

4

The Palestinian Revolution

We have always believed and declared ... that armed struggle is not an end in itself. It is a means for a great humanitarian aim. Since 1917 Palestine has been subjected to wars, revolutions and bloody fighting. The time has come for this land and its people to live in peace as other human beings. We carry arms in order to achieve a truly peaceful settlement of the problem, and not a false settlement based on the imposition of aggression and racism. Such peace cannot be achieved except within the framework of a democratic state in Palestine.

Abu 'Iyad

Roots of the Revolution

The Six Day War

It is difficult to separate out the Palestinian Resistance Movement (PRM) from the historical moment and mood in which it first arose, soon after the Six Day War, like a phoenix out of ashes, galvanizing a whole nation humiliated by the collapse of the Arab armies. In this, its first glamorous debut, the Resistance reaped a harvest of hero-worship from a wide spectrum of Arab public opinion, salon nationalists going so far as to call the *fedayeen* 'angels' and 'saviours'. This kind of support soon showed its shallowness, but

for a time it put pressure on the Arab regimes to give the PRM official backing. For the regimes, the Resistance Movement (which they had tried to suppress before 1967) now had a specific usefulness, in diverting public opinion from the defeat and giving it new hope. The pre-war press ban on reporting guerrilla operations was lifted, and the PRM groups were allowed openly to recruit, train and publicize their existence.

By 1967, many of the small groups formed in the early 1960s had amalgamated, and Fatah had emerged as the most powerful, its strength based on a combination of backing from the various Palestinian classes, a broad national strategy, good relations with most Arab governments, and popularity among the masses. Its leadership was strongly contested by other groups, especially the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP),² but Fatah's decision in February 1969 to take over the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) confirmed its character as, above all, a nationalist party. The PLO underwent a degree of revolutionary transformation, with the National Assembly now representing the Resistance groups, rather than regions and social sectors as it had done earlier. The Executive Committee, elected by the National Assembly at its annual meetings, now also contained representatives of all the major Resistance groups,³ as well as a few independents. Reactivated by the Resistance Movement, the PLO became able to speak in the name of the Palestinian people.

For Fatah's leaders, the urgent need created by the 1967 defeat was to prevent the Arab governments from negotiating, from a position of weakness, an end to the Palestinian liberation struggle in return for Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in the June War. Their long-term hope was that Palestinian guerrilla operations would act as a spark to rekindle the broader Arab struggle against imperialist domination that had lost momentum in the narrow interests of neocolonial regimes. Yet, however compelling the logic of a broad coalition of Arab forces against an Israel that now occupied parts of Egypt, Syria and Jordan' (as well as all of Palestine) might seem to Fatah's leadership, there were more powerful interests that prevented such a coalition from solidifying. As the shame of the Six Day War receded into the past, the regimes still needed the Palestinian Resistance Movement to put pressure

on Israel to negotiate, and as a weapon in their rivalries with one another. But none had any intention of being led into a popular war of liberation.

Thus, though the Six Day War temporarily discredited and weakened them, the regimes neither capitulated, nor took the road of popular mass struggle that the PRM called for. Instead they continued the policy that had preceded the war, that of alternating military threat with political and diplomatic activity on the international scene. Revolutions like those that had been sparked off by the 1948 defeat did not follow the more crushing defeat two decades later.⁵ Instead, what happened was a genuine, though partly aborted, revolution at the level of the Palestinian masses. For them, the call to action of the PRM had a profound and lasting effect, for they sensed in it the first authentic answer to their crisis. It was 'the road to the Return', a way out of the limbo of the camps, a restoration of their humanity.

The PRM appealed to the young, the oppressed, and the disinherited. For many Palestinians, armed struggle was a form of rebellion against those Arab civil and military bureaucracies that had exploited the Israeli threat in order to gain power for themselves, and that had then used Israel's military and political strength as a pretext for failure to confront it. For others, it was a way of rebelling against forms of oppression within Arab society that seemed to them to collaborate with Israeli and imperialist domination. For yet others, it was a way of discovering what was authentic in themselves, and in their culture.

National liberation or social revolution?

Many will argue that the PRM is not a revolution in the usual sense of the word, since it has overturned no regime; and in order not to overstate its claims some Palestinians now prefer to define it as a national liberation struggle. Yet when the Movement first emerged, Fatah leaders emphasized its revolutionary character, particularly in their discussions with Arab communists and leftists, whom they accused of supporting an oppressive reality through their failure to struggle against it.⁶ A more compelling reason for keeping the term 'revolution' is that it is so widely and constantly used by camp Palestinians that its subjective reality cannot be questioned. We

need here to distinguish between the Palestinian Resistance Movement as an organizational structure that has grown and changed in response to successive crises, and the Revolution as a state of consciousness amongst the Palestinian masses. For them, the revolution that was launched by Fatah in 1965 was an event of supreme importance, changing everything irreversibly. Two basic aspects of its revolutionary character were that it substituted mass struggle for passivity and speech-making, and that it brought back the Palestinians to the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Even for those who say today that 'the Revolution has lost its meaning', this is only a way of disassociating the PRM's present leadership and policies from the mass revolutionary readiness which, as they see it, this leadership no longer embodies.

Study of the ways in which camp Palestinians use the word *thawra* in everyday speech shows it to contain multiple layers of meaning. It can mean the present PRM and its cadres (as in 'So-and-so is working with the Revolution'), but more often it is used as a synonym for armed struggle, or the return to Palestine, or rejection of the status quo. Often it appears as a symbol of the life and destiny of the Palestinian people, reaching back into the past to cast new light on uprisings in Palestine, and pointing out a path into the future. Its resonances go far beyond the situation of the moment to a core of permanent identification, built around the ideas of fidelity to the land, to Arabism, to struggle, and to sacrifice: a powerful amalgam that requires little organization to sustain it, for its foundations lie in the collective experience of fifty years of oppression and betrayal. Were it not for the sense of organic relationship between the Palestinian struggle and the wider Arab struggle, one could see in this strong belief in their special destiny the seeds of a Chosen People myth. But their conscious adoption of a destiny of struggle is precisely what gives Palestinians a role and a message in the larger Arab world.

When did the Revolution start?

Different dates are given for the Revolution's beginning. For Fatah, it is always dated from their first announced military operation inside Occupied Palestine, on 1 January 1965. A second key date is the Battle of Karamah, in March 1968, which opened Jordan

as a base for guerrilla action. Whatever the achievements of the 1965 Revolution as a determinate organization, and whatever the dislocation between the masses and the structures of the PRM, crystallization of the Palestinians' sense of a 'struggle-identity' would not have been possible without the spark lit by Fatah in 1965. Nor, probably, would it have mobilized the masses on such a large scale without the vanguard work of activists like those of the Arab Nationalist Movement' during the refugee period.

In Lebanon, the Revolution did not come to the camps until the last months of 1969, but for all regions equally the war of 1967 was crucial in opening the eyes of the masses to the weakness of the 'progressive' Arab regimes on which, until then, they had pinned their hopes. At a single blow, the defeat of 1967 destroyed the regimes' prime argument for restraining the Palestinians, and, for a while, even their military and political power to do so. At the same time, it created a mass Palestinian readiness to respond to calls for mobilization.

But the roots of the Revolution can be traced back before 1967, or even 1965, to the first small operations carried out inside Occupied Palestine by different groups in the early 1960s; and before them to operations launched from Gaza in the 1950s; and on back to the war of 1948 and the whole history of Palestinian struggle, particularly the Great Revolt of 1936-39, and the uprising of Sheikh Izzideen al-Qassam that exploded it. Gaza played a particularly important role, between 1948 and 1967, as the only area where Palestinians could organize in relative freedom.

In discussing the origins of the 1965 Revolution, camp Palestinians always return to three fundamental sets of facts: first, the Zionist conquest of Palestine and the establishment of a racially exclusive state closely linked to US imperialism, which by its nature threatens Arab independence and peaceful development. Second, as a consequence of the first, the dispersion of Arab Palestinians and their deprivation of both land and nationhood. This situation of dispersion and statelessness constitutes, for the mass of Palestinians, the primary compulsion to revolution because of its total unacceptability. To rebel is the only possible reaction. Third, they emphasize the subjective factor, their long history of struggle, constantly crushed or aborted, yet constantly resurgent. Like the

genealogy of a clan, or a charter of membership, these three sets of facts are viewed in the same terms by all camp Palestinians, whatever their political affiliation, and form a solid basis for collective action.

Beyond these fundamental positions, however, lies the complicated interaction of Palestinian and Arab politics. The Arab dimensions of the Palestinian problem have always been crucial, not only in the collusion of Arab leaders in aborting Palestinian resistance, as in 1939, 1948, 1970 and 1976⁶ but also in the radicalizing effect of the Palestinian struggle on the rest of the Arab world (the most obvious example being the revolutions in Syria, Egypt and Iraq during the 1950s); also in the participation of militants from all over the Arab world in the Rebellion of 1936, and again in the 1965 Resistance Movement. Final as the disappearance of Palestine seemed to be to outside observers in 1948, it was not final precisely because, even after the collapse of their own leadership, Palestinians could find support and a role in other revolutionary movements of the 1950s. While Israel revealed ever more clearly its aggressive and colonialist nature, Palestinians in exile were learning at first hand about the political structures and ideological currents of the neocolonial Arab world.

Palestinian disillusion with Arab radicalism

Pinned down in the camps, the Palestinian masses in the *ghourba* were no longer able to react to events through uprisings as they had done in Palestine. All they could do was to scan the Arab scene for signs of movements towards, or away from, liberation. During the 1950s, they could feel that Palestine, though struck off the map, still existed through the appalling effects of its loss. But gradually, as time passed, faith became harder to maintain and the urge to independent Palestinian action stronger.

It would be wrong to see the Palestinian Resistance Movement *only* as a reassertion of Palestinianism since one of its fundamental aims was to give new impetus to the wider Arab struggle. Yet there can be no doubt that disillusion with the Arab regimes and movements contributed its share to the 1965 Revolution. Nor was this growing impatience limited to the PRM leadership, with their closer view of the personal and party ambitions that underlay pledges of

support to the Palestinian 'cause'. Palestinians in the camps may have kept their faith in the progressive Arab regimes longer than the middle-class activists outside. But in addition to frustration at the lack of action towards liberation, the masses also had to bear the squalor and misery of camp life. All these experiences – the humiliation of being refugees, economic exploitation, but most of all the absence of concrete signs of progress towards liberation – combined to create a revolutionary readiness among Palestinians in the *ghourda* which only required a spark to set it off.

To the origins of the 1965 Revolution, then, we need to add the specific events of the early 1960s which made politically active Palestinians begin to turn away from the Arab parties they had joined or helped to form in the 1950s. In the period immediately after 1948, Palestinians had been strongly drawn to all those parties or movements that opposed, in whatever way, the status quo. These were mainly the Parti Populaire Syrien (PPS), the Ba'ath, the various Arab Communist parties, the Muslim Brethren, Nasserism and the Arab Nationalist Movement. Because of the widespread belief that Arab unity must precede liberation, it was the pan-Arab movements that gained most from Palestinian support.

At least three distinct attitudes towards the political movements of the 1950s can be discerned among Palestinians in the camps. First, the majority of the older generation, the *jeel Falasteen*, remained fixed in their pre-1948 loyalties, whether to national or to provincial leaders, and distrusting of the new political parties as divisive, or anti-religious.¹⁰ Second, a large number of the younger *jeel-al-nekba* joined the opposition movements, following the principle that a younger teacher expressed when he said: 'We would have joined the Devil's party if it had put Palestine among its aims.' Third, a very small minority examined the positions of all the existing parties and decided that none of them had been able to provide a correct analysis of the Palestinian crisis, and thus that they were unlikely to provide a correct programme of action to solve it. In consequence, this group set out to form a new political movement that finally took the form of the Arab Nationalist Movement.

The mood of the 1950s – confidence in the progressive regimes in Egypt, Syria and Iraq – began to change in the early 1960s. Several events were crucial in crystallizing the new mood which

Fateh was to express when it first emerged, that Palestinians must have an active and leading role in their own liberation. The first of these was the break-up of the union between Egypt and Syria and the subsequent failure to re-form the unity of the progressive camp. Another was the failure of the Arab summit meeting of 1964 to prevent Israel's diversion of the River Jordan. It was at this conference that President Nasser went on record as saying that he had no plan to liberate Palestine (unlike Syria's President Amin al-Haféz, who was reported to have presented the summit with a plan to defeat Israel in forty-eight hours). Egypt's long drawn out and unsuccessful involvement in Yemen¹¹ was another source of concern to Palestinians. It began to look as if the Arab unity on which the mass of Palestinians had pinned their hopes of liberation was not coming closer, but rather moving further away. The fact that the Algerians had achieved their independence against superior force in 1962, with little Arab support, was a further spur to independent Palestinian action.

It was in this period that activist Palestinians became increasingly aware, through their experiences in the different pan-Arab movements, that, although they all put the Palestinian 'cause' in the forefront of their programmes, they were simply using it for local and sectional ambitions. As Palestinians, they began to realize that it was not only the regimes, but also the opposition movements, that had been influenced by the neocolonial structures of the Arab world. Before 1967, such perceptions were confined to a small minority; the masses continued to believe that 'Abdul Nasser would give us Palestine on a plate'. But the new tendency towards independent Palestinian action did not only exist among a politicized minority outside the camps, it was also manifested inside them in a sudden proliferation of small, purely Palestinian cells calling for armed struggle.¹² These groups made no attempt at mass mobilization – the control of Lebanon's Deuxième Bureau was too harsh for that – but they tried to create a new mass atmosphere through the distribution of leaflets, and a few began to undertake actual operations inside Occupied Palestine. The camps were full of informers, and the militants of this period formed strict habits of secrecy. In a return to the patterns of peasant mobilization in Palestine, they recruited with extreme caution

along existing ties of family, village or party comradeship. And, just as in 1936-39, when Arab support from outside Palestine had enabled local peasant leaders to gain some independence from a national leadership always too ready to negotiate with the British,¹³ so, during the germination of the new revolution, activists in the camps worked outside the control of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which they distrusted because of its dependence on the Arab regimes.¹⁴

Growing repression in Lebanon

Lebanese surveillance of the camps grew harsher in the 1960s, in direct proportion to the growth of Palestinian activism, each side responding in an opposite way to the same set of shifts on the Arab scene. But the harshness of repression added its own momentum to the building up of a revolutionary readiness among the Palestinian masses. In the 1950s, the Lebanese ruling class had feared that pan-Arab, pan-Muslim forces mobilized by Nasserism and Ba'thism would disrupt Lebanon's fragile sectarian balance. As this fear receded in the 1960s, a new one took its place: that Palestinian attacks on Israel from Lebanon would end by provoking Israeli retaliation, and that this in turn would create pressure for a larger army based on national conscription, instead of the existing, small, selectively recruited army through which the Maronites could maintain their hegemony.

The rise of the Deuxième Bureau in Lebanon as a political power centre coincided with the opening of guerrilla training camps for Palestinians in Syria, Algeria, and, to a lesser extent, in Egypt. Despite being few in numbers, the trainees became a nucleus of new militant Palestinianism in the camps. This worried the Lebanese authorities so much that in 1962 a decree was passed forbidding any Palestinian who had left for military training from returning to Lebanon.

Gradually the mood in the camps changed from one of patience and suppressed anger to one of revolutionary readiness, which Lebanese oppression only made more explosive. The quotations below show clearly the interrelationship between the beginnings of Palestinian armed struggle, militancy in the camps, and Lebanese oppression:

When the UAR was formed we began to train our youth in Syria, and a few went to Egypt. We believed in forming a military nucleus which would go to Occupied Palestine and start work there. Our aim was to increase these training courses, so that those who went outside to train would come back and train our scouts.¹⁵

In 1964, the Arab Nationalist Movement lost their first fighter, Khaled Abu 'Aisheh, inside Israel. The news was not publicized – such was the secrecy surrounding military operations that most ANM members did not know the identity of their own fighters. The next year came Fatch's first publicized operation, which had an instant effect on the mass mood in the camps:

Palestinians in the camps received this news with joy, and after it the situation in the camps changed. Everyone started talking about this new step, and their desire to participate, especially the students and young workers.

Lebanese oppression increased in intensity, and being suspected of membership in a Palestinian organization became increasingly dangerous. Even collecting funds could lead to beating or imprisonment. In 1966 Jalal Kha'wash, a Fatch member, was killed after torture, and his body thrown from a high building to make his death look like suicide. An ANM organizer, Walid Kaddoura, was beaten 'to plaster' in front of the assembled inhabitants of Bourj al-Shehali camp.

Although oppression fell most harshly on members of organizations, the masses in the camps also suffered from the escalation of repression. Families of activists lived in a constant state of expectation that the police would appear.¹⁶ Mothers whose sons were suspected of having gone for military training would be constantly interrogated. Often, if a wanted person was not at home, another member of the family would be arrested in his place. The overall atmosphere of repression encouraged random brutality, for instance the hitting of children in the streets with the *korbag*.¹⁷ Many young militants had their first experience of struggle through the DB coming at night to take their fathers away for interrogation.

Oppression in Lebanon did not lighten in the aftermath of the Six Day War, since the Lebanese Army had not been involved in the defeat. But the freeing of Jordan for guerrilla action after the

Battle of Karameh (1968) had an effect on the situation in Lebanon, by increasing the flow of recruits for training. There were no arms in the camps in Lebanon, but the mass mood was growing steadily more defiant:

We saw our young men eager to go to training camps in the Ghor, and take part in operations. They'd come back with stories of the war; so, instead of telling the old stories, people began to tell these new stories, about how our young men were fighting. The whole nature of talk changed, as if there had been a deep psychological change among our people. Because the Arab states were defeated, we Palestinians had a chance to be active, and we felt we had to use it to the ultimate extent.¹⁸

Looking back on this period of mounting militancy and oppression, someone from Rashidiyeh camp said:

We can't say that the Revolution entered the camps at a precise time, on a precise day. We can say that it was the continuation of our growing political and military existence. The Palestinian masses in the camps were waiting for the armed revolution as a dry land thirsts for water.

The Place of Armed Struggle in the Resistance

The call to armed struggle issued by the leaders of the 1965 Revolution was not a product of a militaristic outlook or training on their part (most were middle-class professionals turned revolutionaries, very like the leaders of the Cuban Revolution). The centrality of armed struggle in the Palestine Resistance Movement's programmes arose directly from the historical experience of the Palestinian people, who, in every crisis, had been systematically disarmed. This had been their experience in Palestine under the British Mandate, particularly after the outbreak of the 1936 Rebellion. This also had been their experience in the *ghourba*: those of the fleeing villagers who still had their guns when they crossed the borders into the 'host' countries were forced to lay them down.¹⁹ In the camps, there was no possibility of procuring or hiding arms. Thus, for the masses, their lack of weapons came to symbolize not just the loss of Palestine, but also the suppression of the liberation struggle by the Arab regimes.

There can be no doubt that, in the Arab context of the 1960s, the PRM's bid to mobilize the masses for armed struggle was a revolutionary act. The Arab regimes, progressive as well as reactionary, had demonstrated their susceptibility to Western pressures too often for doubt. The socialist and anti-imperialist elements in both Nasserism and Ba'athism had become submerged in state building, while the leftist movements had remained for the most part city-based cliques composed mainly of students and intellectuals, too concerned about ideological warfare to work among the masses. Although the PRM shared these tendencies with the other Arab movements, it reached the masses and related its action to its slogans to a degree that no other political movement in the contemporary Arab world had been able to do. By setting itself squarely in the framework of Third World struggle against US economic and political domination, the PRM revitalized radical elements in the Arab world and exposed the real character of the regimes.

The revolutionary nature of the call to mass-based armed struggle in the Arab context arose also from the class-related roots of militancy in Palestinian, as in Arab society generally. This characteristic class difference in militancy was clearly visible in Palestine under the Mandate, when the national leadership constantly vacillated between struggle and negotiation, using struggle in an attempt to increase its bargaining power, stopping struggle in response to imperialist or Arab pressures. The mercantile and bureaucratic middle class contributed very little to the uprisings in Palestine, and in the *ghourba* their non-militancy became even more marked. And more generally during the 1960s, the new national Arab armies were showing themselves to be instruments for the protection of ruling classes that did not spring from the peasants and workers, whatever their policies towards them.

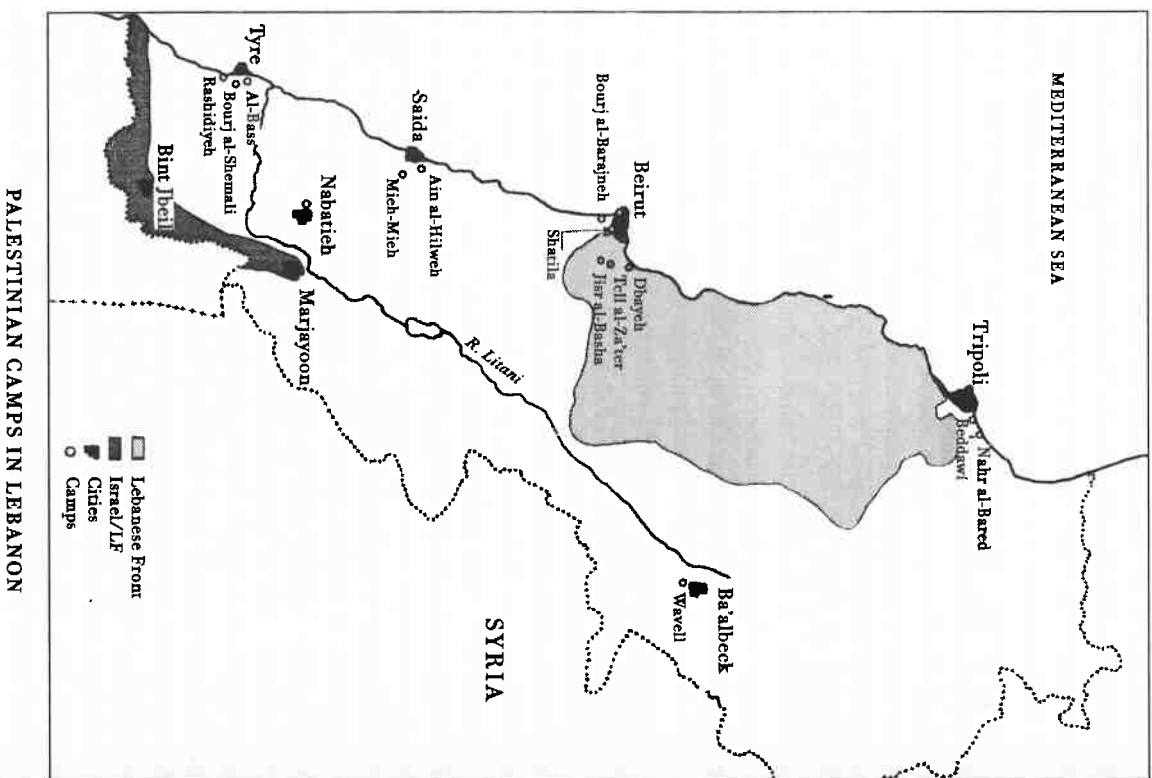
The greater readiness for militancy among poor as against middle-class Palestinians after 1948 needs little explanation. In part, it was a product of their oppressive situation in the camps which made the return to Palestine an urgent necessity, not a distant dream that could be postponed until 'the Arabs are ready'. Influenced by a traditional idealism, many Palestinians in the camps claim that their struggle arises purely from love of the homeland, not from 'material things'.²⁰ Others claim the camps are 'factories

of men for the Revolution'. Economic exploitation has not been as important as political oppression in generating a positive mass response to the Resistance Movement, since the people see their situation as the result of national rather than class oppression.²¹ Yet even if a sense of class oppression was secondary, it existed like a foetus in the womb of the more clearly defined nationalist programmes. This can be clearly seen in the radicalization of the Palestinian national movement after 1967, with the Arab Nationalist Movement moving into overtly Marxist-Leninist positions, and Fatah, the mainstream of the PRM, adopting the language and some of the practice of Third World revolutions, and synthesizing these with the masses' living memory of struggle in Palestine. The PRM as a whole, not just its leftist currents, opened the Arab world to critical currents of thought which the progressive regimes, while interacting at a governmental level with the Communist bloc, had never allowed to reach their masses.

The primacy of armed struggle for camp Palestinians is clear from the fact that, even in the first years after the Disaster, when middle-class Palestinians were preoccupied with hunting for jobs or sunk in individual trauma, we find that one of the first post-1948 organizations to be formed among the masses was called 'The Military Organization for the Liberation of Palestine'. Its militarism was a very distant dream, but underlying its formation was the same peasant obstinacy and toughness that had terraced Palestine's stony soil.

With the growth of education and political consciousness, the appeal of armed mass struggle to the Palestinian people grew as the only way to end both their national and their class oppression. It was young workers and students from the camps who became *fedayeen*, while middle-class Palestinians who joined the PRM moved mainly into 'white-collar' forms of struggle: organization, diplomacy, information. The idea of struggle mobilized them too, but not with the same readiness to sacrifice their lives that was shown by the masses in the camps.

In understanding the primary place of armed struggle in the consciousness of camp Palestinians, it is also necessary to recall how many times the camps had been targets for Israeli or Arab attack. When West Bank villages were hit by the Israelis before the



Six Day War, they were neither defended by the Jordanian Army nor allowed to form their own defence militias. In Lebanon, later, the same situation was repeated. Even in Syria, the camps near Damascus came under both Israeli and Syrian attack. To camp Palestinians, the lesson to be drawn from these experiences could hardly be clearer. In this they shared a common perspective with the unarmed Arab inhabitants of the Jordan Valley, the Cholan Heights and Sinai, who had seen the national armies withdrawing to protect city-based regimes in 1967, abandoning the border areas and the poor peasants who inhabited them.

Few peoples have been more systematically kept helpless in the face of attack than the Palestinians, and it is not surprising that the symbol of their resurgence after 1967 was the gun. To a people for whom dispersion had added new divisions to the older class and party divisions in Palestine, the gun was both a means to creating 'one mass for the return' and a symbol of their regained identity as strugglers and Palestinians.

However, what Fatah militants have called 'the unity of the gun'²² soon became fractured in the ideological conflicts that had marked the Resistance Movement from its gestation. Fatah was accused of mindless militarism: a charge it did not deserve, since its call to armed struggle was backed up by projects of social, cultural and economic development. In spite of its limited middle-class origins and backing, Fatah expressed the pragmatism of the Palestinian masses, their longing for the reality of action as against the un-reality of *felsefeh*. The words of a camp laundry worker who said, 'If a man tells me that he is going to fight, I don't believe him unless I see him take a gun and go', well express how, for the masses, the gun had become a touchstone of authenticity.

It was true, as the leftist groups point out, that the gun was not enough, that what was needed was a clear revolutionary ideology backed up by a programme of revolutionary mass mobilization. These never fully materialized, although their embryo is clearly visible in the short period of the PRM's freedom in Jordan from March 1968 to September 1970. To what extent the failure to realize its full revolutionary potential was due to the class origins of the PRM leadership with their limited vision, or to Arab interference, is an argument hard to resolve because of the impossibility of draw-

ing a clear line between the Palestinian Resistance and its Arab environment. But what differentiates all the Palestinian Resistance groups from most of the leftist parties in the rest of the Arab world is a much stronger commitment to mass armed struggle as a means to change the status quo. While awaiting a comprehensive study²³ of the ideologies of the different groups that compose the PRM, and their changes over time, it is useless to indulge in facile or partisan criticism, particularly as there are no clear class differences between their memberships.²⁴

Year of the Revolution

The Palestinian revolution comes to Lebanon

In 1966 the Palestinian Revolution came to Lebanon, in a prolonged series of confrontations between the Lebanese regime and (i) the *fedayeen* in the South, supported by part of the Lebanese rural population, (ii) Palestinians in the camps, and (iii) large segments of the Lebanese population of the coastal cities (national and progressive parties, students and the Muslim masses). Alliance between these different popular forces was based on a common opposition to Israel's role in the area, and forged through battles with the regime. With so many loci of protest to control, the regime's forces were spread thin and in constant danger of crumbling since their own internal divisions forbade their use in really ruthless repression. The course of the Revolution was thus quite different in Lebanon from Jordan, with a much higher degree of mass spontaneity, a closer alliance between Palestinian and local forces, and more lasting effects in terms of autonomy for the camps. The first *fedayeen* bases in South Lebanon were established in the winter of 1968-69, not far from the Syrian border, and began very soon after to attack Israeli settlements in Galilee.²⁵ With its mountains, caves and thick scrub, South Lebanon is a much better terrain for guerrilla warfare than Jordan or the West Bank. It is continuous with Galilee, the district in which around 60 per cent of Israel's Arab minority lives, and the two areas are linked by long-standing economic, social and political ties. Far from the capital, impoverished, neglected, predominantly Shi'ite,²⁶ the South also offered a promising socio-political basis for the Resistance Movement. The local elite were large landowners

who willingly supported the Maronite hegemony, and had done nothing to improve conditions in their fiefdoms. Thus South Lebanon provided the Resistance Movement with some of the geographical and political conditions it needed.

Fedayeen action in the south

Between 1968 and 1970 *fedayeen* action received deep popular support in the South. Not only this, but many of the younger, more politicized Lebanese southerners joined their ranks as fighters. The following account of one of these fighters is worth quoting at length because it shows the identity of experience and views between ordinary Lebanese and Palestinians:

I come from the South, from a village on the border of occupied Palestine. Like the Palestinians, my family left our village in 1949 because the Zionists carried out a massacre in Hula, a village near ours, where they killed about seventy young men in a mosque. A great number of Lebanese from the border villages were forced to leave in this way, and they lived in Beirut in the same conditions as the refugees.

After the Palestinian Revolution, in 1968, we went back to our village, to live with the people there. There were daily *fedayeen* operations against the Zionist enemy's settlements. This created a revolutionary tide. The masses all supported the Revolution because they saw it was the only force able to stand up and say No after the defeat of 1967.

At that time our material resources were few, and we had to rely on donations from the people. For a long time the masses were supplying all our needs, even clothes and food. On night patrol, we would knock on doors as we passed through the villages, and people would give us food and shelter...

Before everything else, there must be an everyday political relationship with the masses, to look at their problems, and help them to solve them, especially through their own consciousness....

In 1969 there were many battles between us and the Lebanese Army, and that is when we saw the villagers rise against the army. I remember particularly Majdel Slim, where the army put a force estimated at brigade size around the town to besiege a group of a hundred *fedayeen*. The population made a demonstration against the army, protecting the *fedayeen* with their own bodies. This is the incident I consider the most expressive of fusion between us and the masses at that time.

As in all Lebanon's rural regions, governmental services to the villages of the South were almost non-existent, so that supporting

the Palestinian Revolution became a means of protesting against a corrupt and negligent regime.⁷¹ Apart from one small hospital in Bint Jbeil, the only places where surgery or blood transfusion could be performed were the distant cities of Tyre and Sidon, and conditions there were such that most people preferred to reach Beirut if they could. The only schools in the villages were primary:

They were hiring rooms to use as classrooms, scattered far from each other. The teachers were too few, and their qualifications and salaries were low. Most of them were sons of the village with no diploma higher than the Brevet.⁷² Only a few of the bigger places had Intermediate classes. Our schools were not even attached to the Lebanese educational system.

The Lebanese Army was not regarded by most southerners as a national army but as closer to an army of occupation:

The percentage of southerners in the army was very low, because it's always been difficult to get into the army. It needed *wazata* and bribes. People in the South saw that the army wasn't theirs. It ill-treated them, and they saw how it was always withdrawing in the face of the enemy, and that it never defended them.

Relations between the *fedayeen* and the Lebanese Army were never based on total confrontation, since it was not the clearly stated position of the government that guerrilla action in Lebanon was illegal, or that it must stop. Instead, limited action against the *fedayeen* was undertaken on legal pretexts, such as that they were carrying arms without a permit, or entering forbidden zones. The aim was to harass and deter the guerrillas, and raise segments of the people against them, rather than try to eliminate them entirely. The army's ambiguous policy reflected its own internal divisions, similar to those of the regime:

The Lebanese Army in the South wasn't unified. It had some people who wanted to defend their country, and others who were just puppets, henchmen, who wanted to deal with the Israelis. Others were only concerned to protect Maronite interests.⁷³ During battles between the *fedayeen* and the Israelis, part of the army would withdraw immediately, but part would stand and fight, even against orders from their headquarters. This happened many times. The Palestinian Revolution had relations with many men inside the army, and they would let us

through when we were passing checkpoints. Those who were pro-Israeli would stop us. One of their commanding officers used to pass all the information that the Army Intelligence office had on the *fedayeen* movements to the Israelis.

The freedom of the *fedayeen* to carry on their action from the south was the issue that sparked off every demonstration in camp and city during the year of the Revolution. Support for the *fedayeen* spread far beyond the Palestinian masses to Lebanese schools and universities, and to the groups that made up the loose alliance of national and progressive forces. Students would taunt the soldiers sent to attack them with tear gas and hoses: 'Why aren't you on the borders in the South?'

In spite of the relative freedom of the Lebanese press, the army censorship code³⁰ was able to stop or delay news of the clashes occurring in the South from reaching Beirut. In April the army threw a siege around Bint Jbeil to capture a group of *fedayeen* just returned from a mission. The people of the town refused to hand the *fedayeen* over to the army, but after three days of siege and a threat of bombardment, the *fedayeen* gave themselves up to avoid bloodshed. News of their imprisonment in the barracks of Tyre leaked out, leading to the historic march of 23 April, which weakened the regime, and prepared the way for the liberation of the camps later in the year.

The march of 23 April

As news of the siege of Bint Jbeil spread, spontaneous demonstrations erupted in several camps, always the most responsive to interference with *fedayeen* action, and the army put tanks around them. The *Yamniyya*³¹ reports that four students were killed in Ain Hilweh camp, and twenty wounded: 'Similar demonstrations in other areas of Lebanon were suppressed by force and many people were killed, in Beirut, Mar Elias and elsewhere.' In Beirut a call for a march on the afternoon of 23 April was put out jointly by the Gathering of National and Progressive Parties in Lebanon³² and the Palestinian organizations. Leaflets explaining the situation in the South were distributed widely in schools and universities. The Minister of Interior refused an authorization for the march, and

from the morning of the 23rd rumours began to spread that the authorities intended to use force, to deter people from participating. But the effect was the opposite. This eyewitness report from a participant describes both the mood of the masses (between ten and twelve thousand people are estimated to have taken part in the march) and the methods employed by the Lebanese authorities to suppress it:

Around 3.30 to 4.00 p.m. people started gathering in the Makassad Square.³³ Groups came in from the North and the South in buses, from all the schools and universities of Beirut, and from all the Beirut camps except Bourj al-Barajneh, which was tightly encircled by the army.

We started to move at 4.00 a.m., and we had only moved about 25 metres when we came face to face with the Security Forces. They threw tear-gas bombs at us, and the fire brigade hosed us with hot water. This went on for about five minutes, as a warning to disperse. But the people regrouped and started to move again. The Security Forces had no choice but to carry out the orders they had received that morning, to shoot directly into the crowd, not to scare people, but to kill.

What happened then was unprecedented in the long history of demonstrations in Lebanon: a battle lasting two hours between the armed Security Forces and the unarmed crowds. Instead of dissipating, or changing the course of the march, the demonstrators would spontaneously regroup after each confrontation, and try again to force their way along the road to the city centre which the Security Forces were blocking. With each re-starting of the march, the police would fire again into the crowd, killing or wounding several.

Many of those who participated in the march were students who had never encountered police violence before. A schoolgirl remembers seeing a man being carried away by comrades with blood streaming from his leg shouting '*Allahu akbar!*' Another participant remembers a group of demonstrators seizing a police transport lorry and distributing its load of helmets to the crowd. The eyewitness description continues:

During all this time the people were shouting one slogan, '*tasfa, tasfa.*' Each time the march recommenced the police would shoot five or six people, then the marchers would regroup in the back streets and start again. The demonstrators had no weapons. The only thing we had

were four or five wooden vegetable carts, which some people used as shields, though the bullets went through them. The authorities wouldn't let ambulances into the area, we had to carry the wounded away ourselves...²⁵

No less than five times the crowd came back to attack, fully aware that the military force in front of them made it impossible for the march to go through. But the mass mood was at such a pitch that though people could have got to the city centre by other roads, they kept coming back to confront the police... The mass mood on that day was such that they were ready to confront tanks.

In order to placate public opinion, which was outraged by the fact that the police had aimed directly into the crowd instead of using more normal riot-control methods, the authorities claimed that the police had been shot at first. However, they were unable to produce a single bullet-wounded policeman, only a few slightly bruised by stones.

Forty-eight hours later, there was another confrontation with the Security Forces during the funeral march of one of those killed on 23 April. The authorities tried to confine the march to one quarter, but it spread into small demonstrations all over the city. Student strikes went on for several days, until there was an agreement between the authorities and the Resistance Movement to free the *Jedayeen* and calm things down.

It was discovered later that, instead of depending on the local quarter police, the authorities had brought in army personnel from other areas and put them in FSI uniforms. Police whose faces were familiar would be too afraid of retribution to shoot into the crowd.

The march of 23 April was a turning point in many ways. It proved to an important segment of the Lebanese public what many had not believed before, that the authorities would use force against the *Jedayeen* since they were ready to use it against their own people. The resignation of Prime Minister Karamah deprived the regime for many months of its normal Muslim cover. The Resistance Movement, which was not strong in Lebanon in terms of men and arms, became, after 23 April, a force that the authorities had to bargain with. Freedom of *Jedayeen* action had shown itself to be a potentially revolutionary issue, and the Palestinian camps no

longer faced army tanks alone. In addition, it appears that, in the course of the confrontation, files containing the names of government secret agents fell into the hands of the demonstrators, thus weakening the state's information-gathering apparatus.

Liberation of the camps

April 23rd did not produce a sudden capitulation of the Lebanese regime. But, during the months that followed, changes in Lebanese mass consciousness were manifested in dynamite attacks on government installations. Army tanks still encircled most of the camps, but there was a new feeling of hope and defiance. Nahr al-Bared, a large camp 20 kilometres north of Tripoli, was the first to gain its freedom.

On 28 August, eleven policemen entered the camp with orders to pull down a Fateh office that they said had been built without a permit. The people of the camp refused and took the policemen hostage. Army reinforcements were called up and threatened to enter the camp unless the hostages were surrendered. Someone who took part in the fighting that followed describes it:

They brought tanks and the army tried to enter the camps. That day, we can remember with pride, we brought out the few guns that we had - they were eleven. We did well at first, but then we ran out of ammunition. A rumour ran round the camp that the ammunition was finished and we tried to calm the people by telling them that rescue would come from the Resistance. But we didn't really know whether it would come. But what was amazing was that people returned to what they had been in 1948, preferring to die rather than to live in humiliation. Women were hollering because it was the first time a gun had been seen defending the camp. It was the first battle that we didn't lose. The children were between the fighters, collecting the empty cartridges although the bullets were like rain. It was the first time that people held knives and sticks and stood in front of their homes, ready to fight.

Reinforcements did come during the night, and in subsequent negotiations the army agreed to withdraw 2 kilometres from the camp, whilst the people of the camp agreed to release the eleven police hostages. Among the recollections of the man quoted above is that of a Deuxième Bureau officer, 'a tool of oppression in the camp, impotently kissing our feet, and telling us that he had six

daughters'. Someone else recollected seeing a man violently destroying an iron bed, to which he had once been tied with a stone on his chest, in the camp police station.

Although the army continued to demand that the Fatch office in the camp should be pulled down, and 'troublemakers' in the camp handed over to the authorities, the situation in the country as a whole was too explosive for the launching of an all-out attack on the camp. Not only the Lebanese situation, but mounting Arab pressures limited army action.

The next camps to contest Lebanese control were Rashidiyeh and Bourj al-Shemali in the south. A militant from Rashidiyeh describes what happened there:

A week before the liberation of Nahr al-Bared a group of fighters entered Bourj al-Shemali camp and were welcomed by the supporting masses. But the political situation was still not mature enough to keep them in the camp. After negotiation between the PLO and the Lebanese authorities, they found it necessary to retreat, and a group of people known not to be from the camp left it. A week after that the *fedayeen* entered Nahr al-Bared, and the Lebanese authorities tried to confront them. They fought for four days with very simple weapons and little ammunition, and the result was victory for the Revolution.

The next camp was Rashidiyeh, on 10 September. After that the camps fell one after another, and the forces of oppression began to withdraw... They knew the people were waiting for the Revolution. They felt afraid because the people had started to confront them, and they didn't know from where the next blow would come.

There was something in common between all the camps, that they provided people who prepared for the Revolution from within. Those who came from outside the camps were very few. In Rashidiyeh there were eighteen cells. We had few arms, but the authorities imagined that everyone in the camps carried a gun.

The camps in Beirut were less easily surrounded than the more isolated rural camps, except for Bourj al-Barajneh which has sand dunes on three sides. Sabra, Shateela and Mar Elias melt into populous Lebanese (Muslim) areas, and could not easily be attacked. By the time of the September confrontations there were still very few arms in the camps, but the mood of both the Palestinians and the Lebanese masses had become much more confident.

What helped the liberation of the camps was the state of mobilization of the Lebanese masses, which prevented the authorities from hitting the camps fiercely. It wasn't the force inside the camps, or the quantity of arms, but the mood of the masses, and the continuous demonstrations, that paralysed the state... In Jordan there were arms, and in the South, but in the camps there were very few.

I remember that at the entrance of Sabra camp there weren't more than four old Egyptian rifles, but every home had prepared 'molotovs', it was incredible how many they made, every home had 10 to 15 of these bombs. But there were no other weapons. In Sabra there was only one 'Kalashnikov'... But the authorities couldn't enter the camps because if they had, other areas would have exploded.

It was during September that all the camps got rid of the police and DB offices that had oppressed them so long, although they continued to be besieged by army tanks. In Beirut, Lebanese mass demonstrations reached a new intensity:

I remember that there was a demonstration at Bourj Abu-Haidar, a Lebanese suburb, and some of us managed to get out of besieged Sabra to join it. The unarmed demonstrators entered a local police station and took their weapons and sent them to Sabra. Two other stations in Beirut were attacked by the masses and their arms taken.

Some idea of the spontaneity of mass action at this stage is given by the anecdote of a PLO official to whom an employee laconically reported one morning: 'We took over Shateela last night', upon which the official went off to put a new PLO plaque on the old DB office. That there was any clear PRM plan to replace Lebanese authority with revolutionary authority may be doubted. Unable to guarantee the security of their police in the camps, the Lebanese government in several cases requested the PLO to intervene to protect them as they withdrew. Shortly afterwards a PLA-trained police force, the *kifah musallah*, was sent into the camps to reassure the authorities that law and order would be kept.

Although the mood of camp Palestinians had, by September, reached boiling point, it is impossible to establish that there was any overall plan for the liberation of the camps. A veteran member of one of the Resistance groups describes how the Revolution came to Bourj al-Barajneh, almost accidentally, undirected even by a local command:

I had worked that day in the city and as I left the camp I saw gatherings of students and workers demonstrating to kick out the police and DB from the camp. Among them I saw my father... An hour later I got a phone call telling me that my father had been killed. I returned to the camp and found that sixteen had been wounded, and one killed. My father was one of the wounded and had been sent to a local hospital.

As a known militant, the man could not risk staying with his wounded father in the hospital since the police would come to interrogate him. Later after interrogation, the old man was removed to a police station in a suburb near the camp. What happened next gives a fascinating glimpse of camp Palestinians in action:

I bought medicine for my father and gave it to my wife, and told her to take some old women with her, and go to the police station and throw stones at it. So six or seven women went and surrounded the police station and demanded that they give up the wounded man. The police refused to give him up, so the women started throwing stones. The police got in touch with higher officials and finally they handed him over. As the women were bringing my father away a group of young men with arms surrounded the police station and this time the police and the DB did not shoot, but ran away, because now our people had weapons... Up to that moment there were very few arms in the camp, but within twenty-four hours of the police withdrawal, hundreds of arms were being carried.

Clashes between the Lebanese Army and the *fedayeen* in the South continued throughout October, with growing Arab pressure on Lebanon to allow freedom of guerrilla action. During the siege of Mejdel Slim (18 October), in which there were many Lebanese civilian as well as *fedayeen* casualties,³⁶ Syria closed its border with Lebanon, Libya recalled its ambassador, Nasser sent a telegram to President Helou, and most Arab governments issued statements supporting the Resistance Movement. It was these pressures that led directly to the signing of the Cairo Agreement on 2 November, by General Bustani for the Lebanese regime and Yasser Arafat for the Palestinians.

But the Cairo Agreement changed little. Only a few weeks later a clash took place between the Lebanese Army and *fedayeen* in the camp of Nabatiyeh in the South, during which an estimated fifty Palestinians were killed or wounded through long-range shelling.

In their communiqué from Amman, the PLO pointed to Saeka and the PFLP as having triggered the clash. This was one of the early signs of splits within the Resistance Movement that were to vitiate guerrilla action in the South, and to some extent also the Revolution in the camps.

Revolution in the Camps

The Palestinian Resistance has been criticized for the primitive level of its political training programme,³⁷ and for the ad hoc character of its work among the masses in the camps. Yet the absence in 1968-69 of a single, solid revolutionary Palestinian movement, with cadres trained in mass mobilization, should not surprise anyone. At that time the PRM was a congeries of small, scattered clandestine groups which broke into the open before they had completed their merger attempts, in a bid to prevent the Arab regimes from submitting to an Israeli-dictated peace after the Six Day War. It was a historic decision, taken prematurely from the point of view of the PRM's own development, yet necessary within the Arab context. Upon the new-born PLO Resistance framework fell the weight of three sets of problems: sustaining armed struggle against Israel; maintaining a balance of forces within the Arab environment that would give the PRM a minimum of independence; and becoming a government for the oppressed and neglected masses. Given the objective and subjective conditions within which the PRM had to work if it was to exist at all, it can plausibly be argued that it did all that was possible. Others will argue that if the leadership had analysed the Arab scene more accurately they would not have gambled on spontaneous mass reactions, but would have put greater thought and effort into a plan of revolutionary mass organization. If they had done this, the weaknesses that showed up later in the PRM might have been less serious.

The people's new consciousness

If we ask camp Palestinians today how much the Revolution changed their lives, the answers are overwhelmingly positive. In a group discussion held in January 1978 in Bourj al-Barajneh camp, the changes most emphasized were these: first, the lifting

of Lebanese oppression and the freedom to engage in political activity and struggle; then the restoration of the Palestinian identity; the defence of the camps; the normalization of ordinary life; the creation of new institutions – nurseries, workshops, training centres – and the revival of Palestinian traditions and folklore. It is noticeable that whatever a person's group affiliation the points emphasized hardly vary:

The Palestinian felt after the Revolution that he's living like a normal person again after a life of humiliation. The camps now are like fortresses, where in the past people had nothing to do but die under these zinc roofs... A large number of the Revolution's leaders are from the camps, some in the first rank such as Abu Maher, or Abu Ahmad Yunis – we needn't mention names, but they are a large number... Now we have new institutions which were forbidden before. Palestinian customs and arts have been revived. And there are many other changes. Palestinians now are like the Vietnamese and Chinese, moving in the same line.

Someone who returned to his home in Tel al-Za'ter camp after the Revolution describes the changes that struck him most:

The first moment I got down from the car I saw the Palestinian flag instead of the Lebanese flag, and a group of Palestinians in *fedayeen* clothes instead of the Lebanese police. As I moved through the camp I saw the happiness on people's faces, and in the schools there wasn't the frustration of before. The *sheikh* in the mosque now spoke clearly about the homeland – in the past he couldn't do this. There were many young men in the camp who have been outside, in Syria and Jordan, with the Revolution...

Before, there had been a political and ideological siege around us, but now the camp radio played revolutionary songs and speeches. In the homes, mothers spoke clearly with their children about Palestine – before this was only done in a whisper. In the past we used to listen to Sawt al Arab, but only in secret. Before the Revolution, meetings in the camps were limited to social problems; after it, discussion became political – the land, the nation, the Revolution. There were continual political meetings between the young people, the local Resistance group leaders and the old. There were many new projects which weren't there before: social activities, sports, meetings where people could say what they thought clearly, without censorship...

A Palestinian sociologist who knows the camps well gives a similar view:

The most important thing was that they felt liberated from the daily persecution of the DB. They felt more able to defend themselves, and to participate more fully in the Revolution, and take part in the fighting. And they felt more pride. All that came to them from the Revolution was a matter of morale... The most important benefit of the Revolution was freedom of political activity, freedom to organize and to work...

Naturally enough, the most vivid recollections of the first intense feelings of joy and liberation which surged through the camps with the ending of Deuxième Bureau control come from the people from the camps. A militant from Bourj al-Barajneh camp describes the atmosphere there:

The people didn't sleep for weeks afterwards, from happiness at seeing their youth carrying arms to liberate the homeland. They were in total support of the *fedayeen*, and showed this by bringing them food, tea, coffee. Those were beautiful days in the camp, *like wedding days*,⁴⁸ after the uprising.

A man from Rashidiyeh said:

It was impossible to find a person who didn't want to invite the *fedayeen* and offer his home as an office. It was felt to be shameful not to be the first to give the fighters food, water, shelter. The people were ready to sacrifice everything they had for the Revolution. When we said we needed money, the women would give their gold earrings, bracelets, watches.⁴⁹ And whatever they gave, they felt it was nothing.

With the breaking of Lebanese control, camp Palestinians were free to organize themselves:

The circle of fear was over, and now there was active movement in the camp. For the first time in our history women took their right role, and there was military training for girls as well as boys. We felt we had regained our identity, not just as Palestinians, but as human beings.⁵⁰

An expression much used by people in the camps about the Revolution is 'It raised our heads', meaning that it restored their self-respect, crushed by expulsion from Palestine and oppression in the *ghawba*. Before it, they had been paralysed by the trauma of dispersion, and their sense of collective weakness.⁵¹ After the Revolution, resignation and fear changed to self-confidence. Now

the Palestinian masses could feel pride because the *Jedayeen* were challenging an Israel that had just defeated three Arab armies equipped with modern weapons. Whether or not the newfound pride of the Palestinians verged on chauvinism is a point debated inside the PRM, but its mobilizing effect is undebatable. Before the Revolution 'two policemen controlled a camp of thousands'. After it, 'The policeman who used to curse us salutes us now!' The activism liberated by the restoration of camp Palestinians' self-respect set in motion changes in their relations with the Lebanese population around them, as well as in their own internal social relations.

Among the many differences that distinguished the *jeel al-thawra* from the *jeel Falasteen* was that, for the parent generation, identity was not a problem. Whatever their suffering in the *ghourba*, they knew where they belonged. For their children, who only knew Palestine from their parents' descriptions, uprootedness took on a deeper, more bitter dimension. All they had ever known was the camps. The parents could remember what it was like to be citizens in their own country; their children had only known what it was like to be 'strangers', 'refugees', 'different' in the countries of others. Childhood experiences of hostility from Lebanese neighbours had imprinted on many of them a sense of exclusion, almost of pariahdom. For camp Palestinians of this generation the Revolution brought a new identity which they eagerly grasped: Palestinian, struggler, revolutionary. As an eighteen-year-old schoolboy phrased it: 'The Revolution gave me the answer to who I am.' Instead of being part of a despised, marginal group of 'displaced persons', Palestinians now adopted en masse the role of vanguard of the Arab revolution, strugglers against imperialism, closely linked with other Third World struggles. This conscious adoption of a 'struggle-identity' encompassed Palestinians of all ages in the camps, but was particularly strong in the *jeel al-thawra*:

Before the Revolution I and all Palestinians wondered how we could return to Palestine. As a Palestinian I felt that I must have a role in the struggle... The Revolution was the most important event, not just in my life, but in the life of the Palestinian people. Our understanding, our talk, our thinking all changed. Before there was reactionary thinking, now there is revolutionary thinking.⁶⁸

Pride in being Palestinian is closely tied to the ability to struggle and to suffer: 'Maybe no other people could have borne such hardships.' This special capacity for suffering is seen as necessitated by the unique difficulty of carrying on a liberation struggle from 'countries that do not completely support us', against an enemy that is technologically and militarily superior, as well as being supported by the USA. A seventeen-year-old girl shows the organic relationship between Palestinian identity and anti-imperialist struggle:

I am proud of being Palestinian, especially among the Lebanese, because I feel I have a cause that will shake imperialism in the Middle East, and in the world.

A boy of eighteen from the same camp said:

I feel proud to be Palestinian, one of a people that is revolutionary, struggling and suffering. We were lied to many times, others tried to bury our existence as Palestinians. But with the Revolution we broke our handcuffs. Before I was living in a refugee camp, now I feel that it is a training camp.

Because of their militancy, political consciousness and love of Palestine, hope for the future has become centred upon the *jeel al-thawra*, who are seen as more educated than their parents, better equipped to challenge Israel's scientific and technological superiority, but no less courageous and patriotic. In defining their own distinct character, members of the *jeel al-thawra* tend to reproach their parents for leaving Palestine and express their own determination to protect the Revolution with their lives. *Nashat* – political activities – are the sign of the young, in contrast to what they see as the resignation and passivity of their parents in the refugee period.

Although there were differences in income between families in the camps, these were not rigidified into a class structure. Because everyone lacked possessions and shared the 'bad life' of the camps, all had an equal interest in radical change:

If we look at the camps from a class point of view we find that all belong either to the very poor or to the small bourgeoisie. Most were ready to support the Revolution – this was clear from the way they welcomed it. For example, a man who had done twelve-hour guard duty would keep

on clutching his gun after he was told to rest because he felt it was the symbol of his freedom, his hope for the future.

Previous informers were treated gently:

Everyone knew who they were, so the Revolution brought them out and tried to convince them that what they were doing was backward. We tried to correct them, and we weren't severe with them, because they lacked consciousness.⁴³

The only group in the camps who may have viewed the Revolution with misgiving (there is debate on this point) was the remnants of the peasants' own authority system, the old men, the family and village leaders. A camp school director describes their attitude:

Most of the *wujaha'* collaborated with the authorities and the informers, not because they were unnationalistic, but because they feared the new generation which was threatening their influence. These were the people on whom the Mufti depended – they worked together against the new current – they were both part of the leadership that had failed, and when the Revolution came to the camps its first conflict was with them. Everyone in the camps was with armed struggle except this group. They represented every traditional thing in our society and they held on to their position. Eventually they found it better to support the Revolution, so as not to be isolated. Their time had gone.⁴⁴

Pride in the militancy of the young was certainly accompanied in some quarters by misgivings about the retaliation it would eventually provoke. But such worries were scarcely present in the first months of the Revolution. It is evident from all testimonies that the first relationship of the PRM to the camps was one of complete identification. In all the 'answers' to the loss of Palestine produced by Arab leaders and parties, this was the first to weld itself into the consciousness of the masses as their own authentic answer. It combined their longing for Palestine, their rejection of expulsion and dispersion, their rebellion against oppression in the *ghourba*, and their insistence on struggling against external domination of the Arab area:

The relationship between the people of the camps and the Revolution was very simple: it was one of complete collaboration and fusion. Everyone said, 'This is our Revolution.'

The problem of revolutionary authority

In understanding what became of the Revolution in the camps after 1969, a key is the multiplicity of authority centres which made it impossible to produce a level of organization commensurate with the level of revolutionary consciousness. The *kifah al-musellah* which filled the interregnum between the authority of the Lebanese and the camps' own popular committees, the *lajan al-sha'biyyeh*, were not part of a new revolutionary authority structure, but took their orders from the PLO. Their specialized role is clear from the fact that they took no part in the new camp defence militias. For camp Palestinians they were a vast improvement on the Lebanese DB, but they still occupied an ambiguous position somewhere between the old and the new order. A camp inhabitant comments:

The *kifah al-musellah* sometimes make mistakes. Sometimes they intervene in social problems and make them more complicated because they have a military training, not a social one. But we don't look at them as we did at the Lebanese police or the DB. We can tell them when they're wrong. If we'd done this with the Lebanese police they would have beaten us.⁴⁵

Almost as soon as the camps were liberated, popular committees were formed which harked back to those formed in Palestinian villages in the last years before 1948. Although their members were inhabitants of the camp, they were chosen by the Resistance groups rather than being elected by the quarters, thus creating a certain gap between the affiliated and the unaffiliated. They took on the important tasks of organizing defence, public hygiene, sports and cultural facilities, and facing day-to-day problems. With support from a united Resistance Movement, the *lajan al-sha'biyyeh* would have evolved into a strong tool of self-government and change.

Men chosen to work on the popular committees were those who had been outstanding during the refugee period as leaders and nationalists. Some were teachers who had refused the option of leaving the camps so as to remain close to the masses. Others were self-educated working men from the *jeel al-nekba*, the generation who had lost their schooling in the move from Palestine to Lebanon. Too young to fight in 1948, by the time of the 1965 Revolution they were too old. Tough and impressive people, their

a basic source of recruitment for the PRM's fighting wing and local political leadership. But disunity meant that, after all the demonstrations, marches, speeches, rallies and battles, and in spite of the heights to which revolutionary consciousness had reached, not enough remained in terms of revolutionary organization. The camps were still, from an organizational point of view, as well as in terms of material conditions, areas of neglect.

The effect of the Resistance Movement on middle-class Palestinians outside the camps lies outside the scope of this book, but it is relevant to note that there existed a number of Palestinian organizations which were stimulated by the Revolution to try to carry out projects among the masses. The most important of these were the general unions, particularly those of the workers, women and students, which had existed before the Revolution, albeit with a limited national/liberal role. With the Revolution, the unions were freed from their earlier leadership and began to undertake mass-based projects. However, several problems (besides continual Palestinian/Lebanese crisis) hindered their work in the camps. One was that, outside their organizing committees, their membership remained largely passive, reflecting the lower level of politicization of middle-class Palestinians in comparison with that of the masses. Another was that much of their energy was spent on internal conflict, reflecting differences among Resistance groups. Another was the socio-cultural gap which dispersion had deepened between middle-class and camp Palestinians, and which was difficult to overcome in the short run, even between members of the same Resistance group.

Health and education: new fronts of revolutionary action

Although with education the economic situation of camp Palestinians improved between 1948 and 1969, the material conditions of the camps had changed very little. In certain respects they had even deteriorated, since living space and services had not increased in proportion to the population, and although the rise of a new, educated generation had created a trickle of emigration out of the camps, this was more than compensated for by the high birth rate. Other factors inhibiting migration were fear of losing precarious UNRWA rights, insecurity of status in the countries of work mi-

gration,⁴ and attachment to kin and neighbours. But living in the camps, as one ex-inhabitant said, was like living on a rubbish tip. Physical conditions which had been accepted stoically during the refugee period became increasingly unacceptable as Palestinians perceived the populations around them achieving a faster rate of progress than they, in spite of their diplomas and hard work.

In the first months after the Revolution under the leadership of the *lujan al-sha'biyyeh*, camp Palestinians began to attack some of their most urgent environmental problems. Students from outside the camps used to come to join the work groups digging wells, trenches and shelters. But for these projects to be completed on a mass scale would have required mass mobilization, or funds. Instead, aid came after crises that ought to have been foreseen and prepared for. An organizer from Tel al-Za'ier camp recalls:

I remember that the first shelter in Tel al-Za'ier was built after the clashes of 1973,⁵ and it was done by a group of young men from from the camp and from outside. We started digging the shelters with our hands.

He continued:

Roads in the camps are bad. Health services are very poor though lots of money was put into this. Until now only about 10 per cent of our children have kindergartens, the rest are on the streets. Social activities for young people and women are too few. Until now authority in the camps is not properly organized.

A pressing problem to which all the Resistance groups gave their attention was health, in response to the obvious need for wider health care created by poverty, undernourishment, overcrowding and tension. UNRWA's health services were underfunded to a point where they hardly existed for the masses. A camp of 16,000 people would be served by one clinic with a daily nurse, and a twice-weekly doctor. Admission to Lebanese hospitals was limited to a few cases a month in each district, so that it needed *wasta* to be admitted. In the rural camps, the situation was much worse because of the absence of alternative Lebanese medical services, private or public, outside the larger cities.

The importance attached by the Resistance Movement to health is evident in the fact that all the groups – even those which had no

potentialities were not used as they should have been by a leadership which had no clear programme of mass organization outside the training for the *fedayeen*. Because they knew camp conditions and the problems of the masses intimately, from their own lives, they would have been a better bridge between the Revolution and the camps than the Resistance cadres, many of whom were young and inexperienced, though formally better educated.

At the beginning, building on the pent-up energies generated by Lebanese oppression, the popular committees were able to achieve a great deal without external support or direction. They collected money, dug wells, laid water pipes, set up quarter committees to keep the streets clean, started small libraries. That they were not able to do more was due to the same conditions that offset so many efforts in the camps: continual Palestinian/Lebanese crisis, competition between the Resistance organizations, confusion of authority, lack of funds, lack of an overall plan.

The real centres of power in the camps were the Resistance group offices, since they had arms and direct links with the leaders of the PRM. For the youth of the camp, they incarnated the armed struggle idea, and their appeal was irresistible. Stories are often told in the camps of children as young as four going on their own to the Resistance offices and demanding to be given a gun.

No one makes a secret of the fact that the primary purpose of the Resistance groups' offices in the camps was to recruit. Although most offered social benefits as part of their recruiting campaign, only three had social or training projects from which camp inhabitants as a whole, not just their members, could benefit.⁴⁶ Competition for recruits was bitter, and often inter-group conflict would be built on to family or quarter conflicts, occasionally leading to violence because of pent-up tension and the profusion of arms. There were no Resistance cadres with special training for work among the masses, although many acquired this with time. Probably for most of them, the specialized role of fighting appeared enough in itself; only the most politically mature understood that the masses could not participate fully in struggle unless the Revolution came close to their lives and changed them. To gain the support of the masses, rather than to change their conditions, appears to have been the principal aim of all the groups at this stage.

The proliferation of groups within the Resistance Movement had characterized it from birth, and neither Fatchi's mass popularity after the Battle of Karameh, nor its takeover of the PLO in the National Assembly of February 1969, enabled it to construct a united national front. In the first months after liberation, the only organizations with a real presence in the camps were Fatchi, the PFLP and the PLA. But soon others made their appearance, both those backed by Arab governments (such as Saeka and the ALF) and splinter groups from the PFLP (PDFLP, Jibreel's General Command). Competition between the groups had many dangerous effects, not least, perhaps, an overemphasis on ideological differences which were often irrelevant to the real problems faced by the Palestinian people. Another by-product was over-publicity for the military training programmes in the camps. A PLO official comments:

Definitely the Palestinians over-enjoyed their freedom in the camps, even if this was a reaction to be expected. We have to link this with the ambitions of the different groups who wanted to expand among the masses and so opened recruitment offices in the camps. That's when we began to get publicity about training. They'd hold a ceremony over the training of a few kids – it wasn't even real training – but it was the idea, the novelty, seeing a Palestinian in uniform, holding a gun, jumping over fire. Even the Lebanese bourgeois newspapers printed these pictures all over their front pages, simply as a thrill.

Possibly the most serious effect of inter-group competition, comparable in gravity to the way it blocked the development of revolutionary organization in the camps, was the blow it dealt to morale. None of the attacks they faced ever disheartened the unaffiliated masses as much as the failure of the Resistance groups to achieve unity. Certainly there was a basis for group competition in the culture of the camps, and there were those who would argue that their number spread revolutionary consciousness more rapidly, and allowed more of the people to participate actively, than if there had only been one national front. But the feverish mass activism of the earlier years, during which everyone rushed to affiliate him/herself in a group, gave way later to a dropping off of membership. To some extent this was inevitable and did not damage fundamental mass support for the Revolution as an idea. The camps remained

other type of social programme – opened clinics in the camps and distributed large quantities of free medicine. In addition, Fateh established a national health service, the *Hilal al-Ahmar* (Red Crescent), which was originally formed to cope with emergencies arising from attacks on camps. Its founders hoped to draw nationalist doctors from the middle classes to work as volunteers in the camps and bases. Some did, but they were not enough to expand the Red Crescent's services, and critics from the left blamed it for its bourgeois concept of health care, emphasizing hospitals and highly specialized doctors instead of attacking the health problems of the masses with new methods. What was needed was training programmes for health workers among camp Palestinians, prevented by the high qualification barriers⁴⁹ from entering the medical professions. Whilst the Resistance group clinics in the camps did give courses in first aid, it was not until just before the Lebanese Civil War that regular training courses for nurses, lab assistants and pharmacists were set up in the Beirut area. In time, these will lessen the camps' dependency on expensive urban facilities and encourage the spread of basic medical knowledge among the masses.

The deficiencies in the quantity and quality of education available to camp Palestinians have already been discussed in Chapter 3. Of these defects, the one that the Resistance Movement was most conscious of, and set out most energetically to change, was the absence of any element of Palestinian nationalism in UNRWA's syllabus. In reaction, the PRM strongly emphasized national political consciousness in its own training programmes for the *fadayeen* and *ashbal*. One of the first studies to be carried out by the Palestine Planning Centre (an offshoot of the PLO) was a content analysis of history and geography textbooks used in the Arab educational systems, and by UNRWA.⁵⁰ They were found to be deficient, often inaccurate concerning Palestinian history, particularly in minimizing popular resistance to the British occupation and to Zionism. Pressure was also brought upon UNRWA to adopt new textbooks; when I was living in a camp, one of these, consisting of photographs of Palestine, often used to be brought out to show me by children who were still not yet in school, like a family treasure. Admittedly, the new children's storybooks published by Dar al-Fata had hardly begun to penetrate the camps by 1975, nor had the colourful

wall magazines for children produced by the PPC. But parents in the camps who had lived through their country's severest crisis without knowing it as 'history' were impressed and happy to see these books in their children's hands. A laundry worker whose own schooling had been cut short in 1948 told me proudly: 'My sons will grow up knowing that they have a country, with a history and a civilization.'

Still along the lines of providing a more nationalist education was Fateh's *ashbal* children's training programme, first initiated in Jordan soon after Karamah, and conceived as supplementing normal schooling, not replacing it. It consists of basic military and physical training, with courses in Palestinian history and general political history (Zionism, the Arab world, imperialism and the Third World). Although at first the hostility of Western public opinion was roused by news photos of small children in uniform, carrying guns, Israeli attacks on the camps have provided more than enough justification for Palestinian militarism, which is increasingly viewed by world public opinion as legitimate defence. In spite of the restrictions placed on the PRM in the host countries, *ashbal* training has not ceased, and every summer it brings together Palestinian children from different regions and classes. Another of its values has been its emphasis on the necessity of coexisting with Jews in a future Palestine.⁵¹

Until today, however, the Revolution has no general concept of an alternative educational system for the children whom they call the 'generation of liberation'. An independent Palestinian intellectual, I. Abu-Lughod, has raised the question of how suited conventional Arab education with its strongly academic and clerical bias and its deeply ingrained elitism is to a people engaged in a difficult liberation struggle.⁵² Among a minority of radicalized camp Palestinians one finds an understanding that Arab education tends to make people middle class more than to liberate them, and such people are ready to say 'We need a more revolutionary education.' But so far no Resistance group, from the most revolutionary to the most conservative, has sufficiently raised itself above day-to-day crises to consider this vital problem.

On the whole, the masses in the camps only want more schools, not a different system. They need schools, first and foremost, to

improve their condition; but also they see education, along with political consciousness and armed struggle, as an enrichment of the Palestinian masses' human potentials and as a challenge to Israel's present technical and military superiority. Education is an integral part of the special role they see themselves as playing in the Arab world, as guides and pathfinders, as modernizers and revolutionaries. Their long-standing class longing for education, combined with the crucial role it played in enabling them to survive the Disaster economically, makes it a part of their self-image, so that only with difficulty can they begin to view it critically or oppose its tendency to drain the camps of those with diplomas. Even the few who are aware of the way the educational system supports the class structure have hardly begun to draw the blueprint of an alternative. Yet people often say that education on its own is not enough; it has to be combined with political consciousness 'or we shan't succeed in liberating Palestine'. This is only one of many examples of the way 'ordinary' camp Palestinians often have a keener perception than the leaders and ideologists.

Thus to camp Palestinians, the deficiencies of UNRWA's medical and educational services persist, with the Revolution contributing mainly stopgap efforts here and there. There are more clinics and hospitals than before, but still no overall surveys of health needs, no mass health training programme, and only a few training courses for health workers. In education there has been a promising development in pre-school kindergartens,⁵³ by a group that recruits and trains its own teachers from the camps. But most supplementary education still depends on middle-class volunteers, and therefore fluctuates with their availability: evening classes for Baccalaureat candidates have, for example, only been carried on in camps near enough to Beirut to attract volunteer teachers. The same is true of adult literacy classes for women, begun in some camps shortly before the Lebanese Civil War.

Another severe problem which has hardly begun to be tackled lies in the high dropout rate of children at the end of intermediate school. There is need for mass work training programmes, designed to fill the manpower requirements of Palestinian and Arab economic development over the next decade, instead of leaving teenage boys to fill the basement factories, print shops, laundries

and garages, so prolific in Lebanese city suburbs. Despite their limited scope, the work training courses which the Red Crescent and Samed⁵⁴ have recently initiated are valuable, not only because they develop Palestinians' manual and technical skills, but also because they carry political discussion and consciousness-raising into the workplace, whereas before there was a complete divorce between the two. In Samed's workshops a limited form of 'autogestion' is practised, with elected workers' committees, weekly discussion groups and seminars, training cycles and a magazine. The General Union of Palestinian Workers (GUPW) is making similar efforts for its members, and is gradually abandoning the traditional formula of inviting outside 'experts' to make speeches to a passive audience, in favour of seminars and discussion groups in which the workers themselves participate. One sign of evolution in the action of the Resistance Movement is the fact that a recent strike conducted by the Lebanese branch of the GUPW, against employers in the port of Beirut who refused to indemnify Palestinian workers,⁵⁵ was turned into a two-week training course in economic-political struggle. It is true that these organizational changes are limited to the Lebanese area, but their impact will certainly be felt by Palestinian workers in other areas.

An inhabitant of Tel al-Za'iter camp who works with the Revolution gave this evaluation of the PRM's achievements and failures, interesting because of the way it balances 'political and military victories' against lack of improvement in the life of the people:

If we think of what was required of the Revolution to give to the camps we have to admit to being disappointed... The Revolution won political and military victories, but with all this we failed to satisfy the needs of our people.

First Decade of Revolution: Victories and Tasks

Political mobilization

In attempting to assess action of the Resistance Movement among the Palestinian masses, we can ask two questions: (1) To what extent has the first emotional identification of the masses with the PRM been translated into organizational integration? (2) Has the PRM radically changed internal social relations within the camps?

Perhaps we can begin to answer the first question by remarking that, although the 1965 Revolution's leadership saw the camps as 'factories of men for the Revolution', and regarded them as their primary mass support, they did not see them as its heart and centre. None of the groups ever set up its headquarters in a camp, though all maintained a 'presence' in them.

The centres of the Revolution were not even the military bases, but were rather their offices in the capital cities. Amman, Damascus, Beirut: these were the areas of concentration for the PRM's cadres, close to the centres of communication and state power. Urbanization of the Revolution was already clear in Amman before the 1970 massacres,⁵⁶ and became even more pronounced later as armed struggle gradually yielded first place to diplomatic and informational action. This shift of emphasis inevitably increased the role of the middle classes at the expense of the masses.

At the same time important changes have come about through the masses' belief that the PRM is *their* Revolution. Most camp Palestinians below the age of forty have been active members in one or other of the Resistance groups, most have gone for periods of military training:

- For the Palestinian, being a member of an organization is a very natural thing, like his name, or his family. This is an important development. Of course it is also a danger because of the very big difference between the Palestinians' level of organization and that of all the other Arab masses.⁵⁷

Apart from full-time members, most camp Palestinians are affiliated to a Resistance group, giving part-time volunteer work or financial contributions. In times of crisis, women and children, as well as men, participate in camp defence. In addition, a significant number have become full-time, salaried cadres with the PRM, mainly at middle levels of leadership. As they gain experience, Palestinians from the masses will reach the higher levels of leadership which, until now, have been occupied mainly by revolutionary intellectuals. But such a shift in the class origins of the leadership is not likely to change the conditions of the masses, or the ideological direction of the Resistance Movement, unless at a certain moment the masses themselves, or their representatives, make a determined

bid for control. What is more likely is that the PRM leadership will show itself increasingly attentive to mass demands and needs, while steering them in broadly nationalist directions.

Even though a certain dislocation persists between the structures of the PRM and the masses in the camps, it is striking to what extent the politicization of camp Palestinians is self-sustaining. Their material conditions have changed little, and many of the Resistance groups' early activities have lapsed through shortage of organizers. Yet there are still certain basic kinds of work that are carried on in the camps without much support or direction from outside – for instance defence, consciousness-raising, contacts with the Lebanese population around. There is a constant political alertness which keeps the sense of autonomous revolution alive. There is also a belief, expressed by old as well as young, that it is the situation of the Palestinians which is the primary creator of revolution, not a particular organization or leadership. One of the oldest people I interviewed, a veteran of the 1936 Rebellion, answered a question on organization in Palestinian villages by saying:

Even if I feel that I have no power and no leader to direct me to rebel, I have another director which is suppression and subordination. Oppression creates in the human being the methods and ideology he needs to prepare the road of resistance against his persecutors.

There is both continuity and difference between these words and those of a much younger man, a Fatah militant from an exceptionally poor family, who had nonetheless managed to become an engineering student:

I thought of the things I must do to return to my country. I participated in all strikes and demonstrations on Palestinian issues. Finally, I joined one of the Resistance organizations, which represents for me the peak of my political consciousness. As an engineer, I feel there is a link between my specialization and the aims of the Revolution, so I am using my knowledge in a magazine for our fighters. There can be no separation between theory and action.

For the younger man, an organization exists which he believes has an ideology and line of action which will ultimately lead to liberation. But in both there is the same direct response, as human

beings, to a situation that is unacceptable because it negates them.

Even those who believe that the Revolution has become bureaucratized, or say that it has 'lost its meaning', or accuse a particular leadership of betrayal, do not see this as the end of the story. The absence of hero-worship of the leaders of the Revolution is striking. The photos of *shuhada'* are much more visible on the street walls of camps than those of the Resistance leaders, and people praise the latter sparingly, saying, 'They live the lives of the people.' If one falls, another will take his place. It is the invincibility of the Palestinian people as a whole, not a given party or leadership, that people mean when they say, drinking coffee, 'Revolution until victory!'

Revolution and social relations: how much has changed?

The second question, on the degree of revolutionary change in the camps, is not easy to answer. Definitely they are not foci of revolutionary ideology in the way that the guerrilla bases of South Yemen or the Sahara are. But nor are they areas of pure peasant conservatism, as the Lebanese Marxist Samir Franjich once wrote.⁵⁸ We can begin by saying that the preservation of peasant values and social organization by Palestinians in the camps was itself a form of resistance and included struggle among its values. Certainly, traditional peasant culture contained many elements that were politically conservative, for instance deference to the advice of the old (who usually advised patience and submission), respect for 'leading families', loyalty to patrons. But it contained strong collectivist and egalitarian elements as well.

The impact of the Disaster upon this traditional peasant culture was not to destroy or erode it, but rather to build up counter-forces, particularly that of political organization, which affected traditional forms without attacking them directly. It is probable that the *idea* of the conservatism of the masses in camps was too deeply imprinted on the minds of the Resistance leaders for them to risk creating antagonism by encouraging 'premature' revolutionary practices. If correct, this may explain why none of the groups made any strong effort to change the situation of women.

Yet even before the Revolution of 1965 there had been signs of rebellion within the camps against the old order. A veteran militant describes this growth of generational conflict:

When we left Palestine we brought with us our village customs and habits, which were symbolized by respect for the oldest member of the family and the oldest man in the village. They had great influence. A few young men tried to confront these notables because they felt they held back the evolution of the people, but they couldn't achieve anything before the Revolution. Confrontation sometimes took a violent form, for instance when the 'infantile leftists' attacked religious values and feelings, which only had a negative effect. What had real influence was the slow growth of armed struggle...

Given the strength of traditional peasant culture, and peasant distrust of 'foreign' ideologies, it was only in conjunction with national liberation struggle that revolutionary thinking could make any headway among the masses:

Leftist thinking started to spread in the camps, and in the Revolution itself, after 1967. Before that it had no chance to enter our very conservative society – the Communists tried after 1948, but they were accused of being atheists, and this was enough to end them then. After 1967, leftist thinking came to us through books, newspapers, organizations, and visits from European leftists. People began to say 'It's the leftists who come to fight with us...'

At the beginning of the Revolution, the leftists tended to oppose traditions, but with time this extreme leftism became modified and adapted to our reality. Through simplifying leftist ideas they have become more acceptable to our people. As a result, rightist thinking is much weaker than before. It still exists, but in the past it was the only ideology, whereas now leftist thinking is growing and is accepted.

This quotation gives an accurate picture of the ideological flux in the camps which makes it difficult to distinguish a Fatah militant from one from the Jebha or the Democratyeh. As for the Resistance groups, it is not evident that any one of them aimed first at changing social relations within the masses. Paradoxically, we find the largest Resistance group approaching the masses via the same leaders whom young camp militants had earlier challenged:

The first thing I usually do when I start working in a camp is to have a meeting with the old people, the *wujahat* and the heads of families. I say

to them, 'The camp belongs to you, it's up to you to solve the problems of marriage and neighbours' quarrels. We don't want to interfere in your affairs.' I meet them regularly every week, in a different house, we drink coffee and talk. I ask them, 'What do you want? You are asking for many things. To which do you give priority? To finishing the hospital? Or the sewerage system? Or to distributing money?' Finally they decide to finish the hospital first, then dig wells for water, then make the sewerage system, and not to distribute money. If I had come from above and imposed these decisions I would have been replacing one repression with another.⁵⁷

Before the 1965 Revolution, not only had religion and the *wujahat* kept their dominant place in camp culture, but the peasant family had maintained its traditional control over the lives of the young. For centuries, family membership and solidarity had been closely tied in to the celebration of the great religious feasts. Fawaz Turki, from a social level somewhat above the camps, recalls his revolt against the convention of the feasts:

we shocked our parents by refusing to adhere to the social dictates that governed the observation of the Eid.⁵⁸ At a time of year when, traditionally, Palestinians go around dressed in their best attire and visit friends and relatives to celebrate the Eid, we opted to ostentatiously wear our grubbier clothes, and head for the beaches.⁵⁹

For young camp Palestinians, revolt against the family took a less individualistic, more moderate form, compatible with cultural loyalty. A young man who went on a military training course in Syria some time between 1967 and 1969 recalls:

A teacher came to collect students who had left home without their parents' permission, and because there was going to be a feast. But we refused to go with him. We valued the feast, but we stayed in the camp. We forgot our families for the sake of our country.

It is very clear here that national struggle was the *only* obligation strong enough to confront the moral authority of the peasant family. For the families, to let their sons go for military training was an immense sacrifice, since they represented their economic future, their only hope before the Resistance Movement of one day escaping the squalor of the camps. But after 1969 the mass belief that the PRM was the beginning of the road back to Palestine

made most families ready to let their sons go for training, and those whose parents refused them permission would go anyway. Daughters also began to claim a role in the struggle. From then on, camp families boasted of their children's participation in the Revolution, and if they had anxieties they hid them.

Although the Resistance groups could count on the total support of the *jeel al-thawra*, they tried for the most part to prevent mass adolescent revolt, returning runaway children to their parents and trying to heal breaches in family solidarity. But the militancy of the sons definitely weakened the authority of the fathers,⁶² already undermined by the loss of land which had been one of its main bases. Patriarchal authority was also reduced by the greater earning power of the new educated generation, giving daughters as well as sons relatively more weight in family decisions.

As family relationships changed, so did those between teacher and student:

In schools before, there was absolute obedience to the teacher. If a student was absent from school for one day it took the whole family's pleading to get him readmitted. When the Revolution came, those who rejected to it most were students in the Intermediate classes - they joined the Revolution, and supported it. The schools became training camps, and education took a smaller part, most time being given to mobilization and training. A teacher who was not with the Revolution would lose respect.⁶³

The Revolution not only changed teacher-student relationships, it changed the people's concept of the teacher's role. Whereas traditionally the job of teacher had been the means to middle-class status and income, the Revolution honoured a new kind of teacher, one who not only preached struggle but practised it. A trenchant criticism of teachers before the Revolution, reflecting on the entire middle class, is this, from a building labourer:

Teachers told us something about Palestine, but they should have told us more. They should have participated in action, for example in demonstrations, but they hadn't the courage. Most were with the Deuxième Bureau... They are good at making speeches, and arguing, but when the Revolution faces difficulties, they will not be there. Only when the difficulties are over, then you will see them, in the front.

Today, most of the teachers who have remained in the camps are very far from the traditional *usrah*, with his townsman's *tarboosh*, his *sibha*, and his cane. They are sons of the camp, close to the people, called on to fulfil political as well as cultural functions, interpreting political events to the masses, mediating new ideas.

While it is often claimed that, with the Revolution, 'woman took her right role for the first time in Palestinian history', if the subject is discussed more deeply, people admit that there are still deeply entrenched obstacles to the political activity of women:

Up to now the Revolution hasn't given woman her authentic role. The Revolution still understands the role of the woman in a way that doesn't allow her to get free from her cage... The majority of our women up to now are not able to struggle against their families so as to share in political activity... I know people who are in responsible positions in the Revolution, and who claim that they are real revolutionaries, but who still do not allow their wives and daughters to take part in the Revolution.

This comment comes from one of a minority of camp girls who succeeded in working in a Resistance group without defying her family. She, and other girls of her generation, had taken part in strikes and demonstrations at school, only to find at home that going out to meetings at night or joining a political organization were prohibited activities. A few have managed to persuade their families that their national feelings have the same right of expression as their brothers'. But the majority do not dare to undertake political activity against the families' wills, especially as they cannot feel confident of the respect of the male members of the organizations they join.

It has often been remarked that during crises the code of conduct preventing girls from taking an active role is dropped, only to be reinforced when the crisis is over. Most families argue that if girls want to help the Revolution, they must do it in traditionally female ways, such as sewing uniforms for combatants, nursing or teaching children. But, so they argue – the supreme form of woman's contribution to the Revolution (reinforcing her traditional role) is to bear sons and bring them up to be militants.

The diversity of ideological currents in the camps – from Maoism to Muslim piety – is understandable if we remember that they are

densely packed natural settlements, with three and sometimes four generations inhabiting the same household. Family consciousness is still very strong, and conservatism extends not merely over the sphere of religious ideas and deep cultural values like women's 'honour', but also shapes ideas of class and names the groups that can give rise to political action. 'The nation' and 'the Resistance Movement' have meaning in a way that 'the proletariat' and 'women's oppression' still do not. The struggle of segments of the people against internal oppression are at present subsumed in the struggle of the whole, to exist as a nation in Palestine.

Thus, the radicalization of mass Palestinian thinking that accompanied the rise of the Resistance Movement appears to have been mainly limited to: (1) understanding of the links between Israel, US imperialism and Arab reaction; (2) the placing of the Palestinian struggle in a Third World context, with the alliances and antagonisms that this implies; and (3) the decision to struggle. But this, in the Arab context, is already a great deal. A sympathizer who knows the camps well comments:

For me, the most important thing is their extraordinary ability to bear loss, especially personal loss. It's something incredible... The masses are still giving, much more than the intelligentsia. I think this change was caused by the sense of belonging to a country, Palestine, which the Revolution expressed. The masses are attached to the Revolution as an expression of the homeland, consequently they are ready to sacrifice for it, simply, without pretensions. I have seen with my own eyes people dying every hour, in Baddawi and Tel al-Za'fer, Their capacity for sacrifice is something extraordinary.

What is the political significance of this unusual capacity to bear loss and to recover from attacks? We can say without rhetoric that the determination to carry on their struggle, shown by the Palestinian masses since the rise of the Resistance Movement, has a political importance that goes beyond any 'diplomatic victories' gained on the international scene, and beyond any immediate concessions that may be squeezed out of the Israelis by Arab/American pressures.

First, it has political effects upon the Palestinians themselves, strengthening the identity that unites them in spite of conflict within the Resistance Movement and geographical dispersion.

However costly, each phase of active struggle deepens the foundations of this unity. The immediate effects can be seen in the renewal of resistance inside Israel, and the refusal of West Bankers to be wooed away from the PLO. If this trend continues, it will become increasingly difficult for Israel – even in partnership with Jordan – to carve the Palestinians up into easily controlled cantons. One does not have to be a visionary to predict that the effort required of Israel to suppress the Palestinians will eventually weaken the structures of the Zionist state, and lead to their transformation.

A second gain from mass Palestinian resistance is that it has made it much harder to separate 'the problem' from the people, or to reach a settlement through hand-picked politicians making minor adjustments to frontiers. As a result of mass struggle, Palestinians have become expert at seeing through attempts to deceive them and efforts to present failures as victories. Both their voices and their actions will surely prevent from becoming permanent any settlement that legitimates Israel's presence as an extension of America in the Arab world.

A third gain from the experience of struggle over the last decade has been an understanding of how long and difficult it still must be. For the first five years after the rise of the Resistance Movement many Palestinians believed that liberation was at hand. This over-optimism has now disappeared, giving place to a much more realistic appraisal of the difficulties to be faced.

A fourth gain has been the experience of mass organization, on a scale hardly paralleled in the Arab world. From this has come a clearer understanding of the objective and subjective conditions within which mass organization must progress to reach greater effectiveness.

The effects of mass Palestinian struggle on the Arab scene will be slower to reveal their shape, because of the complex interplay between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces. As the Palestinian scholar Walid Khalidi has argued, 'a Palestinian state in the West Bank would tend to stabilize the present regimes and status quo. A mini-Palestine hemmed in by Israel on one side and Jordan on the other would have little scope for playing the role of 'fire under ashes' which Palestinian militants have seen as theirs since 1948. This would be a solution that would leave Israel's nature

as a militaristic and racist state unchanged, and all the arguments that Khalidi puts forward to convince Americans of the proposed state's harmlessness are ones that make it unattractive for the masses. No Palestinian state could afford to become, as Jordan is, an instrument for suppressing the liberation struggle. And even if a West Bank state emerges, it will not be able to accommodate the majority of Palestinians. The dispersion will continue to exist, with all the pressures it generates towards changing the status quo.

In Lebanon, hostility to the idea of a West Bank state has been strong among camp Palestinians from the time of its first launching in 1973. They mostly come from Galilee and the coastal cities, and have no homes to return to in the West Bank. Many do not regard the West Bank state as a serious proposal, but rather as a means to divide the Resistance Movement. Their opposition to it comes through pungently in comments like these:

There is not one of our people who has not sacrificed, and is not willing to sacrifice. But we must see our leadership announcing revolutionary programmes instead of flying to meet this king and that president, and working towards concessions that will humiliate our people.

We have a Revolution and the Arab states are offering us a state. A people's war doesn't last ten years only, it goes on until it achieves something.

These remarks reflect the attitude of the PFLP towards the PRM leadership's adoption, since 1973, of a moderate, compromising stance towards a settlement. While there are indications that Fatah's leaders believed in the genuineness of the West Bank state proposal when it was first put out, it is not likely that they are as ready to sell out the Revolution as the Rejection Front⁶⁸ claims. There will have to be clear political gains from negotiation, or, as a camp mother said, 'All our sons' blood will have been shed in vain.' Not only the Rejection Front but the mass of Fatah's following expect the leadership to reject submissive solutions, even if the alternative is to return once more to clandestinity and struggle.