the anti-Zionist turn of the New Left in 1967 did not constitute an embrace of the Palestinian national movement and its liberation struggle, given that Palestinians were generally not considered a national group in themselves at the time. Instead, the New Left's drastic shift from *philo-* to *anti-*Zionism spurred a new discussion on Israel's legitimacy in Norway, at the same time that Palestinian nationalist organization like Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) were becoming increasingly more visible. With this backdrop, Norwegian New Leftist activists "discovered" Palestine through journeys to the Middle East. In their encounters with the Palestinian national movement, the Norwegians interpreted Palestine using references to the ongoing Vietnam War, drawing on global ideas of Third World revolutionism and anti-imperialism. This interpretation was also offered to them by the Palestinians themselves, who presented Palestine as a frontline for the shared anti-imperialist struggle against both US imperialism and Soviet social imperialism. This understanding of Palestine constituted the basis for the Norwegian solidarity movement with Palestine, which was institutionalized with the foundation of *Palestinakomiteen* in 1970. Even when told from the Norwegian activists' perspective, the transnational history of this process illuminates the role of the Palestinians themselves in globalizing their struggle, as well as how global intellectual frameworks shaped early conceptualizations of Palestine on the Norwegian New Left. Finally, the emergence of the Norwegian solidarity movement with Palestine also sheds light on how the "Palestinianization" of the Middle East conflict was perceived on the Norwegian New Left.

## Foreword and Acknowledgements

To look back at the past year is a strange exercise in these times. When I began researching this thesis, I didn't know what relevance the concept of solidarity would have upon its completion. As it turns out, it was to be far more than I expected, but also in far more ways than I could have imagined. Since last summer, demonstrations against corruption, racism, and oppression have taken place on close to all continents. As I am writing this, the United States is convulsing, teeming with protests and their harsh rebuttal by police and military. At the same time, political developments in the Middle East are again causing concern and unrest in Palestine. President Trump's green light to Israeli premier Netanyahu means that we now find ourselves looking at what might be the final blow to the two-state solution. It goes without saying that the annexation of the West-Bank will lead to more death and despair for the region, and for the Palestinians. Finally, the global COVID-19 pandemic has just begun to loosen its grip on the minds of Norwegians. It feels paradoxical, given that the virus still claims thousands of lives every day in other parts of the World, and that projections for the pandemic's aftermath are all grim. The historian's second nature might be to point out that the course of history is not linear, but I think nobody envisaged such cruel examples to arise within such a short span of time.

Privileged as I might be, living far away from harm and oppression, the pandemic must still be addressed with regards to my access to sources. When the "lockdown" of Norway went into force on March 12, 2020, I was in the middle of the writing process. Luckily, I had already collected most of the primary source material I needed, bar interviews. As the interviews could be done over telephone, this was not too much of a setback. However, there were certain archival files I had scheduled to investigate, including the relatively recently released archives of *Sosialistisk ungdomsforbund* at the Labor Movement's Archive in Oslo. There were also certain documents I had intended to look over at the Norwegian National Archives, pertaining to *Det norske studentersamfund*. None of these were accessible, potentially meaning that certain details could not be asserted for this thesis. They include the exact voting results in the DNS, and to assert whether SUF had adopted any distinctly pro-Palestinian resolution in the period I study. This would likely not have affected my final conclusions. There was always going to be more ground to cover with regard to my topic and I believe I have managed to address the most important aspects of my argument with what I had already assembled before institutions closed.

Even with this volatile backdrop, studying the emergence of Norwegian solidarity with Palestine has nonetheless been rewarding. Both in what this process has taught me about the Palestinians, the radicals, and the period, and in the sense of being the personal journey writing a master thesis is. Growing up in Northern Norwegian Tromsø, an official sister city of Gaza, the interest in both Palestine and the solidarity movement with it has been present with me for a long time. Although I am myself not an activist, or engaged with any relevant political organizations, my upbringing has imprinted a strong sympathy with the Palestinians on me. Because of this, I have tried to stay more aware of how I present my topic and to maintain some distance to the material. To study how such a stance made its way to Norway in the 1960s, and, by extension, to my hometown, has nonetheless been nothing short of riveting.

With that said, some acknowledgements are in order. First of all, I must thank my supervisor, Toufoul Abou-Hodeib. Even in times of trouble, the supervision has been excellent and thorough. Our discussions have been both inspiring and stimulating, and I cannot be more grateful for the time she has put into my project. I am also grateful to the activists who have let me interview them for the thesis. With Finn Sjøe and Peder Martin Lysestøl, I have had vivid and interesting conversations, and they have openly shared their personal stories about their involvement with the solidarity movement with me. Mads Gilbert should also be mentioned. Although I did not interview Mads as a source, he took his time to talk to me about my topic in the early phase of the project and provided an overview of who to seek out in my research. Finally, I thank my family and friends who have proofread my writing and offered guidance and encouragement throughout my studies.

Sigvart Nordhov Fredriksen,

Oslo, June 2020.

*To Bård*

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## List of Abbreviations

AKP (ml) = Arbeidernes kommunistiske parti (marxist-leninistene) (The Workers' Communist Party, (the Marxist-leninists))

ARBARK = Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek (The Labor Movement's Archive and Library)

AUF = Arbeidernes ungdomsfylking (The Workers' Youth League)

DNS = Det Norske Studentersamfund (The Norwegian Student Society)

DNSA = Det Norske Studentersamfund's Arkiv (The Norwegian Student Society's Archive)

FNL = Front National de Libération (National Liberation Front)

KBPA = Kjell Byggstad's private archives

LK = Lund-kommisjonen (The Lund Commission)

LO = Landsorganisasjonen i Norge (The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions)

Palfront = Palestinafronten i Norge (The Norwegian Palestine Front)

Palkom = Palestinakomiteen i Norge (The Norwegian Palestine Committee)

PFLP = Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine

PLO = Palestine Liberation Organization

POT = Politiets overvåkningstjeneste (Police Surveillance Agency, Norway)

RA = Riksarkivet (The Norwegian National Archive)

SF = Sosialistisk folkeparti (Socialist People's Party)

SF-stud = Sosialistisk folkeparti studentlag (Socialist People's Party student union)

Solkom = Den norske solidaritetskomiteen for Vietnam (The Norwegian Solidarity Committee for Vietnam)

SUF = Sosialistisk ungdomsforbund (Socialist Youth Federation)

SUF (ml) = Sosialistisk ungdomsforbund (Marxist-leninistene) (Socialist Youth Federation (the Marxist-leninists))

Working Group = Arbeidsgruppen for et Fritt Palestina (The Working Group for a Free Palestine)

## Introduction

In early September 1970, a small group of Norwegian activists found themselves in Amman, Jordan, attending The Second World Conference on Palestine. They were members of *Arbeidsgruppen for et Fritt Palestina* (Working Group for a Free Palestine, Working Group), which had just been formed the previous year to study the Palestinian national movement and its struggle against Israel. Now, they were in the Hashemite kingdom on the invitation of the General Union of Palestinian Students. The Palestinians had gathered several hundred activists from far and wide, of starkly different backgrounds, representing a wide political spectrum of Leftist youth movements.<sup>1</sup> What all these foreign activists had in common, however, was their engagement for the Palestinians. Despite this shared interest, the discussions at the conference were heated and loud. At times, arguments over the struggle for Palestine, and its implications, clashed with such fervor that shoes were sent flying through the air. The hosts, on the other hand, seemed pleased to see such engagement for their cause.<sup>2</sup> The passionate discussions, as well as the number of attendees gathered, spoke to how they were succeeding in building a global movement. The Norwegians were also allowed speaking time. Activist Finn Sjøe rose to denounce the imperialist United States, Zionism, and the Soviet Union, his remarks about the latter causing some stirring amongst the audience. Finally, he declared: “From Vietnam to Palestine, one enemy, one struggle! [...] *Thaura Hata Anasser!*”<sup>3</sup>

At the time, Amman was a hotspot for pro-Palestinian sentiments, be that of the national movement itself or of its supporters. Members of the Norwegian contingent found themselves in the company of myriads of radicals, all seeking to begin solidarity work for the Palestinian struggle in one form or another. Some would ultimately estrange the wider streams of the movements they represented, some had already done so, whereas others would contribute to

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<sup>1</sup> The 1970 conference in Jordan was described in detail by former activists Finn Sjøe and Peder Martin Lysestøl in the fifty year anniversary edition of *Fritt Palestina*, the newspaper of solidarity organization *Palestinakomiteen* (The Norwegian Palestine Committee, Palkom). Peder Martin Lysestøl and Finn Sjøe, "Et akutt behov for solidaritet," *Fritt Palestina*, no. 2 (2019). In an interview, Sjøe recalled the number of activists assembled to be in the hundreds, possibly four hundred. Michael R. Fischbach, on the other hand, places the number of attendees to have been over one thousand. Phone interview with Finn Sjøe, May 6, 2020; Michael R. Fischbach, *The Movement and the Middle East: How the Arab-Israeli Conflict Divided the American Left* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 44, Kindle.

<sup>2</sup> Sjøe remembered being impressed with how the Palestinians managed to stay in a good mood, despite mounting pressure from the Jordanian government forces in Amman. Phone interview with Finn Sjøe, May 6, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> “Thaura Hata Anasser” translates from Arabic into “Revolution until victory.” Sjøe’s speech is quoted in Odd Karsten Tveit, *Alt for Israel: Oslo - Jerusalem 1948-78* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1996), 444. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of non-English material are my own.



forging a lasting pro-Palestinian movement within their home countries.<sup>4</sup> Others again were in Amman offering the experience of their respective liberation struggles at home, including South Africans, Vietnamese, and members of the American Black liberation movement.<sup>5</sup> Although radical movements were also gaining ground in Norway, the Norwegians might have seemed out of place if one considers how support for the Palestinians had been close to unheard of until just recently in their home country. On the other hand, support for Israel had gone more or less unchallenged since the Jewish country's foundation. Not until roughly around the 1967 Six-Day War, three years previously, had anyone doubted Israeli motives and the character of their state.<sup>6</sup>

However, the timing for hosting a conference assembling hundreds of foreign visitors was not the best. Before it could be concluded, Jordanian government troops began an assault on the Palestinian strongholds in the country, setting off the Jordanian Civil War, commonly known as Black September. The conference was hastily canceled as Amman descended into chaos, and the Norwegians were forced to flee the capital along with their counterparts, literally dodging bullets as they did.<sup>7</sup> Eventually, they were escorted out of the country by armed members of *Fatah*. Seeing the Jordanian regime with the backing of Israel and the United States, to them the harbingers of global imperialism, move to eradicate the Palestinian presence in Jordan with their own eyes became the last straw for the Norwegians.<sup>8</sup> Later that same month, they founded *Palestinakomiteen i Norge* (The Norwegian Palestine Committee, Palkom) in Oslo, institutionalizing the Norwegian New Left's solidarity with Palestine.

Despite its chaotic ending, the conference illustrates how the national movement was tying the growing network of solidarity movements with Palestine into the wider radical youth

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<sup>4</sup> Danish radicals present at the conference were more or less completely estranged from the wider Danish New Left due to their violent support for Palestinian liberation. In Norway, on the other hand, the solidarity movement with Palestine gained traction within the radical movement in the 1970s and 80s. See Peter Øvig Knudsen, *Blekingegadebanden: Den danske celle*, vol. 1 (København: Gyldendal, 2007); Tarjei Johannessen Vågstøl, "Den norske solidaritetsrørsla for Palestina, 1967-1986" (Master thesis, University of Oslo, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> For the history of American Black Liberation activists in Amman at the time, see Michael R. Fischbach, *Black Power and Palestine: Transnational Countries of Color* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 141. The other participating liberation movements are mentioned in Chamberlin's *The Global Offensive*, which also points out some of the European student movement in attendance. Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 111, Kindle.

<sup>6</sup> Vågstøl, "Solidaritetsrørsla for Palestina," 14; Hilde Henriksen Waage, "Norwegians? Who needs Norwegians?": *Explaining the Oslo Back Channel: Norway's Political Past in the Middle East*, Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Oslo, 2000), <https://norad.no/en/tools/publications/publications/2010/norwegians-who-needs-norwegians-explaining-the-oslo-back-channel-norways-political-past-in-the-middle-east/>.

<sup>7</sup> Lysestøl and Sjøe, "Akutt behov for solidaritet," 19; Fischbach, *The Movement*, 44-45.

<sup>8</sup> Lysestøl and Sjøe, "Akutt behov for solidaritet," 19.

movements of the 1960s. The activists assembled understood Palestine as a colonial subject fighting for its national liberation. To them, Palestine had moved from obscurity into the world of revolutionary Third World movements and decolonization. The process through which this happened is the topic for this thesis.

## Research Questions

My aim is to explore how Palestine was first conceptualized by a few Norwegian radicals in the late 1960s. Furthermore, I seek to show how their conceptualization laid the seeds for their subsequent pro-Palestinian engagement, culminating in the founding of Palkom in 1970. I do this by following Norwegian New Leftists who in the 1960s created new, transnational activist networks and drew on radical interpretations of the Third World and imperialism to challenge the predominant “truths” about the state of Israel. By analyzing how their transnational experiences changed their conceptions of the Middle East, Palestine, and Israel, I will attempt to answer the following research questions:

**How did solidarity with Palestine emerge on the Norwegian New Left in the late 1960s, and how did it reconstruct Norwegian conceptions of Palestine? What implications did this have for Norwegian radicals’ understanding of the wider Arab-Israeli conflict?**

It is said that the 1960s were tumultuous times in the West. However, the New Leftist activists described in this thesis left the tumultuous West to find a Middle East on fire. The thesis follows these people and analyzes events, journeys, and exchanges they took part in between spring of 1967 and the end of 1970. Within this relatively short time span, the Middle East was ravaged by a series of destructive wars, most of which were closely entangled with the question of Palestine. I follow the trajectory of a few persons central to the launch of the Norwegian solidarity movement as they encounter this question on the dusty streets of Amman and the ravaged battlefields of the Golan Heights, but also in noisy debates at the Norwegian student societies and in the relative comfort of Oslo’s grand meeting halls. In the transnational networks these activists created between themselves and the Palestinian national movement, I argue, these localities were connected, and Palestine was discovered. In this process, Palestine took on a new meaning, moving it towards the center of how they understood the Middle East conflict.

## State of Research

I aim to contribute to the existing literature by providing an elaborate analysis of how Norwegian New Left radicals decided to take Palestine’s side in the Middle East conflict. In

doing this, I also seek to illuminate the role of Palestinians in spurring solidarity for their cause. As such, the thesis engages with bodies of historical literature concerning the Norwegian New Left, Western solidarity movements, and the Palestinian national movement in the post-World War II era. Little has been written by historians about the Norwegian solidarity movement with Palestine specifically, although it has warranted mentions in works about the Norwegian New Left, Norwegian Marxist-Leninist-groups (ml), and other solidarity movements.<sup>9</sup> The New Left is the collective term for radical, yet diverse, political Leftist movements formed in the 1960s as a critique of the so-called Old Left, which was typically embodied by Liberal, Communist, and Social Democratic parties. The New Left's emergence was a global phenomenon that had distinct, yet interconnected, national and local characteristics, summed up by historian M.S. Kimmel as "the linking of political and cultural radicalism, and the linking of an economic critique of capitalism with a political critique of bureaucracy. [...] [T]he product of an era of political reform, grown stale and complacent, enervated by institutional lethargy."<sup>10</sup>

The persons covered in this thesis were part of the radical New Left movements of the 1960s and 70s in Norway. Historians have asserted how the Norwegian New Left was closely tied to radical youth movements, and much of the literature has focused on the mentioned Maoist ml-factions.<sup>11</sup> Despite its marginal political role, the ml-movement has attracted the attention of Norwegian scholars since the 1980s, seeing as it had a substantial impact on how the 1968 youth revolts in Norway played out. A host of explanations for the ml-movement's rise have been provided, both through historical analysis and the memoirs of central actors. Parts of this scholarship has warranted criticism for being sentimental and commemorative, given that many historians have been part of the movement themselves.<sup>12</sup> Still, research into the ml-movement within its Norwegian context has shown how its counter-cultural and quasi-religious traits, but also its charismatic leaders and play on generational dynamics, were all

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<sup>9</sup> The solidarity movement with Palestine is for example referenced in James Godbolt, *Den norske vietnambevegelsen* (Oslo: Unipub, 2010); Terje Tvedt, (*ml*): *En bok om maoismen i Norge* (Oslo: Ad Notam, 1989); Terje Tvedt, *Verdensbilder og selvbilder: En humanitær stormakts intellektuelle historie* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Michael S. Kimmel, "The Sixties without Metaphor," *Society* 26, no. 3 (1989): 79, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02699253>.

<sup>11</sup> Tvedt, (*ml*); Hans Petter Sjøli, *Mao, min Mao: historien om AKPs vekst og fall* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2005); Pål Steigan, *På den himmelske freds plass: Om ml-bevegelsen i Norge* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1985); Jon Rognlien and Nikolai Brandal, *Den store ML-boka: Norsk maoisme sett nedenfra* (Oslo: Kagge, 2009); Ragnhild Mork, "Kinas raude sol: MI-rørsla og kulturrevolusjonen i Kina," *Nytt norsk tidsskrift* 15, no. 1 (1998); Håkon Kolmannskog, "Ideologisk leiarskap i den norske ml-rørsla: Det umogleges kunst 1965-1980" (Master thesis, University of Oslo, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Tor Egil Førland, "'1968' in Norway: Piecemeal, Peaceful and Postmodern," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 33, no. 4 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1080/03468750802305283>.

important causes for its relative success among Norwegian youths.<sup>13</sup> Its representations of, and inspiration from, the Third World has also been highlighted. In an essay from his book *Selvbilder og Verdensbilder*, for example, Terje Tvedt postulates that Norwegian Maoist intellectuals conceptualized and perceived the Third World as the “future of History”, arguing that these intellectuals’ radicalism and self-understanding was based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the developing world and its cultural complexities.<sup>14</sup>

The literature on Norwegian solidarity movements has challenged the marginality of the ml-movement, showing that the solidarity organizations it spawned, or absorbed, later went on to have significant impacts on the Labor movement in Norway, embodied by the Labor Party and the largest federation of Norwegian unions, *Landsorganisasjonen* (LO).<sup>15</sup> In the 1960s, solidarity took on a new meaning to Leftist youth in Europe. In the Marxist terminology commonly employed by the Left, solidarity had been the idea of mutual support for an interconnected, common struggle, typically the working class’ struggle against the bourgeoisie system of oppression.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, this understanding of solidarity’s focus on common grievances also entailed a notion of self-identification. With the New Left of the 1960s and 70s, the understanding of solidarity was widened to include civil and minority rights struggles, encompassing anti-racism, women’s liberation, and gay rights. Importantly, it also took on a meaning centered around the support for liberation movements in the Third World, with solidarity often used to distinguish this support from the contemporary anti-war movements.<sup>17</sup>

In the Norwegian context, New Left solidarity with the Third World is covered in several works, including on the movements for Vietnam, Afghanistan, and South Africa.<sup>18</sup> These illustrate the new operationalization of solidarity that arose in the 1960s and 70s, and generally position the various movements within their national, and often, Marxist-Leninist

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<sup>13</sup> Mork, "Kinas røde sol."; Sjøli, *Mao, min Mao*; Kolmannskog, "Ideologisk leiarskap."

<sup>14</sup> Tvedt, "Den tredje verden som historiens fremtid," in *Verdensbilder og selvbilder*.

<sup>15</sup> Øystein Jackwitz Rovde, "I solidaritetens navn: LOs forhold til Midt-Østenkonflikten 1947-2002" ( Master thesis, University of Oslo, 2004); Inayatullah Hanbaly, "Bake Sale for Weapons: The Role of the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee in Mobilizing Norwegians for the Afghan Cause (1979-1989)" ( Master thesis, University of Oslo, 2019); Godbolt, *Den norske vietnambevegelsen*.

<sup>16</sup> Steinar Stjernø, "The Idea of Solidarity in Europe," *European Journal of Social Law* 1, no. 3 (2011), <https://www.jurisquare.be/en/journal/ejsl/2011-3/the-idea-of-solidarity-in-europe/>.

<sup>17</sup> Steinar Stjernø, "Solidaritet i Europa," *Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning* 46, no. 3 (2005), [http://www.idunn.no/tfs/2005/03/boksymposium\\_solidaritet\\_i\\_europa](http://www.idunn.no/tfs/2005/03/boksymposium_solidaritet_i_europa).

<sup>18</sup> Godbolt, *Den norske vietnambevegelsen*; Vesla Vetlesen, *Frihet for Sør-Afrika: LO og kampen mot apartheid* (Oslo: Landsorganisasjonen i Norge, Tiden Norsk Forlag, 1998); Tore Linné Eriksen, ed., *Norway and National Liberation in Southern Africa* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2000); Hanbaly, "Bake Sale for Weapons."; Vågstøl, "Solidaritetsrørsla for Palestina."

frameworks. Some recent contributions also highlight transnational aspects, shedding light on the movements' ties to other Scandinavian organizations and their reliance on global ideas about imperialism.<sup>19</sup> The only contribution to deal extensively with the Norwegian solidarity movement with Palestine, besides non-academic work conducted by the former activists themselves, is Tarjei Vågstøl's master's thesis from 2007, *Solidaritetsrørsla med Palestina*.<sup>20</sup> In the period he covers, 1967-1986, Palkom and its organizational offspring, *Palestinafronten* (The Palestine Front, Palfront), organized the Norwegian solidarity work and successfully lobbied to change public opinion. Vågstøl is mostly concerned with how these actors organized themselves in opposition to the official foreign policy of Norway, which transitioned from pro-Israel to ambiguity to moderate pro-Palestinianism in the period he studies. As with many of the other works on the Norwegian solidarity movements, elements of transnational perspectives are mentioned, yet they are not explored specifically or at great depth. Although Vågstøl does reference how contacts with the Palestinian national movement were helpful in launching the movement, and the importance of references to Vietnam in understanding the Palestinian struggle, he does not analyze these threads beyond the Norwegian context. My aim, on the other hand, is to illustrate the fundamentally transnational nature of how this solidarity came to be, and how transnational encounters shaped Norwegian perceptions of solidarity, the Third World, and Palestine.

Åsmund Borgen Gjerde's recent doctoral dissertation on the Norwegian Left's understanding of Israel between 1933 and 1968 also makes a contribution to the historiography on the Norwegian New Left.<sup>21</sup> In his final chapter, Gjerde shows how the Norwegian New Left's turn towards anti-Zionism in the 1960s represented the abandonment of the civilizational discourse employed by the Old Left. Within this civilizational discourse, the state of Israel had previously been seen as a necessary reaction to Nazism's pollution of Western civilization before and during World War II, and as a representative of civilization and democracy in a "sea of backwardness". The 1968-generation, however, renounced this idea of civilization as

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<sup>19</sup> Hanbaly, "Bake Sale for Weapons."; Godbolt, *Den norske vietnambevegelsen*.

<sup>20</sup> Vågstøl, "Solidaritetsrørsla for Palestina." Vågstøl's thesis was later rewritten as a book chapter on how the Norwegian solidarity movement for Palestine framed the Palestine-question, see Tarjei Johannessen Vågstøl, "Framtida tilhører palestinarane: Innrammingsstrategiar i den norske solidaritetsrørsla for Palestina," in *Historier om motstand: Kollektive bevegelser i det 20. århundret*, ed. Jardar Sørvoll, Knut Kjeldstadli, and Idar Helle (Oslo: Abstrakt, 2010). Former activist accounts about the Norwegian solidarity movement with Palestine include Lysestøl and Sjøe, "Akutt behov for solidaritet."; Kjell Bygstad, "Norsk Midt-Østen politikk og solidaritetsarbeidet for palestinerne," *Vardøger*, no. 29 (2004), [http://www.vardoger.no/fulltekst/vardoger29/13\\_Bygstad\\_Norsk%20solidaritet.pdf](http://www.vardoger.no/fulltekst/vardoger29/13_Bygstad_Norsk%20solidaritet.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> Åsmund Borgen Gjerde, "The Meaning of Israel: Anti-Zionism and Philo-Zionism in the Norwegian Left, 1933—1968" ( Ph.D. diss., University of Bergen, 2019).

imperialist and racist, which in turn flipped their perception of Israel and its position as representative of Western Civilization. Furthermore, he argues that it was the move away from this civilizational discourse, not their (lacking) perception of Palestinians, that initially fostered the anti-Zionist turn. Thus, Gjerde's thesis provides essential background for understanding how the mindset and worldview of Norwegian radicals at the outset of the periodization in my own study emerged. By employing a transnational perspective, I attempt to show how Palestinians eventually influenced these mindsets as Norwegian New Leftists encountered them in the period following Gjerde's.

Perceptions and representations have more often come to light in recent works on the Western New Left and its connection to the wider world, not just in Norway.<sup>22</sup> Although the New Left has been analyzed through a global lens for quite some time, several newer works also deals closer with how transnational exchanges on the individual and organizational level influenced both representations, ideas, and decisions.<sup>23</sup> This has provided new perspectives on how events like the Vietnam War, the Algerian revolution, and the spread of Socialism in Asia influenced developments in the New Left through the 1960s and 70s. Furthermore, such approaches have shed new light on actors on the margins, both within New Leftist movements and in Western societies at large, showing how immigrants, racial minorities, and women interacted with their contemporaries in other parts of the world to shape the New Left. As such, the newer historiography provides insight into the complex nature of the connections between the New Left in the West and the Third World, and how transnational exchanges like these spurred a highly diverse group of radicals in the era.

However, few of these works elaborate much on the Western New Left's connections to the Middle East in general or Palestine specifically.<sup>24</sup> For the American case, historian Michael R. Fischbach's two books *Black Power and Palestine* and *The Movement and the Middle East*

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<sup>22</sup> See for example Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey & Oxford, England: Princeton University Press, 2010); Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism during the Vietnam Era* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2013), Kindle.

<sup>23</sup> For a global perspective on the New Left, see for example George N. Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Boston: South End Press, 1987); Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003). For works that emphasize the transnational aspects of the New Left, see Wu, *Radicals on the Road*; Fischbach, *Black Power and Palestine*; Fischbach, *The Movement*.

<sup>24</sup> Of the works cited, besides Fischbach, only Wolin addresses the impact of the Palestinian uprising. Wolin, *Wind from the East*, 220-21, 351. For a discussion specifically addressing the Arab Left's entanglement with New Left movements elsewhere, including the West, see Sune Haugbolle, "Entanglement, Global History, and the Arab Left," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 51, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743819000060>.

can be considered efforts to reinsert this dimension into the body of literature.<sup>25</sup> By addressing how American radicals from various political movements of the 1960s connected with the Israel-Palestine conflict, Fischbach shows how these actors conceptualized Palestine through lenses of anti-imperialism and Black Liberation. For example, Jewish Americans linked their radicalism to the national struggle of the Palestinians, eventually causing division in the American Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). For the Black Power movement, the encounter with Palestinian national liberation saw solidarity with Palestine become “an integral part of the construction of a revolutionary Black identity.”<sup>26</sup> As such, Fischbach’s works can be placed along other additions, such as Keith Feldman’s *A Shadow over Palestine* and Alex Lubin’s *Geographies of Liberation*, in illustrating how studies into the interactions with the Israel-Palestine conflict, and Palestinian nationalism, provides new insight into Western political movements.<sup>27</sup> Although the actors portrayed in Fischbach’s books are quite different in themselves from those portrayed in this thesis, their stories add a previously omitted dimension to the field of the New Left, similar to what I am attempting to do with this thesis.

If one moves beyond the New Left, the political history between Norway and the Middle East on the state- and international level has attracted a lot of attention from scholars. This is in part due to the importance of the 1990s Oslo Accords, which at the time of its conclusion signaled a breakthrough in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Particularly, the backchannels and connections that culminated in the Accords have been thoroughly investigated in macro-level studies as well as more journalistic works.<sup>28</sup> Mostly embedded in diplomatic and international history, these works show how it was commonplace for Norwegians to have a highly romanticized view of Israel, and covers how this was being challenged in official channels after 1967.

Finally, as the thesis discusses the encounters between Norwegian actors and the Palestinian national movement, the latter’s historiography is also of relevance. Most of the literature about the Palestinian national movement tends to place emphasis on how the Palestine

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<sup>25</sup> Fischbach, *The Movement*; Fischbach, *Black Power and Palestine*.

<sup>26</sup> Fischbach, *Black Power and Palestine*, 103.

<sup>27</sup> Keith P. Feldman, *A Shadow over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Alex Lubin, *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> Hilde Henriksen Waage, *Norge - Israels beste venn: Norsk Midtøsten-politikk 1949-1956* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1996); Waage, *Norwegians*; Tveit, *Alt for Israel*; Odd Karsten Tveit, *Krig & diplomati: Oslo-Jerusalem 1978-96* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2006).

Liberation Organization (PLO) organized itself to successfully mobilize support, publicity, and a sense of Palestinian national identity in the period from the 1960s to the mid-to-late 1980s.<sup>29</sup> These books give some attention to the international aspirations of the PLO, although emphasis is placed on the more immediate context. More recent works have also covered the period that culminates with the PLO's inception into the Palestinian Authority established by the Oslo Accords, showing how the national movement's armed struggle provided impetus for "the evolution of Palestinian national identity and [...] the formation of parastatal institutions and a bureaucratic elite."<sup>30</sup>

An internationalist addition to the historiography on the PLO is Paul T. Chamberlin's *The Global Offensive* from 2012.<sup>31</sup> This work presents the PLO's role as protagonist in a history of global Third World cooperation against the expanding power of the United States in a process which eventually transcended its Cold War-context. Chamberlin stresses the importance of transnational networks between Third World revolutionary movements and the internationalist strategy of the PLO within these networks, and shows how the Palestinian national movement tapped into global intellectual and political frameworks like Third World internationalism, tricontinentalism, and revolutionary anti-imperialism.<sup>32</sup> This makes it central to my thesis topic, as it concretely describes the anti-imperialist representations and networks that influenced activists such as those I follow. However, Chamberlin's focus is generally directed at relationships with other Third World-movements, and *The Global Offensive* does not feature in-depth analyses of the PLO's influence on First World radicals. My thesis seeks to add another dimension to this transnational aspect of the PLO's struggle, showing how the connections described by Chamberlin also mobilized Western radicals into support of Palestine, and how this changed their understanding the Israel-Palestine conflict.

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<sup>29</sup> On the PLO, see for example Helena Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation: People, Power and Politics*, Cambridge Middle East Library, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Jillian Becker, *The PLO: The Rise and Fall of the Palestine Liberation Organization* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2014), Kindle. For longer perspectives on Palestinian nationalism and the wider Israel-Palestine conflict, see James L. Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

<sup>30</sup> Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), vii.

<sup>31</sup> Chamberlin, *Global Offensive*.

<sup>32</sup> For transnational and global histories of the Third World in the post-World War II era, see Anne Garland Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018); Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization and the Third World Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Samantha Christiansen and Zachary A. Scarlett, eds., *The Third World in the Global 1960s: Protest, Culture and Society*, Kindle ed. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013); Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007).



## Methods and Theory

To show how Norwegian radicals' perceptions of Palestine were influenced through transnational exchanges, and engagements with transnational networks, I employ the methodologies summed up by Ian Tyrrell in his article about the transnational turn in United States history.<sup>33</sup> By looking into the places Norwegian activists went, the people they met, and the events that moved them, I seek to illustrate how a complex network spilling across borders influenced their perceptions and decisions by providing new references within an already familiar framework of understanding, namely that of global New Left anti-imperialism and Third Worldism. The events, journeys, and exchanges I analyze mainly take place in and between Norway and the Middle East. They are highlighted because they formed turning points in the radical reconstruction of Palestine as a distinct national sphere within a framework of New Left anti-imperialism and decolonization. As such, the transnational frame is also reflected in my choice of tempo-geographic scope. The analysis is informed by its global context, what others have termed the *global 1960s*.<sup>34</sup> However, seeing as this is a transnational study of events that took place within a more narrowly defined geographical sphere than what can be considered global, the thesis itself is better positioned within the *transnational 1960s*. This term is meant to point towards an analysis of a more narrowed down cross-section of global currents and processes of globalization.

Using a transnational approach to study the relationship between Norwegians and Palestinians aims at decentering any *Sonderweg*-perspective on what 'special relationship' might exist, or might have existed, between Norway and Palestine. Instead, I will seek to emphasize the power of global ideas tied to the Third World and anti-imperialism in catalyzing change. A way to do this is by employing different framing contexts. By showing how similar events were taking place elsewhere, for example in the other Scandinavian countries, and that these parallel processes influenced and informed one another, these dynamics are shown not to be specifically tied to the national contexts in themselves.<sup>35</sup> That is not to say that national factors were not important. They did certainly play important roles, both for the drive of the first Norwegian pro-Palestinian activists and for their reliance on institutions firmly embedded in the Norwegian public sphere, such as *Det Norske Studentersamfund* (The Norwegian

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<sup>33</sup> Ian Tyrrell, "Reflections on the Transnational Turn in United States History: Theory and Practice," *Journal of Global History* 4, no. 3 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022809990167>.

<sup>34</sup> See for example Christiansen and Scarlett, *Third World*.

<sup>35</sup> Here, I lean on Tyrrell's discussion of what he terms "framing contexts" in transnational history. Tyrrell, "Reflections on the Transnational Turn in United States History: Theory and Practice," 462-64.

Student Society, DNS). Nevertheless, I will show how the turning points leading up to the foundation of Palkom all happened as part of transnational processes of exchange and interaction within and beyond the West, bringing in not only Palestine, but also places like Jordan, Vietnam, and other Scandinavian countries. Thus, by illustrating how these experiences shaped and catalyzed the Norwegian radicals' understanding of Palestine and of solidarity, while also addressing how they were colored by both global and national references, I intend to produce an analysis that goes beyond simply contextualizing political events in Norway.

The analysis of transnational networks runs the risk of downplaying power discrepancies between actors engaging in reciprocal exchanges.<sup>36</sup> The power and agency of individual actors also changes as they move between different contexts and localities. Norwegian activists might seem to be better predisposed as inhabitants of a country firmly entrenched in the West. However, seeing as the radicals studied were part of a marginalized political movement, their interactions with Palestinians, and the power relationship between them, becomes more complex. I intend to address this by following Charles Maier's proposition for mapping various "nodes" of influence as they "pull at the networks" presented.<sup>37</sup> In the context of this thesis, then, the networks described are buoyed by a host of ideological and conceptual influences such as anti-imperialism, solidarity, and Third Worldism, as well as nationality itself.

Finally, for clarity, I deploy terms like "the Third World" and "imperialism" as they would have been used by the actors described. Thus, they need to be properly historicized. In short, the Third World is used to represent what it meant in the 1960s, that is to describe the decolonizing world as opposed to the communist and the capitalist worlds.<sup>38</sup> As such, it replaces more contemporary terms like "the developing world" or "the Global South." Similarly, the people presented in this thesis generally understood imperialism through its Marxist-Leninist definition. Although conceptions of imperialism varied substantially at the time, also within the New Left, the typical understanding among Norwegian Maoist radicals emphasized the Leninist view of imperialism as "the final stage of capitalism."<sup>39</sup> However, it also expanded it. In the 1960s, the New Left ml-movements adopted the Maoist understanding of so-called social imperialism to denounce the Soviet Union's foreign policy. More broadly

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 465.

<sup>37</sup> Maier is referenced in *ibid.*, 467-68.

<sup>38</sup> Prashad, *Darker Nations*, xv-xix.

<sup>39</sup> See for example Godbolt, *Den norske vietnambevegelsen*, 186.

speaking, social imperialism denoted a socialist country's attempts to dominate other countries through direct and indirect means.<sup>40</sup> To Mao and his followers, this constituted a betrayal of international socialism and especially of the self-determination of the Third World, which was increasingly seeing its sovereignty encroached upon by Moscow as well as Washington. In other words, both superpowers in the Cold War were considered the enemy.

## Primary Sources

Although a stated goal of transnational history is to decenter the nation's position within the analysis, certain limitations to this endeavor arise due to the scope of the thesis and the access to primary source material. As I do not myself speak Arabic, I have had to rely on sources in Norwegian and English. This obviously limits the study's ability to decenter the national perspective. Furthermore, it means that Palestinian actors have to be presented through the eyes of Norwegian activists, something that might also be affected by my own nationality as a Norwegian.<sup>41</sup> In practice, this limits the thesis' ability to shed light on both sides within the transnational networks forged between Norwegian and Palestinian actors, and to address how the construction of perceptions likely happened within a reciprocal process. However, it still allows insight into how the Palestinians were perceived by the Norwegians, which remains highly relevant given that the thesis discusses how Palestine was "discovered" by Norwegian actors.

To present the narrative from the Norwegian activists' own perspective, I lean on archival material and their own recollections, while relevant secondary literature and contemporary media reports provide context and nuance to the presentation. By analyzing material produced by the activists themselves, such as resolutions they wrote or statements they gave, their understanding of Palestine and anti-imperialism comes into focus and can be used to discern how their interpretations were constructed and changed. The archival material studied is mainly gathered from the collections of institutions and individual Norwegian political actors. The organizational archive of Palkom from the period is unfortunately missing, and instead I rely upon the personal archive of activist Kjell Bygstad, located at *Arbeiderbevegelsens Arkiv og Bibliotek* (The Labor Movement's Archives and Library, ARBARK). Moreover, I have also studied parts of the DNS' archives at *Riksarkivet*, also in Oslo (The Norwegian National

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<sup>40</sup> Godbolt illustrates this understanding of social imperialism using the case of the Maoist factions in the Norwegian Vietnam movement in *ibid.*, 196.

<sup>41</sup> The problem of reflexivity, i.e. that of the author's role in influencing the presentation of history, is discussed in Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity," *History and theory* 45, no. 1 (2006).

Archive, RA), which holds resolutions and correspondence, as well as recordings of its debates on the Palestine question. The RA also holds surveillance reports, released in the early 2000s as part of an investigation into illegal state surveillance of certain individuals between the 1960s and 1980s. Among those surveilled by the Norwegian Police Surveillance Agency (POT) were both Finn Sjøe and Peder Martin Lysestøl, the central activists presented in this thesis, and I have had access to the declassified surveillance file of the latter.<sup>42</sup>

Through the collection of *Nasjonalbiblioteket* in Oslo (The Norwegian National Library), I have also had access to a complete collection of Palkom's newspaper, *Fritt Palestina*. Although the first issue of *Fritt Palestina* went into print in late 1970, i.e. at the endpoint of my periodization, studying its editions from the 1970's provides insight into the pro-Palestinian position as it was presented in a period adjacent to the periodization covered in the thesis. Moreover, *Fritt Palestina's* first issue covers how Palkom's foundation took place, including certain inaugurating documents and texts.

To fill in any blanks in the archival material and get a better understanding of their individual trajectories, I have also conducted interviews with Finn Sjøe and Peder Martin Lysestøl. They are both considered to have been instrumental in the establishment of a Norwegian solidarity movement with Palestine and have also held other significant positions within the Norwegian ml-movement after their initial engagements with Palestine. The interviews also supplement recollections they themselves have written about their own engagement in this period.<sup>43</sup> These published recollections themselves are on the other hand consulted as reference and secondary literature. Finally, I make thorough use of newspapers and radio programs contemporary to the thesis topic, found at *Nasjonalbiblioteket's* online portal and in the ml-movement's digital archive. This adds nuance to the narrative of certain events described in the archival material, while also representing the predominant contexts of the time. The media accounts used have been collected from media outlets covering most of the mainstream political spectrum at the time, as well as several from the radical Left, from right wing *Morgenbladet* to socialist *Ungsosialisten*.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Of the two, only Lysestøl's file has been released to the public.

<sup>43</sup> Lysestøl and Sjøe, "Akutt behov for solidaritet."

<sup>44</sup> From the National Library's online collection, besides *Morgenbladet*, I have consulted the Socialist People's party-organ *Orientering*, Labor party-organ *Arbeiderbladet*, left-leaning *Dagbladet*, centrist-conservative *Verdens Gang*, conservative *Aftenposten*, as well as one issue of Trondheim's local newspaper, *Adressavisa*. URL: <https://www.nb.no/search?mediatype=aviser> Moreover, I have studied two radio programs aired on the Norwegian Public Broadcasting's radio broadcasts, available from the National Library at <https://www.nb.no/nbsok/search> Issues of the socialist youth publication *Ungsosialisten* are available at

## Structure of the Thesis

In addition to the introduction, the thesis is structured into four parts, of which chapters two and three contain the main primary source analysis. Chapter one provides a broad background for the analysis by discussing the rebirth of Palestinian nationalism in the 1950s and 60s, Norwegian perceptions of Israel in the time leading up to the 1967 Six-Day War, and the emergence of the Norwegian New Left. By showing how organizations like Fatah worked to globalize the Palestinian struggle through involvement with international revolutionary networks and so-called Third World Internationalism, I address how this made them appeal to radical youth movements. This happened within the same Cold War context that also saw the rise of an anti-Americanist critique in Norway, directed at the dominant Labor Party. This critique eventually became central in spawning the Norwegian New Leftist youth movements in the 1960s. By illustrating how these different historical processes were in fact connected and drew on each other's influences, the chapter sets the scene for the new dynamics that arose with the Norwegian New Left's turn against Israel and Zionism following the 1967 Six-Day War.

Chapter two treats the aftermath of the Norwegian New Left's anti-Zionist turn between the summer of 1967 and the spring of 1969, and how this period saw various activists gradually uncover Palestinian nationalism. This happened at a time when most Norwegians still had no conceptions of Palestine as anything beyond a former mandate territory that up until Israel's founding had been inhabited by Arabs. As increased focus was directed at Israel's Zionist character by New Left publications and political actors, young Norwegians discovered the Palestinians and their armed struggle during trips to the Middle East. Central to the realization that the Palestinians in fact constituted their own distinct national group were references to anti-imperialist perceptions of the Vietnam War, as well as the Third Worldist meta-narrative presented by the Palestinian national movement itself. This happened in a time when organizations like Fatah and the PFLP were becoming increasingly visible following a series of political victories and spectacular military operations.

The third and final chapter analyzes how the pro-Palestinian position was consolidated in a way that emphasized its connection to the global revolutionary struggle against superpower imperialism. These interpretations were informed and reinforced by encounters between Palestinian activists and Norwegian students, both through meetings in the radicalizing

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<http://akp.no/ml-historie/pdf/ungdom/ungsosialisten/index.html>. I have also consulted one issue of British *The Guardian*, available from <https://theguardian.newspapers.com/>

student societies and journeys to the Palestinian national movement's bases in Amman, Jordan. Rounding off the analysis, the founding of Palkom in 1970 is shown to have represented the culmination of these experiences, and I underscore the Palestinians' role in evoking the anti-imperialist understanding of Palestine that emerged with it.

Finally, the conclusion summarizes the developments covered in the previous chapters and discusses what they tell us about how solidarity with Palestine emerged in Norway. In doing this, I illustrate how the various transnational encounters between Norwegian activists and the Palestinian national movement, both in Norway and the Middle East, in several different types of forums, tying in the global ideas of anti-imperialism and Third World revolutionism, shaped the Norwegian solidarity movement with Palestine, and Norwegian views of Palestine itself in relation to the wider Middle East conflict.

## Chapter one: The Norwegian New Left, Palestine, and the Third World

When a solidarity movement with Palestine developed on the Norwegian Left in the latter half of the 1960s, it happened as part of a complete reinterpretation of the Middle East, and of Israel. Although often overlooked in the context of the 1960s youth revolt, this reinterpretation was in fact spurred on by the radicalism of a new generation growing restless with the world built by the old guard and the Cold War world system that controlled it. In the world around them, they witnessed the people of the Third World revolt against colonialism and be harshly rebuked by the world powers. New communications technologies brought the blood-stained images of the Algerian revolution and the Indochinese Wars into Western living rooms, and it shook Western youth to the core to find themselves on the side of the oppressor. Record players relayed the hoarse voices of protest singers exclaiming, in the words of Bob Dylan and P.F. Sloan, that the times they were a'changing, the Eastern world exploding, "and even the Jordan River [had] bodies floating."<sup>45</sup>

Norwegian youths sensed these things when looking out at the world, but also turned their gaze back at their own society and state. Norway was a founding member of NATO. Its social democratic Labor-government had modernized society, but to some, it had done so at the expense of a neutral foreign policy. Furthermore, it was deeply embedded with Israel, a country few regarded as controversial to support at the time. In fact, support for Israel was so consolidated that when a few persons took the Palestinians' side, they were instantly estranged by the mainstream. As such, the emergence of a "pro-Palestinianism" among Norwegian radical youths happened both as a result of, as a part of, and despite of a series of different yet intertwined historical developments, both in Norwegian, Middle Eastern and Global history.

This chapter will provide an overview of the dynamics leading up to 1967 through an overview of several historical threads. The main threads include the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East, of Fatah and the Palestinian national movement itself, as well as that of the New Left in the Arab world, the West and in Norway specifically. These histories are tied together and colored by their connections to the wider global political and cultural contexts of the second half of the twentieth century, such as the Cold War, decolonization,

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<sup>45</sup> Bob Dylan, vocalist, "The Times They Are A-changin'," by Bob Dylan, track one on *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, Columbia Records, 1964; Barry McGuire, vocalist, "Eve of Destruction", by P.F. Sloan, track one on *Eve of Destruction*, Dunhill Records, 1965.

and International Third Worldism. These interlocked scales further display the multitude of contexts through which the transnational processes between Norway and Palestine discussed in this thesis can be understood.

## The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict, the Cold War, and Decolonization

The Arab-Israeli conflict was one of the region's defining stalemates of the latter half of the twentieth century. Not only was it central to politics in the Middle East, but it also touched upon, and was shaped by, the dominating global contexts of the period. The battle over Palestine was in essence one over territory, but it was also one over ideology and culture, influenced by, and itself shaping, political paradigms at the regional, international and transnational levels. Internationally, it found itself at the nexus of decolonization and the Cold War.

The ideological and military contest between the two predominant superpowers at the time, the United States of America and the Soviet Union, occupied the center stage of world politics from the end of the Second World War until the collapse of the latter in the late twentieth century. Through five decades, it constituted an international system in its own right due to its magnitude and all-encompassing nature.<sup>46</sup> However, the influences of the Cold War also saturated the national and local levels from the outset, inciting popular reactions and radicalization across borders on a global scale. The Cold War's changing dynamics also played their part in the emergence of new political movements relevant to this thesis. Of primary importance were for example the Sino-Soviet split of the late 1950s and China's critique of *détente*, i.e. the easing of tensions between the superpowers in the 1970s. These developments helped incite European Maoism through the vehicle of the Soviet-critical Marxist-Leninist movements.<sup>47</sup> The Cold War also influenced processes that preceded the conflict itself, among which were the on-going processes of decolonization.<sup>48</sup>

To be clear, decolonization here means the process in which Third World nationalist movements worked for the independence and self-determination of their various countries in the post-World War II era. If one wants to talk about waves of decolonization, the wave relevant here is the third, which succeeded the first that took place in the Americas in the late

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<sup>46</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (London: Penguin Random House, 2017).

<sup>47</sup> Wolin, *Wind from the East*, 12-13.

<sup>48</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).



1800s and the second in Europe and the Near East during the inter-war years.<sup>49</sup> During the Cold War, processes of decolonization, all varied in shape and form, took place on all non-Western continents, causing political, economic, and cultural ripples in the metropolises as well as in the international system. In seeing it as something that goes beyond a single political event in which power is transferred from a colonial ruler to a sovereign nation-state, I borrow the definition posed by Farina Mir, who describes it as “a broader historical process” that traces further back into history than the event itself, thus extending the orthodox understanding of the concept.<sup>50</sup>

To the leaders of newly independent Third World states, the Cold War posed a threat of a potentially existential nature. Getting mixed up into superpower rivalry could mean limitations to their newfound sovereignty through alliances in the short term, which in turn could lead to foreign occupation and even nuclear annihilation in what was perceived as a highly uncertain future. These considerations led many leaders, such as Indian Jawaharlal Nehru, Indonesian Sukarno, and Egyptian Gamal Abdel-Nasser, to unite behind a stance of neutrality, forming a block of their own within the United Nations and other international organs.<sup>51</sup> Between 1945 and 1965, fifty new, independent countries emerged and began to consolidate under this collective Third World-banner, as opposed to the first (the West) and the second (the Communist) worlds. Initially embodied at the 1955 Bandung Conference, its political agenda revolved around neutrality in the Cold War and national liberation from the shackles of colonialism.<sup>52</sup>

This so-called Third Worldism, or Third World Internationalism, would have many repercussions in the international “community,” such as speeding up decolonization itself, and in turn propelling their international efforts through increased numbers. The influence of the Non-Aligned Movement on the international scene was limited, however. Due to internal incoherence and general economic inferiority, it remained inadequate in its ability to exert power over the still dominant superpowers and their respective alliance-systems. It was important nonetheless, perhaps even more so at the national and transnational levels, where it

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<sup>49</sup> The concept “waves of decolonization” is summed up in Dane Kennedy, *Decolonization: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>50</sup> Farina Mir, “Introduction,” *The American Historical Review* 120, no. 3 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/120.3.844>.

<sup>51</sup> Westad, *Cold War*, 261-62; Prashad, *Darker Nations*.

<sup>52</sup> See Prashad, “Bandung,” in *Darker Nations*.

underbuilt a sense of Third World solidarity that had global repercussions as it inspired, and entangled itself with, new political movements and organizations.<sup>53</sup>

The experiences of the Cold War and decolonization also made ripple effects in the Arab world. The Arabs had struggled against the colonial powers of Great Britain and France since the inter-war years, instigating the rise of Arab nationalism, an ideology seeking a strong and united Arab world that could carve out a role for itself in the international world order.<sup>54</sup> Over the course of the 1950s and 60s, Arab nationalism and pan-Arabist ideals were given a charismatic front figure, draped in anti-colonialism and neutralism, in Egyptian President Gamal Abdel-Nasser. However, it is important not to overstate the support for the Nasserist project, as doing so, “overwrites the way a significant group of politically active Arabs viewed the world at the time”.<sup>55</sup> According to Sune Haugbølle, the Arab New Left was a good illustration of exactly this. Born out of the Arab nationalist movement in the 1950s and early 1960s, the Arab New Left was visible through its critique of both Nasserism and the various Arab communist parties, while at the same time aligning itself closer with the global revolutionary movements that idealized leaders like Che Guevara, Mao Tsetung, and Vo Nguyen Giap.<sup>56</sup> By placing the plight of Arabs within a framework in which American imperialism was the enemy, the Arab New Left associated itself with the global struggle of the Third World for equality, freedom and self-determination, i.e. with the revolutionary fighters of Algeria, Vietnam, and Cuba. These political ideas were however not crystalized into fully fledged movements until after the 1967 war had seriously rocked the Nasserist project.

## The Palestinian National Movement

Israel was founded in 1948 within the former British mandate territory of Palestine, in what the Palestinians have dubbed the *nakba*, literally meaning “disaster” in Arabic. The wars that followed the withdrawal of British troops were resounding victories for the Zionists and left the newly formed state of Israel in control of around 80 percent of the former mandate territory, with Egypt in control of the Gaza Strip and Jordan of the West Bank.<sup>57</sup> By the time hostilities calmed down in 1949, tens of thousands of people had lost their lives while roughly

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<sup>53</sup> Christiansen and Scarlett, *Third World*; Prashad, *Darker Nations*.

<sup>54</sup> Eugene L. Rogan, *Araberne: Historien om det arabiske folk*, trans. Gunnar Nyquist (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2011), 322.

<sup>55</sup> Sune Haugbølle, "The New Arab Left and 1967," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 4 (2017): 504, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2017.1360008>.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 501.

<sup>57</sup> Gelvin, *Israel-Palestine Conflict*, 134.

seventy-five percent of the Arab population of Palestine, which had counted 1.4 million before the war, was upended and made refugees. In the decades that followed, the vast majority of these Arabs, the Palestinians, and their descendants, remained in a state of exile within the Middle East while Israel consolidated its state and control of the territory.<sup>58</sup> Over the next two decades, peace initiatives crumbled and gave way to new wars between Israel and the surrounding states, creating new waves of Palestinian refugees, while the base of Palestinian nationalism moved into the increasingly more widespread diaspora. Meanwhile, the Israeli population grew steadily along with its economy and military, and the discrepancy in power between it and its neighbors became increasingly unbridgeable.

After 1948, Palestinian hopes of statehood seemed to be effectively crushed for the time being, and the Palestinian national movement mostly remained uncoordinated and thinly spread across the region until the 1960s. Due to the disastrous results of 1948 and the subsequent dispersion of the diaspora, it “would not have been surprising had the Palestinian national movement and a distinct Palestinian national identity vanished forever”, to use the words of historian James Gelvin.<sup>59</sup> During the 1950s, however, one person who would become emblematic of their national struggle was beginning to take steps that set him on a course for both political stardom and infamy. In 1959, the then Kuwait-based Yassir Arafat, along with a group of likeminded, exiled Palestinians, founded the Palestinian National Liberation Movement, known better by its inverse acronym in Arabic, Fatah. Arafat had fought in the 1948-war at the impressionable age of nineteen and earned his engineering degree in Cairo in 1957. In Kuwait, he was running a successful construction enterprise, the profit of which probably went into funding the nascent organization.<sup>60</sup>

Fatah was in many ways a child of transnationalism: formed by representatives of local groups from all over Europe and the Middle East, who created what amounted to a transnational political space for Palestinian nationalism. As Helena Cobban describes it: “The orientation of the new organization was that which the refugee activists had already hammered out through years of bitter experience in Cairo, Damascus, Gaza, the Gulf and elsewhere.”<sup>61</sup> This probably had much to say for the articulation of its political line, which was meant to be populist and broad, a catch-all organization for and by the masses. Even

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 166-70.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>60</sup> James Dunn and Michael R. Fischbach, "Arafat, Yassir," in *Biographical Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Michael R. Fischbach (Detroit: Gale Group, 2008), 107-08.

<sup>61</sup> Cobban, *Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, 24.

though the organization was meant to rely on no clear ideological line as such beyond an emphasis on Palestinian self-reliance and self-determination, Arafat and his collaborators incorporated principles closely tied to Leftist ideas of anti-colonialism and Third World revolutionism from the early 1960s. They saw the armed struggle as essential to recouping their lost homeland, and their operations drew inspiration from the guerrillas of Cuba, Algeria, and Vietnam.<sup>62</sup>

Importantly, the decision to found Fatah rested in part on the notion that the Palestinians could not wait for the disorganized Arab states to liberate their home country. After 1948, Arab leaders routinely denounced Israel and advocated for its territory to be returned to the Palestinians, but the critique seldom went beyond rhetorics. With Fatah, Arafat and his comrades sought to take back the initiative, thus departing from the Arab nationalist paradigm of the time.<sup>63</sup> Structurally, Fatah was centered around a central committee which oversaw a political and an armed branch, the latter receiving its training in Syria and Algeria. In late 1964, its guerrillas began their raids on Israeli targets under the moniker *Al-Asifa*, meaning the Storm, invoking the “cleansing” effects of armed struggle as described by Frantz Fanon in his influential *The Wretched of the Earth*.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, by getting training in places like Algeria, they were able to link up with the revolutionary movements there, which would serve as important allies in the future. At the time, Algiers was the “Mecca of Revolution” and went on to play a central role in the advancement of the Palestinian cause, allowing Fatah to set up an office there and host its *fedayeen* for training, as well as facilitating meetings with other revolutionary movements.<sup>65</sup> The networks created in Algeria saw Palestinians travel to places like China, Korea, and Vietnam, and meet up with prolific radicals like Che Guevara and Eldridge Cleaver.<sup>66</sup>

Fatah was far from the only Palestinian liberation group formed in this period. Within the various refugee communities, Palestinian activists of different political backgrounds and ideologies were also working to advance the nationalist cause. One was George Habash, a medical student in Beirut who had grown up in a small orthodox Christian community in northern Palestine. Habash eventually founded what was to become one of the largest factions

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<sup>62</sup> Chamberlin, *Global Offensive*, 20; Gelvin, *Israel-Palestine Conflict*, 204.

<sup>63</sup> Cobban, *Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, 24.

<sup>64</sup> Gelvin, *Israel-Palestine Conflict*, 204; Dunn and Fischbach, "Arafat," 108; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967).

<sup>65</sup> *Fedayeen* were Palestinian guerrillas; the word *fedayeen* is Arabic for “those who sacrifice themselves.”

<sup>66</sup> Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution*; Chamberlin, *Global Offensive*, 52; Fischbach, *Black Power and Palestine*, 115; Cobban, *Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, 32.

within the Palestinian national movement, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in 1967, which gained international notoriety for its widely covered airplane hijackings. But in the 1950s, his activism was based in the pan-Arabist Arab Nationalist Movement, which saw the Palestinian struggle as reliant on Arab unity and thus went into close cooperation with Nasser.<sup>67</sup>

Meanwhile, Nasser initiated the conference that saw the birth of a new Palestinian nationalist entity under the leadership of the Arab League.<sup>68</sup> In May 1964, the Palestine Liberation Organization was founded under the sponsorship of Nasser and the Arab League, despite some reservations from both Palestinian nationalists and pan-Arabists. The founding conference for the organization gathered over four hundred delegates from the Palestinian diaspora who agreed on a Palestinian National Charter and a Basic Constitution, stressing, among other things, that the new organization was to be the official representative of the Palestinian people, that Zionism was a racist and imperialist ideology, and that the use of armed struggle was necessary to liberate the Palestinian territories. As such, its founding principles illustrate the influence Fatah representatives had had on the proceedings.<sup>69</sup> These founding documents also set up an Executive Committee, leading the Palestinian National Council that would act as legislative organ, as well as a military branch dubbed the Palestine Liberation Army. However, any optimism generated by the new initiative was quickly marred by schisms and general discord within the PLO leadership, and it was not until the organization was wrested from the control of Nasser in 1969 by Arafat's Fatah that it began to actually function as many Palestinians had hoped. Under Arafat's leadership, the PLO would then essentially be ruled by him and the consensus among the partaking organizations, for better or worse.<sup>70</sup>

## Global Palestine

Having come of age during the heydays of Third Worldism, Arafat saw the potential in transnational partnerships as a remedy to the false promises of Arab nationalism.<sup>71</sup>

Intertwining their fate with that of the global Third World revolutionary movement allowed

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<sup>67</sup> Rochelle Ann Davis, "Habash, George," in *Biographical Encyclopedia of the Modern Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Michael R. Fischbach (Detroit: Gale Group, 2008).

<sup>68</sup> Cobban, *Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, 28-30.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>70</sup> Arafat's reliance on consensus was subject to much criticism due to the weight it allotted smaller organizations within the PLO. Furthermore, the often-painstaking process of achieving agreement between the various members made the PLO slow to react to events and circumstances that occurred in times of conflict. Gelvin, *Israel-Palestine Conflict*, 207.

<sup>71</sup> Chamberlin, *Global Offensive*, 18-19.

Fatah, and later the PLO, to draw on the experiences of other Third World revolutions, and to elevate their struggle beyond what the Nasserists and Ba'athists were able to offer. Spanning from Latin America to the Far East, the Third World revolutionaries saw common cause in what they perceived to be imperialist incursions into the decolonizing Third World by the racist-capitalist Western powers.<sup>72</sup> Fatah had originally linked up with Algerian revolutionaries during the initial training of al-Asifa, and it was through them that the Palestinians gained access to new allies such as China, North Vietnam, and eventually Cuba.<sup>73</sup> By tying the Palestinian cause to the general plight of the Third World, Arafat was able to mobilize support on a much grander scale, and to challenge Israel with the weight of a global network behind him.<sup>74</sup>

As we have seen, the Third World had risen in the post-World War II years, both in the sense of a flexible alliance between newly decolonized nations and as a concept of self-understanding, focusing on neutrality and furthering decolonization. By the mid-1960s however, its attention was becoming increasingly focused on casting off the baggage left behind by the Western imperialist project of the late nineteenth century, and the regimes that represented it. As Samantha Christiansen and Zachary A. Scarlett explain: “The nation-state, as it turned out, was simply unable to create an equal and just society, and instead began to repress any challenge to its power. It was this political, social, and cultural environment that sparked the protests of the second wave of the 1960s.”<sup>75</sup> For many Third World countries, this involved parting ways with the leaders of the national liberation and replacing them with regimes intellectually embedded in new interpretations of Marxism and revolutionary thought. Even though this international movement was highly heterogenous, both socially and politically, it still managed to foster a mutual, transnational solidarity that in the 1970s would pose an ideological challenge to the Cold War superpowers and capture the minds of activists worldwide.

What had begun as an Afro-Asian movement moved to include the Americas in the mid-1960s, embodied by initiatives like the Tricontinental Congress of 1966. The Tricontinental gathered representatives from eighty-two countries and went on to form a movement that in many ways superseded the Non-Aligned Movement set up at Bandung in the previous decade. As the various activists and leaders came together within the Tricontinental framework, they

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<sup>72</sup> See *ibid.*, 20; Christiansen and Scarlett, *Third World*.

<sup>73</sup> Cobban, *Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, 32.

<sup>74</sup> Chamberlin, *Global Offensive*, 3.

<sup>75</sup> Christiansen and Scarlett, *Third World*, Introduction, location 327 (kindle version).

espoused an ideology centered around anti-imperialism with a critique of global capitalism and racism, although with a much more action-oriented focus than its predecessor.<sup>76</sup> In doing so, they recalibrated the Cold War along a North-South axis instead of the typical East-West, pioneering a worldview that eventually took hold by the end of the century. The Tricontinental also supported the Palestinian struggle from the outset, and its members soon contributed to push the conflict to the forefront of the global political agenda, giving the Palestinians themselves the possibility to represent their own national cause in the process.<sup>77</sup> Through such experiences, and by adopting the Third World revolutionary discourse, Arafat and Fatah made the Palestinian conflict global, bringing it beyond the Third World as well.

The transnational links formed in the 1960s and 70s also extended into the West, and saw the Palestinian cause receive attention and support from places like the US, Germany, France, and the Scandinavian countries to mention but a few.<sup>78</sup> In the buildup to the watershed year of 1968, Western activists had become increasingly aware of the Third World struggle, and were beginning to forge ties to its revolutionaries around the world. Young people in the West had initially been spurred into action by the atrocities of the Algerian and Vietnamese wars, and would soon extend their critique to inequalities and unjustness they saw in their own societies, be it racism, gender inequality, or outright oppression.<sup>79</sup> American and European student movements hatched revolutionary responses to these faults, and eventually, many aligned themselves with the anti-imperialist movements fighting for self-determination in the Third World, positioning themselves critically to both the US and the Soviet Union. In these volatile times, Western radical movements connected with their Third World counterparts, sending delegations and representatives to places like China, North Vietnam, North Korea, Algeria, and, eventually, Palestinian exile communities in Jordan and Lebanon.<sup>80</sup>

## Norwegian Attitudes, the Rise of the New Left, and the Six-Day War

At the official level, the Norwegian Left's attitudes towards the creation of Israel were initially lukewarm. The leadership of the Labor-movement had generally rejected the Zionist

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<sup>76</sup> Haugbolle, "New Arab Left," 501. For a discussion of the Tricontinental Congress, see Mahler, *Tricontinental to the Global South*.

<sup>77</sup> Haugbolle, "Entanglement, Global History, and the Arab Left," 301.

<sup>78</sup> See for example Staffan Beckman, *Palestina och Israel, en analys från vänster* (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1969); Fischbach, *Black Power and Palestine*; Fischbach, *The Movement*; Maxime Rodinson, *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?*, trans. David Thorstad (New York: Monad Press, 1973); Vågstøl, "Solidaritetsrørsla for Palestina."; Øvig Knudsen, *Blekingegadebanden*, 1.

<sup>79</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1987); Katsiaficas, *Imagination of the New Left*; Suri, *Power and Protest*.

<sup>80</sup> Wu, *Radicals on the Road*; Fischbach, *Black Power and Palestine*.

project as a possible resolution to the Jewish question in the inter-war years, and instead favored Jewish assimilation into their European “host-societies”.<sup>81</sup> According to Åsmund Borgen Gjerde, this had little to do with how the Norwegian Left perceived the rights of Palestinian Arabs and more to do with a combination of its own anti-Semitic tropes and how it saw Zionism, at least implicitly, as inherently racist.<sup>82</sup>

Things began to change with the Second World War. The carnages of the Holocaust forced many to reevaluate their stance on Zionism and the Jewish question, although not right away. Through most of the war, Norwegian socialists were aware of the horrifying treatment of European Jews under the Third Reich’s occupation.<sup>83</sup> However, even after its conclusion, as more and more information about the death camps in Eastern Europe was spread, the Norwegian socialist press remained somewhat skeptical of the ongoing Zionist project in Palestine. At this point, the press also underscored the rights of what it described as primitive, yet victimized Arabs in the face of economically superior European Zionists. A marked change in this attitude does not appear to have become mainstream within the Labor movement until 1949, when the Israeli war of independence was drawing to a close. By this time, Norwegian socialists were beginning to denounce Arab nationalists in Palestine for their anti-Semitism, which had come to the fore during uprisings leading up to the UN-sponsored division of the mandate territory, and to critique the European states for creating the problem to begin with.<sup>84</sup>

The philo-Zionism of the Norwegian Left remained remarkably solid after 1949. It did not waver an inch during the 1956 Suez Crisis, and went on to last well into the 1960s. This period saw the LO build up its ties to its Israeli counterpart, the Histadrut, while the ruling Labor Party supported Israel through foreign policies and voting in the UN. Although concerns about Israel were voiced in the Norwegian foreign service, it had only minor influence on the Labor-government’s policy.<sup>85</sup> Instead, according to historian Hilde Henriksen Waage, the Labor Party continued to uphold a level of support for Israel that “bordered on a quasi-religious reverence.”<sup>86</sup> Meanwhile, the media adopted a similar pro-Israeli discourse,

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<sup>81</sup> Gjerde, "Meaning of Israel," 85.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>84</sup> Gjerde explains this pro-Zionist turn in the Norwegian Left by showing the changed application of a civilizational discourse, with Norwegian social democrats beginning to critique the European states for not protecting Jewish refugees in the wake of the Holocaust, while Arabs were portrayed as barbaric, neo-fascist, and anti-Semitic, in other words as uncivilized to Western eyes. Ibid., 217-18.

<sup>85</sup> Rovde, "I solidaritetens navn."; Waage, *Norge - Israels beste venn*, 19-20.

<sup>86</sup> Waage, *Norwegians?*, 15.



and regularly carried articles that celebrated Israel and vilified any opposition to it, Arab or otherwise, as anti-Semitic. The Left, through its philo-Zionism, considered Israel to be a beacon of unspoiled civilization in a sea of Arab backwardness, with Arab perspectives generally left uncovered besides narrating their lack of civilization.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, it became fairly typical for Norwegian Leftist youths to spend time in Israeli Kibbutzim, agrarian farming collectives hailed by social democrats for their de-facto practice of socialism, which seems to have further entrenched pro-Israeli sentiments in the Norwegian population. In fact, several of the founding members of Palkom also spent time in the Israeli Kibbutz-system, something that underlines the complexity of their later pro-Palestinian transformation.<sup>88</sup> Things began to change in the early 1960s however, as the Labor movement went through several schisms in those years. The ideologies of the New Left would set its adherents on a collision course with both Israel and their former cadres.

As in much of the Western world, the 1960s were a tumultuous time in Norway as well. Politically, the Labor Party was gradually beginning to lose its grip on the state apparatus, hampered by schisms and the highly sensitive question of EEC-membership.<sup>89</sup> Meanwhile, the far-left opposition was strengthening itself. The youth organization of the *Sosialistisk Folkeparti* (Socialist People's Party, SF), the latter itself a product of a split in the Labor Party regarding NATO-membership and nuclear weapons, was growing increasingly unrestful in the eyes of the mother party. Certain members of *Sosialistisk Ungdomsforbund* (Socialist Youth Federation, SUF) had in the early-60s become enamored with Maoism and was now consistently challenging the old guard.<sup>90</sup> Embodied by the Bryn-Hellerud chapter of SUF and the radical student group *Sosialistisk Folkeparti studentlag* (Socialist People's Party Student Union, SF-stud) at the University of Oslo, the Maoist factions would eventually break away from SF completely to form SUF (ml) in 1969, adding the Marxist-Leninist suffix to its name that was also appearing in various political parties and groupuscules across Europe.<sup>91</sup> These ml-groups were in many ways part of the countercultures that were emblematic of the youth revolts facing the region. Their heroes were not the typical Western icons of modern social

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<sup>87</sup> See Gjerde, "Israeli Utopia, 1949-67," in Gjerde, "Meaning of Israel."

<sup>88</sup> Both Lysestøl and Sjøe spent time in Israeli Kibbutzim, see Lysestøl and Sjøe, "Akutt behov for solidaritet."

<sup>89</sup> Berge Furre, *Norsk historie 1905-1990: Vårt hundreår* (Oslo: Samlaget, 1992), 320.

<sup>90</sup> Former party leader Finn Gustavsen describes SF's split in detail in Part One of his memoir *Kortene på Bordet*. Finn Gustavsen, *Kortene på bordet* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1979). See also Sjøli, "På verdens tak," in *Mao, min Mao*.

<sup>91</sup> Wolin, *Wind from the East*, 17.

democracy, but Mao, Giap, and Guevara, and their attention was hastily turning towards the Third World and its ongoing skirmish with global imperialism.

The emergence of the New Left in Norway coincides with the appearance of critical sentiments on Israel. In the socialist weekly *Orientering*, the party organ of SF, a new undercurrent was seeking more nuance to the narrative typically presented of Israel in the mainstream media. Driven by a younger generation of leftist writers, this nuancing of the narrative did not immediately come close to denouncing Israel, but it did still challenge some of the earlier social democratic conceptions and was gradually beginning to introduce Arab subjectivity to the equation.<sup>92</sup> However, the real change came with the Six-Day War in 1967. That year, following a build-up in tensions that had been brewing since the 1956 Suez Crisis (or 1948 for that matter), Nasser mobilized, sent his army into the Sinai Peninsula, and closed off the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping. The final straw for the Egyptian premier had allegedly been a report from the Soviet Union claiming that Israel was preparing an assault on Syria, which later turned out to be false. Israel took Nasser's actions as a sufficient provocation to attack and went on to decimate the air forces of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria in the ensuing war.<sup>93</sup> After six days, its Arab neighbors had been more or less blown away by Israel's military superiority and the Israelis were suddenly in control of all of the previous mandate territory, Eastern Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula.

The Six-Day War transformed the strategic impasse of the Arab-Israeli conflict, but it also spurred Western activists to quickly critique Israel. The way Israel had conquered huge swaths of Arab territory in such a short time underlined both its superiority on the battlefield and, to many activists, displayed its intrinsic expansionism and imperialism.<sup>94</sup> Thus, it was no longer seen as the victim, but as the aggressor. In Oslo, SUF adopted a resolution on the war, deriding Israel as a "bridgehead of imperialism" and calling for support for its Arab population. This was not only the case in Norway. From Paris to Los Angeles, leftist radicals were becoming more vocal about Israel's connection to the imperialist West, and some soon turned to explicit anti-Zionism.<sup>95</sup> As more and more radicals denounced Israel, several also paid closer attention to the Arabic countries, the growing Palestinian refugee problem within them, and the (re-)emergence of Palestinian nationalism.

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<sup>92</sup> Gjerde, "Meaning of Israel," 288-90.

<sup>93</sup> Gelvin, *Israel-Palestine Conflict*, 174-75.

<sup>94</sup> Waage, *Norwegians?*, 23.

<sup>95</sup> Chamberlin, *Global Offensive*, 39-41.

Simultaneously, in the Middle East, the Six-Day War shattered any illusion that the Arab states could liberate Palestine. This gave further credence to Fatah, having built its ideology around Palestinian self-reliance. Furthermore, Israel's wipe-out of the Arab militaries provided more leeway for the *fedayeen*, allowing them to operate more independently. Increasingly, they were coming out into the open. These developments began transforming how the conflict was perceived by both internal and external actors, and ushered in what Herbert C. Kelman has termed the "Palestinianization" of the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>96</sup> For Norwegian New Leftists, this process set off as they began to turn on Israel, with the Palestinians offering them a new critique framed around the anti-imperialist discourse of Third World revolutionism and Tricontinentalism. It would however still take a few years until the two movements, the Norwegian and the Palestinian, truly found each other.

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<sup>96</sup> Herbert C. Kelman, "The Palestinianization of the Arab-Israeli Conflict (1988)," in *Transforming the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: From Mutual Negation to Reconciliation*, ed. Philip Mattar and Neil Caplan (London: Routledge, 2018).

## Chapter two: From Arabs to Palestinians

The morning of Monday, October 9, 1967, probably seemed like the beginning to a normal, chilly autumn day in Oslo like any other. However, if one were to pick up an edition of the leftist daily *Dagbladet*, it would have been near impossible to miss that something dramatic was unfolding within the Norwegian Left. Directly beneath the paper's front page heading, written in large bold letters, a headline glared out at the reader: "SF-youth wants to abolish the state of Israel."<sup>97</sup> To any reader, leftist or otherwise, the SUF resolution referred to in the article must have been bordering on the outrageous. The case caused one of the first real fissures between SUF and SF, one that was eventually widened by the growing adherence to Maoism within the SUF-leadership.<sup>98</sup> By the turn of the decade, the two had split completely into separate parties with SUF adopting the Marxist-Leninist suffix (ml) from 1969.

What might be striking to contemporary eyes, considering the importance it has played in more recent renderings of anti-Zionism, is that the radicals that set these events in motion did not seem to emphasize the role of the Palestinians. The SUF resolution on the Six-Day War had one short mention of the rights of the "Palestine Arabs", and the public discussion it catalyzed only briefly touched upon their national struggle.<sup>99</sup> Instead, the denouncement of Israel in 1967 pertained to its allegiance to the imperialism of the United States and the Jewish country's inherent lack of "essence". In fact, in 1967, whether Norwegians had a sense of who the Palestinians were, or whether they constituted a people with a distinct national identity for that matter, seems doubtful.

Two years later however, in 1969, radicals on the Norwegian Left were increasingly perceiving the Palestinians as a distinct national group, and, perhaps more importantly, as the central actor in the Middle East conflict. Why did Palestine suddenly emerge, and how did it capture the hearts and minds of young radicals in the late 1960s? I argue that the pro-Palestinian position emerged as Palestine was conceptualized within the intellectual framework of New Left anti-Zionism, Maoism, and global anti-imperialism. A factor in this was the increasing focus on the Middle East, in part catalyzed by the controversy caused by SUF's denouncement of Israel in the autumn of 1967. When paired with the globalization of the Palestinian nationalist struggle on the initiative of Fatah, the issue was now out in the

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<sup>97</sup> KMH, "SF-ungdommen vil avskaffe staten Israel," *Dagbladet*, no. 234, October 9, 1967. The weather is reported on the front page of the same issue of *Dagbladet*.

<sup>98</sup> Sjøli, *Mao, min Mao*, 26-27.

<sup>99</sup> Gjerde, "The New Left and the Turn Against Israel, 1967-68," in "Meaning of Israel."

open, and ready to be seized upon by Western revolutionary anti-imperialists. This happened as a few Norwegian radicals “discovered” Palestine. In doing so, they constructed a distinct interpretation of the conflict, one that was shaped by references to the war in Vietnam, the intertwined influences of their world views, other Scandinavian activists, and their own personal experiences from the Middle East.

### “The Palestine Arabs”

Any clear conception of “Palestinianess” itself remained elusive in 1967.<sup>100</sup> Since 1948, the idea of Palestine had generally been restricted to the area referred to in the Bible, or to the mandate territory that had been called Palestine up until the creation of Israel. To most Norwegians, the people who had lived there before the founding of Israel were simply Arabs. According to the typical narrative, most of these Arabs had left after 1948, and those that had chosen to stay and fight had done so mostly out of anti-Semitism, either from their own conviction of it or under the auspices of the anti-Semitic Arab leaders in the surrounding countries.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, the predominant Zionist narrative of 1948 was that most Arabs that had actually left their lands in the former mandate territory had done so either voluntarily after having their land purchased by Zionists or on the instructions of Nasser. As several newer historical works have shown, this was both highly exaggerated and generally not the case, but this was barely known outside of the Arab world in 1967.<sup>102</sup> Norwegian leftists were aware of their hardships as well, but their poverty was generally perceived to be a consequence of “an Arab lack of civilization and progress”.<sup>103</sup>

SUF’s anti-Zionist resolution reflected this. Even though it did have a vague mention of the “Palestine-refugees” and their “fight to regain their homeland”, the members of SUF remained mostly focused on the pervasiveness of Israeli expansionism in the region in their later defense of the resolution:

For as long as Israel continues its aggressive, expansionist and racist policies, we need to establish the following:

1. SUF supports the Palestine-refugees and the oppressed Arabs’ fight to regain their homeland.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 333, footnote 730.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 334; Waage, *Norwegians?*, 24.

<sup>102</sup> See for example Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab world (Updated and Expanded)* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014).

<sup>103</sup> Gjerde, “Meaning of Israel,” 334.

2. The State of Israel in its current form as a bridgehead of imperialism must cease to exist.
3. The current population of Israel must be guaranteed the right to live in the Middle East.<sup>104</sup>

With the possible exception of a few individuals, the radicals who went on to form Palkom in 1970 were likely no different in this regard. Several of these younger Leftists had been to Kibbutzim in Israel, and some had come across its Palestinian population as well but had generally had them described by their hosts as simply Arabs. This was also the case for future members of the solidarity movement with Palestine, and the realization that they had been so ignorant about the Palestinians in their earlier years later became a driver in itself to support their emancipation.<sup>105</sup> At this time however, for those who even knew of their existence, they were “Palestine Arabs”.

This vagueness is also evident in the study-material of SF party secretary Kjell Bygstad, whose personal archives also contain correspondence with Israeli social democratic parties.<sup>106</sup> Bygstad participated in study groups on the Middle East organized by SF in the period leading up to the Six-Day War, and later joined Palkom after its foundation in 1970. The material in his archives covers the period from 1948 to 1967 and was seemingly collected from these study groups. It goes into detail on the UN partition plan from the 1940s, the subsequent war between Israel and the neighboring Arab states, and Israel’s role in the 1956 Suez Crisis.<sup>107</sup> The material also deals with the refugee question but does not identify the displaced beyond being Arabs. Furthermore, it does not vilify Israel, but rather portrays the Jewish state as defending itself from the threat of extinction with Western support. Meanwhile, a page of what appears to be his own notes divides the Arab states into groups of conservative and radical regimes, with the latter group often personified by Nasser and generally seen as potential leaders in a new, peaceful Middle East. In the conclusion, it is asserted that the two

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<sup>104</sup> SUF’s 1967 anti-Zionist resolution, quoted in Norwegian in Sjøli, *Mao, min Mao*, 26.

<sup>105</sup> Phone interview with Peder Martin Lysestøl, April 28, 2020; Phone interview with Finn Sjøe, May 6, 2020; Helga Hvidsten, "I komiteens tjeneste," *Fritt Palestina*, no. 2 (2019); Lysestøl and Sjøe, "Akutt behov for solidaritet," 8.

<sup>106</sup> The correspondence with Israeli political parties is generally centered around their involvement with the Israeli Peace Movement, which called for a negotiated solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict based on UN resolutions. Otherwise, the study material mostly consists of newspaper articles and notes, both typed and hand-written. The latter is generally more critical of Israel, and vice versa sympathetic to “progressive Arab governments” like the Nasser-regime in Egypt. Kjell Bygstad’s private archive (KBPA), Box: AAB/ARK-2788/D/Dc/Dce/L0001 – “Bakgrunnsmateriale om Palestine og Midtøstenkonflikten.” Folder 0001, labeled “Bakgrunnsinformasjon 1965-1967.”

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

sides, the Arab states and Israel, need to moderate their demands and to comply with the UN-resolutions, and should cooperate on resolving the refugee issue.

Without identifying any notion of a distinct Palestinian national identity, much of Bygstad's study-material is still decidedly more nuanced than the typical media reports of the time. The Arab states are generally not vilified, in fact, many of them are pointed out as progressive, and refugee perspectives are taken into account to some degree.<sup>108</sup> Similar notions are possible to glean from material seemingly collected directly after the Six-Day War as well, which is also more critical of Israel, as can be expected considering the ongoing anti-Zionist turn at the time, with similar events also taking place in places like France and the US.<sup>109</sup> Even though he was party secretary of SF until March 1967, Bygstad had strong sympathies with the radicals in SUF. During the party split in 1967, he took the youth's side and left SF to found a new groupuscule called *Marxistisk Arbeidsgruppe* (Marxist Working Group).<sup>110</sup> His background material on the Middle East from the period immediately following the 1967 war include an article from British newspaper *The Guardian* with the headline "Two Wronged Peoples", which argued for a negotiated solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict similar to what can be garnered from the older SF study material.<sup>111</sup> There is also a longer account, recorded by a French nun who worked in a convent on the West Bank during and after the war, which in detail describes the suffering of Palestinians during the war, although still under the Arab identifier, and harshly criticizing the behavior of the Israeli military.<sup>112</sup> As such, these sources underline how little was known of a Palestinian national identity, but it also shows how the Norwegian Left was increasingly taking Palestinian subjectivity and Arab perspectives into account.

To what extent did the Palestinians themselves have a strong sense of national belonging at the time? The question was heavily politicized in the 1960s and has remained so to this day. Nonetheless, self-identification as Palestinians was typical at the time, and had been distinguished from pertaining to other Arab nationalities since at least the eighteenth

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> KBPA, Box: AAB/ARK-2788/D/Dc/Dce/L0001 – "Bakgrunnsmateriale om Palestine og Midtøstenkonflikten." Folder 0002, labeled "Bakgrunnsinformasjon 1967-1971"; Gjerde, "Meaning of Israel," 337; Wolin, *Wind from the East*, 351; Chamberlin, *Global Offensive*, 41.

<sup>110</sup> Bygstad, "Norsk Midt-Østen politikk og solidaritetsarbeidet for palestinerne."; Sjøli, *Mao, min Mao*, 19.

<sup>111</sup> David Hirst, "Two Wronged Peoples," *The Guardian*, found in KBPA, Box: AAB/ARK-2788/D/Dc/Dce/L0001 – "Bakgrunnsmateriale om Palestine og Midtøstenkonflikten." Folder 0002, labeled "Bakgrunnsinformasjon 1967-1971."

<sup>112</sup> KBPA, Box: AAB/ARK-2788/D/Dc/Dce/L0001 – "Bakgrunnsmateriale om Palestine og Midtøstenkonflikten." Folder 0002, labeled "Bakgrunnsinformasjon 1967-1971."

century.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, scholars have contended that the expulsions after 1948 fostered a stronger sense of Palestinian national identity. This was especially the case among Palestinian refugees, seeing as they were treated differently from host-country to host-country, with their rights ranging from near non-existent in Lebanon to fairly high levels of integration in Jordan.<sup>114</sup> For those who had remained inside the new Israeli state after 1948, policies implemented during an eighteen-year state of martial law made sure that they remained marginalized within Israeli society and economically depended on the Jewish economy.<sup>115</sup> Thus, the marginalization of refugees outside Israel crystalized the sense of exile among them while those living in the Jewish country became a national minority. Both cases reinforced their self-identifications as Palestinians. However, the late 1960s saw a rebirth of Palestinian nationalism with the rise of organizations like Fatah and the PFLP, for which the crystallization of this national identity was one of their primary concerns.<sup>116</sup> Therefore, in essence, the national character Western activists were grasping for was growing in complexity among the Palestinians themselves, and was decidedly there.

### A New, Anti-Zionist Discussion and the Emergence of Fatah

Despite the early criticisms of Israel, there is much evidence to suggest that the anti-Zionist turn had been just as sudden to the young radicals in SUF as it might have been to any outsider. Besides the tone in Bygstad's material, which was somewhat sympathetic, one example is how just six months before the anti-Zionist resolution, *Sosialistisk folkeparti studentlag*'s (Socialist People's Party's student union, SF-stud.) publication *Oppbrudd* had advertised its yearly trip to an Israeli kibbutz.<sup>117</sup> SF-stud. held a collective membership in SUF and was considered to be among the most radical within the New Left in Norway, and it was also one of the political milieus that drove much of SUF's radicalization in the late 60s along with the Bryn/Hellerud chapter. After the Six-Day war, they were among those who publicly condemned Israel as a "bridgehead of imperialism" and denounced its existence as illegitimate, mere months after they seemingly saw it as uncontroversial for Norwegian youths to spend time in an Israeli kibbutz. This underlines the abruptness, as well as the radicalism, that characterized the anti-Zionist turn in the Norwegian New Left.

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<sup>113</sup> See Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*.

<sup>114</sup> Rex Brynen, "Palestinian Refugees," in *The Routledge Handbook on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, ed. David Newman and Joel Peters (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 111.

<sup>115</sup> Amal Jamal, "Palestinian Citizens of Israel," *ibid.*, 280.

<sup>116</sup> See for example Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*.

<sup>117</sup> Gjerde, "Meaning of Israel," 330.



To imply Israel's collaboration with imperialism was on the other hand not unheard of before 1967. After all, the country's close ties to the United States had been demonstrated several times, and had also been underlined in SF-led study circles, as well as from the Soviet Union-aligned *Norges Kommunistiske Parti* (The Norwegian Communist Party) before the Six-Day War.<sup>118</sup> It was not that SF were not critical of Israel in 1967 either. According to the memoir of the party leader at the time, Finn Gustavsen, several people within SF had their concerns about Israel's behavior and close ties to America, which the party did address in its own statement about the war.<sup>119</sup> Many had been surprised by Israel's military superiority, and the perceptions of Israel as a victim were fading given that it had increased its territory manifold.<sup>120</sup>

What was new here, however, and quite radical even in this context, was to criticize Israel's right to exist at all.<sup>121</sup> As Gjerde illustrates, the reasoning built on recycled notions of anti-Zionism from before the Second World War, the new, radical interpretation of imperialism, and the idea that Israel represented Europe's failed remedy for the atrocities of fascism and Nazism: "[Israel] was a tool of imperialism and a symptom of the pathologies of Western civilization; it was not a nation-state, but a state for a racially and religiously defined community; and it thus lacked any real substance that could justify its continued existence."<sup>122</sup> The radical and sudden nature of the change had several effects. It decidedly came as a shock to the Old Guard of the Left, spurring hefty debates in *Orientering*, in addition to general condemnation from the more mainstream press. The focus on Israel and the Middle East on the political and public agenda had also been growing in recent months, mostly due to the fact that a war was brewing and consequently broke out. However, the anti-Zionism of the New Left carved out a new discussion on the very essence of Israel and its conflict with the Arab countries, both within the Norwegian Left itself and in the more mainstream press.

In this new discussion on Israel's legitimacy, the Arab refugees were often used to justify the anti-Zionist position. One example is the SUF executive committee's reply to an editorial in

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<sup>118</sup> KBPA, Box: AAB/ARK-2788/D/Dc/Dce/L0001 – "Bakgrunnsmateriale om Palestine og Midtøstenkonflikten." Folder 0001, labeled "Bakgrunnsinformasjon 1965-1967"; Gjerde points to how NKP's party organ, *Friheten*, called Israel a "bridgehead of imperialism" already in 1956 during the Suez Crisis, *ibid.*, 336-37.

<sup>119</sup> Gustavsen, *Kortene på bordet*, 20-21.

<sup>120</sup> Waage, *Norwegians?*, 23.

<sup>121</sup> Gjerde, "Meaning of Israel," 346-47.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

*Orientering*, published a few days after the controversial party congress in October 1967, in which they assert:

During the war of 1948, nearly one million Arabs were driven out of their lands and have since lived in terrible refugee camps. The condition for the state of Israel's existence was that the refugees should be allowed to return to their homes or, if they did not want to return, receive reparments [erstatning] for the loss and destruction of [their] property.

[...]

We see it as [our] task to point out that what was once a Jewish problem is an Arab problem today. Now it will soon be time to stop speaking of Israel's rights, now we have to start speaking of the Arab's rights.<sup>123</sup>

Clearly, the role of the Arabs was central to them. Although the excerpt barely alludes to the existence of a Palestinian people, it illustrates how more attention was being paid to the plight of the Arabs Israel had displaced.

The discussion about Israel was not only carried out at the party elite-level. Readers from outside of the central leadership also submitted letters that were published in *Orientering*. In the issue of *Orientering* from October 28, 1967, for example, several discussion-pieces sent in by local groups and individuals are dedicated to the matter.<sup>124</sup> Although the conception of Palestine as a national identity in its own right was still vague, aspects of it were slowly beginning to materialize elsewhere as well, as the leftist press beyond the strictly radical sphere was beginning to take notice of the "Palestine Arabs". In the year that followed the Six-Day War, for example, *Arbeiderbladet* published several articles pertaining to the plight of Arab refugees in the newly Israeli-occupied territories. Even though these articles did not in any way blame Israel for their troubles, the fact that they were written at all represents a change from the coverage of the previous decades.<sup>125</sup> Slowly but surely, the Palestinians were beginning to appear.

Fatah was also getting more attention. The organization had been covered in passing by the mainstream Norwegian press since they began their guerrilla activities in 1965 but was for the

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<sup>123</sup> SUF executive committee, "SUF og Midt-Østen, SUF's sentralstyre svarer Orientering," *Orientering*, no. 37, October 21, 1967.

<sup>124</sup> See for example Helgheim, Edvin. "Skuffende utvikling i SUF," reader's letter, *Orientering*, no. 38, October 28, 1967; Krohn, Finn. "Litt av en flause?," reader's letter, *Orientering*, no. 38, October 28, 1967.

<sup>125</sup> Gjerde, "Meaning of Israel," 392-93.

most part just referred to as a terrorist organization, with its name apparently something of a mystery for Western journalists. First it had been translated as “conquer”, then later as “the opening,” speculating that the goal of the organization was “to open [Israel] to the Arabs, first and foremost the Palestine-refugees.”<sup>126</sup> They eventually got the name right, however, and even if this did not exactly add any nuance to the reports themselves, it did assert that there was a Palestinian liberation movement. For example, in January of 1968, *Orientering* described the guerillas of Fatah as “Palestinian nationalists”, clearly indicating the existence of both a national identity and a movement to realize self-determination for it.<sup>127</sup>

Developments in the Middle East soon saw to it that they became even more visible.

In the morning of March 21, 1968, several units from the Israeli Defense Force had crossed the Jordan River into Jordanian territory to destroy a Palestinian *fedayeen* base and avenge a mine attack that had struck an Israeli school bus, killing two children and injuring twenty-seven.<sup>128</sup> Even though the Israelis inflicted heavy casualties on the guerrillas, and eventually drove them out of their base in the town of Karameh, the *fedayeen* in the area had managed to cause enough damage that Fatah could exploit it politically. As Chamberlin writes:

“Palestinian recruits might not be marching on Tel Aviv anytime soon, but they were strong enough to give the IDF a bloody nose and live to tell about it.”<sup>129</sup> The Battle of Karameh suddenly brought Fatah to the fore of international attention, and thrust Arafat into the limelight. As Fatah’s only public spokesperson at the time, he soon appeared in news coverage across the world, also in Norway, and even ended up on the front page of *Time Magazine* later that year.<sup>130</sup>

As the interest around Fatah increased, journalists also sought to better understand what they were fighting for. For example, a longer piece on the group by British journalist David Hirst appeared on the pages of *The Guardian* on May 3, 1968. Hirst quotes a Fatah representative and refers to several of the organization’s own publications on the question of Palestinian nationality and self-determination.<sup>131</sup> According to the article, a Palestinian national identity was still vague by Fatah’s own admittance, but their plan was to rouse it through their

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<sup>126</sup> “After a 10-year break, the Arabs have found it the time to pick up the acts of terrorism again, this time under the name of Al Fatah, which means ‘the opening.’ The name is likely meant to symbolize that with the help of these means one will ‘open’ the country to the Arabs, first and foremost the Palestine refugees.” Richard Oestermann, “Bølge av arabisk terrorvirksomhet mot Israel,” *Dagbladet*, no. 149, July 2, 1965.

<sup>127</sup> Ellen Brun & Jacques Hersh, “Konfliktpunkter 1968,” *Orientering*, no. 4, January 28, 1968.

<sup>128</sup> Tveit, *Alt for Israel*, 401-02.

<sup>129</sup> Chamberlin, *Global Offensive*, 46.

<sup>130</sup> Tveit, *Alt for Israel*, 402.

<sup>131</sup> David Hirst, “Force the faith of al-Fatah,” *The Guardian*. May 5, 1968.

collective armed struggle, the people's liberation war. This was not the first time articles in *The Guardian* had addressed Fatah as an important player in Middle East conflict, but it was likely one of the first examples of Western reporting which extended the organization's agency beyond that of a Syrian-controlled terrorist cell and thoroughly researched its *raison d'être*, including the underlying notion of a Palestinian national identity.

To what extent, then, did these dynamics influence the activists on the Norwegian New Left? The increased coverage of the Palestinian national movement by the press, as well as the gradually emerging subjectivity of Palestinian Arabs being portrayed, had provided the public with the implied notion of a Palestinian national identity. Thus, media-savvy Norwegians knew well that there was a Palestinian national movement and that Palestinian refugees stood at the core of the Middle East conflict already by 1968. Even though the future Palkom-members would largely discard Norwegian mainstream media in the 1970s for misrepresenting the Arab-Israeli conflict, the idealized image of Israel was being challenged on several fronts, at least implicitly. Additionally, as we will see, some of the first pro-Palestinianists partook in the public discussion on the essence of Israel themselves. Thus, they were in fact among those who informed it and, importantly, were most likely also informed by it.

At the same time, anti-Zionist and pro-Palestinian sentiments were indeed spreading, at least among Norwegian youths. In May of 1968, for example, a demonstration was staged during a visit of the Israeli foreign minister Abba Eban to Oslo. Eban's visit was part of a celebration of Israel's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, but a group of "bearded and lost students" interrupted the planned program.<sup>132</sup> The activists hailed not only from SUF. In fact, the flyer passed around after the demonstration was signed by no less than five youth parties, including the Oslo-branch of the Labor Party's Youth League, *Arbeidernes ungdomsfylkning* (AUF), as well as its student union. A report in *Dagbladet*, published next to articles on the ongoing student uprisings in Paris' Latin Quarters and heavy fighting in Saigon, noted how the slogans presented by the Norwegian protesters included "Israel celebrates 20 years of aggression" and "Long live Al Fatah."<sup>133</sup> Even though the demonstrators were generally condemned in the press, and largely outnumbered by students and Labor leaders denouncing them, the event still showed how the anti-Zionist turn was beginning to set root and that Fatah had supporters as far away as Oslo.

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<sup>132</sup> Unsigned. "Eban: Samarbeid Israel, Jordan og Libanon ingen utopi," *Verdens Gang*, no. 106, May 8, 1968. See also Tveit, *Alt for Israel*, 395-96.

<sup>133</sup> Unsigned. "Gamle AP-medlemmer kastet ut demonstranter," *Dagbladet*, no. 106, May 8, 1968.

Furthermore, this event illustrates how the Palestinian cause was gradually being entangled with the youth revolts of 1968. As such, it stands as a manifestation of how the globalization of Palestine had seemingly followed the trajectory of the Vietnam War in transcending its Third World starting point. As Fatah was beginning to capture the minds of radical youth in their global protest against oppression everywhere, the spirit of '67 was intertwining with that of '68.

To sum up, the road from anti-Zionism to what one might term pro-Palestinianism was far from obvious in 1967. Nevertheless, by opening the discussion on the essence of Israel, SUF in practice also opened a discussion about the “truth” about the Arab-Israeli conflict. Seeing as this was the very same concept Palestinian nationalists were trying to influence with their activism in the Middle East and their involvement with the Third Worldist movement at the time, it might be tempting to say that the political context of the 1960s simply implied that the Norwegians would discover Palestinian national identity sooner or later. Yet, such an explanation remains too vague, and obscures the role transnational encounters on different levels had in shaping this process. Within this context, pro-Palestinianism seems to have emerged as an argument against Zionism, and imperialism by extension, not as a position supporting Palestinian nationalism in itself, let alone acknowledging its existence. On the other hand, it would be reasonable to believe that the generally increased focus on Israel still informed and influenced those New Left activists that did conceptualize a Palestinian national identity and eventually developed a more distinct pro-Palestinian position.

## Peder Goes to Cairo

The first contacts between Norwegian radicals and the Palestinian national movement was made by Peder Martin Lysestøl, who later became central to the emergence of a pro-Palestinian solidarity movement in Norway. In 1967, he visited the Palestinian refugee camps of Gaza, mere weeks before the Six-Day War.<sup>134</sup> The visit had been organized during a youth congress for leftist students in Cairo in May 1967, in which Lysestøl was one of few Westerners. He attended as the sole Norwegian representative, on behalf of both SUF, AUF, and the Communist Party's youth league. According to Lysestøl himself in a later interview, the Vietnamese delegation “stood firmly with the Palestinians” at the conference, something that persuaded him that the latter were on the right side of the ideological divide. When he saw the plights facing the people in Gaza, he was convinced of the Palestinians' struggle in

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<sup>134</sup> Phone interview with Peder Martin Lysestøl, April 28, 2020; Vågstøl, "Solidaritetsrørsla for Palestina," 24.

the face of oppressive and imperialist Zionism. Although the immediacy of his conviction has been contested, seeing as he was chairman of SUF when the anti-Zionist resolution was adopted just five months later, it is still clear that the trip made a big impression on him nonetheless.<sup>135</sup> In an interview, he clarified that the sight of the refugee camps mobilized him immensely. Moreover, the feeling that the older generation had deceived him about Israel's character catalyzed a drive to learn more about both the Zionist regime and the Palestinians.<sup>136</sup>

A student of social economics who had come up through SF-stud, Lysestøl was the chairman of the SUF executive committee from 1966 to 1967.<sup>137</sup> He had worked at an Israeli kibbutz in 1964, a visit that had spurred his interest in the region and made him aware of the poor Arab population within Israel. During summer of 1966, he spent time in Belgrade, where he met several Palestinians who told him about their situation.<sup>138</sup> The Third World was also an important inspiration for him in general, and he had focused much attention on the ongoing Vietnam War. Upon being elected chairman of SUF, for example, he stated to *Orientering* that he perceived American imperialist aggression in Vietnam to be the greatest political question facing the organization at the time, and that educating the public on the character of the *Front National de Libération* (FNL) had to be among its primary missions.<sup>139</sup> His activism for the Vietnamese liberation movement was not uncommon for the time, given that SUF openly supported the North Vietnamese and spearheaded a "coup" of *Den norske solidaritetskomiteen for Vietnam* (the Norwegian Solidarity Committee for Vietnam, Solkom) the following year, transforming it from a pacifist group into an FNL-front.<sup>140</sup> According to his own recollection, the work with Solkom took up too much of the SUF-radicals' energy to allow the formation of a solidarity organization with Palestine upon his return from the conference in Cairo.<sup>141</sup> This seems reasonable, seeing as SUF focused much of their attention on transforming the Vietnam movement in the summer of 1967, but as seen above, it is also likely that very few of them actually knew much about the Palestinians at that point, beyond what Lysestøl had told them from his trips to Gaza and Belgrade.

Any doubts he might have had about the Palestinian nationalist struggle were likely undone during his second trip to Cairo. During his relatively short stay in 1967, Lysestøl had married

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<sup>135</sup> See Gjerde, "Meaning of Israel," 339.

<sup>136</sup> Phone interview with Peder Martin Lysestøl, April 28, 2020.

<sup>137</sup> Gjerde, "Meaning of Israel," 372; Lysestøl and Sjøe, "Akutt behov for solidaritet," 9.

<sup>138</sup> Lysestøl and Sjøe, "Akutt behov for solidaritet," 8-9.

<sup>139</sup> O.S. "SUF's nye formann," *Orientering*, no. 44, December 17, 1966.

<sup>140</sup> Godbolt, *Den norske vietnambevegelsen*, 168-70.

<sup>141</sup> Lysestøl and Sjøe, "Akutt behov for solidaritet," 10.

an Egyptian woman he had met while studying in Belgrade the previous summer, who according to himself knew several people in the Palestinian resistance.<sup>142</sup> These contacts were important when he returned the following fall to spend a full year on a scholarship to study at the University of Cairo, seeking to educate himself further on the Palestinian struggle and to study Nasser's ongoing socialist experiment in Egypt.<sup>143</sup> Nasser's revolutionary regime was an interesting case for young radical in the late 1960s, similarly to that of Tito's communist Yugoslavia which the SF leadership had sent him to investigate earlier that year. The decision to move was a result of multiple factors, but he has several times indicated that studying the Palestinian struggle was one of his chief motives.<sup>144</sup>

Even though he was there to study, Lysestøl did not spend much time at the university. To Tarjei Vågstøl, he described Cairo as an activist's heaven, recounting how he went from office to office, speaking with various national and revolutionary movements, both Palestinian and otherwise.<sup>145</sup> Since the last time he visited, the Palestinians and Fatah had won a major propaganda victory at the Battle of Karameh in March of 1968. With the backing of Arafat's extensive international network, the group was beginning to position itself for the take-over of the PLO, which in late 1968 was still more or less controlled by Nasser. Thus, by the time of Lysestøl's return to Cairo, Fatah's position was stronger than it had ever been and still rising. Now it was poised to make an impression on the young radical. Furthermore, several of the Palestinians he met there were also influenced by the national movement. In Cairo, they were students, seeking engineering degrees so they could earn money for their refugee families. However, according to Lysestøl, they dreamed of becoming *fedayeen* and to fight alongside Arafat against Israel to reclaim Palestine.<sup>146</sup> Hearing these people speak loudly about giving up their studies and future source of income to fight Zionism made a big impression on him.

Lysestøl returned to Norway in the spring of 1969, having expanded his networks and been impressed by several leaders of the Palestinian national movement. He recalls how the activists he met there were very interested in forming ties with Westerners, and the most robust connections had been forged with representatives of Fatah.<sup>147</sup> Besides his own accounts, this is also visible from the reports of the Norwegian Police Surveillance Agency,

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 9; Vågstøl, "Solidaritetsrørsla for Palestina," 28.; Phone interview with Peder Martin Lysestøl, April 28, 2020.

<sup>143</sup> Phone interview with Peder Martin Lysestøl, April 28, 2020.

<sup>144</sup> See Lysestøl and Sjøe, "Akutt behov for solidaritet," 10; Vågstøl, "Solidaritetsrørsla for Palestina," 27.

<sup>145</sup> Vågstøl, "Solidaritetsrørsla for Palestina," 27.

<sup>146</sup> Phone interview with Peder Martin Lysestøl, April 28, 2020.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

which had been surveilling him and several other radical activists since the mid-1960s.<sup>148</sup> The POT had first become aware of Lysestøl because of an alleged series of meetings with a KGB-attaché to the Russian embassy in Oslo, Vissilij Toporov. According to former activist Pål Steigan, Toporov had in fact attempted to recruit Lysestøl and several other youths on the Left as informants by hosting extravagant parties in an exclusive Oslo villa. However, as Lysestøl was growing increasingly skeptical of the Soviets in foreign policy matters, he had been non-receptive to the approach.<sup>149</sup> Now, the POT was growing concerned with his role as “contact person for people from Al Fatah that legally or illegally would visit Norway,” a concern they used to justify extensive surveillance of his person, including wiretapping, over the course of the next decade.<sup>150</sup>

## The New Vietnam

Other Norwegians were also making similar discoveries while on the road. To Finn Sjøe, as it had been to Lysestøl, unraveling the anti-imperialist interpretation of the Palestine question was deeply personal.<sup>151</sup> For Sjøe, the introduction to the Middle East and Israel had come through his Jewish girlfriend, and a Kibbutz-stay in the Negev in 1965. Although he was unimpressed by the Kibbutz, he remained generally sympathetic to Israel, and he even defended the Jewish country in an opinion piece during the anti-Zionist turn in 1967.<sup>152</sup> Still, the aftermath of the Six-Day War had perplexed him. In 1968, he returned to Israel in an attempt to understand the country better, going on a roundtrip “searching for its *volksgeist* [folkesjela].”<sup>153</sup> Already growing suspicious, he joined a bus full of American tourists, “most [of whom] had dyed their hair blue” in support of Israel, to visit the newly occupied Golan Heights. Upon reaching the remnants of a battlefield from the war littered with shrapnel, rusting cannons, and trucks destroyed by gunfire, the Americans apparently went into a frenzy, applauding the results of Israeli military efficiency. It was at this point that one of them made the connection for him, exclaiming: “Oh, look, this is exactly what our boys are

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<sup>148</sup> Lysestøl was under surveillance by the Norwegian Secret Police from 1965 to 1979 for his ties to a Soviet KGB-attaché, and later for his close contact with Fatah-representatives. His surveillance file was released in 2000 following a successful court battle, in which he also won reparations from the Norwegian government for unlawful surveillance. See Lund-kommisjonen (LK), Box: RA/PA-1349/F/L0003/0011, folder labeled “Lysestøl, Peder M. – Kopier fra POT,” “Dokument 6.”

<sup>149</sup> Steigan, *På den himmelske freds plass*, 82-83.

<sup>150</sup> LK, Box: RA/PA-1349/F/L0003/0011, folder labeled “Lysestøl, Peder M. – Kopier fra POT,” “Dokument 6.”

<sup>151</sup> Phone interview with Finn Sjøe, May 6, 2020. Sjøe has himself written about these events in Lysestøl and Sjøe, “Akutt behov for solidaritet,” 15-16; Finn Sjøe, “‘Rød august’ før Svart september,” in *Palestinerne: historie og frigjøringskamp*, ed. Peder Martin Lysestøl (Oslo: Oktober, 1973).

<sup>152</sup> Vågstøl, “Solidaritetsrørsla for Palestina,” 28.

<sup>153</sup> Lysestøl and Sjøe, “Akutt behov for solidaritet,” 15.



doing in Vietnam”. A deeply uncomfortable Sjøe suddenly realized that he found himself on the wrong side. Recalling his shock in a 2019 article for *Fritt Palestina*, he writes:

The woman’s outburst hit me like a horse’s kick in the stomach. What the United States was doing in Vietnam was easy to understand. But here I had to realize that Israel was conducting the same brutal warfare as the US. Targeted, raw occupation. Had I really not understood this before? On the surface, yes. But now the insight felt brutal and real. [...] The road back to Norway seemed short. Now, it was about time to use [my] efforts to the Palestinians’ advantage.<sup>154</sup>

Parts of Sjøe’s recollection fits the narrative previously presented in this chapter. The results of the Six-Day War led him to reassess his stance on Israel, and the realization of Israel’s close ties to the United States led him to turn against it. However, the recollection does not explain why his efforts should now be spent helping exactly the Palestinians. In a later interview, he elaborated that he had been vaguely aware of them before, and that his own research paired with hearing about Lysestøl’s activism led him to actively take their side.<sup>155</sup> Furthermore, as becomes apparent through his personal narrative, it was the direct comparison of the Middle East conflict to the Vietnam War that led him to change his views.

The references to Vietnam were clearly important for understanding Palestine and its position in the Middle East for the young Norwegians, and they went on to actively use it for what it was worth. Later manifestations of early solidarity with Palestine produced by the activists around Lysestøl and Sjøe would often use comparisons to the Vietnam War, as can be seen from resolution texts presented in DNS, in study material circulated by the later Palkom newspaper, *Fritt Palestina*, and in speeches and demonstrations held after the founding of Palkom in 1970.<sup>156</sup> The repeated mentions of Vietnam, and its role in both Sjøe and Lysestøl’s discovery of Palestine, testify to the framework of reference the war in South-East Asia had come to represent. The descriptions of the Palestinian national movement within this material shows how the use of anti-imperialist and Maoist tropes as formulated to describe the

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Phone interview with Finn Sjøe, May 6, 2020.

<sup>156</sup> Det Norske Studentersamfund’s Archive (DNSA,) Box: RA/PA-1322/E/L0015 – “Medlemsmøter.” Folder 0001, labeled “Resolusjoner/resolusjonsforslag 1967-1969,” “Resolusjonsforslag til møtet lørdag 20. september 1969.”; Palestinakomiteen i Norge, *Fritt Palestina*, no. 1, 1970; Translated speech of ‘Nuha’, 1972 in KBPA, box: AAB/ARK-2788/D/Dc/Dcd/L0002/ – “Palestinakomiteen.” Folder 0005, labeled “Fotoutstilling,” “Besøk av Nagwa og Nuha i Norge 1972.”

Vietnamese liberation movement played an important part in their dawning understanding of Palestine and was shaping their solidarity with it.<sup>157</sup>

In the late 1960s, the war in South-East Asia was constantly in the back of the radicals' minds, and it was one of the chief catalysts for youth engagement with the Norwegian New Left.<sup>158</sup> It even got to the point where the ml-movement could actively use Solkom as a recruitment pool.<sup>159</sup> Indeed, for many, Vietnam became the door-opener into a new anti-imperialist worldview. Building on the interest for foreign policy questions initiated around SF's founding in 1962, which was centered around a critique of the Labor Party government's support for NATO and close cooperation with the United States on the international arena, Vietnam pushed the anti-American critique one step further and eventually forced the Norwegian government to reassess its position, at least to some degree.<sup>160</sup> Due to its importance at the time, it is not hard to imagine that seeing the Middle East conflict as a continuation of, and a parallel to, the Vietnam War likely offered an easier entry into understanding it for those Leftists not familiar with the politics of the region. They could simply fit it straight into its framework of reference, as Lysestøl and Sjøe had both done in their respective ways. As Sjøe conceded, "there was an element of pedagogy to it".<sup>161</sup>

However, Sjøe's background also shows that the Maoism that was taking hold of SUF activists was not a prerequisite to making the connection. In the late 1960s, Sjøe was studying



PLO poster. Source: Ismail Shammout, ca. 1972, via The Palestine Poster Project Archive. URL: <https://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/vietnam-palestine>.

<sup>157</sup> For example, the first issue of *Fritt Palestina* contained an article discussing the PLO's use of the so-called people's war of liberation, a Maoist term, using references from the Vietnamese FNL to illustrate.

<sup>158</sup> Tor Egil Førland, Trine Rogg Korsvik, and Knut-Andreas Christophersen, *Ekte sekstiåttene* (Oslo: Gyldendal akademisk, 2008), 258-59.

<sup>159</sup> Godbolt, *Den norske vietnambevegelsen*, 190-91.

<sup>160</sup> See Godbolt, "Den norske vietnambevegelsens betydning," in *ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> Phone interview with Finn Sjøe, May 6, 2020.

psychology at the University of Oslo. His upbringing had imprinted on him a sympathy with the Leftist factions who broke out of Labor to form SF in the early 1960s, but for the time being he stayed out of political activities and parties. Despite shying away from organized politics in the mid-60s, however, he had developed a clear position against the United States and its campaigns in Vietnam and Indochina, as with many other youths of his time. It was not until 1969, when he joined the Working Group and went on to become the first chairman of Palkom in 1970 that he started to make a name for himself as an activist, eventually joining the ml-movement. His work on the Palestine issue would see him become a founding member of AKP (ml), acting as vice-chairman of the party and editor of *Klassekampen* in the early 70s.<sup>162</sup> For him, discovering Palestine also represented his entry into the world of political activism and, a few years later, absorption into the Maoist microcosm. As such, he illustrates how even a more moderate conception of the Vietnam War was sufficient to see the similarities, although he obviously had quite radical leanings.

The reinterpretation of the Middle East using references to Vietnam and FNL did not stem solely from the Norwegian Maoist movement either. The Palestinians, particularly Fatah, often evoked the same ideas, as for example when the organization called on the people of the world to “provide the Palestinian people with such material and moral aid as they give to liberating revolutions in Vietnam, Rhodesia, Angola, and other armed popular revolutions.”<sup>163</sup> It was also reiterated by other Palestinians who appeared at Palkom demonstrations in the early 1970s.<sup>164</sup> More generally, even though Fatah’s own meta-narrative was firmly built around its self-reliance, it also placed a high emphasis on its Third Worldist presentation, for example through its involvement in the Tricontinental framework. Fatah did not necessarily share all the aspects of the Norwegian Maoist perception either. Generally, their criticism of the Soviet Union was for example much more reserved. Still, these examples illustrate how the Palestinian national movement could actively tap into protests against the Vietnam War, and in doing so mobilize solidarity for its own cause in places like Norway.

By presenting the Middle East conflict as a successor to Vietnam, the early expressions of solidarity with Palestine illustrate how transnational anti-imperialism, conveyed through Maoism and Maoist terms, but also influenced by Palestinian activism and Fatah’s self-presentation, contributed to expand the understanding of solidarity on the Norwegian New

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<sup>162</sup> Phone interview with Finn Sjøe, May 6, 2020.

<sup>163</sup> Fatah spokesman speaking in 1968, quoted in Chamberlin, *Global Offensive*, 26.

<sup>164</sup> Translated speech of ‘Nuha’, 1972 in KBPA, box: AAB/ARK-2788/D/Dc/Dcd/L0002/ – “Palestinakomiteen.” Folder 0005, labeled “Fotoutstilling,” “Besøk av Nagwa og Nuha i Norge 1972.”

Left. As the Norwegians linked the revolutionary movements of the Third World and the ml-groups in the West, the political implications of solidarity were expanded. Thus, by also conjoining the enemies, namely US imperialism, Israeli Zionism, Soviet social imperialism, and Norwegian foreign policy, solidarity with Palestine became a way to critique both Norwegian policy and society.<sup>165</sup> By emphasizing revolutionism, and tropes like the People's war, pacifism was pushed aside, and humanitarianism became a by-product of the Palestinian armed struggle. Moreover, by seeing Palestine as Vietnam's successor, it underscored the notion that the Palestinian national movement was in fact a national liberation movement in the context of decolonization. In essence, Vietnam had widened the appeal of Palestine to young radicals, offering a crystal-clear understanding of who was who.

### Palestine has Landed, Solidarity Takes Flight

By the time Lysestøl returned to Oslo in the spring of 1969, several things had changed in the Norwegian capital. The Bryn/Hellerud chapter of SUF had completed the transformation of the party into SUF (ml), completely splitting it from SF in the process. The Maoists were also beginning to make inroads into DNS and were poised to take over its executive committee by the end of the year. What had also begun to change was how sections of the Norwegian New Left interpreted the Middle East conflict. Since 1967, the anti-Zionist turn had stimulated a new discussion on the essence of Israel, increasingly turning attention towards the Middle East and the Arab population of Palestine, the Palestinians. Furthermore, the revolutionary air of 1968, which engaged thousands of youths in Norway and saw several take a critical position vis a vis that of the previous generations and the Old Left, allowed the anti-Zionism of SUF to spread within a growing, willing audience. Meanwhile, the steady rise of Fatah in the public domain had seen Arafat spring onto the global scene with the backing of Vietnamese, Chinese, and Cuban revolutionaries, setting him up for a potential alliance with Western New Leftists who increasingly saw their own struggle and that of the Third World as one, united anti-imperialist front. In this complex political mist, the distinct national character of the Palestinian people was emerging with Fatah and Arafat at the helm.

Lysestøl's activism, his position in SUF and his personal experiences from the Middle East placed him at the crossroads of these historical threads. As we will see, his travels to the Middle East put him in a central position for the building of pro-Palestinian solidarity within the Norwegian New Left. Through his Egyptian wife, he had gained access to Palestinian

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<sup>165</sup> This is similar to what Godbolt found to be the case with the ml-aligned factions of the Norwegian Vietnam movement, see Godbolt, "Det ideologiske hamskiftet" in *Den norske vietnambevegelsen*.

revolutionaries. His budding Maoism, which influenced his interpretation of concepts such as Zionism and the Third World, led him to seek out similar ideologic currents within Fatah. He wasted little time in taking advantage of the new context. The flurry of initiatives he set in motion eventually forged a robust pro-Palestinianism among New Left radicals. Finn Sjøe, on the other hand, came at it from a different angle. His discovery of Palestine was seemingly a result of him discovering his own anti-Zionism in Israel in 1968. The deeply unsettling and personal way this turn came about gave him the impetus to unravel the predominant truth about Israel that, to him, had misguided him for years. The same drive to know more about the Middle East and the Palestinians later brought him to seek out Lysestøl.<sup>166</sup> For Sjøe, as with Lysestøl before him, support for Palestine in their national liberation became linked to his support for what the Vietnamese were doing against the United States, on the other side of the world. Sjøe's own early aversion to Maoism at the time did not significantly delay his own search for Palestine, or impede his anti-imperialist interpretation of it.

Beyond the anti-Zionist turn of the New Left, attitudes towards Israel and the Palestinian refugees were also changing within the wider Norwegian context in this period. In 1967, SF had called for increasing Norwegian aid to the UN's refugee agency in Palestinian refugee camps. The proposal was not adopted, but it marked the first time someone in parliament raised the Palestinian refugee issue. Furthermore, elements of the Norwegian foreign service began to consequently address the refugees as Palestinians from about 1969. Gradually, Norwegians were beginning to see them as a national group.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Phone interview with Finn Sjøe, May 6, 2020.

<sup>167</sup> Waage, *Norwegians?*, 24.

## Chapter three: The “Battle for Palestine” at Folkets Hus

On Saturday April 4, 1970, the students of Oslo were seemingly gripped by a moment of Palestine-fever. As they amassed on Folkets Hus in central Oslo, nearly fourteen-hundred of them in total, they were met with large signs shouting “photography prohibited,” and a tight security-regime.<sup>168</sup> Guards bearing red armbands searched bags for camera equipment and made sure anyone considered unsafe was either turned back or sent to the back rows. One member of the conservative student union complained that he had been patted down upon entry and prohibited from getting too close to the stage. As people settled in the cramped locale, the chairman of the Norwegian Student Society, Carl Erik Schulz, rose to remind of the photo-prohibition and to introduce the guest of honor. Mounir Shafiq, better known at the time as Abu Fadi, a prominent Maoist ideologue within Fatah, entered the stage flanked by two Palestinian bodyguards. As he spoke to the audience, he recounted the suffering and plight of the Palestinian people at the hand of Zionism and imperialism in a heated and personal fashion, but he also emphasized the rising strength of the national liberation movement and Fatah. The crowd was mesmerized by the articulate Shafiq, and they remained captivated for the duration of the speech. “For a few hours, ‘the battle for Palestine’ was relocated to the grand hall in Folkets Hus”, one reporter wrote.<sup>169</sup> After he had left the stage, the students voted for a resolution that stood clearly in solidarity with the Palestinians and Fatah in their national struggle, and equated its importance with that of the Vietnam War.<sup>170</sup> The mood was so decidedly different from that of just three years earlier, during the anti-Zionist turn.

Lysestøl had wasted little time upon his return to Oslo in 1969. The cadres of the newly founded SUF (ml) had its reservations about him due to his long absence, and he later recalled to Vågstøl how he found himself without political obligations to focus on. Thus, with extra time on his hands, he busied himself with spreading what he had learned while in Cairo.<sup>171</sup> The next year saw a flurry of pro-Palestinian activity in the Norwegian capital that eventually culminated in the founding of Palkom in the fall of 1970. From spring 1969 to autumn 1970, the pro-Palestinian position was clearly incorporated into the political line of the Norwegian New Left, in which it drew supporters from both the Maoist SUF (ml), but also less radical

<sup>168</sup>Sv. A. “En stillferdig revolusjonær i bevoktet Studentersamfund,” *Arbeiderbladet*, no. 78, April 6, 1970; Unsigned. “Felles politisk program for gerilja i Midt-Østen,” *Dagbladet*, no. 78, April 6, 1970.

<sup>169</sup> Unsigned. “Felles politisk program for gerilja i Midt-Østen,” *Dagbladet*, no. 78, April 6, 1970.

<sup>170</sup> DNSA, Box: RA/PA-1322/E/L0015 – “Medlemsmøter.” Folder 0002, labeled “Resolusjoner/resolusjonsforslag 1970-1971,” “Resolusjonsforslag til møtet lørdag 4. april.”

<sup>171</sup> Vågstøl, “Solidaritetsrørsla for Palestina,” 27.

students who emphasized the humanitarian consequences of Israel's policies or wanted to study the Middle East. These, at times contradictory, streams merged as Palestinian nationalism was presented in a way that carefully distanced it from allegations of anti-Semitism, while also incorporating it into the discursive framework of New Left anti-imperialism. Central to this process was the activism of Lysestøl and the newly established Working Group for a Free Palestine, which facilitated appearances from Fatah-representatives and other Scandinavian activists in Norwegian student societies in Oslo and elsewhere. DNS, at the time undergoing a process of radicalization, provided an early platform for pro-Palestinianism from which the Palestinian issue reached a broader audience and eventually found footing.

### The Working Group for a Free Palestine

The first step towards a Norwegian solidarity organization for Palestine was taken when Lysestøl set up a study group to directly tackle the Palestinian cause within its regional and global context. The Working Group drew members from his personal network in Norway, and politically represented a cross-section of the various youth groupings on the Left.<sup>172</sup> Most of them did however have Maoist leanings, and several eventually joined the SUF (ml)-successor, *Arbeidernes kommunistiske parti (marxist-leninistene)* (The Workers' Communist Party (The Marxist-Leninists), AKP (ml)), after its formation in 1973. The members of the Working Group mostly spent their time studying the Palestinian people, the conflict, and its various actors, as well as circulating material on the issue and developing a political platform on which to establish a fully-fledged solidarity organization.<sup>173</sup> Furthermore, the activists took it upon themselves to expand the network between the Norwegian New Left and the Palestinians, organizing study trips to the Middle East and facilitating appearances by Palestinians in Norway. As Finn Sjøe later summed up:

Unity was created. And not least, we had to gather serious insight into what the Palestinian struggle was about. It didn't suffice with slogans and will. It wouldn't convince most people if they felt that we only waffled about it [bare var store i kjeften].

We had to dive down into the Palestinian resistance movement. Go behind their slogans. Get an insight on the ground level. Get to know the leadership as much as

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Lysestøl and Sjøe, "Akutt behov for solidaritet," 11.; LK, Box: RA/PA-1349/F/L0003/0011, folder labeled "Lysestøl, Peder M. – Kopier fra POT," "Dokument 13."

possible. Navigate the many groups and organizations. Clarify what they agreed and disagreed on. Find out how substantial their contradictions were [hvor sterke motesetningene mellom dem var]. Get as close to concrete, armed fighting as was possible and safe [forsvarlig]. Try to separate loud, symbolic weapon rattling from serious armed struggle conducted with life in the balance.<sup>174</sup>

The fact that Lysestøl was able to gather an engaged group of radicals to specifically tackle the Palestinian issue speaks to the change that had occurred over the past two years. From being busy with the war in Vietnam, young people were now beginning to discover the plight of the Palestinians, and to see the Palestinian struggle as central to the global struggle against Western imperialism, equating the Middle East conflict with that in South-East Asia. It also illustrates how, with the rise of Palestinian nationalism within the global Third World context, the conflict had transcended its regional context. Fatah's transnational activism had seen its cause adopted by important partners within the tricontinental and Third World frameworks, something Western activists were increasingly becoming aware of. As Lysestøl later put it, "many had taken notice of China's support for the Palestinian people."<sup>175</sup> Now, with the expertise and network of activists like him, the political potential of Palestine was more accessible to Norwegian radicals than ever, perhaps even more so than Vietnam.

The Working Group also appealed to students with more than anti-imperialist rhetorics. The lure of academic interest was also an effective tool, both for recruitment to the Working Group and subsequently for its operations. Due to the fact that so little was still known in Norwegian academic circles at the time about Palestine, and indeed about the Arab world at all, many jumped at the possibility to study an area that previously had received so little attention.<sup>176</sup> Lysestøl and the other activists wagered that studying the subject would lead people to realize the Palestinian plight for themselves, and in many ways, the bet seemed to pay off with dividends. The academic drive of the participants, along with the general interest among Leftist youths in international questions, saw the group produce vast volumes of study material, and interest in the Middle East grew rapidly across the political spectrum in the period. In fact, according to Lysestøl, many of the Working Group activists went on to study Arabic and become experts on the Middle East later in their lives.<sup>177</sup> Along the way, most

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>176</sup> Phone interview with Peder Martin Lysestøl, April 28, 2020.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.



participants seem to have drawn the same conclusions as Lysestøl had done about the global anti-imperialist implications of the conflict.

According to both Lysestøl, Sjøe, and pro-Palestinian activists in other countries as well, the drive to understand the Middle East was not only academic. Many had a strong sense that they had been fooled by the previous generation.<sup>178</sup> The fact that several of them had worked at Kibbutzim, now seen as small “fortresses of occupation”, and at times been personally engaged for Israel, also made them uncomfortable. It seems that the revelations about how the Palestinians had been treated shook them so much because of the contrast it offered to what they themselves had grown up believing, namely that Israel was a bastion of democracy and socialism in a Middle Eastern desert of backwardness. As such, their strong interest in Palestine and Israel had elements of both personal redemption and generational resistance to it as well.

The previously described importance of references to Vietnam also illustrates how comparing Palestine’s case to other conflicts embraced by the New Left held significant symbolic power, as well as political capital, and could be used by the Working Group to efficiently redress the various components of the Middle East conflict. Likening Israel to the apartheid-regime in South Africa, for instance, allowed radicals to further distance it from the virtues that had been celebrated by the Old Left since 1949, namely Israel’s social democratic credentials and strong unions. The Norwegian Labor movement had nurtured close ties to its Israeli counterpart, and the mentioned Kibbutz-system had also had a strong appeal on young leftists as well as the Old Guard of the social democratic parties. Now, Histadrut was criticized for contributing to the marginalization of Palestinians through Jewish exclusivism, and the Kibbutzim for being a smokescreen for de facto military occupation.<sup>179</sup> Meanwhile, the Vietnam-comparison had a double edge. First and foremost, it reasserted Israel’s ties to the United States and Western imperialism. Following this logic then, it reinterpreted the whole Middle East conflict as a frontline for the anti-imperialist struggle, in which the Palestinians represented the emerging, revolutionary Third World.

For the people who got engaged with the Palestine issue through the Working Group, the political aspects of solidarity with the Palestinian people held a significant humanitarian

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.; Phone interview with Finn Sjøe, May 6, 2020. American activists related a similar feeling in Fischbach, *The Movement*, 45-47.

<sup>179</sup> Recording of debate meeting on the Israel-Palestine conflict, September 20, 1969, in DNSA, Box: RA/PA-1322/U/Ub/L0037/0005, recording labeled “Debattmøte om Israel/Palestina (20/9).”

dimension as well. Since the Six-Day War, more and more reporting on Palestine had focused on the plight of the refugees, and activists like Lysestøl often mentioned how the Palestinian population of Israel was being mistreated, emphasizing the apartheid-like nature of the country, especially after the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>180</sup> Accusations of apartheid were hard-hitting already in the late 1960s. Solidarity work with the black population of Southern Africa had been going on through the decade, and reached a broad following in Norway, not only among New Left radicals.<sup>181</sup> The solidarity movement for Vietnam also held a significant humanitarian dimension at the core, and even though Solkom had been radicalized over the past few years, much of the broader Vietnam movement's following emphasized reducing the human suffering in their opposition to the war in Asia. By invoking the same sentiments, the budding Palestine-movement broadened its appeal beyond the Maoist interpretation of the anti-imperialist struggle, at least to some extent.

## Palestine in DNS

DNS became an important arena for the Working Group. Public interest in the society's debate was considerable, most of the meetings were covered in the national press, and the generally free position of the executive to choose subjects for debate meant that it held substantial political potential for activists wishing to spread their message.<sup>182</sup> Originally set up as an organization within which students could educate themselves through free academic discussion, debates, and lectures, the DNS was however gradually becoming politicized in the late 1960s, and a growing Marxist-Leninist faction was in effect seeking to transform it into an alternative public space.<sup>183</sup> The radicalization of the student body had already manifested itself in resolutions supporting the FNL in Vietnam and denouncing Norwegian membership in NATO, and now it also opened a door for the pro-Palestinian activists.

In September 1969, Lysestøl and Swedish activist Staffan Beckman each held talks on the Palestinian issue and the character of Israel for a DNS meeting of roughly three hundred students. Beckman was likely the first to publish discussions on the anti-imperialist aspects of the Palestinians' armed struggle in a Scandinavian language, and his early works on the subject were often referenced by Lysestøl and the Working Group, as well as Danish

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<sup>180</sup> See for example Peder Martin Lysestøl, *Palestinerne: historie og frigjøringskamp* (Oslo: Oktober, 1973), 178-79.

<sup>181</sup> See for example Eriksen, *Norway and National Liberation*; Vetlesen, *Frihet for Sør-Afrika*.

<sup>182</sup> Mette Torp Christensen, "Fra akademiske idealer til radikaliserings og studentopprør - En studie av Det Norske Studentersamfund ved Universitetet i Oslo 1963-1972" (Master thesis, University of Oslo, 2002), 6.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

activists.<sup>184</sup> Their opening presentations were clearly pro-Palestinian. However, in the debate that followed, it became clear that the congregation was still split on the issue.<sup>185</sup> While several participants claimed that Lysestøl and Beckman presented false information, reciting the virtues of Israeli social democracy, others called for an internationally negotiated solution to the Middle East conflict. Others again denounced Israel and called on the assembly to support the Palestinians' armed struggle. Although the students still had considerable differences in who they supported in the conflict, and how they believed a solution should come about, it was also becoming clear that the belligerents of the conflict were increasingly interpreted as the Palestinian people on one side, and the Israeli regime on the other. Even some of the pro-Israeli voices saw the Palestinians, represented by Fatah and Arafat, as central actors in this issue, although they considered them part of a conspiracy with Nasser and the other Arab regimes. The implications of such reasonings are quite clear: the Palestinians were now seen by many to be actors in their own right, implying an understanding of them as a more or less coherent group, signified by their national identity as Palestinians. Although some perceived their agency to be limited within the confines of Nasser's influence, they were part of the equation.

After the debate, the divided crowd voted on a resolution tabled by Lysestøl, and it was adopted with small margins. The text was articulated in the form of a history lesson culminating in a statement of support for the Palestinians.<sup>186</sup> What is interesting, though, is how it rearranged the logic of the anti-Zionist iterations of the previous two years. Whereas SUF's motion in 1967, which had been reaffirmed in 1968, had cited the rights of the Palestinian people as part of the justification for anti-Zionism, Lysestøl's resolution referred to the expansionist and colonialist character of Zionist Israel, and its role as bridgehead for US imperialism, as justification for the Palestinians' own struggle against Israel. Thus, it switched from anti to pro, giving it a positive definition in which the protagonists were the fighting *fedayeen* of Fatah. Furthermore, it also reflected the Maoism of its advocates by

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<sup>184</sup> Both Lysestøl and Sjøe stated in interviews that Beckman's writings were early influences for them. Lysestøl also referenced Beckman's two 1969 books on Palestine in his own book, *Palestinerne*, published in 1973. See Staffan Beckman, *Palestina och USA-imperialismen* (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1969); Beckman, *Palestina och Israel*; Lysestøl, *Palestinerne*. For mentions of influence on Danish activists, see Øvig Knudsen, *Blekingegadebanden*, 1, 130.

<sup>185</sup> Recording of debate meeting on the Israel-Palestine conflict, September 20, 1969, in DNSA, Box: RA/PA-1322/U/Ub/L0037/0005, recording labeled "Debattmøte om Israel/Palestina (20/9)."

<sup>186</sup> "DNS, assembled for meeting 20/9-69, will on this background give its full support to the Palestinian and other Arab peoples and the anti-Zionist forces within Israel in their righteous struggle against the American imperialism and the state of Israel". From draft resolution about the Middle East for meeting on September 20, 1969 in DNSA, Box: RA/PA-1322/E/L0015 – "Medlemsmøter." Folder 0001, labeled "Resolusjoner/resolusjonsforslag 1967-1969," "Resolusjonsforslag til møtet lørdag 20. september 1969."

extending the list of enemies to include the Soviet Union.<sup>187</sup> The resolution text gives agency to the Palestinians. Instead of emphasizing their movement's nationalist credentials, it clearly demonstrates how they are seen to be on the frontlines of the global fight against Western imperialism via references to Vietnam:

In the same way that the Vietnamese people's struggle for liberation in Vietnam, is the Palestinian people's struggle against the state of Israel, for the Palestinian and other Arab people's most elementary rights, a struggle against the main enemy in the world today: US imperialism [USA-imperialismen].

The resolution then continued:

The struggle in the Middle East does not direct itself against the inhabitants of Israel, but against the Zionist state Israel, which in its nature is expansionist and forced to cooperate with imperialism and to counter any progressive development in the Middle East. The Jewish people of Israel is in the same way as the Arabs a victim of imperialism.<sup>188</sup>

The enemy of the Palestinians was not the Jewish people, something that had been emphasized before. The enemy was the US-led imperialist system of the West, in cohorts with the social imperialism of the Soviet Union. For the New Leftists, as can be seen, this made the Middle East conflict comparable to the Vietnam War. Moreover, the claim that "*The Jewish people of Israel is in the same way as the Arabs a victim of imperialism*" distances its proponents from allegations of anti-Semitism. Instead, it states the opposite, namely that the Jewish people are being used in an imperialist plot to maintain the interests of the United States. In essence, the text attempts to reflect claims of anti-Semitism back at its critics.

There are several reasons why Lysestøl and the student radicals would apply such a rhetoric. Firstly, and most obvious, being accused of anti-Semitism was extremely harmful to the legitimacy of the Palestinian national movement as well as the New Left in general. Thus, Lysestøl and the activists were highly conscious of not articulating themselves in a way that might implicate anti-Semitic notions.<sup>189</sup> For the older generation as well, the memories of

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<sup>187</sup> "What has happened in the Middle East clearly demonstrates the Soviet social-imperialist counter-revolutionary cooperation with the American imperialists. These two great powers strive to attain a so-called 'political solution' for the Middle East-question, with the goal of controlling the strategic positions in this part of the world, plunder the rich oil deposits there and enslave the Arab people. It is a step in the American-Soviet neo-colonialist conspiracy to redivide the world [between them]." Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Phone interview with Peder Martin Lysestøl, April 28, 2020.

Nazism and the Holocaust was still relatively fresh in mind, and being seen in the same light as these things would ravage the activists' credibility. There was also a sense of continuity in distancing the movement from such accusations, considering how the original anti-Zionist decree of SUF in 1967 had called for guaranteeing "the current population of Israel [...] the right to live in the Middle East".<sup>190</sup> Finally, it also reflected the political situation within Fatah and the wider Palestinian national movement. Since 1967, Fatah had ambiguously called for a new Palestinian state for all ethnicities, religions and races, and this position had been further elaborated and developed since then. By early 1969, allowing the Jewish population of Israel to remain within the new state envisioned was indeed being consolidated among Palestinian nationalists, at least at the leadership-level.<sup>191</sup>

The day after the debate in DNS, a resigned journalist from the conservative daily *Morgenbladet* reported that the leftists had spent hours decrying Zionist expansionism and promoting the Palestinian cause, noting that the conservative voices which had sided with Israel had been limited to less than a minute of speaking time. The reporter in many ways mirrored the criticisms presented at the debate, in which several attendees had accused the executive board of DNS of demonstrating a heavy bias towards the pro-Palestinian resolution.<sup>192</sup> Conservative voices were not the only ones to speak out against the meeting, however. An article in *Dagbladet* also tabled severe criticism on the "one-sidedness" of the pro-Palestine resolution, labeling the DNS a "political kindergarten".<sup>193</sup> Lars Alldén, the DNS chairman, came under especially heavy scrutiny for having voted for the resolution and eventually had to answer his critics on September 25<sup>th</sup>, defending his leadership and his decision to support the motion. In his rebuttal, he reassured the reader that every meeting protocol had been followed, and added that he did not agree with how the resolution characterized Israel's character and the way it equated US imperialism with Soviet social imperialism.<sup>194</sup> Still, he maintained that he fully supported "those Palestinian and Israeli forces working for justice for the peoples that live in West-Asia today". He continued:

The Palestinians' rights can only be invoked if Israel ceases to be a purely Jewish state, closely tied to the United States' imperialist interests. The Palestinians have

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<sup>190</sup> SUF resolution on the Six-Day War, quoted in Sjøli, *Mao, min Mao*, 26.

<sup>191</sup> Chamberlin, *Global Offensive*, 98.

<sup>192</sup> Hhr. "DNS støtter anti-zionismen, Rekord i ensidighet lørdag," *Morgenbladet*, no. 219, September 22, 1969; DNSA, Box: RA/PA-1322/U/Ub/L0037/0005, recording labeled "Debattmøte om Israel/Palestina (20/9)."

<sup>193</sup> Unsigned. "Politisk barnehage," *Dagbladet*, no. 220, September 23, 1969.

<sup>194</sup> Alldén, Lars. "Dagbladet og Studentersamfundet," *Dagbladet*, no. 223, September 26, 1969.

themselves supported [gått inn for] a federal state where today's Israelis would be able to live on the same terms [på like fot] as the Palestinians.<sup>195</sup>

At first glance, Alldén's answer seems to concur with the pro-Palestinianism of Lysestøl and the Working Group, however, his rejection of the strict anti-Zionist critique of "Israel's character" illustrates his nuancing of it. His solidarity is clearly with the Palestinians, and he echoes the rejection of a purely Jewish state, but his ambition for the Middle East is reformist rather than revolutionary in this context. As a social democrat, and a member of SF, Alldén's interpretation of the Middle East conflict is clearly placing the Palestinians and the refugee question at the center of events. As such, his article in *Dagbladet* espoused an early iteration of the reasoning that later prevailed when elements of the Labor movement adopted the Palestinian cause the next year.<sup>196</sup>

Despite several reassurances that the meeting protocol had been followed as customary, the pro-Palestinian resolution was nevertheless revoked by another resolution tabled two weeks later.<sup>197</sup> This episode occurred in the midst of the ongoing radicalization of DNS. Alldén himself was a member of SF's central committee and co-editor of *Orientering*. However, even though his platform aligned itself with the social democratic program of SF, it several times stretched itself to support Maoist-inspired resolutions more aligned with the policies of SUF (ml).<sup>198</sup> This was indicative of the ongoing change. His period as chairman would be the last time the social democrats controlled DNS for over fifteen years. The following term, a conservative platform succeeded it, before the SUF (ml)-aligned coalition *Rød Front* (Red Front) took over the reins. *Rød Front* went on to keep them until 1986, only interrupted once in 1973.<sup>199</sup> The rebuff of the pro-Palestinian resolution highlights the transitional nature of this period, in which such a position was still highly controversial within DNS but could nonetheless amass substantial support. The members of the executive committee in fact voted against the ensuing counter-resolution, with Alldén citing his solidarity with the Palestinians as part of the reason. The pro-Palestinian position's bumpy debut at the DNS-stage was however not telling for the future, as the radical rule that followed one term later endorsed it unequivocally.

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Tveit, *Alt for Israel*, 451.

<sup>197</sup> DNSA, Box: RA/PA-1322/E/L0015 – "Medlemsmøter." Folder 0001, labeled "Resolusjoner/resolusjonsforslag 1967-1969," "Resolusjonsforslag til behandling på møte i Det Norske Studentersamfund lørdag den 4. oktober 1969."

<sup>198</sup> Christensen, "Fra akademiske idealer," 125-26.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

Shafiq's visit eight months later also drew much attention. It garnered large crowds of students, as well as much of Oslo's Arab population and journalists from the largest media outlets.<sup>200</sup> The resolution adopted this time was even more clearly in support of Fatah and its attempts in forming a broad Palestinian coalition in the armed struggle:

DNS [...] gives its full support to Al Fatah's and other liberation organizations' work to assemble the Palestinian people to continued struggle against US imperialism and the Zionist state of Israel.<sup>201</sup>

In line with Fatah's emphasis on Palestinian self-reliance, it also went far in implying how the Palestinians themselves were the main actors in the Middle East conflict. Whereas the decree of support from 1969 had mixed their fates with that of "other Arab peoples", this one did not use such vagueness other than in referencing how Fatah had called for an end to discrimination against Jewish minorities in Arab states. It also elaborated on Fatah's emphasis on the concept of people's liberation war and sang the praises of its military successes against Zionist forces.<sup>202</sup>

The resolution was among others signed by Sigmund Grønmo, a central person in the leadership of SUF (ml) and *Rød Front*.<sup>203</sup> Grønmo had been chairman of SUF during the split from SF in 1969 and was *Rød Front*'s candidate for head of DNS for the next semester. Considering Pål Steigan, another of the ml-movements central architects, had written an article in support of Fatah in early 1969, and that Grønmo was the sponsor of this resolution, SUF (ml) was clearly supporting them publicly at this point.<sup>204</sup> This, along with the Working Group's activism, shows how support for the Palestinians in the DNS was gradually gaining foothold among the radical students. Central was their presentation of the conflict as an anti-imperialist struggle, seeing Palestine as a frontline, while also underscoring that the pro-Palestinian position did not entail a hatred for Jews or the Israeli people as such.

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<sup>200</sup> Lysestøl and Sjøe, "Akutt behov for solidaritet," 11.; Sv. A. "En stillferdig revolusjonær i bevoktet Studentersamfund," *Arbeiderbladet*, no. 78, April 6, 1970; Unsigned. "Felles politisk program for gerilja i Midt-Østen," *Dagbladet* no. 78, April 6, 1970; Ast. "DNS støtter Al Fatahs 'kamp mot sionismen'," *Morgenbladet*, no. 78, April 6, 1970; Unsigned. "Al Fatah-stemning i Studentersamfundet," *Aftenposten morgenutgave*, no. 154, April 6, 1970; "Aktuelt: Representant for Al Fatah på besøk i Oslo," *NRK Radio*, April 4, 1970.

<sup>201</sup> DNSA, Box: RA/PA-1322/E/L0015 – "Medlemsmøter." Folder 0002, labeled "Resolusjoner/resolusjonsforslag 1970-1971," "Resolusjonsforslag til møtet lørdag 4. april."

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.; Pål Steigan and Kjetil Bull. "Palestinerne til kamp mot israelsk aggresjon," *Ungsosialisten*, no 1, 1969.

## A Palestinian Maoist Denouncing Israel in Oslo

Shafiq's appearance in Oslo is an important example of how the Palestinians themselves relayed this interpretation to Norwegian students. In his speech, he had underlined the injustices carried out against the Palestinians by Israel and the Western states both historically and contemporarily, but also the resilience of the Palestinian people in the face of a behemoth imperialist system.<sup>205</sup> This narrative, in which the fearless *fedayeen* and the poor but tireless Palestinian masses are seeking justice for past and present wrongdoings through violent revolutionary action, was very similar to the one presented in Lysestøl's motion in the DNS in the previous year. The focus actively denied sentiments with clear anti-Semitic connotations, such as a hatred of Israel, instead focusing on the strong and distinct national character of a people deprived by a Zionist-imperialist system. The problem was not presented as the people of Israel per se, but instead its corrupted leaders and bourgeoisie structures who uphold the system of oppression.<sup>206</sup> Imperialism and the Zionist state of Israel was the enemy, not the Israeli people, reiterating the sentiments of the resolution put forward by Lysestøl in 1969. Thus, there was a sense of continuity to his message.

Shafiq was an influential figure in the national movement and highly articulate, perhaps more so than Lysestøl and the DNS executive committee had realized before the visit. They knew that he was close to Fatah's central leadership, but he was also likely the editor of the Fatah-paper *Filastin al-Thawra* during his visit. Although he was ousted as editor in 1973, he later went on to become an advisor to Arafat himself and leader of the PLO Planning Centre in Tunis, highlighting his important position within the national movement.<sup>207</sup> Knowing that Lysestøl was Maoist and that the ml-movement was growing within the Norwegian student body, his Palestinian friends from the time in Cairo had decided to send Shafiq when Lysestøl asked for a speaker from Fatah to attend the meeting in DNS. According to Lysestøl, they believed he would "fit to speak in front of a European crowd."<sup>208</sup> When he appeared before the students in Oslo, he became one of the very first Palestinians to speak publicly in Western Europe as a representative of Fatah, in fact possibly the first.<sup>209</sup> Both Lysestøl and Sjøe

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<sup>205</sup> "En stillferdig revolusjonær i bevoktet Studentersamfund," *Arbeiderbladet*, no. 78, 06.04.1970; "Felles politisk program for gerilja i Midt-Østen," *Dagbladet* no. 78, April 6, 1970.

<sup>206</sup> "En stillferdig revolusjonær i bevoktet Studentersamfund," *Arbeiderbladet*, no. 78, 06.04.1970.

<sup>207</sup> Phone interview with Peder Martin Lysestøl, April 28, 2020; Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, 352.

<sup>208</sup> Phone interview with Peder Martin Lysestøl, April 28, 2020.

<sup>209</sup> DNS advertised his visit as the first public appearance of a Fatah representative in Western Europe, however it is hard to confirm without gauging the press and solidarity movements of other Western European countries at the time. Considering how early the Norwegian solidarity work with Palestine was organized though, it is not farfetched. Unsigned. "Al Fatah-leder holder foredrag i Samfundet," *Arbeiderbladet*, no. 77, April 4, 1970.



recalled how they did not fully understand his expertise until he took the stage at Folkets Hus, and that his speech caught the crowd more or less off guard, describing how “nobody in attendance said a word” for the duration of the lecture.<sup>210</sup> Furthermore, according to Lysestøl, Shafiq’s Maoist interpretation of Palestine was likely important in building a sense of trust between the Norwegians and Fatah, as his analysis resonated with the mostly radical students in the audience.<sup>211</sup>

Whereas the speech struck a note with the radical students, the media outlets in attendance were more critical, as could be expected. Shafiq’s visit to Oslo was covered by *Aftenposten*, *Arbeiderbladet*, *Dagbladet*, and *Morgenbladet*, and *Norsk rikskringkasting* (the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, NRK) aired an interview with him on national radio.<sup>212</sup> Besides relaying his explanation for the use of armed struggle against Israel, several of the articles also gave characterizations of Shafiq’s appearance. Especially an interview that appeared in *Arbeiderbladet* made a point out of how normal and educated he seemed, implying that one would not have known he was an Arab revolutionary from just looking at him. Instead, to quote the journalist, in a calm interview setting “he reminds [you] of a solid businessman or a university lecturer”.<sup>213</sup> Such characteristics are interesting insofar as they also indicate how *Western* he might have seemed. Although neither of the articles explicitly say this, it can still be discerned when seen in conjunction with evidence of how Arabs generally seem to have been perceived in the Norwegian public around the same time. As previously mentioned, media accounts of the time typically regarded Fatah as a group of anti-Semitic terrorists controlled by other Arab states. It was also not uncommon to describe them using typical orientalist tropes like fanatical, emotional, and hateful.<sup>214</sup> Thus, the descriptions of Shafiq as someone reminiscent of a “businessman or university lecturer” seem diametrically opposite of the typical orientalist and racist depictions of Palestinians from the time. Despite this moderation on some parts, the journalists all pointed out that Shafiq’s speech was mainly

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<sup>210</sup> Phone interview with Peder Martin Lysestøl, April 28, 2020; Phone interview with Finn Sjøe, May 6, 2020.

<sup>211</sup> Phone interview with Peder Martin Lysestøl, April 28, 2020.

<sup>212</sup> Sv. A. “En stillferdig revolusjonær i bevoktet Studentersamfund,” *Arbeiderbladet*, no. 78, April 6, 1970; “Felles politisk program for gerilja i Midt-Østen,” *Dagbladet* no. 78, April 6, 1970; “Al Fatah-stemming i Studentersamfundet,” *Aftenposten morgenutgave*, no. 154, April 6, 1970; “Aktuelt: Representant for Al Fatah på besøk i Oslo,” *NRK Radio*, April 4, 1970.

<sup>213</sup> Sv. A. “En stillferdig revolusjonær i bevoktet Studentersamfund,” *Arbeiderbladet*, no. 78, April 6, 1970.

<sup>214</sup> Orientalism was coined by Palestinian-American scholar Edward W. Said in Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978). The Norwegian media’s use of orientalist tropes is for example illustrated in “Hatets vulkan. Møte med palestinske geriljaorganisasjoner,” *NRK Radio*, November 23, 1969.

sentimental in some way or another and concluded that these emotions were fueling the violence in the Middle East.<sup>215</sup> In other words, they were not convinced.

For the students though, Shafiq seems to have played the part well. By relaying his story to them in a passionate, yet personal manner, he embodied his narrative. He brought a little piece of the Middle East, of Palestine, and the Arab-Israeli conflict, i.e. himself, to Oslo, and interpreted it in a way that was relatable to the young radicals. The fact that he was himself a Palestinian, and a revolutionary one at that, likely also carried an authenticity that gave him credibility. However, the characterizations in the news reports indicate that his authenticity arrived not from him being an Arab in itself, seeing as he resembled a Westerner. Considering that the students were likely also influenced by the predominantly orientalist tropes used to describe Arabs and Palestinians at the time, the contrast he represented from these descriptions might in fact have been a factor in captivating them. In a sense, they were as taken aback as the reporters. On the other hand, the students' embrace of his message indicates that Shafiq not only got his revolutionary credibility from his expertise and articulation, as recalled by Lysestøl and Sjøe, but also from his relatability.

This demystification might have been a factor for why Shafiq's message found footing among the radical students. For them, the combination of his appearance combined with the fact that he spoke the same "language" seems to have persuaded them. Such an analysis challenges other narratives concerning the connections between the Third World and the New Left. To take the American case, for example, it has been argued that an orientalist perception laid at the core of New Leftist perspectives on the Third World and its revolutionaries, both radical and more moderate.<sup>216</sup> For the Norwegian students however, the meeting with Shafiq seems to represent a rejection of an orientalist dichotomy and instead a willingness to embrace their commonalities, i.e. their global struggle against Zionism and imperialism. As well as fitting into the wider narrative portrayed in this thesis, this is also supported by Gjerde's findings on how the Norwegian New Left's embrace of new anti-imperialism in the late 1960s spurred their rejection of the civilizational discourse of the Old Left.<sup>217</sup> Although not addressing

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<sup>215</sup> "It was a sentimental, but at the same time highly personal testimony from someone from the revolutionary headquarters in Amman. He did not give an elaborate analysis of today's situation in the Middle East, but was a living example of the emotional engagement that is driving the Middle East conflict towards more death and misery." Sv. A. "En stillferdig revolusjonær i bevoktet Studentersamfund," *Arbeiderbladet*, no. 78, April 6, 1970.

<sup>216</sup> In her *Radicals on the Road*, Judy Chu Tsun Wu postulates that the Third World revolutionaries and American New Leftist radicals together fostered a 'radical orientalism', in which the Third World was romanticized as opposite to the imperialist and morally corrupt West. Wu, *Radicals on the Road*.

<sup>217</sup> Gjerde, "Meaning of Israel," 397.

explicitly whether this new discursive paradigm entailed a rejection of orientalism as such, Gjerde shows how it meant that the radicals came to see the Old Guard's orientalist descriptions of Arabs as essentially racist, and instead sought out Arab subjectivity in their attempts to understand Israel. This was the same dynamic which, among other things, had been important in fostering SUF's anti-Zionist turn back in 1967. One can also argue that this fits into the generational dynamics of the Norwegian youth revolts, as the students' embrace of Shafiq and his anti-imperialist presentation resembles a de-facto refutation of the previous generations' perspectives on Arabs. As such, Shafiq gave the Palestinian national movement a face the students recognized not for its differences, but for its similarities. This only reinforced his anti-imperialist analysis; they were all in this together.

Shafiq's subsequent tour of Norway also illustrates how the backdrop was gradually changing. The visit to Folkets Hus was in fact part of a longer itinerary that included visits to student societies in Bergen and Trondheim, as well as to Lysestøl's family cabin in his native Trøndelag.<sup>218</sup> On this roundtrip, he gave several more interviews to Norwegian newspapers, repeating the messages he had relayed in Oslo. In a sense, the circle was closing, as media outlets that had reported on the rise of Palestinian nationalism were now met by its manifestation on their own home turf. However, this time they allowed the Palestinian speaking time on their pages, thus relaying a voice that would have gone unheard just a few years prior. In this process, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was gradually moving closer to the center of the wider Arab-Israeli conflict.

### Red August, Black September<sup>219</sup>

The summer of 1970 saw what must be considered a major breakthrough for the consolidation of a pro-Palestinian position on the Norwegian Left. On June 2, the Oslo wing of AUF officially went in for support of the Palestinian liberation struggle.<sup>220</sup> As with SUF after the anti-Zionist turn, the decision caused a row between it and the mother party, this time played out on the pages of Labor's party organ, *Arbeiderbladet*. The young social democrats drew condemnations from top politicians in the party, as well as from leadership-level of the LO, and the ensuing discussion likely reached a much broader audience than the debate in

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<sup>218</sup> Vågstøl, "Solidaritetsrørsla for Palestina," 29.; Unsigned. "Vi kjemper mot systemet som drev oss ut fra våre hjem," *Adressavisen*. April 8, 1970.

<sup>219</sup> This headline draws inspiration from the title of a text by Finn Sjøe, see Sjøe, "Rød august."

<sup>220</sup> Waage, *Norwegians?*, 24; Tveit, *Alt for Israel*, 451.

*Orientering* had done three years earlier.<sup>221</sup> AUF's pro-Palestinian decree was similar to the position Alldeén had taken in his defense of the 1969 resolution in DNS, and called for solidarity with the PLO, as well as the establishment of a new, multi-ethnic Palestinian state to succeed Israel.<sup>222</sup> The concern caused by the generational discrepancy regarding Israel-Palestine was perfectly summed up in a report by the Israeli ambassador to Norway, Avigdor Dagan: "Biological development is working against us. From now on, we must rely on the young ones, and that will not be easy."<sup>223</sup> His report also gave an interesting analysis of the ongoing shift, one that would arguably soon be proven for its underestimation of the Norwegian youths: "The young are against us, not because they know the situation and not because of ideology, but automatically because the old are for Israel."

Shafiq had visited Oslo while Fatah was in a position of relative strength. Since the war in 1967, the various *fedayeen*-groupings had mostly amassed in Jordan, from where they could consolidate their numbers and carry out attacks against Israeli targets.<sup>224</sup> By 1970, the national movement was growing steadily, both in terms of numbers, reputation, and support, and Fatah was drawing most of it. For the past year or so, a number of *fedayeen* had taken to the skies, quite literally, by initiating acts of transnational terrorism in the form of airplane hijackings. Mostly carried out by fighters from the PFLP, these hijackings had successfully drawn much attention to their cause and proved an effective way into pressuring various governments into concessions, such as prisoner exchanges.<sup>225</sup> However, they were also contributing to the increased tensions now facing the Jordanian Hussein-regime. By the summer of 1970, these tensions seriously challenged hopes for stability in the region, which had not eased much since 1967, seeing as Israel was still in a state of war with its neighbors and still engaged in occasional skirmishes with them. The Palestinians had managed to capitalize on this situation, such as at the Battle of Karamah, but they were balancing a fine line with pressure mounting on Amman to crack down on their activities.<sup>226</sup>

It was this volatile context that made up the backdrop to several Norwegian activists' first meeting with the wider Palestinian national movement. In 1970, the Working Group was

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<sup>221</sup> The Labor Party was by far the largest political party in Norway in 1970, and *Arbeiderbladet* had a circulation of approx. 75 000 editions each day. Bjørn Bjørnsen, *Har du frihet og sommersol kjær? 1918-1984*, vol. 2, *Arbeiderbladet 100 år*, (Oslo: Arbeiderbladet, Tiden Norsk Forlag, 1986).

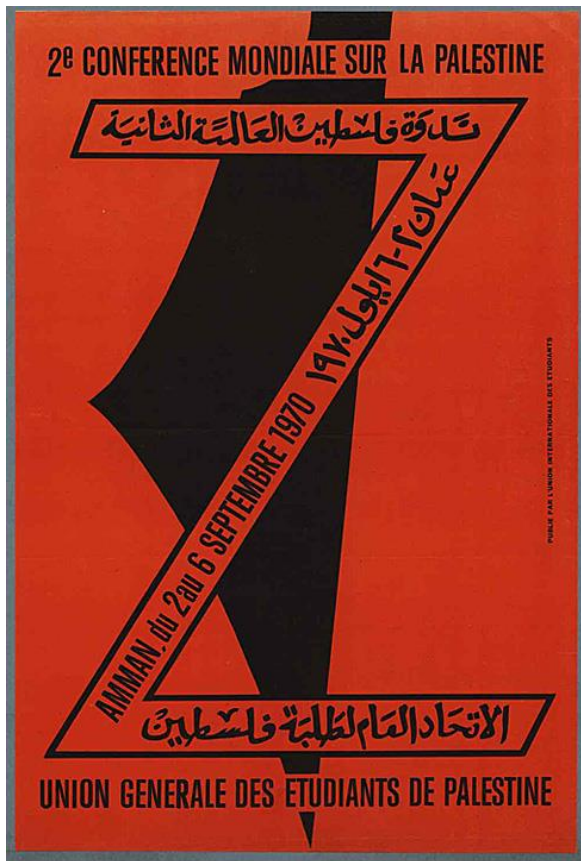
<sup>222</sup> Excerpts from the resolution can be found in Tveit, *Alt for Israel*, 451.

<sup>223</sup> Dagan's report is quoted in *ibid.*, 451-52.

<sup>224</sup> Cobban, *Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, 48.

<sup>225</sup> See Chamberlin, "Nixon, Kissinger, and the Terror of a Postimperial World," in *Global Offensive*.

<sup>226</sup> Cobban, *Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, 48-50.



Poster for the Second World Conference on Palestine. Source: General Union of Palestinian Students, 1970, via Palestine Poster Project Archive. URL: <https://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/second-world-conference-on-palestine>.

political victories over the past three years, the *fedayeen* were attracting activists and revolutionaries from across the world, and the Palestinians were generally happy to show the foreigners around. In Amman, besides the various armed *fedayeen* groupings, one could find Jewish-American student radicals rubbing shoulders with representatives from Southern African resistance movements, Chinese Hsinhua-correspondents, and Danish members of the soon-to-be infamous *Blekingegadebanden*.<sup>229</sup> For Sjue, the research was fruitful from the beginning. Shafiq had briefed him on the situation before he travelled and tipped him on whom to seek out. In Amman, he stayed as Fatah's guest, and was greeted with hospitality and openness by the guerilla leaders.<sup>230</sup> Sjue was allowed to move around the capital freely, and it was decided he should do so on his own so as not to alert the regime forces patrolling

invited to partake in the Second World Conference on Palestine in Amman, organized by the General Union of Palestine Students in September.<sup>227</sup> Finn Sjue saw it as an ample opportunity to review the various nationalist groups, navigate their differences, and potentially expand the Norwegians' networks with the Palestinians. He subsequently travelled some time in advance of the Working Group delegation to conduct research on the national movement.<sup>228</sup> From his previous journeys to Israel, Sjue had some experience from conducting research on his own in the region. What met him in Amman though, was of a different caliber from what he had ever experienced, at home or abroad, as Jordan was approaching the tipping point.

Amman was bustling with activity during the late summer months of 1970. Due to their

<sup>227</sup> See page one of this thesis, as well as Lysestøl and Sjue, "Akutt behov for solidaritet," 11; Vågstøl, "Solidaritetsrørsla for Palestina," 29.

<sup>228</sup> Lysestøl and Sjue, "Akutt behov for solidaritet," 16.

<sup>229</sup> Chamberlin, *Global Offensive*, 111; Fischbach, *The Movement*, 44-45; Fischbach, *Black Power and Palestine*, 141; Lysestøl and Sjue, "Akutt behov for solidaritet," 18; Øvig Knudsen, *Blekingegadebanden*, 1, 153.

<sup>230</sup> Lysestøl and Sjue, "Akutt behov for solidaritet," 16.

the streets of his allegiances. This allowed him to conduct his interviews more or less independently:

Over the course of the three weeks, besides the student conference, more than thirty interviews and conversations were conducted. It was like a lurching marathon [marathonløp i rykk og napp]. [...] There were meetings with top leaders and central committee members of all the largest organizations within the PLO; Al Fatah, PFLP (referred to as the Peoples front) and DFLP (referred to as the Democratic front).<sup>231</sup>

Sjue recorded all of these conversations in his notebook and used the knowledge to inform the rest of the Working Group when they arrived in the beginning of September. The close relationship with Fatah also gave him opportunities to observe the organization up close, in a more thorough way than its competitors, and he was even allowed to join a group of their guerillas on a raid across the Jordan river into the occupied West Bank. Experiences like these, which he later recounted vividly in interviews and book chapters, made a great impression on the young radical and seem to have gone a long way in solidifying the Norwegian's already close ties to Fatah.<sup>232</sup>

The purpose of the trip had been to review the national movement and get a feel for which faction to maintain cooperation with, and as such it was successful. However, in reviewing the recollections of the trip, all of which have been given by Lysestøl and Sjue, there is a sense that it was always going to be Fatah.<sup>233</sup> Ties to Fatah were already developing steadily before the trip, and the ideological links between the young Norwegian Maoists and the Soviet-critical elements within Fatah were clear. As such, there had already been established a baseline of trust. Sjue also stayed with the organization during his research, and at least some of the interviews had been set up based on guidance from Shafiq. On the other hand, his research allowed the Norwegians to ascertain for themselves the ideologies and strategies of the other groupings and then base their own decisions on this knowledge. Still, it seems to have been a matter of confirming their own previous interpretation. A telling passage from Lysestøl and Sjue's own recollection of the ensuing solidarity conference demonstrated this unfolding dynamic:

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 17-18; Sjue, "Rød august."

<sup>233</sup> See for example Lysestøl and Sjue, "Akutt behov for solidaritet," 29; Tveit, *Alt for Israel*, 438-42; Vågstøl, "Solidaritetsrørsla for Palestina."

I was instructed to hold our presentation. Either one of us could have done it. It was not without edge. We allowed ourselves to criticize the Soviet Union for its lack of true support to the Palestinians. No shoes were thrown through the room, but the presentation made a certain unrest and noise. Afterwards, Al Fatah leaders gave us a pat on the shoulder. We could say what they would have trouble saying out loud in an open assembly.<sup>234</sup>

Although links had been made with a Maoist faction within Fatah, ideology in itself does not suffice as an explanation for why it became so important to the Norwegians. The PFLP, for example, was more outspoken about its adherence to Marxist-Leninism, something that made it popular with Danish New Leftists, and some Norwegians.<sup>235</sup> However, Fatah's emphasis on self-determination for the national movement and non-intervention in other Arab regimes seems to have been central in articulating the Norwegian pro-Palestinian position, especially when seen in conjunction with the slogan adopted upon Palkom's foundation later that same month: "Full support on their own terms."<sup>236</sup> Furthermore, Fatah's strong mass appeal was central. According to both Lysestøl and Sjøe's later recollections, the Norwegians were highly impressed by Fatah's organizational skills and ability to mobilize more strands of the Palestinian population, including women and youths.<sup>237</sup>

The PFLP, on the other hand, they often found to be overly dogmatic, and even arrogant at times.<sup>238</sup> Fatah's emphasis on focusing the armed struggle on the occupied territories themselves instead of external operations such as PFLP's airplane hijackings seems also to have been a factor. Finally, according to Sjøe, the Norwegians found Fatah, unlike the PFLP, to be critical of support from the Soviet Union. This third point raises questions though, because Arafat accepted support from the Soviets, both economically and diplomatically, through the whole period, something that also intensified in the mid-1970s. It might also seem ironic that Norwegian's enmeshed with the infamously rigorous ml-movement would find the dogmatism of Habash's group to be unattractive, but Sjøe himself recalls that he did not see himself as part of the ml-movement at the time, emphasizing pragmatism instead. As such, his

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<sup>234</sup> Lysestøl and Sjøe, "Akutt behov for solidaritet," 19.

<sup>235</sup> For a presentation of Danish connections to the PFLP, see Øvig Knudsen, *Blekingegadebanden*, 1. Norwegian activist Trond Linstad arrived in Jordan in September 1970 and spent a total of nine months with the PFLP, working as a doctor. He later joined Palkom and continued his medical work with their health teams in the Middle East in the 1970s. Tveit, *Alt for Israel*, 456-57, 595.

<sup>236</sup> Palestinakomiteen i Norge, *Fritt Palestina*, no 1, 1970.

<sup>237</sup> Phone interview with Peder Martin Lysestøl, April 28, 2020; Phone interview with Finn Sjøe, May 6, 2020.

<sup>238</sup> Phone interview with Finn Sjøe, May 6, 2020.

solidarity with Fatah might support such a recollection, even though his critical stance towards the Soviet Union also implies quite strong Maoist leanings.

As described in the introduction, the conference eventually had to be cancelled, and the Norwegian delegation headed home as Jordan descended into chaos. Come the end of September, the *fedayeen* had suffered heavy losses and been all but evicted from the country by Jordanian government forces, supported by the US and Israel.<sup>239</sup> Black September, as the Palestinians dubbed the civil war, spurred activity in government meeting rooms across the world, but also in the halls of DNS. Soon after returning from Amman, members of the Working Group penned a new resolution that affirmed support for the Palestinians and called for the condemnation of the US-initiated Rogers Plan.<sup>240</sup> The Rogers Plan was a peace plan based on the UN Security Council resolution 242, which had been voted forth in the wake of the Six-Day War in 1967. This motion proposed a “land-for-peace” deal in which Israel would give up the territories it had conquered during the Six-Day war in exchange for peace treaties and official recognition from Egypt, Jordan, and Syria.<sup>241</sup> Interestingly enough, forces within the Nixon-administration, led by security advisor Henry Kissinger, were in fact working to undermine the peace initiative, and it never managed to secure lasting stability.<sup>242</sup> Nevertheless, as it called for official recognition of Israel, the Palestinians and their supporters obviously had their reservations. To the Working Group, this was yet another demonstration of the imperialist-Zionist conspiracy, and effectively represented a Western declaration of war against the Palestinian national movement.<sup>243</sup>

## The Norwegian Palestine Committee

A few weeks before the Working Group delegation travelled to Jordan, Lysestøl had attended a “Fatah congress” in Gothenburg.<sup>244</sup> According to a memo by the POT, plans were likely drawn up there for the founding of solidarity organizations in Norway and Sweden, and Lysestøl shared some of his research material with Swedish activists. Then, when the

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<sup>239</sup> Chamberlin, “A Worldwide Interlocking Terrorist Network,” in *Global Offensive*; Cobban, *Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, 51-52.

<sup>240</sup> DNSA, Box: RA/PA-1322/E/L0015 – “Medlemsmøter.” Folder 0002, labeled “Resolusjoner/resolusjonsforslag 1970-1971,” “Resolusjonsforslag til møtet lørdag 19. september 1970.”

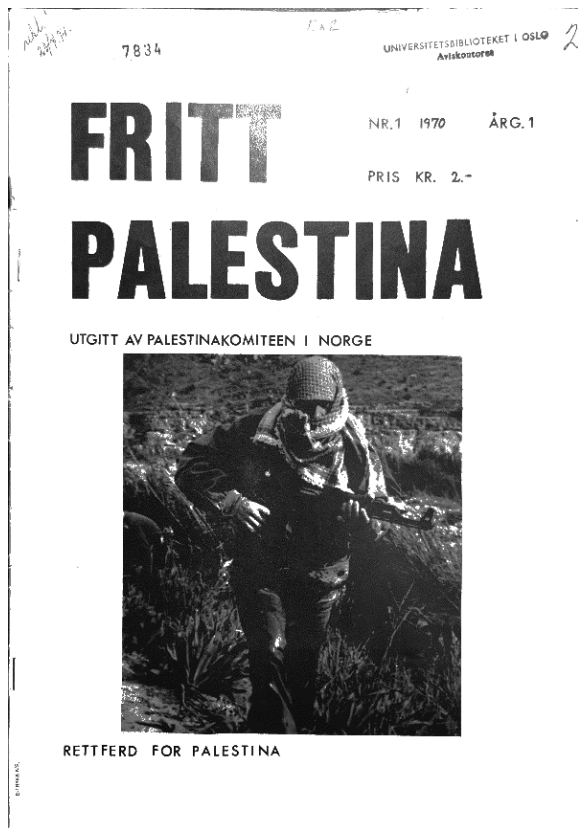
<sup>241</sup> Chamberlin, *Global Offensive*, 85.; Waage, *Norwegians?*, 6.

<sup>242</sup> Chamberlin, *Global Offensive*, 85.

<sup>243</sup> DNSA, Box: RA/PA-1322/E/L0015 – “Medlemsmøter.” Folder 0002, labeled “Resolusjoner/resolusjonsforslag 1970-1971,” “Resolusjonsforslag til møtet lørdag 19. september 1970.”

<sup>244</sup> In the material surveyed, this congress has only been mentioned by the POT. Lysestøl recalls several trips to Gothenburg within this period but could not ascertain what happened at this one specifically. LK, Box: RA/PA-1349/F/L0003/0011, folder labeled “Lysestøl, Peder M. – Kopier fra POT,” “Dokument 6”; Phone interview with Peder Martin Lysestøl, April 28, 2020.





The cover of the first issue of Palkom's newspaper, *Fritt Palestina*. Source: Palestinakomiteen i Norge, via Nasjonalbiblioteket (Oslo, Norway). Author's own photo.

organization set about its business immediately.

Palkom's political program was highly influenced by its leaders' ties to Fatah, but their interpretation also had challengers within the New Left from the offset. For the DNS meeting on October 3 the same year, for example, Palkom activists had tabled a motion renouncing the Jordanian "fascist regime" and renewing solidarity with the Palestinian anti-imperialist struggle.<sup>247</sup> But the DNS executive committee also received a counter-resolution from another group of radicals, renouncing Arafat for compromising with the Jordanian regime and calling on "every progressive to now support [samle seg rundt] the only truly revolutionary mass movement in the Arab countries, the true Marxist-Leninist PFLP under the leadership of dr. Habash."<sup>248</sup> Black September had been a blow for Arafat and Fatah, and now doubts about his

Working Group returned from Amman in September, having seen the Jordanian forces in action against the Palestinians, it was clear that the time to act had come.<sup>245</sup> The Working Group sent out a general invitation in the leftist press to all "friends of Palestine" and drew on all their contacts in Scandinavia to facilitate the founding meeting. The Norwegian Palestine Committee was founded on September 29, 1970, just as the fighting in Jordan was nearing its climax. Forty to fifty persons were in attendance, including some Swedish and Danish activists, and the meeting had speeches from Sjøe, as well as from a leader of Solkom on how to organize an effective solidarity front.<sup>246</sup> The resulting political program of Palkom began with the slogan "Full support for the Palestinian people's national struggle for liberation on their own terms", and the

<sup>245</sup> Lysestøl and Sjøe, "Akutt behov for solidaritet," 12.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.; Tveit, *Alt for Israel*, 454; Vågstøl, "Solidaritetsrørsla for Palestina," 30.

<sup>247</sup> DNSA, Box: RA/PA-1322/E/L0015 – "Medlemsmøter." Folder 0002, labeled "Resolusjoner/resolusjonsforslag 1970-1971," "Resolusjonsforslag til møtet lørdag 3. oktober 1970."

<sup>248</sup> DNSA, Box: RA/PA-1322/E/L0015 – "Medlemsmøter." Folder 0002, labeled "Resolusjoner/resolusjonsforslag 1970-1971," "Resolusjonsforslag til møtet 3/10 70."

leadership of the PLO had seemingly spread to parts of the radical Norwegian student movement as well. As we have seen, the Working Group, and subsequently Palkom, had thus far had their reservations about the PFLP, but there were clearly those on the Norwegian Left who disagreed with this assessment already in 1970. These divisions would reappear six years later, when a group of activists broke out of Palkom to form Palfront, which eventually picked up the connection to the PFLP.<sup>249</sup> Regardless, Palkom's representation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had been carefully laid out to radical students over the past year, and it went on to dominate New Left discussions on the Middle East until Palfront was formed.

Despite some division in DNS, the founding of Palkom in many ways represented the pro-Palestinian position's official absorption into the Norwegian New Left ideological framework and organizational microcosm, albeit firmly entrenched with the ml-movement. This did not mean that solidarity with the Palestinian people was not made uncontroversial, perhaps even to the contrary. For example, right-wing extremists attempted to sabotage the constituent meeting, and the activists were often met with accusations of anti-Semitism and supporting terrorism against civilians.<sup>250</sup> Humanitarian aspects of solidarity with Palestine still drew in many supporters, but the Norwegian Palestine-movement was clearly politicized from the beginning, as illustrated by the Working Group's interpretation of the conflict along the lines of Marxist-Leninism. Through their encounters with Palestine, they had uncovered the Palestinian people and the injustices that had been done unto them. Anti-imperialism had given the young radicals an explanation for why the atrocities had found place, and it provided a perspective that allowed the Palestinian struggle to be perceived through a global lens.

The mood around the world was also changing. Following the Jordanian civil war, calls for the creation of a new Palestinian state were for the first time elevated to state-level in the West. In France, for example, the Pompidou-government went as far as proclaiming the Palestinians a "political fact", and claimed that long term peace in the region hinged upon the creation of their own state.<sup>251</sup> A shift was occurring on the state-level in Norway as well, with non-socialist prime minister Per Borten recognizing "the Arab refugees" as Palestinians in a speech to the United Nations that same year. Although obviously taking much more gradual steps than Pompidou, Borten's articulation still indicates how the Palestinianization of the

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<sup>249</sup> Vågstøl, "Solidaritetsrørsla for Palestina," 64.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>251</sup> Chamberlin, *Global Offensive*, 127.

idea of the Middle East conflict was progressing above the grassroot-level, and beyond the New Left.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Waage, *Norwegians?*, 24.

## Conclusion: “One Enemy, One Struggle”

The Israel-Palestine conflict can decidedly be considered one of the defining impasses of the post-World War II era. It has mobilized engagement across the political, cultural, and intellectual spectra for generations, even stretching back before the founding of Israel in 1948.<sup>253</sup> Norwegians have been involved, albeit at varying degrees, for most iterations of the conflict, and many still mobilize politically for either belligerent. The remarkability of the conflict’s length and political importance in twentieth century history is underlined all the more by the relatively small size of the territory it has been fought out over, and how it has continued to last despite the discrepancy in power between its belligerents. Indeed, it was never a given that a distinct notion of “Palestinianess”, in the sense of it being a national identity with all that might entail, would take off for all the world to see. However, the rebirth of the Palestinian national movement in the 1950s and 60s saw the Palestinians manage to consolidate and spread the idea of their national identity over the next decade, with the PLO eventually gaining international recognition as representative of the Palestinian people in the 1970s.

With Palkom, the pro-Palestinian position was institutionalized within the framework of the Norwegian New Left and the ml-movement. Since its founding in 1970, the organization has been active through a period which has seen a complete upheaval of Norwegian foreign policy with regard to Palestine. At the international level, the Norwegian government was considered one of Israel’s most steadfast allies in the early 1970s. Then, the next decades saw this position move from unequivocal support to criticism of Israel, and public recognition of Palestinian aspirations for statehood, culminating in the Oslo accords of the early 1990s.<sup>254</sup> This development can be partly explained by the extensive solidarity work carried out by organizations such as Palkom.<sup>255</sup> Today, Palkom remains active and Palestine still enjoys support from a host of Norwegian channels and initiatives at levels ranging from the grassroots to the government. As such, the power of Palestine has long since spilled out of its radical starting points, transcended the 1968-context and the Cold War-system, and represents a central aspect of Norwegian engagement with the Middle East.

The founding of Palkom represented the culmination of a complex process of Norwegian radicals “discovering” Palestine. Given that so little was known about the Palestinians before

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<sup>253</sup> Gelvin, *Israel-Palestine Conflict*.

<sup>254</sup> Waage, *Norwegians?*

<sup>255</sup> Vågstøl, "Solidaritetsrørsla for Palestina."

the late 1960s, the elaborate conception Palestine forming the backbone of the nascent organization just a few years later was in many ways remarkable. The 1960s were a time of youth radicalization and revolt, but also one of increased youth mobility and accelerating globalization of ideas. Through their travels and transnational activism, Norwegian activists tapped into global concepts like imperialism and revolutionary Third Worldism, and linked them to Norwegian perceptions and policies, and to the Palestinians' armed struggle against Israel. These links were carried forth through studying and discussions in both closed and open fora. They were also made by physically travelling more or less regularly to the Middle East. On these journeys, often on the invitation of Palestinians, the Norwegian radicals sought out the core of the Palestinian national movement and established political and personal connections to it.

Palkom's embrace of Fatah further illustrates the fundamentally transnational nature of how solidarity with Palestine came about in Norway. Although solidarity between two national actors will always imply such a connection on one level or another, it can be emphasized in this case because of the tenuous ideological link. Fatah was not predominantly Maoist, and although it presented itself as a national liberation organization firmly embedded within the revolutionary Third Worldist movement, the PFLP also successfully charmed other Scandinavian ml-groups in the same period. However, for activists like Lysestøl and Sjøe, both considered pioneers of the Norwegian solidarity movement, the link with Fatah was built through personal connections, exchanges, and outright coincidences. It was not strictly Maoism that had led Lysestøl to Cairo in 1967, and Sjøe did not consider himself a Maoist when he travelled to the Golan Heights in 1968. Instead, the things they experienced in these places, largely independently of each other, were primarily personal experiences, or highly entangled with personal matters. Furthermore, in later meetings with the Palestinians they were deeply impressed with Fatah's ability to organize several layers of Palestinian society, while the Marxist-Leninist PFLP in fact alienated them because of its dogmatism. The ml-dimension was there to offer references through which they could interpret the things they saw and heard in the Middle East, but these references were also buoyed by other "nodes" such as Third World revolutionism, the hugely mobilizing Vietnam War, and the generational character of the 1960s' youth revolts.

The pro-Palestinian position was formed using these references to understand the ongoing rebirth of Palestinian nationalism. The discovery of Palestine did perhaps not change New Leftist ideas about imperialism or the Third World. Nonetheless, it did expand them, and to

some extent, it seemed to confirm them. When seen within the intertwined frameworks of global anti-imperialism, Third World revolutionism, and Marxist-Leninism, Palestine was no longer just a barren, former mandate territory, and its people was not just Arabs who had abandoned it. To Norwegian New Leftists such as Sjøe and Lysestøl, the Palestinians were instead a people deprived. They had been unjustly sacrificed at the altar of big power politics and robbed by racist Zionism as a result. They were the victims of the US-led imperialist conspiracy, but now they were fighting back. Finally, their fight was part of the global struggle against this same system, underpinned by the capitalist and corrupt West. However, Western imperialism was not the sole culprit. The communist world, under the leadership of the Soviet Union, was also beginning to emerge as an enemy, both of the Palestinian people and the wider revolutionary movement. By seeing the Soviets as part of the conspiracy, the Palestinian struggle became an example of the “new” North-South dichotomy emerging within the wider New Left in this era. In the superpowers’ stead, China’s star was rising fast. As Maoism captured the hearts and minds of young radicals all over the world, the Norwegian youths detached the Third World from the Cold War rivalry, perceiving it as the new “future of History.”<sup>256</sup> At the front of the struggle against superpower imperialism stood the Palestinians, side-by-side with the revolutionaries of Algeria, Vietnam, and Cuba.

In the conceptualization of Palestine that emerged, the recast roles established with the anti-Zionist turn were further cemented. As Gjerde has showed and I have further elaborated on, asserting Israel’s ties to US imperialism, and questioning its right to exist, did not necessarily represent an embrace of the Palestinian cause in itself. Anti-Zionism was still an important factor in, and pre-cursor to, the rise of pro-Palestinianism in the late 1960s. Western Leftists became increasingly skeptical of Israel following the Six-Day War, the same event that saw parts of the Palestinian national movement double down on its emphasis on self-determination from the wider Arab world. For the Norwegian radicals, the turn meant that what they saw in Israel was not the “land of milk and honey” promised by their elders. What they saw was a fortress built on death and broken promises. This discovery catalyzed a drive to uncover who was really who in the Middle East.

Although some contacts were made even before the 1967 war, Norwegian New Leftists and the Palestinian national movement did not properly find each other until their representatives quite literally found each other in places like Cairo and Amman. Their meetings happened on

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<sup>256</sup> Tvedt, “Den tredje verden som historiens fremtid,” in *Verdensbilder og selvbilder*.

the Palestinians' turf, or as close to home as they could be at the time, in places where multiple Westerners were going through similar processes of conceptualizing and creating networks with Palestine. These pro-Palestinian Westerners also engaged with each other. Although the thesis still leaves much to be studied in terms of how they influenced each other, it is clear that their exchanges with Palestinian activists, both organizational and individual, became important references to them. Both Sjøe and Lysestøl went from office to office in the Middle East, seeking out the various liberation groups and engaging them in discussions. In doing so, they were trying to understand why the Palestinians fought and how the national movement envisaged the fight itself. Eventually, they landed on the faction they trusted and had faith in, while gradually unraveling the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist dimension of the Palestine issue.

The Palestinians also came to them, offering to interpret their struggle for Norwegian radicals. Shafiq's speeches and interviews in 1970 was one such instance, important both for consolidating the radical conception of Palestine among Norwegian students as well as the budding solidarity movement with it. On his tour of Norway, Shafiq seems to have laid out his revolutionary credentials rather than his ethnicity, as such emphasizing a shared anti-imperialist plight facing both peoples, Norwegians and Palestinians. This was not to be a case of Westerners helping relieve the pain of troubled Arabs, in essence a humanitarian project, but a common struggle against injustice and oppression in which Palestine was one of the frontlines. By undermining the dominant orientalist and racist image of Arabs that had obscured the struggle for so long, he spurred hundreds of Norwegians into supporting Palestine. This offers a challenge to recent narratives on the interplay between Western radicals and the Third World. His success in inciting the Norwegian students speaks to the generational shift occurring with the radicalization of youth in the 1960s and 70s, as the students' embrace of a Palestinian's perspective on the Middle East conflict represented a clear break from the discourse of the Old Guard.<sup>257</sup> Shafiq's success also stands as witness to the Palestinian national movement's achievement in utilizing new political movements to globalize their struggle. When seen in conjunction with the national movement's conferences for foreign activists, his trip to Norway illuminates how the Palestinian national movement itself actively worked to mobilize solidarity with Westerners. Their efforts must still be

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<sup>257</sup> Gjerde, "Meaning of Israel."

studied from their own perspective, using Palestinian sources, but the outline of their work is gradually coming to light.

Because of Palestine's emergence, the period also saw a new idea of the belligerents of the Middle East conflict appear. The conflict had typically been interpreted as one between the Arab states, with Nasser's Egypt at the helm, and the Jewish people: the Arab-Israeli conflict. In Norway, this perception had been tainted with racist depictions of Arabs on the one hand and romanticized notions of Israel on the other. However, as Norwegian radicals were convinced by the Palestinian national movement, they presented a new understanding in DNS that showed how the struggle was actually between the Palestinian people and the Israeli regime: the Israel-Palestine conflict. To the young radicals, the Palestinians were not resorting to violence because they were Arabs, but because they were oppressed and unjustly treated. This new allotment of subjectivities within a span of just three years was as such dramatic and gives new insight into how New Leftists interpreted the ongoing Palestinianization of the conflict. Importantly, this distinction seems not to have become clear among most radical students until 1969 at the earliest, when the conflict was first addressed by the Working Group in DNS.

A transnational perspective on the Norwegian New Left's discovery of Palestine in the late 1960s illuminates the complex roles of peripheral actors in the development of the Norwegian solidarity movement with Palestine. Norwegian and Palestinian activists came together, often in the company of comrades from all corners of the globe, finding common cause in places like Oslo, Amman, and Cairo. The often highly moving experiences retained from these encounters spurred the Norwegians into studies, but also into action. Central to Palestine's emergence in the New Leftist political sphere was also the interpretations offered by the Palestinians themselves, and the period saw Palestinian activists speak in front of hundreds of Norwegian students. Importantly, they met an audience willing to listen to their message. As the 1970s dawned, the *fedayeen* had elevated Palestine from obscurity and captured the hearts of a small, yet substantial number of radicals. These radicals would hail the name Arafat along with those of Guevara and Giap, enraging an even larger number of conservatives in doing so. As the previous chapters have shown, Palestine left its mark on those who discovered it. It changed their idea of the Middle East, inciting new dreams and grievances. They could not be the same again.



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