

Hamas in the West Bank

**A study of the political position of the West Bank branch
between 1987 and 2007**

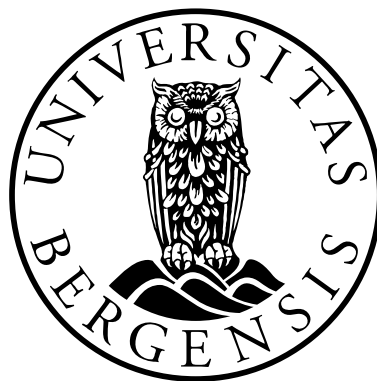


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Master`s thesis in history

University of Bergen

Spring 2011



Summary in Norwegian

Denne avhandlingen har som mål å diskutere og analysere den politiske posisjonen til den Islamistiske motstandsbevegelsen Hamas på Vestbredden, i perioden 1987 til 2007.

Utgangspunktet for analysen er den politiske situasjonen som har utviklet seg i de palestinske områdene etter sommeren 2007. Uenigheter mellom Fatah og Hamas brøt ut i regulære kamper mellom de to bevegelsenes sikkerhetsstyrker i juni 2007, der Hamas festet et grep om Gaza stripen. Den militære styrken til Hamas i Gaza var den utløsende årsaken til seieren, men overtakelsen var også basert på solid støtte i befolkningen, som følge av et bredt nettverk av sosiale velferdsorganisasjoner, og et solid politisk fundament.

Hamas har også vært politisk aktive på Vestbredden. Vestbredden er kjerneområdet i Israel-Palestina konflikten, og utgjør det største landområdet av de okkuperte områdene som Hamas ønsker å frigjøre. I etterkant av 2007 har det internasjonale samfunnet støttet den palestinske presidenten Mahmoud Abbas i å skape en bærekraftig sekulær stat basert på Vestbredden. Et av de viktigste målene i denne prosessen har vært å marginalisere Hamas, inkludert nedstengning av institusjoner og arrestasjoner, for å unngå en liknende situasjon som da Hamas overtok Gaza. I denne sammenheng reiser det seg interessante spørsmål. Det er tydelig at Israel og PA anser Hamas på Vestbredden som en politisk og militær trussel. Men hadde Hamas samme politiske styrke på Vestbredden som i Gaza i 2007? Hvorfor tok ikke Hamas også over Vestbredden samtidig? Eller var det motsatt: Hamas var en marginal bevegelse på Vestbredden, noe Israel/PA ønsket skulle vedvare?

Denne studien baserer seg på en tredeling av de viktigste aktivitetene til Hamas på Vestbredden; sosialt arbeid for fattige palestinere, militante aksjoner mot den israelske okkupasjonsmakten i tråd med ideologiske mål, og politisk arbeid for å oppnå økt innflytelse. Denne tredelingen viste seg som en suksess i overtakelsen av Gaza stripen, men det er mangel på akademisk litteratur rundt den tilsvarende aktiviteten på Vestbredden. For å besvare problemstillingen vil avhandlingen også undersøke en rekke andre nøkkelfaktorer. Ved å undersøke de historiske røttene til Hamas i det Muslimske Brorskapet vil avhandlingen vise hvordan Hamas utviklet organisasjonen på Vestbredden. Den politiske konteksten på Vestbredden vil også bli analysert, for å gi svar på hvilke eksterne faktorer som har påvirket Hamas i den aktuelle perioden. Avhandlingen vil også analysere den indre strukturen i Hamas på Vestbredden for å avdekke faktorer som har betydning for politisk innflytelse. Oppgaven er basert på den akademiske litteraturen om Hamas, og et feltarbeid på Vestbredden i oktober 2010 der det ble foretatt intervjuer med Hamas ledere.

Acknowledgements

First of all I would like to thank the people closest to me for their support throughout my studies. Thank you Mamma, Marita and Ellen Marie! Without your support I would never have finished this project.

I would also like to thank my supervisor at the University of Bergen/Christian Michelsens Institute, Anne Katrine Bang, for constructive and helpful feedback, and for all the times you have guided this thesis into the right track. Furthermore, I am very grateful for all the valuable comments, discussions and corrections from Are Knudsen here at the Chr. Michelsens Institute. This goes also to Frode Løvlie and Hilde Kjøstvedt at CMI, for extremely helpful comments and reviews during my work.

I am also grateful for the opportunity given to me by the Chr. Michelsens Insitute to write this thesis. The scholarship and contacts provided to me in Ramallah was invaluable for my fieldwork. Thanks also to all the staff at Muwatin for providing me with crucial help and assistance during my fieldwork. I will also give praise to the working environment at the CMI, especially down in the basement among the students!

Last, but not least, I have to thank the “gutta” here in Bergen, and your never ending internal e-mails. Good work.

Jarle Opedal Sunsehaugen, Bergen, 01.02.2011.

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Map¹



Map No. 3584 Rev. 2 UNITED NATIONS
January 2004

Department of Peacekeeping Operations
Cartographic Section

¹ ICG 2009:39

Abbreviations

DOP – Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (Oslo agreement)

Da`wa - “Call” or outreach to Muslims.

Fatah – Palestinian National Liberation Movement

Hamas – The Islamic Resistance Movement

Hudna – Ceasefire

IDF – Israeli Defense Force

OPT – Occupied Palestinian Territories

PLO – Palestine Liberation Organization – a multi-party confederation

Tahdiyah – Period of calm

Zakat – Religiously-ordained alms tax

Waqf – Religious endowment

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Chapter 1

Introduction and research question

Introduction

The name Hamas is an acronym for *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya* in Arabic, meaning the Islamic Resistance Movement. It is today the largest and most popular Islamist movement in Palestine, operating both in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank. Hamas was established immediately after the first Palestinian Intifada broke out in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) in 1987. Until that time, the most important Islamic movement in Palestine, the Muslim Brotherhood, had avoided active resistance against the Israeli occupation. The Brotherhood's limited focus on social and religious activities stood in the way of its full development as a popular force when the Intifada broke out. The dimension of the Intifada led the Brotherhood to create Hamas from its own ranks, in order to play an active role in the resistance for the first time. Hamas was established in the Gaza Strip, where it also conducted its first Intifada activities. In early 1988 Hamas expanded its organization and activities to the West Bank. However, in the West Bank it immediately faced difficulties in establishing a strong and viable organization, compared to the powerful branch developing in Gaza.

The main goal of Hamas, as expressed in the charter from 1988 and later political statements, implies resistance against the occupation of Palestine, in other words areas which are now known as Israel, Gaza and the West Bank (Hroub 2006:21-30). The resistance and other political strategies have been pursued during several historical phases in the Israeli – Palestinian conflict. In short, the history of Hamas started with the first Intifada period, which also led to the simultaneous Oslo negotiations. Hamas's resistance continued during the Oslo years from 1993, until the Second Intifada erupted in 2000. Further resistance was initiated from 2000, until the end of the Intifada in 2004/2005. The second Intifada was followed by Palestinian local and national elections in 2005/2006, won by Hamas. The Hamas government of 2006 turned out to be short-lived, and was succeeded by the National Unity government in March 2007. Three months later, the unity government was dissolved immediately after the militant takeover of Gaza by Hamas in June 2007 (Edwards 2010:310-317).

In this complex political context, this last incident marks a watershed in modern Palestinian history. In the following period, between 2007 and 2011, the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip has isolated the local population and the Hamas movement. In addition, the international community has increasingly focused on building a viable secular Palestinian state, based in

the West Bank. The West Bank and the Gaza Strip has thus been effectively separated since 2007, with Fatah controlling the West Bank, and Hamas in control of Gaza. Furthermore, Palestinian security sector reform has been a key instrument in building the secular West Bank state. Security cooperation between Israel and the PA in the West Bank has thus focused on marginalizing the Hamas branch. Their reasons have overlapped, as the PA feared a similar takeover by Hamas in the West Bank,² while Israel was intent on dismantling all militant groups (ICG 2010:i). Today Hamas members and leaders in the West Bank are thus frequently arrested, social institutions closed, and the movement is not allowed to operate in public.

The current marginalization of Hamas in the West Bank is well documented in research, carried out by think tanks like the International Crisis Group,³ and the Carnegie Endowment.⁴ However, research and media coverage regarding the development, activity and political position of Hamas in the West Bank, is scarce in covering the period between 1987 and 2007. Hamas`*s raison d'être*, the struggle to liberate Palestine,⁵ imply that it has a strong strategic interest in developing a powerful organization in the West Bank. After all the West Bank is the core area of the OPT, it is much larger than Gaza, houses more Palestinians, and it is the seat of the Palestinian Authority (PA). But the political interests of Israel and the PLO led to the current campaigns against Hamas in the West Bank. This raises interesting questions regarding the historical political position of Hamas in the West Bank prior to 2007. We can assume that both the PLO and Israel saw Hamas as serious political contender to be marginalized, by force if necessary. But, did this happen because Hamas always has been a strong force in the West Bank? Was Hamas in the West Bank an influential militant Islamist force, armed with Qassam-rockets and suicide bombers? What caused it to be popular, and did it reach its peak in terms of popular support simultaneously as the Gaza branch in 2007? Or was it the other way around: Hamas was a marginal force on the West Bank, and Israel/PA wanted to keep it that way? In the literature on Hamas there is a lacuna regarding the West Bank branch of Hamas. Information regarding Hamas in the West Bank is scattered in

² Popular opinion polls from 2009 showed an increase in the popularity of Hamas in the West Bank, versus a decrease in Gaza

http://www.carnegieendowment.org/arb/?fa=show&article=24120&zoom_highlight=hamas+west+bank

³ See the report "Squaring the Circle: Palestinian Security Reform under Occupation" from 2010.

⁴ http://www.carnegieendowment.org/arb/?fa=show&article=24120&zoom_highlight=hamas+west+bank

⁵ Originally Hamas aimed to liberate the historical Palestine, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River. This position has later been flexible, and other solutions have been considered, including the interim solution with a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, with armistice (Hroub 2000:69-73).

academic books and articles, often only referred to in short references or general phrases regarding the movement as an entirety (the literature will be elaborated in chapter two).

This thesis takes the 2007 takeover of Gaza by Hamas as a starting point. The takeover itself was violent, facilitated by Hamas's militant strength. However, the takeover was grounded in real political influence in Gaza, established as a result of significant political, militant and social activity in Gaza over the past twenty years. But, why did Hamas only takeover Gaza in 2007, and not the West Bank? To be able to answer this question, one needs to know more about the political positions of Hamas in the West Bank. It is thus the goal of this thesis to establish the political position of Hamas in the West Bank, between 1987 and 2007. It does so by analyzing the core factors enabling Hamas to take control in Gaza; namely social activity, militant activity and political activity.

Defining Hamas

Hamas is a multi-faceted and adaptable movement. It is thus useful to establish a definition of Hamas as a movement, which will serve as a platform in my discussions on Hamas. First of all, as the name implies, Hamas is an Islamic resistance movement, with a history of using violence to achieve its political goals. The use of violence as a strategy began already in late 1987, and later involved suicide attacks inside Israeli cities, and rocket attacks from Gaza. The aim of this resistance is to force the unconditional Israeli withdrawal, without surrendering any other Palestinian rights in return, and without recognizing Israel (Hroub 2006:44). A large number of Palestinians has stated its support for the violent approach of Hamas (Tamimi 2007:161, 162). Furthermore, Hamas inherited its focus on social and religious work from its mother movement, the Muslim Brotherhood. Hamas thus provides social welfare services and religious education to numerous poor Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. The unstoppable growth of Hamas between 1987 and 2007, including the victory in the 2006 elections, is largely attributed to its success in social work (Hroub 2006:70). However, despite the fact that Hamas probably won the 2006 elections because of its strong grassroots support, it is not possible to make clear connections between the social work and its political stature. There is no evidence that Hamas provides welfare assistance to Palestinians conditional upon political support (Knudsen 2005:1373). Still, social work is a major part of the activity of the West Bank branch of Hamas. In the academic literature this work is often explored in general terms, which makes it even more important to investigate how this work is performed, and whether it may influence the political standing of Hamas in the West Bank.

It is my assumption in this thesis, that the political position of Hamas at any given time is influenced by its political, social and militant activity. During the period of interest, Hamas has made a political transition from being a militant resistance movement boycotting the national elections, to participate in, and winning both local and national elections. The fact that Hamas decided to make it a political goal to have their avowed members placed in governmental offices, and won the elections, makes it possible to classify the movement as a political party (Harmel 1985:406, 407). It is also in the nature of Hamas, through its main goals, to seek political influence from the first day it was established. Hamas was thus an important participant in West Bank politics early on, especially in university student council elections, which is a major indicator of political leverage in Palestine.

In sum, I will thus define Hamas as an Islamist political party, a militant organization, and a social actor. I will consider the social work of Hamas as an important source of its grassroots political support, but this support is more a matter of the credibility of Hamas, not pressure to support Hamas in return for receiving social welfare assistance. As these three fields of activity are intertwined in the case of Hamas, this three-part divide will constitute the platform from which I will discuss the political position of Hamas in the West Bank.

Research Question

My starting point for this research question is the Hamas takeover of Gaza in 2007, the aforementioned current marginalization of Hamas in the West Bank, and the lacuna in the academic literature regarding the political position of Hamas in the West Bank between 1987 and 2007. To be able to explore, and not exclude, all relevant aspects of Hamas in the West Bank, this research question must be formulated widely:

- **What has been the political position of Hamas in the West Bank between 1987 and 2007?**

As noted above, this thesis is based on a three-part dividing of Hamas` activities. Hamas has worked to gain political influence in the West Bank throughout the period of interest. I will argue that the social and militant activities of the movement are variables which also effect on the political position of Hamas. The militant activities are aimed specifically at raising the political influence of the movement, by pressuring Israel to end the occupation. The social activities are thus somewhat different. It gives the movement much needed political support,

but Hamas does not engage in social work only to gain votes and political influence. Still, these three fields of activity have an effect on each other, and ultimately on the political position of Hamas on the West Bank.

The research question does also imply other actors and contenders involved in West Bank politics. The major Palestinian faction in the West Bank in the period of interest was the secular and nationalist Fatah party. Fatah has also been the dominant faction in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in this period, which, since 1974 have seen itself as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians (Gunning 2008:29). The role and interests of Israel will also be elaborated, as it is the main enemy and opponent for Hamas. The political position of Hamas in the West Bank must thus be seen in relation to the position and political interests of Fatah, the PLO and Israel.

Key issues

The political position of Hamas is also a result of other factors. First of all, the research question and the three-part dividing of the activity of Hamas lead to two important questions:

- *How did Hamas develop its organization in the West Bank in the period of interest?*
- *What have been the main activities of Hamas in the West Bank in the same period?*

To fully answer these questions, other underlying key issues must be explored as part of the thesis.

- **The Muslim Brotherhood connection:** The connection between the Palestinian Brotherhood and Hamas is a key factor to understand the development of Hamas.
- **Political context:** A presentation of the political system and modern history of Palestine will be necessary, to set the context in which Hamas exercise political influence. The continued Israeli/IDF presence in the West Bank (Israeli settlement expansion), and the establishment of the PA and its security forces, have been decisive factors for the operational freedom of Hamas on the West Bank.
- **Internal factors:** The political position of Hamas on the West Bank is influenced by internal matters in the movement, such as the way it is organized. Hence, internal structures of the movement will be analyzed.
- **West Bank V.S Gaza Strip:** The current geographical separation and social and political differentiations between Gaza and the West Bank, have historical roots.

These differences will be highlighted when relevant, to broaden the understanding of how Hamas developed and operates in the West Bank.

Chapter 2

Methodology and limitations of the study

How to approach a study of Hamas on the West Bank

Terms and concepts

There are many considerations to be made when conducting a study of Hamas in the West Bank. First of all, Hamas is an Islamist movement operating in a completely different political context than what exists in Norway. It has thus been important for me to be aware of my own point of view, especially since my perspective is from the outside. Furthermore, any study on Islamist movements must be aware of the terms and expressions used in media coverage and the academic literature on Islamic movements. These are politically charged, and they are at times used uncritically. Terms such as “Islamic fundamentalism, Islamism and political Islam”, has been thoroughly debated by scholars such as John Obert Voll, François Burgat, Gilles Kepel and Olivier Roy.⁶ The mixed use of such terms may be confusing, and it could exclude important distinctions between movements such as Hamas, and other more moderate movements. In the academic discourse, the term “Islamism” replaced the term “fundamentalism” during the 1980s. The term “Islamism” conforms to the Arabic reference to the Islamic movement (*al-harak al-Islamiyya*) and its adherents as Islamists (*Islamiyyun*) (Knudsen 2003:3). However, both Kepel and Burgat call for caution when using this term. The breadth and diversity in Islamic movements must be considered before using this term to generalize (Burgat 2003:8, 9, Kepel 2004:62). A discussion of the diversity in Islamic movements is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, as I will mainly use the terms “Islamism” and “Islamist movement” in this thesis, a brief definition of this term, and categories within the term, is useful to understand how the term applies to Hamas.

Bjørn Olav Utvik and Truls Hallberg Tønnesen states that Islamism could be understood to; *indicate an ideological tendency (or rather a family of tendencies) seeing the religion Islam as not only regulating the relationship between the individual believer and God, but containing as well divine directions which should govern social, judicial and political affairs in a Muslim society* (Tønnesen & Utvik 2008:7). In addition to this definition, it is important to note that the Islamist movement (in its widest sense) can be delimited by three traits. First of all they refer to themselves as the Islamic movement, secondly they call for an Islamic state ruled in accordance with Sharia, and finally they organize themselves for the purpose of

⁶ For full references see literature list.

achieving these goals (Knudsen 2003:3, Utvik 1993:201). The above definition thus makes a separation between Islamic movements which gives priority to political activism, and on the other hand movements that eschew political activism, focusing primarily on religious preaching to revive the Islamic faith in their communities⁷ (ICG 2005:3). It is thus possible to narrow the scope, and place Hamas in a category of movements seeking political power. A central dividing line within this category is whether a movement is inclined to use violence as a means to achieve its goals. Most Islamist movements in this category seek political power without the use of violence, and can thus be labeled as moderate.⁸ Hamas on the other hand, has worked in peaceful terms to achieve political power, but as it is operating under occupation, also taken the stand to engage in violent resistance (militant *Jihad*) (ICG 2005:3). Hamas is thus in the borderline between what is termed moderate and militant Islamist movements. Because of Hamas's violent tactics, several countries and organizations have taken a strong stand against Hamas, and it is listed as a terrorist organization by the EU,⁹ Israel,¹⁰ the UK¹¹ and the US.¹² Still, it is separable from other categories of militant *Jihadist* movements, such as the so-called *Jihadi-Salafiyya* current, which is launching militant Jihad to defend areas which historically has been under Muslim rule (ICG 2005:4).

The structure of the thesis

A historical study of Hamas can be structured in different ways. One approach is the chronological approach, in which key issues are discussed in chronological order. Another approach is thematic, in which key issues are sorted and discussed according to their importance. I have decided to combine these two approaches in my thesis. Hence, from chapter three forward, each chapter is chronological, but also sorted thematically. As indicated in chapter one, I approached Hamas in the West Bank based on the assumption that their activity can be divided in three main categories, political, social and militant activities. These three parts are thus discussed in separate chapters, focusing on key issues in chronological order.

⁷ Examples are the Salafiyya movement and the Tablighi movement (ICG 2005:4).

⁸ Examples are the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the PJD in Morocco (ICG 2005:3).

⁹ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2005/l_314/l_31420051130en00410045.pdf

¹⁰ <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/terrorism-%20obstacle%20to%20peace/hamas%20war%20against%20israel/>

¹¹ <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/counter-terrorism/proscribed-terror-groups/proscribed-groups?view=Binary>

¹² <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>

Limitations on the study

Time period

A major challenge to this study has been to define a relevant time period suitable to discuss my research question. The history of Hamas begins in 1987, and continues today. However, the strong historical roots to the Egyptian and Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood are the key to understand the development of Hamas on the West Bank. Chapter three therefore provides an historical background to Hamas, as a part of the Muslim Brotherhood network. The main part of this thesis covers the period between 1987 and 2007. In my exploration of the history of Hamas, I found no logical breaking-points until the aforementioned military takeover of Gaza in 2007. Ending the study of Hamas at an earlier period would exclude important political developments, such as the recent Palestinian elections. The political events after June 15th 2007 are thus beyond the scope of this thesis. The time-period covered is comprehensive. However, it is my claim that the development and activity of Hamas in the West Bank has been somewhat consistent during the period under study. I have thus explored the political context and history of the West Bank, to identify the most important elements of Hamas's position. This led me to key moments and key activity of Hamas, which I have emphasized. It has thus been possible to cover a twenty-year period, but without referring to every political incident.

Sources and field work

This thesis is based on both primary and secondary sources. The main secondary sources have been academic books, articles and reports, which are elaborated below. My primary sources are interviews conducted during my fieldwork in Ramallah in the West Bank, in October 2010. In Ramallah I was based at Muwatin, the Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy, as part of their research cooperation with CMI. However, fieldtrips to Hebron, Bethlehem, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv were also necessary, both to gain firsthand impressions of the area, and to conduct interviews.¹³ Especially a field trip to Hebron by invitation from TIPH, served to broaden my understanding of the political history of the West Bank. I also draw on my experience as trainee at the Norwegian embassy in Tel Aviv during fall of 2009, which gave me useful perspectives on the political context. During my fieldwork it was my intention to conduct personal interviews with Hamas members, students, activists and leaders on the West Bank. However, the reality on the West Bank as of 2010¹⁴ made this difficult. Before, during and after my stay, both Israeli and PA security forces arrested Hamas

¹³ A list of interviewees can be found in the Appendix

¹⁴ Hamas attacked Israeli settlers in August 2010 - <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6803OX20100901>

members. I was told that if Palestinians on the West Bank publicly displayed support for Hamas, they risked being arrested. People I met were thus reluctant to use their contacts to organize meetings for me with Hamas members. Arranging such meetings could get them imprisoned. Interviews with ordinary Hamas members, and Hamas-affiliated students were thus not possible. The only possible way for me to meet Hamas members, were thus to contact official Hamas representatives, in other words the elected PLC members from 2006. This was, however, also problematic. Several PLC members were in Israeli or PA prisons or detention centers. Others refused to meet me, claiming the security situation did not allow them to discuss issues regarding Hamas openly.

A few Hamas PLC members were however available for interviews in Ramallah. Evicted from their official PLC offices in 2007, these members had now gathered in new offices. Two of them, Mahmoud Musleh and Mahmoud al-Ramahi,¹⁵ was willing to give interviews. Another Hamas PLC member, Mohammad Totah, was available for interviews in Jerusalem. During June 2010, the Israeli government seized his Jerusalem ID-card, and evicted him from the city. Together with two other Hamas PLC members, Totah now lives in the Red Cross facilities in Sheikh Jarrah, Jerusalem, where he frequently meets foreign journalists and researchers. I conducted these three interviews as semi-structured and qualitative interviews. I had prepared an interview guide, which I used selectively, to be able to ask relevant follow-up questions to their answers. I was able to ask questions concerning the political and social work of Hamas, but I had been advised beforehand to avoid questions on its military activity. Questions regarding its military activity would probably been dismissed, but it is also considered a security risk to possess such information. The interview with al-Ramahi and Totah were held in English, while a professional interpreter was needed for the interview with Musleh. The translation of this interview has later been controlled by an Arabic-speaking Norwegian in Bergen. The interview with al-Ramahi was conducted without using a tape-recorder, while both Totah and Musleh agreed to be recorded. This created somewhat different interview situations. Al-Ramahi spoke quite freely off-tape, while I took notes. It is impossible for me to know if the tape-recorder put any restraints on Musleh and Totah. Quotes from these interviews are thus based on my personal notes, tape recordings and Musleh`s words translated by the interpreter. It is my decision to use the full name of these

¹⁵ Mahmoud al-Ramahi was arrested by Israel a month after my interview with him (<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/idf-arrests-hamas-lawmaker-from-the-west-bank-in-pre-dawn-raid-1.323987>).

three interviewees from Hamas. They are officially elected Hamas representatives, and as such, does not risk any harm by being linked to Hamas in this thesis. In addition, I also met several senior political analysts from different research institutions and Birzeit University. The names of some of these analysts must remain anonymous, by their personal request. These interviews were also held in English, some of them on tape, with selective use of the interview guide.

Two examples from my fieldwork can serve to illustrate the challenges I faced during my fieldwork. First of all, Hamas is not a straight forward-topic to discuss even with Hamas politicians. When asked how Hamas is organized on the West Bank, Mohammad Totah answered: *“Hamas is a secret movement. We (Jerusalem branch) do not know how they arrange things inside the movement”* (Mohammad Totah in interview with author). A similar answer was also given by Mahmoud al-Ramahi, who initially refused to discuss topics related to Hamas. This can be interpreted in two ways. They actually do not know how Hamas is organized, or they do not want to discuss this topic in detail. However, all three Hamas PLC members willingly discussed “Change and Reform”, the Hamas-bloc winning the 2006 elections. Second, Mahmoud Musleh gave an interesting perspective when asked “Do you think foreign journalists and researchers make mistakes in the way they approach Hamas?” Musleh answered: *“Of course all journalists and researchers are not the same. So I will categorize them into three categories: 1. Truth seekers. They might make mistakes – but these are pardonable. 2. Intelligence officials. We are aware of them – and their objectives and purposes. They want to have sensitive or classified information from us. But we do not have this information. We give them information – although we know they are ill-intentioned. This information is not dangerous. 3. Those who come to us with pre-judgements – ask questions as if they try to prove that we are terrorists and extremists. We exert maximum effort to this group to try to convince them the opposite. We try to make a change. But we deal with all these categories”*. He did not elaborate on which category I belonged to.

State of the current research on Hamas

The literature on Hamas is extensive. I have relied on academic books, articles and reports on Hamas, written by several different researchers or research institutions. In general, books and articles from Beverly Milton-Edwards, Khaled Hroub, Jeroen Gunning, Azzam Tamimi, Zaki Chehab, and Mishal & Sela are considered to be influential on Hamas.¹⁶ In addition, articles

¹⁶ For full references see the literature list.

and reports from research institutes and think-tanks have been used, such as the International Crisis Group and Carnegie Endowment. However, I will divide my discussion of the current literature on Hamas according to the chapters of this thesis. In chapter three, I relied on books and articles from Ziad Abu Amr, Khaled Hroub, Beverly Milton-Edwards and Mohammed K. Shadid. These books and articles enhanced my knowledge of the Palestinian Brotherhood, and the formative period of Hamas. I will emphasize one book named “*Political Parties in the West Bank under the Jordanian Regime, 1949-1967*”, edited by Amnon Cohen. The book is a compilation of Jordanian intelligence reports, found in Jordanian archives by the Israeli forces as they entered Jerusalem in 1967. From 1968 Amnon Cohen, an Israeli professor, gathered his students and gave them a bunch of files each. The result was Israeli researchers writing history based on the Jordanian intelligence service perspective (Anonymous political analyst in interview with author). Chapter four in Cohen`s book deals with the Muslim Brotherhood, including its history, structure and membership. According to one political analyst, areas in the West Bank with Brotherhood branches mentioned in this book, is almost certain to have an Hamas branch today (Anonymous political analyst in interview with author).

Chapter four relied on the aforementioned influential books and articles on Hamas, as did chapter five, although discussions with informants from my fieldwork were important in the latter. In chapter six on the social and religious work of Hamas, reports from the International Crisis Group (2003), Emanuel Schäublin (CCDP Geneva) and Jacob Høigilt (FAFO) contributed with detailed accounts from the West Bank. Secondary sources such as Hroub (2000), Mishal & Sela (2006) and Gunning (2008) was also valuable, and interviews from my fieldwork complemented the chapter. In chapter seven I was not able to make use of my own interviews, hence used only secondary sources. Tamimi, Chehab, B.M-Edwards (1996, 2010), Hroub (2000, 2006), ICG reports and Gunning gives detailed accounts the militant activity of Hamas. Chapter eight on political activity relied more on my own fieldwork, but here B.M-Edwards (2010), Kristianasen (1997), Gunning (2008), Hroub (2000), Mishal (2003 and personal interview), Tamimi, ICG reports and Mishal & Sela (2006) was invaluable secondary sources. In addition to these sources I have also relied on information from two books written by researchers from the field of terrorism studies. This field of research has grown rapidly after 9/11 2001, and researchers such as Matthew Levitt and Jonathan Schanzer have written on the Israeli-Palestine conflict. However, books and reports from the field of terrorism studies are often based on secondary sources, not personal fieldworks (Gunning 2008:5). These secondary sources are also often classified, such as intelligence reports,

making it impossible for outsiders to verify their claims. In addition, such books tend to be politically biased (linked to governments), and demonizing on the other part (Gunning 2008:5). In the case of Hamas, this category of research makes hard claims on the connection between the social work of Hamas and terrorism. Accordingly, all social welfare work of Hamas is perceived as breeding terrorism, and it rejects the notion that Hamas can be seen as a movement with separate social or military wings and goals. I have thus been critical and selective in my reading of these sources, and primarily used them to complement on incidents mentioned elsewhere.

Lacuna of literature on Hamas in the West Bank

There is, in my opinion, considerably less information available from open sources regarding the development of Hamas in the West Bank than Gaza during the period under study. The noticeable trend in both media coverage and academic literature on Hamas has been the focus given to its activities in Gaza. Information on its development and activities in the West Bank appears more randomly, and it is often not the main focus in the article/book where it is found. Furthermore, no books or articles (to my knowledge) have attempted a study solely on Hamas in the West Bank. Although this study is preoccupied with Hamas in the West Bank, it is the result of an extensive reading of sources which analyze the movement as a whole.

Chapter 3

Historical Background: The Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine

Introduction

Hamas has its ideological roots in the Egyptian and Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood movement. To fully understand the development of Hamas, it is necessary to introduce its origins. This chapter will explain the historical link between the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, by taking a closer look at the historical development of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood. I will focus on how it unfolded in Palestine, as well as its organization and activities. It is the goal of this chapter to analyze how the Brotherhood has developed differently in Gaza and the West Bank. This chapter is chronological, and it will also discuss the political context in the period under study.

The origins of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement in Egypt and Palestine

The Muslim Brotherhood (Jam`iyyat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun) is an Islamic mass movement established in the Egyptian city of Ismailiya in 1928. The founder of the movement, and later its first General Guide, was the charismatic school teacher and political reformer Hassan al-Banna. The Brotherhood started out as a small Islamic association aiming to promote personal piety and engage in charitable activity. In its first years, the movement focused on membership recruitment, private discussions of religion and moral reform, and the building of a social service organization. The activities during the formative years was motivated by the unwanted domination of foreign powers in Egypt, the poverty of the Egyptian people, and the overall declining morality in Egyptian society (Ziad Munson 2001:488-9).

Organization

The movement grew rapidly and spread out to many parts of the country, obtaining premises and funding, and drawing members from almost every segment in Egyptian society. The Brotherhood also acquired a political dimension, calling for Islamic reform of society and the government. The immediate catalyst for this political tone in its activities was the Arab general strike in Palestine in 1936, as both the leadership and members in Egypt identified the Palestine issue as the single most inspirational source for political activity in the movement (Mitchell 1969:31; Ziad Munson 2001:488). Establishing connections abroad, and later local branches, was a natural consequence of the Brotherhood ideology and organization. The Brotherhood established the "Section for Liaison with the Islamic World" as a part of their organization, which aimed to establish contacts with other Islamic associations (Mitchell 1969:172,173). The spread of the Islamic mission (da`wa) was therefore not confined to

Egypt, but to be spread throughout the Islamic world. The Brotherhood recruited, and still recruits, its members from all layers of society, but mainly from the educated middle class and lower classes. Members are recruited from local networks like mosques, charitable organizations, student unions and professional associations. Membership is regulated with strict criterions. The Brotherhood's organizational structure was established already in the 1940s. The foremost position in the Brotherhood is that of the General Guide (al-murshid al-`amm) (Mitchell 1969:165). The General Guide is the head of the society's two major governing bodies, the General Guidance Council, and the Consultative Council. These councils are centralized, and based at the Headquarters in Cairo. Members of the Brotherhood pledge allegiance to their local branches, which lies at the bottom of the Brotherhood hierarchy. Members register and pay membership dues to their local branch, which may be described as miniature headquarters (Mitchell 1969:177, 179). The Egyptian Brotherhood is today the largest political opposition group in Egypt, and widely considered as the mother organization of many modern Islamist movements.

Ideology

The Brotherhood ideology is based on their idea and definition of Islam, which was developed in the late 1930s. Islam is defined as a total, complete system, with the *Quran* and *Sunnah* as the sole reference points for structuring the life of the Muslim family, individual, community, and state (Mitchell 1969:14). Richard P. Mitchell refers to how al-Banna defined the scope of the Brotherhood for its members, within the abovementioned framework of Islam: “*as a Salafiyya message, a Sunni way, a Sufi truth, a political organization, an athletic group, a cultural-educational union, an economic company, and a social idea*” (Mitchell 1969:14). The main goal of the Muslim Brotherhood was thus to offer an alternative to the westernization, secularization, and materialism that threatened Muslim societies (Knudsen 2005:1375). The society created by Prophet Muhammad and his companions served as the main source of inspiration, and inspired by this the Brotherhood worked to transform the Egyptian society, advocating the establishment of an Islamic state without distinction between religion and government (Abu Amr 1993:6).

Palestine and the Muslim Brotherhood, the pre - 1948 period

The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood began establishing connections abroad from 1935 (Lia 1998:154). The Palestine area was a natural place to begin, considering the geographical proximity to Egypt and the unresolved situation in the British Mandate area (Mitchell 1969:55). In the 1930s, the unresolved Palestine issue sparked Arab protests and uprisings all over Palestine, directed against the British rule and Jewish mass immigration. The conflict between Arab and Jewish interests was met by a number of responses from the Palestinian Muslim community.¹⁷ The most successful response was the emergence of a radical modernist Islamic movement in Palestine. This movement was directed by the Islamic leader and preacher Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam (1882-1935), a charismatic personality who managed to influence the masses. The Sheikh has later been credited with introducing the idea of armed struggle to modern Palestinian politics (Edwards 1996:12). The Sheikh's political and military organization particularly influenced Palestinian peasants and workers, and introduced political ideas and principles based on Islam, thus familiar among the Palestinians. The influence of his ideas and activities prepared the ground for the message of the Muslim Brotherhood only a few years later. Hassan al-Banna therefore sent his brother, Abd al-Rahman al-Banna, to Palestine in 1935 to establish contacts. He met with Hajj Amin al-Huseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem and chairman of the Muslim Council, to discuss the expansion of the movement (Mitchell 1969:55). In the years following 1935, the Brotherhood became more directly involved in Palestinian affairs. During the Arab general strikes in 1936-37 the Brotherhood dispatched volunteers, supplies and equipment to Palestine, and organized public supportive demonstrations in Egypt (Mitchell 1969:55). The exact time for the establishment of the first Muslim Brotherhood branch in Palestine is however disputed. Some claim the first branch was inaugurated in Jerusalem on October 26, 1945 (Abu Amr 1994:3, Mishal & Sela 2006:16), while others refer to the establishment of the first branch in Jerusalem in 1946 (Cohen 1982:144, Shadid 1988:659).

It is however clear that in the course of 1946 the Brotherhood opened branches in Jaffa, Lydda, Haifa, Nablus and Tulkarem (Cohen 1982:144), all under the command of the leadership in Cairo (Abu Amr 1994:3). The local branches were at this point only charged with disseminating the ideology of the Brotherhood as widely as possible (Edwards 1996:35). The number of new branches in Palestine reached twenty-five by the year 1947, and the total

¹⁷ One response was the secular Palestinian – Arab nationalism, which demanded territorial rights and self determination. This response never achieved a large mass following (Edwards 1996:10).

membership somewhere between 12.000 and 20.000 (Abu Amr 1994:3). Al-Hajj Amin al-Husseini, served as the local Brotherhood leader for the Palestinian branches, and his name and contacts helped spread its influence in the area (Abu Amr 1994:3).

In the aftermath of the UN Partitions Plan for Palestine in 1947, Hassan al-Banna ordered the branches of the Brotherhood to prepare for *Jihad* in Palestine (Mitchell 1969:56).

Representatives was sent to Palestine to assist in the military training of Palestinian scouts, and in April 1948 three trained Brotherhood battalions were dispatched to assist in case fighting became necessary. Armed Egyptian Brotherhood volunteers also emerged in the border areas close to Gaza, ready to fight against the British and Jewish presence in Palestine.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine, 1948 – 1967

The establishment of the Israeli state in 1948 was met with a declaration of war by the neighboring Arab countries. When the first Arab-Israeli war broke out, Brotherhood volunteers were fighting alongside regular Arab armies. The Brotherhood is later said to have played a visible, but not decisive role in the war (Shadid 1988:659). The war ended in defeat for the Arab countries at the hands of Israel. The conclusion of separate armistice agreements between Israel and Jordan, Syria, Egypt, and Lebanon were finished in 1949 (Elaraby 1968:104).¹⁸ As a result of the war, at least 700.000¹⁹ Palestinians fled their homes,²⁰ some with Arab countries as their next destination, and others ending up as internally displaced persons (Edwards 1996:36). Understandably, taking the negative outcome of the 1948 war into consideration, many Palestinians perceived the war effort from the neighboring Arab states as incompetent, and therefore felt betrayed. The active resistance of the Brotherhood fighters, however, made a strong impression among Palestinians. As a result, many joined the Brotherhood ranks and became “new Brothers” in the newly established branches.

The cease-fire lines agreed upon after the war, better known as “the Green Line”, put Israel in control of almost 78% of the geographical entity then known as Palestine (Falah 2004:956). The remaining 22% consisted of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with the latter under Egyptian military administration, and the former annexed by the Jordanian government in 1950 (Edwards 1996:36). Islamic institutions such as the Waqf administration, the Muslim Councils, and the custodianship of the Muslim Holy places in Jerusalem were placed under the authority of the Jordanian and the Egyptian state (Edwards 1996:37). Importantly, the

¹⁸ For the armistice agreements: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/mideast.asp

¹⁹ Estimates on Palestinian refugees varies, 711.000 refugees are noted by the UN - <http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf/9a798adbf322aff38525617b006d88d7/93037e3b939746de8525610200567883>

²⁰ This incident is also referred to as the Palestinian exodus, or al-Nakbah (Tamimi 2007:53).

Egyptian and Jordanian states were often in competition with each other during the 1950s (Edwards 1996:36). The rule of president Gamal Abd al-Nasser's over Egypt and Gaza gave rise to Arab nationalism and Nasserism,²¹ which in turn led to oppression of Islamist movements such as the Brotherhood (Edwards 1996:36). The Jordanian King Hussein, on the other hand, made the Brotherhood an ally in the fight against local political forces, such as Communism, Arab nationalists and pro-Nasser elements (Abu Amr 1994:5). As a result, the Palestinian cause was subjugated by Arab nationalism and inter-Arab state competition for hegemony (Edwards 1996:36). The Palestinian Brotherhood branches in Gaza and the West Bank therefore followed distinct paths of development, and it is thus sensible to separate their respective histories in this chapter.

The Muslim Brotherhood in the West Bank

The Muslim Brotherhood established branches also in Jordan from 1945, focusing on education and gradual reform of the Islamic society through da`wa work (Roald 2008:89). In the aftermath of the 1948 war, several Brotherhood members who had been fighting for the Egyptian army established new local branches in the West Bank, e.g., in Hebron, Jenin, Qalqiliya, `Anabta, Dura, Surif, Sur Bahir, Tubas, Kafr Burqa, Jericho and in several refugee camps (Abu Amr 1994:3,4). Both the Hebron branch and a branch in Bethlehem were established toward the end of 1949, which gave the Brotherhood a firm foothold in the south of the West Bank (Cohen 1982:145). With the annexation of the West Bank by Jordan in 1950, the Brotherhood's West Bank and Jordanian branches merged.²² Importantly, and in contrast to the situation in Gaza and Egypt, the Brotherhood supported the King, at least as long as he took decisions in support of Islam. When Jordan oriented itself toward the West, however, or when the development deviated from what the Brotherhood deemed as "ethical values of Islam" (e.g., the consumption of alcohol), the Brotherhood criticized the King (Cohen 1982:148). Despite this at times tensions relationship between the King and the Brotherhood, the Jordanian regime allowed the Brotherhood to operate openly as an officially recognized group (Abu Amr 1994:5), whereas other political parties were outlawed. The King still kept strict control with the Brotherhood's activities, including arrests and surveillance, but used the Brotherhood as a buffer against other political forces in the country (Edwards 1996:57). The Jordanian Brotherhood could therefore turn to politics. Its political activity filled a vacuum in the Palestinian community after the 1948 war (Edwards 1996:58), and the

²¹ Nasserism is an Arab nationalist political ideology, based on the thinking of Nasser (Esposito 1998:133).

²² As a result of the annexation of the West Bank, its inhabitants also became Jordanian citizens (Abu Amr 1994:4).

Brotherhood was able to enter every parliamentary election from 1951 as long as their political program avoided issues deemed too controversial. Their performances in different elections and their public support was however limited, due to their support of the King. Branches from both sides of the river Jordan still managed to obtain seats in the parliament and gain political experience (Abu Amr 1994:5). The Brotherhood in Jordan/West Bank can thus be seen as a political party in this period (Cohen 1982:152).

Organization, membership and activity of the West Bank branch

In the first few years after the 1948 war, existing local branches under the Jordanian Brotherhood saw a temporary growth in both activity and membership.²³ According to Beverly Milton Edwards, there were sixteen branches in the West Bank in the beginning of the 1950s.²⁴ The merging of the West Bank branches into the Jordanian Brotherhood altered the Brotherhood organizational structure. The headquarters in Amman were responsible for general guidelines, and the post of the spiritual guide also rested in Jordanian hands.²⁵ However, in the period between 1948 and 1967, the local branches in Jordan and the West Bank were quite autonomous in terms of local decision-making (Cohen 1982:157, Edwards 1996:60). The temporary growth in activity and membership ended in 1954, when the Egyptian president Nasser turned against the Brotherhood organization in Egypt and Gaza. This crackdown also influenced the Jordanian branches, and the Egyptian headquarters even moved temporarily to Jerusalem during 1954 (Abu Amr 1994:4). However, the influence from the mother movement in Egypt was still significant, and Hassan al-Banna's political thinking and ideology was also visible in Jordan.

However, the Jordanian/West Bank Brotherhood differed from the Egyptian movement in terms of its activities. Compared to the Egyptian branch, the Jordanian Brotherhood did not organize and support activities for sectors such as students, workers or professionals. Other communal activities such as in Mosques, hospitals and schools were also largely absent (Cohen 1982:158). Still, the Brotherhood appears to have drawn its membership from all sectors of the society, although urban self-employed merchants and property owners predominated (Cohen 1982:165). The most important distinction in the activity and agenda of

²³ Membership records were never properly maintained from the period, but files compiled by the Jordanian intelligence Service reflects a low membership – never reaching more than 700 (Edwards 1996:61).

²⁴ Among these was Jerusalem, Hebron, Nablus, Jenin, Qalqiliya, Jericho, Anabta, Dura, Surif, Sur Bahir, Aqabat Jaber camp and Tulkaram (Edwards 1996:60).

²⁵ Abd al-Latif Abu Qara served as its spiritual guide in the first years. Between 1948-67 two Jordanian leaders, Abd al-Rahman al-Khalifa and Dr. Yousef al-Athm, directed the Brotherhood (Edwards 1996:59).

the Jordanian Brotherhood in the period, however, was its lack of focus on the liberation of Islamic lands from foreign domination. The Jordanian branch and the local branches in the West Bank had put the question of national liberation temporarily aside, and focused on internal politics and implications of the foreign policy of the Jordanian government. The main focus of the activities thus centered on local East and West Bank issues, not the Palestine cause (Edwards 1996:60). In contrast to the branches in Gaza and Egypt, the Brothers in Jordan never took up arms across the border against the Israeli occupation (Edwards 1996:62). The Jordanian Brotherhood also limited their participation in internal political demonstrations, and avoided political violence, and therefore never organized secret paramilitary cells, as the Brotherhood organization did both in Gaza and in Egypt (Cohen 1982:153). This can partly be explained by looking at the Jordanian society at the time, which was considerably more traditional and conservative than the Egyptian society. The process of modernization and westernization against which the Egyptian Brotherhood was fighting, was much slower in the Jordanian society. Because of this, the harsh measures taken by the Egyptian government against the Brotherhood in 1948, 1954 (also in Gaza) and in 1966 never was considered necessary in Jordan or the West Bank.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza

In the aftermath of the 1948 war, over 200.000 Palestinian refugees entered the Egyptian-ruled Gaza Strip, and joined the 60-80.000 people already living there (Edwards 1996:42). The history of the Brotherhood in the Gaza Strip in this period can roughly be divided in two. First, in the period between 1948 and 1954, the Brotherhood enjoyed support from the Egyptian regime and the movement grew steadily, partly because Egyptian Brotherhood members had established a foundation for a future network in Gaza from its presence in the Egyptian army and as volunteers in the 1948 war. The second period, from 1954 onwards, the Egyptian government led by Nasser banned the Egyptian Brotherhood and persecuted members in both Egypt and Gaza. From that time, the Brotherhood's fortune was entirely dependent on the politics formulated by Nasser, and it had to continue its activity in secret (Edwards 1996:46). This development strongly influenced the Brotherhood in Gaza, where its leaders and members were gradually arrested or put under surveillance.²⁶ Later in the period a number of other political organizations emerged in the strip, and started to compete for popular support. Among these were the Communist party, pan-Arab nationalist parties, the Ba`th party, the Arab Nationalist movement, and later also the Fatah movement (Abu Amr

²⁶ One of the member arrested was Ahmad Yasin (Abu Amr 1994:9).

1994:9, 10). Some of these parties and organizations at times enjoyed support from the Egyptian administration in the Gaza Strip (Abu Amr 1994:9).

Organization, membership and activity of the Gaza branch

The Brotherhood's popularity in Gaza peaked after the 1948 war. Many young Palestinians joined Brotherhood groups, often recruited by Egyptian soldiers, who were members of the Brotherhood (Abu Amr 1994:7). After the Egyptian revolution in 1952, the Egyptian headquarters sent official religious missions to the Strip, with leading members acting as liaison officers. The Gaza branches were headed by a few traditional leaders, who also continued to represent the Brotherhood when the organization went underground (Abu Amr 1994:9). Many of these leaders worked as teachers in the refugee camps. The Brotherhood branches were after a while divided into smaller units, referred to as families (*usra*) (Edwards 1996:45). The ban on the movement from 1954, and the secretive underground operations which followed, put the members under serious pressure. After a few years, members started to escape to the Gulf countries or Saudi Arabia, reducing the size of the organization (Abu Amr 1994:9).

This poor relationship between the Brotherhood and the Egyptian administration continued until the 1967 war. The first relatively calm years in the period gave the Brotherhood time to recruit new members and plan activities. Ziad Abu Amr notes that the Brotherhood in Gaza had over 1000 members spread across eleven branches in 1954 (Abu Amr 1994:8). This made the Brotherhood one of the largest organizations in the area. Membership was spread among various segments of the population. The Brotherhood was present in every refugee camp in the strip through its religious and social work. Here they especially recruited young students, even from the UNRWA run schools (Abu Amr 1994:8). In addition to social work, the activity of the movement was centered round two main themes: religious study and paramilitary training. The leaders of the different Gaza branches often held small reading sessions in their homes, and focused on religious education. They arranged several religious festivals, often connected to Islamic religious events (Edwards 1996:44). But the Brotherhood in Gaza also focused on the liberation of Palestine (*Jihad*) in their activities and training of their members. This included basic military training, in weapons use and guerilla warfare. It also included rhetoric on liberation, which was meant to prepare the Brothers for a future war against Israel (Edwards 1996:44). By these activities they were markedly different from their Brothers in the West Bank. The opportunity to fight Israel came already in 1956, when Israel

occupied the Gaza Strip as a part of their invasion of the Suez Canal. The occupation set off cross-border attacks from local Brotherhood activists, against Israeli soldiers (ICG 2004:4). The Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 1957 emboldened the militant activists of the Brotherhood. Some of them proposed to establish a guerilla force to continue the attacks against Israel, but the leadership refused²⁷ (ICG 2004:4). The increasingly militant attitude of the Brotherhood in Gaza provoked further crackdowns from the Egyptian government. By the mid-1960s the Brotherhood had almost ceased to exist, as a result, though the growing appeal of other political groups from the late 1950s also played its part (Shadid 1988:660). The Brotherhood was thus left politically powerless and insignificant as an organization.

It is important to note the differences between Egyptian and Jordanian policies toward the Muslim Brotherhood between 1948 and 1967. Two distinctly different political cultures developed in the two Palestinian territories. The Gaza branch developed a more secretive and militant Islamism, as a response to the crackdowns by Nasser. Members in Gaza thus had more experience in building clandestine and decentralized organizations, which was unnecessary for the West Bank/Jordanian Brotherhood because of their lawful status (Wiktorowicz 2004:120). This status also allowed the Jordanian Brotherhood to gain political experience. The Jordanian Brotherhood also avoided violence across the Israeli border, as opposed to the Gaza branch. These differences partly explain the disparate state of affairs for the Brotherhood in Gaza and the West Bank after the Israeli occupation in 1967.

The Palestinian Brotherhood, 1967-77

The Six Day War of 1967²⁸ resulted in the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and the Sinai Peninsula, after the armies of Egypt, Jordan and Syria had been defeated by Israel. This outcome of the war ended the inspiration that Nasserism had had on regional politics. Among the Arab countries in the Middle East, it led to a phase of political soul-searching, and an identity crisis (Edwards 1996:73). The war also had a profound effect on the general Islamic movement in the Middle East. Islamic movements emerged and rose steadily during the 1970s, termed as the “Islamic revival”, or the (re)emergence of “political Islam” (Hroub 2000:32).²⁹ The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt played a key role in this revival, and their strong position influenced other movements in the region. Moreover, these movements regarded the outcome of the war as a defeat for secular,

²⁷ Among these activists was Khalil al-Wazir, a future co-founder of Fatah (ICG 2004:4).

²⁸ The war took place between June 5th and June 10th 1967 (Edwards 2010:38).

²⁹ These terms refers to an Islamic reaction to the perceived challenge and hegemony from the West (Abu Amr 1994:12).

nationalist and socialist thinking in the region (Abu Amr 1994:11). The Islamists explained the Israeli war victory by highlighting the strong focus on religion among the Jews, while claiming this focus on Islam was absent in the Arab societies (Abu Amr 1994:11).

A new focal point thus emerged among Islamists during the 1970s and 80s, aimed to increase the focus on traditional Islamic values, and to restore the Islamic character in society.

However, at the Palestinian level, this “Islamic revival” was not as imminent as in Egypt. The secular PLO was restructured after 1967, and gained popular support for their focus on liberation through armed struggle (Edwards 1996:74). New ideas of self reliance and the pursuit of liberation strategies were also introduced to replace the dependence on Arab armies (Hroub 2000:29). Nationalism, led by PLO, became the strong force behind the Palestinian resistance movement in the first decade of the occupation. As a result, the Islamic revival emerged later in Palestine. I will explain this development by dividing the time period in two decades, (1967-77 and 1977-87), focusing on the political context and the organizational development of the Palestinian Brotherhood.

Occupation and reorganization, 1967-1977

During the first decade of Israeli occupation, the Palestinian Brotherhood regrouped and reasserted itself as a religious organization dedicated to the program of social reform and da`wa work. In contrast to the PLO-led Palestinian resistance movement, the Palestinian Brotherhood did not engage in violent resistance against the occupation. The Brotherhood was not prepared or willing, ideologically, politically or militarily to undertake direct and organized military action against Israel (Abu Amr 1994:10).

For the West Bank Brotherhood, the occupation first of all severed the physical link with the Jordanian Brotherhood. The new border limitations caused the Jordanian Brotherhood leaders to shut down the daily contact between the branches in the West and East Bank. Some local West Bank leaders even closed down the activity temporarily in their branches, while others escaped to Jordan in fear of being arrested by Israel (Edwards 1996:85). The decision to reduce the level of activity was also affected by the political climate. The dominance of secularism and nationalism in the West Bank left little room for the Brotherhood`s message. The West Bank Brotherhood also had a generation gap in their organization in this period. In contrast to the Gaza branch, the leadership was growing old, passive and out of touch with the bedrock of the society. They had problems attracting and recruiting new and young members with their ideology (Edwards 1996:85, 86).

In Gaza, the Brotherhood organization was close to non-existent the first few years after the war. Its ideas were still valued, but just as in the West Bank it was impossible for the Brotherhood to compete against the Palestinian national liberation movement. The Gaza branches thus also had problems recruiting new members, and focused on gradually establishing a low profile network of Muslim believers, with a shared Islamic background and vision (Edwards 1996:101). In 1971, an Israeli military campaign in Gaza altered the political climate. The campaign aimed to halt the four years of armed *Fedayeen*³⁰ struggle for national liberation against Israel (Edwards 1996:97). In addition to the forceful removal of suspected fighters, the Israeli campaign also obstructed the institution building of the nationalists, and hindered them in providing services for the local community. The Israeli campaign thus left a political vacuum in the Gaza Strip, a vacuum the Islamic movement began to fill in 1973 (Edwards 1996:98).

The Islamic Center in Gaza (al-Mujamma` al-Islami)

The first signs of the re-emergence of the Brotherhood in the Palestinian territories began in Gaza in 1973. The process was led by the late leader of Hamas, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, together with a number of other future Hamas leaders such as Dr. `Abd-al-`Aziz al-Rantisi and Dr. Mahmud al-Zahar (Abu Amr 1994:16). Yassin was a charismatic personality, and central to the future role of Islamic politics in Gaza. Yassin had no formal religious training, but had established a reputation as a religious reformer through his work with charity, teaching and religious preaching in the mosque (Edwards 1996:99). Under his guidance, the Brotherhood established new organizations and institutions across the Gaza Strip to spread its ideas and influence. The majority of these institutions were put under the authority of “the Islamic Center” and its leadership based in Gaza city. The Islamic Center (al-Mujamma) was primarily established as a mosque, but attached to it was also a medical clinic, a youth sports club, a nursing school, an Islamic festival hall, a *Zakat* committee, and a center for women activities (Abu Amr 1994:16). This institutional concept spread across the Strip, and it rapidly extended its influence over new mosques. Each Mujamma was administered by a committee controlled by the Brotherhood (Shadid 1988:674). The Mujamma project focused on re-shaping the Muslim community by founding of a network of schools and Qur`anic classes to preach and teach the message of Islam (Mishal 2003:575). There are contradicting reports

³⁰ The term “Fedayeen” refers to Palestinians fighting for national liberation, not Mujahedin militias which fight for a religious cause (Esposito 1998:233).

among scholars whether the Mujamma and the Brotherhood are really the same organization. It is clear that there were disagreements concerning the scale of the Mujamma (Mishal & Sela 2006:20). Regardless, the Mujamma took over and expanded the mainstream activities of the Brotherhood in Gaza, functioning as an extension or front. In fact, the focus of the Mujamma on developing a civil society in Gaza by forming voluntary associations did not clash with the established structure of the Brotherhood, which continued to exist separately (Mishal & Sela 2006:21, Edwards 1996:123). As the nationalist factions were unable to provide proper social services to the Palestinian people, the basic services offered by the Islamic Center, such as dentists, doctors, kindergartens and Quranic teachings, made the Mujamma an important institution in the Gaza society. During the mid-1970s, the Brotherhood leadership in Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza was loosely reorganized. They reunited, and formed one organization called “*the Muslim Brotherhood Society in Jordan and Palestine*” (Abu Amr 1994:10).³¹ The branch in the Gaza Strip could thus resume contact with the West Bank branch, and simultaneously distance itself from the mother organization in Egypt. In practice, the branches in Palestine could exchange visits, ideas and publications without considering the former border restrictions between them. Brotherhood members even claim monthly meetings were held from the early 1970s, between Hebron, Nablus and Gaza representatives (Edwards 1996:93).

The re-emergence of the Brotherhood, 1977 - 1987

The Brotherhood continued to focus on its educational, social and religious activities throughout the 1970s and 80s. As will be elaborated, Israel operated with a policy that targeted the PLO, not the Brotherhood. Compared to the PLO factions, the Brotherhood could thus build its organizational structure, and reach out to the masses without Israeli intervention (Abu Amr 1994:14). As a result, the power-balance between the PLO and the general Islamic movement changed in the 1970s. The PLO gradually lost the support of the masses, after failing to deliver on its declared objectives.³² The PLO also suffered internal splits when it opened the door for political and diplomatic solutions with Israel after the 1973 Yom Kippur war. Accordingly, PLO began considering accepting the two-state solution along the 1967 borders (Abu Amr 1994:13). Local and regional political factors also contributed to the weakening of the PLO. The ousting from Jordan in 1970-1 and Lebanon in 1982 generated an ideological and structural crisis inside the organization, with accusations of corruption and

³¹ However, Mohammed K. Shadid contradicts this reunion (Shadid 1988:664).

³² The strategy of the PLO is liberation of all of Palestine through armed struggle (Fedayeen forces), and the creation of a Palestinian state in which Jews, Muslims and Christians would co-exists (Edwards 1996:74).

inefficiency deepening the crisis (Mishal & Sela 2006:14). The Islamic movement perceived the new strategy of the PLO as giving up the goal of complete liberation of Palestinian soil. By presenting an alternative strategy to the PLO, the Palestinian Brotherhood could capitalize on the emerging political weakness of the PLO factions (Abu Amr 1994:13).

In the late 1970s, a number of incidents worked to strengthen the “Islamic Revival”: The oil boom enhanced the influence of the oil producing states in the Arab world, and wealthy countries such as Saudi Arabia became active supporters of different Islamic movements, and the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran provided other Islamist movements with a model to emulate (Abu Amr 1994:12). It is also important to emphasize the impact of the continued Israeli occupation and the rise of the rightwing elements in Israeli politics in the 1970s. The establishment of the Gush Emunim movement in 1974 initiated the national-religious settlement project in the West Bank (ICG 2009:3), which increased after the electoral victory of the rightwing Likud party in 1977. The religious framing of the settler-movement bolstered the existing Islamist tendencies in the Palestinian territories and beyond (Wiktorowicz 2004:119).

The West Bank Brotherhood

The West Bank branch had struggled in the first decade after the occupation with aging leaders, an age gap among members in many branches, and problems with recruiting new members. Starting from 1977 the situation improved. The local branches were now able to attract new and younger members, many of which had grown up under the occupation. The first areas where the Brotherhood re-established their activities were Nablus, Ramallah, Hebron and Jerusalem (Edwards 1996:130, 131). However, the influence of Palestinian nationalism and the leftist parties were stronger in the West Bank society than in Gaza. This was evident with an ongoing secularization apparent at every level of the society, including in the establishment of new “national institutions” such as hospitals, newspapers, research centers and universities (Edwards 1996:131). The secularization was part of an intellectual trend in the West Bank, particularly influential in the cities. In rural areas and in conservative cities like Hebron, people were less receptive to secularization and Palestinian nationalism (Edwards 1996:131). As indicated above, the success of the nationalists gradually broke down during the 1970s. At the beginning of the 1980s the PLO managed to partially recover and restore some of their political power, but the Muslim Brotherhood still steadily increased its influence. From the early 1980s, the Brotherhood branches in the West Bank and Gaza was

under the command of a council of elected representatives drawn from the Gaza Strip, and from the central, northern and southern regions of the West Bank (Tamimi 2007:54,55).

Educational and religious institutions in the West Bank

The growing university sector in the West Bank became an important political arena from the end of the 1970s, when the Israeli Likud party banned Palestinian municipal elections. The Brotherhood entered this arena to raise its profile in relation to other political factions, and to compete in the annual student council elections (Edwards 1996:132), organizing student groups which offered Islamic alternatives on campus and Islamic activities (Mahmoud Musleh in interview with author). The main focus for the Islamists on the universities was often not to protest against the occupation, but to compete for influence among its co-students. From the beginning of the 1980s, the Brotherhood ideology seemed to increasingly appeal to students, especially those from lower classes and/or from conservative areas (Gunning 2008:33) At the al-Najah University in Nablus, the rise of an Islamic bloc (MB and Islamic Jihad) was apparent already from 1981, and in the five years before the closure of the university in 1987, the Islamic bloc won a majority in all annual student elections³³ (Edwards 1996:135).

Hamas member and former Birzeit student Mahmoud Musleh emphasized that the Brotherhood set out actively to conquer the nationalist influence in Birzeit from late 1970s: *“The major problem that faced them (Brotherhood student blocs) at that time was that the society was dominantly affected by the secular and atheist groups. This was a big problem. So they started to focus their seminars, work, symposiums, and speeches on how to turn people from atheism into faith”* (Mahmoud Musleh in interview with author).

Traditionally Birzeit is regarded as a secular and liberal University, but the Islamists managed to win on average a third of the student votes there during the 1980s (Edwards 1996:137). Student leaders of the Islamic bloc in Birzeit later also became leading figures in the nationwide Islamic movement (Edwards 1996:127). At the Hebron University the Brotherhood was part of the Islamic bloc, and dominated student politics during the 1980s. However, the tension between the nationalists and the Islamists found elsewhere in the West Bank and Gaza were not present in Hebron. Here the local Fatah representatives had more religious leanings,

³³ In line with its policy of targeting nationalists in this period, the Israeli authorities arrested 100 Fatah youth members before the elections in 1986/87, and thus contributed to a 5 % increase in the Islamic bloc vote (Edwards 1996:135).

and the leftwing forces were all but absent, probably preventing Palestinian infighting (Edwards 1996:138).

The many West Bank mosques constituted the other major arena for the Brotherhood's activity in this period. While the mosques primarily function as places of worship, they were also used for political work. And, because they are defined as religious sanctuaries Israel did not impose the same restrictions on them as on other political institutions during the 1970s and 80s (Abu Amr 1994:15). This made it possible to keep religious functions operative, and made mosques a good place for the Brotherhood to recruit new members and expand its influence. The total number of mosques on the West Bank also increased from 400 in 1967, to 750 in 1987 (Abu Amr 1994:15). This was a result of many factors, but it is important to note that the Islamists understood the power of the mosques for the spreading and consolidation of political influence, vis-à-vis the secular and national forces. The mosques in the West Bank were often connected to *Waqf* institutions. The *Waqf* institutions employed many Palestinians, among them Brotherhood members or sympathizers. The Brotherhood thus got privileged access to the masses through their influence in these institutions, and it got unofficial credit for the services rendered³⁴ (Abu Amr 1994:15).

In other areas of activity, the Brotherhood in the West Bank was less successful. The welfare and education structure established by the nationalists was weak, but solid enough to restrict the Brotherhood's influence. In addition, the Brotherhood was not able to influence other associations such as professional associations, trade union groups or NGOs (Edwards 1996:139). The Brotherhood was thus not able to establish a strong extended organization, such as the Mujamma, in the West Bank.

The Islamic Center increases its influence in Gaza

The Brotherhood's activity in the Gaza Strip between 1977 and 1987 revolved around the Islamic Centre. The Centre had developed into two parallel organizations. The formal and registered organization had offices in Gaza city, and focused on charity and welfare work. But another informal part of the organization operated from the home of Yassin and a nearby mosque (Edwards 1996:125). This part of the Center was responsible for political activities. Led by Yassin, this component of the Centre gradually became more involved in the political

³⁴ In 1988, Jordan disengaged from the West Bank with the exception of the Jerusalem branch of the Ministry of Awqaf. In 1994-95, Jordan handed most of the Jerusalem branch of its Awqaf Ministry over to the PA. It kept control of the *waqf* and zakat of the city of East Jerusalem (Schäublin 2009:35).

sphere during the 1980s; trying to curb the secularization of the Gaza society and compete with nationalism for popular support. Mujamma leaders also kept in contact with other Islamic leaders outside of Gaza, and in particular through Brotherhood leaders in Jordan, the Mujamma was able to receive economic support from abroad (Mishal & Sela 2006:21). This financial aid in turn enabled the Mujamma to send their future leaders for education in Saudi Arabia or the West. The Gaza Strip also saw a major rise in the number of mosques between 1967 and 1987. Here the increase was even greater than in the West Bank, from 200 – to 600 mosques (Abu Amr 1994:15). The strong organization and leadership of the Mujamma, and its influence and importance in Gaza did not have a parallel in the West Bank.

Israeli policies

In their struggle for influence in Gaza, the Center found unexpected support in the Israeli state. Throughout the 1980s, Israel feared the strong popular support of the PLO in Gaza, and therefore continued its policy of targeting them. The Mujamma activities, on the other hand, were often left undisturbed, enabling the movement to organize and mobilize a strong institutional basis without interruptions (Edwards 1996:105, Gunning 2008:34).). In fact, Israel even sponsored a number of Mujamma`s activities (Edwards 1996:128, 129). This political space provided by Israel to the Mujamma throughout the 1980s was critical for the development of the Islamist movement in Palestine. The Mujamma`s level of influence in Gaza is perhaps best described by the Israeli adviser on Palestinian religious affairs in the 1980s and 1990s, Avner Cohen. He was already in June 1984 worried about reports on how Mujamma used the Mosques to store weapons, train fighters and incite against the Jews (Edwards 2010:60). According to Beverly Milton Edwards & Stephen Farrell, Cohen sent a letter to the head of the Israeli Civil Administration and security forces, where he concluded that “*if Israel keeps covering its eyes toward Mujamma`s activities, it will go against Israel in the future*” (Edwards 2010:60).

Sources from my fieldwork emphasized the significance of the differences in Israeli policies towards Gaza and the West Bank. My sources partly explained the difference by referring to the structure and organization of the Israeli Civil Administration, the security forces, and the IDF, in which field commanders often have wide powers when it comes to decision making. In this case, the Israeli field-commander responsible for the Gaza Strip believed that oppressing PLO and leaving the Mujamma alone would benefit Israel, while the West Bank commander did not. As a result, the West Bank Brotherhood was under the same Israeli restrictions as the PLO, while the Mujamma in Gaza were left free to operate and build its

organization (Interview with anonymous political analyst). In 1978 Israel even granted the Mujamma a legal license to operate, and Gaza field commanders donated funds to build mosques which were controlled by the Mujamma (Edwards 2010:44, Edwards 1996:128). This difference is a significant “piece of the puzzle” to understand how the Mujamma was able to grow into a large organization in Gaza, while Brethren in the West Bank struggled.³⁵ However, in 1984 the political leaders of the Mujamma, including Yassin, were arrested by the Israelis for the first time, charged with illegal possession of arms. The weapons were to be used by a newly established military wing, the Mujahideen Filastine (Chehab 2007:21). After a year in prison, Yassin was released as part of a prisoner exchange, but was not allowed to return to his former duties as the leader of the Mujamma. Instead he appointed Dr. Rantisi and Dr. Ibrahim Yazouri as formal leaders (Edwards 1996:115). The arrest was the first hint of the coming - and more militant leaning of the Mujamma. The leaders of the organization had clearly initiated a new stage, which involved more structural planning of the future, willingness to use violence, and the development of military capabilities (Mishal & Sela 2006:23).

Mujamma`s activities

In the early 1980s the Mujamma enjoyed extensive popularity in Gaza. The organization used links it had established with the grassroots of the Gaza society, mainly through its charitable and mosque activities. Interpersonal networks and informal interactions based on friendship, reputation and trust were more important than their hierarchical structure, also when it came to expanding the organization and building more public support (Mishal & Sela 2006:153). This can be observed in the popularity of the Mujamma`s conciliation committee, established to offer its services in mediation and conflict resolution between local clans involved in feuds.³⁶ (Mishal & Sela 2006:21). The Mujamma continued its policy of Islamizing the society in the years leading up to the Intifada. The main focus was on da`wa work from below, not resistance. However, a famous incident took place in 1979, when the Mujamma attended and lost an election for the administrative committee in the Palestinian Red Crescent in Gaza City, controlled by the nationalists. A few months later, Mujamma members initiated a violent campaign to revenge the loss, burning down the Red Cross offices, and attacking cafes, video shops and liquor stores (Edwards 1996:107). This campaign demonstrates that

³⁵ The appointment of Ariel Sharon as defense minister in Israel in 1981 led to the removal of pro-PLO mayors on the West Bank, replaced by Israeli officers. Israeli officers held these positions until 1987 (Mishal 1994:21).

³⁶ Given the social prestige involved in mediating feuds, and the tendency of customary Palestinian law to favor the strongest part in such feuds, it enabled the Mujamma to eject greater equity into the process of mediation (Mishal & Sela 2006:21).

the Mujamma was well organized already in 1980, and that its strategies became more violent. But the real institutional base for the Mujamma in Gaza was to become the Islamic university. Here they gradually infiltrated the administration from the early 1980s, and later won elections for student associations. But they also took control over the university by violent means. The university soon became an arena for fights and struggles between nationalists and the Islamists – in line with the strategic interest of Israel (Edwards 1996:109 - 112). By controlling the university, the Mujamma could influence the society, give valuable training to its members, and shape the minds of the youth (Edwards 1996:114).

Later the Mujamma contested elections to professional associations, to broaden the influence on the civil society. Members with higher education were encouraged to join such associations, in an attempt to influence the public sphere. Furthermore, to increase the influence on the public agenda, the Mujamma initiated strikes in important sectors of the society from 1980 (Mishal & Sela 2006:23). They also ignited unrest in the mosques from 1982, and initiated mass demonstrations against Israel in 1985/86 (Hroub 2000:38). Starting from 1985, a more intensive Islamic pressure was observed in the Gaza Strip. Shops selling alcohol was closed, along with cinemas and casinos. When shop-owners protested, they found their shops vandalized. The tendency was that things deemed inconsistent with Islamic tradition, were closed down or even attacked (Edwards 1996:115). This process was more intensive in the Gaza Strip than the West Bank.

Socio- political differences between Gaza and the West Bank

There are several historical, political and socio-economic differences between the West Bank and Gaza. There are also significant such differences inside the West Bank. In these lie the key to understand why the Brotherhood, and later Hamas, has enjoyed stronger influence in Gaza than the West Bank, but also why it has been stronger in certain areas of the West Bank. During my fieldwork in Ramallah I asked several key informants about these differences. Researcher and former Palestinian minister of foreign affairs Ziad Abu Amr stated that the society in Gaza has historically been more socially conservative and less susceptible to outside influences than the society in the West Bank (Ziad Abu Amr in interview with author). Mahmoud Musleh emphasized that the Gaza society has been poorer, overcrowded and more traditional in terms of the importance of tribes and families. According to Musleh, the Egyptian Brotherhood has always been a powerful force in Gaza, which has made it easier for the Islamic movement in Gaza to recruit new members. In the West Bank on the other hand; *“You need a bigger effort to convince the people to become Islamic affiliates. When*

these people have joined the Islamic movement in the West Bank – they will stay Islamic affiliates” (Musleh in interview with author). The literature on the Brotherhood and Hamas also supports this notion. The harsh economic conditions in Gaza, and the importance of traditional social relationships, have provided a climate for the Islamists to gain influence and trust in the society (Abu Amr 1994: 20, 21). The West Bank inhabitants on their side have been more mobile than the Gaza inhabitants (who often travelled to Egypt), and thus more exposed to outside influences. Mishal & Sela also points out that the West Bank Brotherhood always have enjoyed support from members with a higher socio-economic profile, including landowners, merchants and middle-class officials and professionals (Mishal & Sela 2006:25, Gunning 2008:34). In addition, the PLO and has had a much stronger presence in the West Bank than Gaza, and Israeli settlements and later restrictions on movement have also affected the West Bank more than Gaza.

However, such differences between Gaza and the West Bank are also present within the West Bank. Geographically, the Brotherhood (and later Hamas) support in the West Bank has been concentrated in northern and southern towns, which are predominantly conservative. Central parts of the West Bank on the other hand, include a sizeable Christian minority, and the influence from foreign visitors. Central areas, especially Ramallah, have also been the center for Arab nationalist and communist influence (Amr 1994:21). In interviews with author, Mahmoud Musleh, Mohammad Totah and Mahmoud al-Ramahi all pointed to Hebron and Nablus when asked if Hamas has been stronger in certain areas of the West Bank. When asked why Hamas was stronger in these areas, Ziad Abu Amr responded that certain areas in the West Bank, such as Hebron and Nablus have always been more traditional and conservative (Ziad Abu Amr in interview with author). Mahmoud Musleh added to the list of differences between Gaza and the West Bank, when asked the same questions above. He stated that the overcrowded areas in Gaza have given people there a more explosive temper, which easy leads them into trouble. He cited an example from an Israeli prison in the Negev desert, were West Bank and Gaza prisoners established themselves in to different camps. The West Bank camp was united and calm, while the Gaza camp was often creating trouble. *“It is easy to make a Gaza man an angry man”* (Musleh in interview with author). It is difficult to evaluate this statement by Musleh, but it was among the issues he chose to emphasize when asked about differences between the West Bank and Gaza.

The issue of clans³⁷ and politics are also influential in Palestinian politics. According to Glenn E. Robinson, Palestinian clans act on the principle of “*amoral familialism*”. That is, members of the clan will act to advance the interests of the clan over all other social ties. Furthermore, he states that clans are not social organizations generally receptive to radical Islamism or *jihadism*. Indeed, they are forces for conservative, status-quo oriented social norms (Robinson 2008:1-10). The clans of Palestine have thus been known to focus on what is best for the clan. It has not been possible for this thesis to determine how clan politics in the West Bank affects the political situation of Hamas. However, clans are known to be stronger in Gaza than in the West Bank, and clans are known to be stronger in certain areas of the West Bank such as Hebron and Nablus. In addition, Robinson notes that clan and clan leaders have considerable local power, but not national power. However, clans can become politically important in two ways: First, clans may act in concert if they feel threatened collectively, and second, when elections are structured by districts, clans can become centrally important in electing representatives in any one district (Robinson 2008:3). It is thus possible to imagine that clans supportive of Hamas, will give Hamas a political boost in areas where clans are strong. However, from my fieldwork, it is my impression that strong support for Hamas in certain areas is more related to conservatism and traditionalism, than clan-politics. Even in Gaza, Hamas has had severe trouble handling initiatives from clans (Robinson 2008:1-10).

Conclusive remarks

There are strong ties between the Egyptian Brotherhood, the Palestinian Brotherhood and Hamas. The period between 1948 and 1967 is important in the development of the Brotherhood. The West Bank Brothers belonged to the Jordanian branch, while the Gaza Brothers belonged to the Egyptian branch. The two branches thus developed within two distinct political climates. The West Bank Brotherhood participated peacefully in politics, while the Gaza Brothers built a clandestine organization and engaged in violent attacks against the occupiers. After 1967 the Brotherhood re-emerged faster and stronger in Gaza than in the West Bank. This development was influenced by socio-economic, ideological and political factors (Gunning 2008:31). In terms of socio-economic factors, Gaza offered a much more conducive combination of urbanization, entrenched poverty, an emerging lower middle class, and conservative culture, which helped the Brotherhood’s activist approach to flourish (Gunning 2008:31). The ideological aspect was clear in the sense that other political competitors, mainly secular nationalists, were stronger in the West Bank than in Gaza

³⁷ A clan will consist of at least several extended families claiming a shared ancestry, linked through the father’s male line (Robinson 2008:2).

(Gunning 2008:31). As stated by Ziad Abu Amr, “*the Brotherhood ideology did not have the same fertile conditions in the West Bank as in Gaza*” (Abu Amr in interview with author). In political terms, the most important factor was the direct and indirect support given by Israel to the Mujamma in Gaza. The Brotherhood in the West Bank did not have the same leeway to operate and build its organization, but were faced with many of the same restrictions as the PLO. Another important political factor was the emerging Israeli settlement focus from 1974. Israeli strategic and religious interests were mainly focused on the West Bank. In sum, the influence and scale of the Mujamma network thus far exceeded the Brotherhood network in the West Bank. The West Bank Brotherhood did neither have the charismatic leaders, nor the conditions to create and control public institutions as the Mujamma. The Palestinian Brotherhood thus entered the Intifada period with its gravity in the Gaza Strip.

Chapter 4

The formative period of Hamas in the West Bank, 1987 - 1993

Introduction

The first Palestinian Intifada (1987 – 1993) formed the context in which Hamas emerged as a major political force. Public support for the organization increased steadily in Gaza and the West Bank during this period. However, Hamas had a more solid network to build on in Gaza, and it faced stronger competition in the West Bank from secular nationalist forces. In this chapter the main focus is the establishment and early development of Hamas. As the Brotherhood developed differently in Gaza and the West Bank prior to the Intifada, an interesting question arises: *Did the two Hamas branches also develop differently during the first Intifada?* I will discuss the formative period in four phases, and round off the chapter by introducing the new political context which developed in the West Bank in the wake of the Intifada.

The first Palestinian Intifada 1987-1993

The first Intifada was triggered by the deaths of four Palestinian workers the 9th of December 1987. The workers from the Jabaliyah refugee camp in Gaza, died when a Israeli truck hit their car as they returned from a day`s work in Israel (Aronson 1987:323). In the following days, disturbances and violent disruptions spread from the Jabaliyah camp, throughout the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and Jerusalem (Aronson 1987:323). The spontaneous and uncoordinated local riots had suddenly spread to the whole OPT. It was essentially the hard living conditions for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, created by the Israeli occupation, which suddenly reached an unprecedented and unacceptable state. But still, the uprising took the Israelis by surprise. The Palestinian demonstrators burned tires, threw stones and Molotov cocktails, and built barricades against Israeli soldiers. After a while, the intifada also included full commercial strikes, and drew support from the broad range of the entire Palestinian community. Thousands of Palestinians took to the streets, and as Beverly Milton-Edwards notes, *“It appeared as if one mighty force was uniting the Palestinians, their desire to bring the Israeli occupation to an end through an unprecedented campaign of mass rebellion and civil disobedience”* (Edwards 2010:53).

The IDF reacted immediately with full crowd control measures, including tear gas, water cannons and live ammunition (Aronson 1987:324). The Israeli defense minister Yitzhak Rabin, implemented his “Iron Fist” policy, which included the use of force and might to

restore order. Rabin stated at the time, that Israel had to protect its military rule in the West Bank and Gaza, with all means at its disposal (Edwards 2010:54). During the intifada this included curfews, closures, deportations, administrative detention, and even legislation permitting soldiers to fire live ammunition at rioters (Edwards 2010:54). The Israeli Civil Administration³⁸ also contacted local Palestinian village leaders to end the violence. But the old generation was now challenged by a new generation of leaders. Young, educated and militant Palestinians were determined to end the status quo (Aronson 1987:324). The PLO leadership was still confined to exile in Tunis when the intifada erupted. The leaders were thus initially taken by surprise, but quickly agreed to support the creation of a PLO-led “United National Leadership of the Uprising” (UNLU). Throughout the intifada, the UNLU was an important factor in mobilizing grassroots support, and emerged as the main contender for the Islamists. Hamas on the other hand, refused to bring their organization under the command of the PLO throughout the Intifada. The first Intifada developed in several recognizable phases (Edwards 1996:147).

The Muslim Brotherhood establish the “Islamic Resistance Movement: Hamas”

The specific date for the establishment of Hamas is contested. According to the International Crisis Group, Hamas itself use the 8 of December 1987 as the date of origin (ICG 2004:6). This is a strategic choice, to indicate that Hamas was established the day before the eruption of the Intifada. However, from sources other than Hamas, it seems as if the organization was established after the eruption of the Intifada (Usher 1999:176, Hroub 2006:12, Abu Amr 1993:10). What is more relevant for this thesis is the fact that it was the top leaders of the Palestinian Brotherhood and the Mujamma, localized in Gaza, who took the initiative to establish Hamas.³⁹ It is essential to note that the Hamas branch in the West Bank was established later.

As described in chapter three, there were several local, socio-economical, ideological and political factors which influenced and facilitated the immediate evolution of Hamas in Gaza. As the new organization took over Brotherhood leaders and its institutions, the leaders of Hamas could focus less on organizational matters. In interview with author, Ziad Abu Amr stressed that the conservative cultural and religious orientation in the Gaza society was an

³⁸ The Israeli governing body responsible for running all non-military actions of the Israeli government in the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) and Gaza (until the disengagement in 2005) - <http://www.cogat.idf.il/english/Pages/default.aspx>

³⁹ The founding leaders of Hamas were Ahmad Yassin, `Abd al-`Aziz al-Rantisi, Ibrahim al-Yazuri, Salah Shihada, `Issa al-Nashshar, Muhammad Sham`a and `Abd-al-Fattah Dukhan (Amr 1994:63).

advantage for Hamas. He also emphasized that Mujamma institutions did not exist in the West Bank. Brotherhood ideology did not have the same favorable conditions as in Gaza, but instead had to compete with secular and nationalist ideas (Abu Amr in interview with author).

Ideological shift

The creation of Hamas marked a significant ideological shift from the established Brotherhood ideology. The Brotherhood and the Mujamma had until the Intifada erupted, held on to the policy of Islamizing the society from below, without violent means (Hroub 2006:13). The decision to involve their organizations in the violent struggle for Palestinian national liberation was thus dependant of a change in this “no deadline process”. The establishment of the new organization was a response to a number of pressing factors, but the decision was not clear-cut (Abu Amr 1993:11). The Mujamma in Gaza and the Brotherhood in the West Bank had experienced tensions within their organizations before the Intifada erupted. Young members pressed to participate in violent operations against Israel, while older members and leaders held on to the traditional policy (Gunning 2008:37, Ziad Abu Amr in interview with author). The immediate extensiveness of the Intifada, and the fact that competing PLO factions took part, made it impossible for Yassin to hold the organization on the sidelines. Two dilemmas then presented itself to Sheikh Yassin and the Mujamma leaders. The first dilemma was ideological, and alludes to the fact that if Yassin was to depart from the established policy of non-violence, he would have to declare *Jihad*. As mentioned, this was in line with the demands made by young Brotherhood/Mujamma members. Yassin on the other hand, argued that the time for *Jihad* was yet to come, because the process of Islamizing the society was not complete (Ziad Abu Amr interview with author). The second dilemma is connected to the first one, but deal with the future implications of turning the Mujamma into a violent *Jihad* organization. This would change the focus of the Mujamma from Islamizing the Palestinian society, towards being an armed militant group hostile to Israel. The Mujamma leaders then had to weigh these options against expected Israeli repercussions, including the probable end of Israeli support. It has thus been suggested that Hamas was established as a separate organization, to protect the Mujamma and the Brotherhood from the potential fallout if the initiative failed or the Intifada came to an early end (ICG 2004:6, Abu Amr 1993:11). Nonetheless, the new Hamas organization represented a shift of emphasis in the Brotherhood`s strategy, from reformist and communal to political, and from the spiritual life of the individual to national action (Mishal 2003:575). But with the creation of Hamas, the

Brotherhood practically overstepped the basis of their ideology – to complete the Islamizing of the society, before turning to *Jihad*.

Phase 1, the early Intifada period and the expansion to the West Bank

One of the most important events in the early Intifada period for Hamas was the expansion of the movement to the West Bank. The evolution of the Intifada during 1988 pushed Hamas leaders in Gaza to expand the movement. Popular support for Hamas continued to grow both in Gaza and the West Bank in this period. However, here I will emphasize that the literature on Hamas regarding this period, contains considerably less information on the development of Hamas in the West Bank than Gaza. Interviews and discussions from my fieldwork have thus been a major factor to increase my understanding of this early phase. In January 1988, Sheikh Yassin and his colleagues contacted Sheikh Jamil Hamami from the West Bank, and gave him the mission of establishing new Hamas branches there. Hamami, in the capacity of being a prominent Brotherhood member in the West Bank, a preacher in the al-Aqsa mosque, and a teacher, enjoyed huge popularity at the grassroots level in the area (Chehab 2007:28). In this formative period, local leaders were organized informally, both in Gaza and the West Bank, based on ties of solidarity and traditional attachments (Mishal 2003:581). Friendship, reputation, trust, common background (Brotherhood) and solidarity were thus more important than the hierarchical chain of command (Shaul Mishal in interview with author). Hamas's political activity in the formative period was focused on spreading the Islamic message to Palestinians. This was primarily done by distributing Hamas communiqués, but also by sponsoring political gatherings, tours to religious sites, forums, celebrations of Islamic events and the organization of demonstrations (Ziad Abu Amr 1993:15). In the beginning, many of these communiqués on the West Bank was written by Mahmoud Musleh. The communiqués were then spread through an underground network of people, and distributed once a month across the West Bank (Edwards 2010:56). Sheikh Hamami also functioned as the liaison between the Hamas leadership in Gaza, and the Brotherhood's leadership in Jordan because of his extensive network of contacts (Muslih 1999:16). Hamas activists in Jordan were at the time involved in raising funds (Chehab 2007:28). Sheikh Hamami was also given the task to bridge the increasing gap between Hamas and Fatah in the West Bank. He made several drafts for an agreement, but was arrested by Israel in June 1988 accused of working for Hamas. He served eighteen months in prison, and was later sidelined by younger hardliners in the leadership http://www.passia.org/publications/research_studies/Hamas-Text/intro.htm. Hamas gradually inherited Brotherhood institutions in the West Bank, although in a smaller

scale than the Mujamma network in Gaza. Such institutions were kindergartens, social and sports clubs and educational institutions. From 1991, Hamas also turned their attention to West Bank *Zakat* committees. As will be elaborated in chapter six, some *Zakat* committees were established in part by Brotherhood and Hamas members. Then from 1991, Hamas increased its focus on integrating people from the political section, into other existing committees (Schâublin 2009:54). Activity in the network of West Bank mosques were also increasing, as the mosques were considered a useful tool in recruiting new members, and in the spreading of Hamas` ideas and influence (Ziad Abu Amr 1994:14). However, as is clear from the organizational outline of Hamas (chapter five), it was the founding fathers in the Gaza leadership who dominated official decision-making during these first years. Funding of Hamas was also controlled from Gaza, which thus was the main base for the organization.

To understand how the Hamas branch in the West Bank developed, one must focus on the larger context. The first intifada was characterized by the spreading of leaflets, Palestinian general strikes and demonstrations in Gaza and the West Bank. These were tactics developed by the UNLU, who already had attracted a huge popular support. UNLU leaflets contained information on specific actions and goals in their Intifada campaign (Edwards 1996:148). Thus, when Hamas entered the arena on the West Bank, the first challenge was to catch up with the leaflet distribution. Hamas did so with their own twist, by trying to strengthen the Islamic nature of the Intifada. In the first six months, Hamas shadowed the initiatives of the UNLU by making similar appeals, calls and demands through leaflets (Edwards 1996:149). Palestinian general strikes were the other defining feature of the first Intifada. The UNLU initiated and organized strikes, held as an act of protest against Israeli actions, or as a symbolic action to show solidarity in the community (Edwards 1996:150). The strikes involved withdrawal of labor from Israel, closing of shops, schools and offices. General strikes were an initiative every Palestinian could support, and it could last for months. Hamas leaders also immediately recognized the political significance of the strikes, and sought to impose their own strikes in competition with the UNLU. These strikes were initiated in the Gaza areas first, through leaflets (Edwards 1996:150). As the Intifada continued into the summer of 1988, Hamas also organized its first independent strike on the West Bank the 21st of August.⁴⁰ Nationalists perceived this step as devastating for the future of the Intifada, and urged Hamas to place national interest above their factional concerns (Edwards 1996:150).

⁴⁰ Middle East Journal Vol. 43 No.1, Chronology 16th July – 15th October 1988.

But Hamas refused to restrain their actions, and clashes between Hamas and nationalists took place in Ramallah. Hamas members also violently enforced the call to hold strikes, attacked shops which stayed open during Hamas strikes, and beat up car drivers (Edwards 2010:57). The disagreement between Hamas and the nationalists escalated during 1988. The PLO released their “Declaration of Palestinian independence” in November, where they accepted UN resolutions 181, 242 and 338. Hamas leaders strongly disagreed, attacked PLO in their leaflets, and increased its attempts to undermine PLO’s credibility as the representative of the Palestinian people (Edwards 1996:151). During this early period of the Intifada Hamas also developed its first organizational framework as explained in chapter five. Accordingly, the writing and publication of leaflets were the responsibility of the political wing, while the intelligence wing (MAJD) chased Palestinian collaborators in Gaza. The Brotherhood and the Mujamma continued to exist separately for a while, and they were responsible for the social work in the formative years. Hamas also laid foundations for the network of foreign based financial contributors, as Hamas members in Jordan travelled the Gulf region and raised millions of dollars in support. Supporters in Europe and America arranged fund-raisers and spread the political message of Hamas (Edwards 1993:149).

1988: The Hamas charter

Hamas released its charter on the 18th of August 1988, to rival the charter of the PLO (Edwards 2010:56). The charter spelled out Hamas’ philosophy, rationale and positions on important issues, such as the Palestine question, Jihad and resistance, social welfare, the role of women, other Islamic movements, their view on nationalist movements and the PLO, other Arab countries and more (Abu Amr 1993:12). It was only when Hamas released this charter that the connection to the Palestinian Brotherhood was publicized. According to Helga Baumgarten, the charter is firmly rooted in the tradition of the Muslim Brotherhood, but abandoned the sophisticated politico-philosophical argumentation of Hassan al-Banna and the Islamic thinker Sayyed Qutb (Baumgarten 2005:38). Instead, the main tenets of Brotherhood were projected into a populist style and applied to the problem at hand: the Israeli occupation (Baumgarten 2005:38). In practice the charter states that Palestine is an Islamic *Waqf*, which cannot be given up in initiatives such as peace negotiations. The solution is to increase the focus on *Jihad*, remove the Israeli state, and establish in its place an Islamic state ranging between the river Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea (Abu Amr 1993:12). Some of the core goals of the Brotherhood was thus downplayed, such as transforming the society from the bottom up through *da`wa*. After the Hamas charter was released in August 1988, both

nationalists and Israeli authorities became more suspicious toward the new movement. Israeli authorities imposed mass arrests of Palestinians as a measure to quell the Intifada, and thousands of prisoners were placed in Israeli prisons or temporary desert detention camps (Edwards 2010:56). In these prisons the Palestinians already started to organize themselves in groups reflecting their political orientations outside of prison (Edwards 2010:56).

Phase 2, the relationship between Israel and Hamas

The strategic relationship between Israel and Mujamma continued with Hamas. Israeli authorities perceived Hamas as a non-violent, social reform movement, a continuation of the Brotherhood, which could be used strategically to keep Palestinians away from secular nationalist groups. However, the relationship was controversial in many ways. In terms of funding, Israel turned a blind eye when foreign funding of Hamas` Intifada activities reached Gaza, while at the same time stopping all funds collected for the PLO (Edwards 1996:151). Moreover, Hamas leaders and members were left relatively free to operate, compared to different nationalist groups (Edwards 2010:56). The Israelis even let Hamas operate their printing presses, and hold their offices open. The organizational structure of Hamas was also left undisturbed, and Hamas continued to grow as an organization. PLO and Fatah naturally perceived the Hamas – Israel link as disturbing. The relationship between Hamas and Israel was at its strongest during 1989. Israel awarded Hamas with legitimacy and the status as “partner in discussions”, through many high-level meetings between Hamas leaders in Gaza and Israeli government officials.

However, it is important to note that West Bank leaders were not part of this cooperation. Israel had strategic and religious interests in the West Bank, and the West Bank branch had to operate in a more secretive level from the outset. The Gaza leaders publicly claimed it had nothing but contempt for Israel, although the cooperation was favorable for the Gaza branch. But in mid-1989, the relationship changed when Hamas members kidnapped and later murdered two Israeli soldiers.⁴¹ This incident turned the relationship for a number of reasons: the incident was planned and calculated, it was the first Hamas attack on Israeli military targets, and it was the first violent attack directly linked to Hamas (Edwards 1996:152). The Israeli response was harsh. Within a month of the killings, Israel arrested three hundred Hamas activists in Gaza and the West Bank, including Sheikh Yassin and Mahmoud al-Zahar (Edwards 1996:152). Later in 1989 Israel announced that further official contact with Hamas

⁴¹ The two Israeli soldiers were Avi Sasportas and Ilan Sa`don (Edwards 2010:61).

leaders was suspended, and by December the organization was prohibited and membership in it declared a punishable offence (Edwards 1996:153). Still, as the first year of the Intifada ended, popular support for Hamas had increased both in Gaza and the West Bank (Edwards 1996:151). As elaborated in chapter seven, cells from the militant wing of Hamas, the al-Qassam brigades also spread to the West Bank during 1990.

Phase 3, Gulf crisis

The next discernible phase in the Intifada period is the outbreak of the Gulf crisis in August 1990. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and the following deployment of Western troops in Saudi Arabia, created a situation where Hamas and PLO issued statements on the situation through communiqués. Hamas expressed a balanced view, careful not to provoke its Gulf funders or its supporters. Hamas thus condemned the presence of Western forces in Saudi Arabia and demanded the Iraqi withdrawal of its troops from Kuwait (Edwards 1996:154). The PLO response on the other hand, supported Saddam Hussein. The differences in opinion among the Palestinian leaders triggered clashes between Hamas and Fatah supporters in Tulkaram and Jenin in the West Bank, and in Gaza during September and October 1990. The last stages of the Gulf crisis progressed without further political activity from Hamas or the PLO, as Israel placed the whole OPT under a blanket curfew. The PLO backing of Saddam Hussein led wealthy Gulf funders to withdraw their financial support to the PLO. Instead money was sent to Hamas, through the branch in Gaza (Edwards 1996:155). Large national institutions throughout the OPT thus announced massive budget cuts in 1991 and 1992, while Hamas increased its funding to the growing welfare network in Gaza and the West Bank. With this new situation Hamas could extend financial support to needy Palestinian families, formerly supported by the PLO. Hamas leaders thus earned a reputation as being honest, and it turned the popular support of the Palestinians in favor of Hamas (Edwards 1996:155).

Phase 4, deportations, peace talks and early political participation

The last phase of the Intifada is probably also the most discussed and best documented. It began with the proposals of peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians during summer of 1991. The process of peace talks had significant side effects for Hamas. Hamas opposed any negotiations with Israel, based on their perception of Palestine as Islamic land, a subject not open for discussion. Throughout the summer and autumn of 1991, Islamists and nationalists had ongoing disputes over the issue of peace talks. Hamas initiated general strikes and even issued a *fatwa* in response to the Madrid conference in 1991 (Edwards 1996:156). From October 1991 to August 1993, Israel and the Palestinians engaged in eleven sessions of

negotiations. However, the Madrid process stumbled into a number of devastating problems.⁴² Hamas as the rejectionists could thus capitalize. During 1992, Hamas stepped up the activity of the al-Qassam brigades in attacks against Fatah, and gained popular support for attacking Israeli settlers and soldiers (Edwards 1996:156). Clashes between Fatah and Hamas increased in this period. In 1992 Israel elected a new Labor government, headed by Yitzhak Rabin, which was more committed to peace. Hamas on their side continued to attack Israeli civil and military targets, and they attacked Palestinian who collaborated with Israel (Edwards 1996:157). In December 1992 Israel responded to a number of Hamas attacks by deporting 415 individual Islamists into the Lebanese mountains (Edwards 1996:158). Israel deported not only the top leaders of the different Islamic movements, but also the second and third ranking officials http://www.passia.org/publications/research_studies/Hamas-Text/intro.htm. This was significant for the West Bank, which had a smaller “pool” of potential new leaders than Gaza. As will be elaborated in chapter eight, early attempts at obtaining political influence through political channels were also observed in this period. This included attending student council elections and professional associations.

The creation of a new political context in Gaza and the West Bank

Hamas is today operating in a complex political context, which comprises two physically separate areas, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. A major part of this political context was created in 1993, with the Oslo process and the signing of the DOP by the PLO and Israel.⁴³ The DOP provided for a transitional period of Palestinian interim self-government in Gaza and the West Bank, not exceeding five years from 1994 (Hroub 2006:48). Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails were released, the PLO leadership returned to Gaza, the new Palestinian police and security forces were put in action,⁴⁴ and the Palestinian Authority (PA) initiated administering of the agreed-upon areas from 1994 (Edwards 2010:74). The institutional development of the PA was however influenced by the fact that PLO and Fatah leaders were interchangeable with the PA from the outset. In practice they dominated the PA, by occupying senior administrative and political positions, as well as controlling the security services. Many of these leaders had been in exile for years with little experience in running a government (Edwards 2010:76). The DOP included a transfer of certain powers and

⁴² In short: Continued Israeli settlement building, an intransigent Israeli prime minister, internal dissension within the Palestinian community over the peace process (Edwards 1996:156).

⁴³ Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (Edwards 2010:10).

⁴⁴ As agreed in the Oslo accords, Yassir Arafat disbanded Fatah militias such as the Fatah Hawks, Black Panthers and Red Eagles. But he also rewarded their members with new jobs in the PA security forces (PSS), along with 7000 members of the Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA) from their bases in Jordan, Sudan and Yemen (Edwards 2010:75).

responsibilities in both security and civil affairs from Israel to the PA. All areas of civil governance over Palestinians were to be assigned to the PA, while Israel retained responsibility during the transitional period for external security and public order in Israeli settlements (<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=16918>). The OPT were further divided into administrative areas. The West Bank were split into areas A, B, C, where the PA had responsibility for internal security in area A, Israel and the PA had joint responsibility in area B, while Israel had sole responsibility in area C.⁴⁵ However, dividing this responsibility was a slow process. The PA did not reach most of its towns until December 1995, and arrived in Hebron as late as 1997. Most rural areas with Area A status was not under PA control until 1998-1999 (ICG 2004:7). The PA also consolidated its security forces in the middle of the 1990s, which was the only ones permitted to carry arms. The Oslo process created a discourse on state formation, and how to implement democracy. Elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) and the PA presidency were scheduled for 1996. The PLC is the legislative component of the PA. It is limited by the fact that its legal standing is derived from negotiations with Israel, not from a constitution. Per agreements with Israel the PLC does not have any authority over borders and defense policy (<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=16918>). On the local level, Palestine was divided into 16 administrative divisions also serving as electoral divisions. 331 municipal councils were established in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These local authorities are today relatively decentralized in terms of fiscal policy, and they are independent to develop their own budgets. These budgets are primarily allocated towards infrastructure and development projects, in which foreign aid is a key contributor. Local elections were not held between 1976 and 2004/2005 (NDI report 2nd round 2005:9).

Conclusive remarks

Hamas was first established in Gaza, where it built on the existing network of Mujamma institutions. The West Bank branch was established later, and developed at a slower pace. Although the public support for Hamas was on the rise in the West Bank, most West Bankers supported the secular and nationalist Fatah party, the peace negotiations and later the Oslo accords during the first Intifada. People in the West Bank were not as receptive to the Hamas ideology as people in Gaza. The West Bank branch initially focused on the uprising and resistance activities, including the establishment of the first al-Qassam cells in 1990. Furthermore, the West Bank branch gradually took over Brotherhood social welfare

⁴⁵ For a map on these changes see Appendix

institutions, increased its activity in West Bank mosques, and from 1991 focused on integrating members from the political section into existing *Zakat* committees. Hamas also began using the available political channels to obtain more political influence from 1992/1993, including attending student council elections. The deportations of 415 Islamists in 1992 hit the West Bank harder than Gaza, as the Gaza branch had a larger pool of potential new leaders. Israeli pressure also hit harder in the West Bank. Israeli strategic interests focused on its West Bank settlements, while being more lax against the branch in Gaza. The Gaza branch was thus both the “brain and the bank” of Hamas in the formative period. Gaza leaders was the fundament in the organization, its leaders controlled the finances, made the communiqués, initiated the first Hamas-led strike and held talks with Israeli representatives. In comparison, the West Bank branch played “second-fiddle” behind the Gaza branch in this period.

Chapter 5

The internal organization of Hamas: the role of the West Bank

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the unclear and complex internal organization of Hamas. As Hamas is a secretive organization which refuses to give full information on its internal workings and organizational outline, researchers are left with speculations and assumptions. Still, it is possible to discern certain organizational traits by studying historical decisions and events, and by leaning on established literature, as well as findings from my own fieldwork. As the internal structure is a result of continuing processes, I will begin with a historical perspective, and cover the period up until 2007. It is the goal of this chapter to analyze and indicate the internal influence of the West Bank branch, compared to other central elements in the organization. I will thus reflect on an underlying question related to my thesis: *Does the organizational structure of Hamas influence on the political position of the West Bank branch?* It is important to have a clear understanding of the internal organization of the movement, before I turn to social, militant and political activity.

Early organization and leadership

As established in chapter three and four, Hamas inherited leaders and institutions from the Brotherhood in a gradual process in the formative period. The blurry connection between Hamas, the Palestinian Brotherhood and the Mujamma was upheld as a strategic decision. After all, Hamas could be discontinued if the Intifada failed. In the first period, Hamas was divided into three functional wings, either new or pre-existing from the Brotherhood (Hroub 2000:40). This was the political, intelligence (MAJD), and the military wing, all three based in Gaza which constituted the main area of attention. The political wing was staffed by Yassin and his closest Mujamma associates. They assumed the responsibility of political matters, recruitment, fund-raising and writing leaflets (Edwards 1996:148). The political wing also worked to organize Hamas control in the Gaza mosques, initiate Quran classes and political meetings in the mosques. The structure of the intelligence wing was more secretive from the beginning. MAJD were given a policing role in Gaza, and part of this role was to identify Palestinian collaborators, and attack Israeli targets (Edwards 1996:148). The early military wing was originally the smallest part of the organization. In the first years it was based on the Mujahideen Filastine, and later MAJD (Tamimi 2007:63). In 1990 the al-Qassam brigades were established as the military wing of Hamas. To adapt to the changing political context during the Intifada, Hamas also established functional groups responsible for

communications, youth, the Intifada campaign, and the growing number of prisoners (Chehab 2007:30). The West Bank branch developed in a slower pace than the Gaza branch. There are no reports on early intelligence and military wings in the West Bank, although the first al-Qassam cell was established in 1990 (Edwards 2010:117). In the first few years of the formative period, the original structure of Hamas in Gaza was recognizable for the Israeli military administration, after the last decade of cooperation. It was thus easy for Israel to harm the organization by arresting the top leaders. This tactic was used increasingly after 1989, when Israel decided to end the cooperation with Mujamma.

The concept of *Shura*

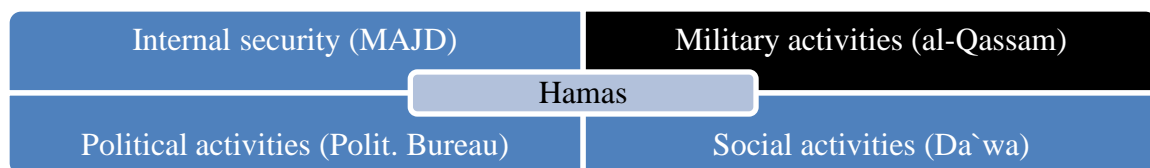
In a discussion of the internal organization of Hamas, it is important to emphasize the concept of *Shura* (consultation). Decision-making in Hamas is always based upon the principle of *Shura*, or rule through consultation and deliberation (Mahmoud Musleh in interview with author). This is an important Islamic tenet, also common in the Muslim Brotherhood movement (Mishal & Sela 2006:xix). Jeroen Gunning explains that the concepts of *Shura* (consultation) and *ijma* (consensus), are rooted in Qur`anic injunctions, where either the Prophet exhorts his followers to consult, or God exhorts the Prophet to consult his companions (Gunning 2008:59). In terms of a future Islamic state in Palestine (a stated Hamas goal), the legislative power will rest with a *Majlis al-Shura* council. This council is expected to consult the population before taking decisions, as is also the leader of the state. The concept of *Shura* has been emphasized by Hamas as the Islamic equivalent of western style democracy, and Hamas also proposes a number of checks and balances to ensure that legislators in this council will remain accountable to the electorate (Gunning 2008:57-59).⁴⁶ However, one must look at the existing local, regional and national *Shura* councils to understand this practice. These councils meet to discuss a certain issue which needs to be solved. Depending on the level of the council, they will consult with members from underlying branches, before they aim to reach a consensus. The top level in the Hamas organization is the national *Shura* council based abroad, while the regional *Shura* councils in the West Bank and Gaza represent the top level inside the OPT. Names of members in these councils are secret, to avoid arrests.

⁴⁶ E.g. separation of power between executive, legislative and judicial branches, and moral codes based on Islam (Gunning 2008:57-63).

Re-structuring the organization

The development of the current organizational structure of Hamas was initiated in 1989. This was as a strategic response to Israeli arrests of large numbers of Hamas leaders.⁴⁷ These Israeli purges were meant to destabilize Hamas, because of its dependency on its top leadership. One Hamas leader based abroad was given the task of restructuring the movement. Musa Abu Marzook developed new mechanisms and re-organized the leadership structure (Tamimi 2007:60). This structure has changed several times, and new bodies have emerged when needed. The new structure can be described as both secretive and collective. It is secretive in the sense that distinctions between different wings and branches are not completely clear, and names of leaders are often not published. The collective characteristic comes from the fact that the movement relies on elected consultative councils (*Shura*) on different levels, rather than one leader at the top.⁴⁸ The first step in the process of restructuring the organization was done by separating the political, social (*da`wa*) and resistance work (Gunning 2008:40). Furthermore, as the pressure on Hamas increased during the 1990s, new leadership wings and committees was established to handle political matters, security, military operations and the media (Amr 1993:13). Note that the important structures of the movement were in Gaza. Annual Israeli campaigns against Hamas, and especially the deportation of 415 Islamist leaders by Israel in 1992, served to hasten the re-organizing process. *Figure 1* below indicates the first structures established by Marzook:

Figure 1: Hamas organizational structure in the early 1990s⁴⁹



Source: Mishal 2003:582.

As will become clear, political activities are the responsibility of the political bureau. The internal security branch (MAJD) was gradually integrated in the al-Qassam brigades.⁵⁰ The role of the Da`wa unit was to Islamize the community, by means of social mobilization and

⁴⁷ Brotherhood leaders were arrested from January 1988, as Israel tried to uncover who was responsible for the Intifada. 1500 members and leaders were arrested in May 1989 (Tamimi 2007:55).

⁴⁸ However, Sheikh Yassin was seen by many as the top leader of Hamas until 2004, as is Khaled Mishal today (<http://www.aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=3&id=15728>).

⁴⁹ The black color indicates the unclear connection between al-Qassam and the rest of the movement.

⁵⁰ Hamas has at times maintained an internal security branch in Gaza, such as the El-Tanfithya (Executive Force) established in Gaza in 2007 (Edwards 2010:664).

religious preaching (Mishal 2003:582). The Da`wa unit also includes social welfare and religious institutions, offering education, sports and health-services as elaborated in chapter six. The military wing, the al-Qassam brigades, was a product of the Intifada. It was established with decision-making capabilities and infrastructure of their own, to enable Hamas to continue attacking Israel despite IDF crackdowns on its leaders (Chehab 2007:53). The al-Qassam brigades are known to operate in small cells, with a secretive⁵¹ and unclear connection to Hamas. This connection deliberately turned even more unclear during the 1990s, to direct the blame for terrorist attacks away from Hamas` top leaders.⁵² By 1991/1992, Musa Abu Marzook established a new Hamas branch in Amman, Jordan, and an office in USA. The Amman branch was given overall control of the movement, to ensure continuity in the leadership as the Israeli arrest campaigns continued. Another important task was to raise financial support (Tamimi 2007:60). The leadership of the Amman branch also kept in close contact with the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan. In practice, this introduced the separation of the internal and external leadership of Hamas.⁵³ The top internal leaders have continued to work from their base in Gaza, while the leaders of the West Bank branch never have held such influential positions. The external leadership had their permanent base in Amman until they were expelled in 1999.⁵⁴ The expulsion forced the external leadership to move to Damascus in Syria and other neighboring countries, where they have continued to operate largely out of Israeli reach.

The organizational structure since the 1990s

An organizational outline is helpful to understand how Hamas has been organized since the early 1990s, how it operates, and to understand the role of the West Bank branch in the larger movement (*Figure 2 below*). However, making an organogram of Hamas is not an easy task.⁵⁵ The constant pressure on the movement from Israel, and lately the Palestinian security forces, leads Hamas to be secretive about their internal organization (Mohammad Totah, and Mahmoud al-Ramahi refused to discuss this topic in interviews with author). Organizational outlines and discussions on the current structure of Hamas must thus be considered as indications, rather than absolute facts. What is known is that the rapid growth of the

⁵¹ The al-Qassam brigades operate with face masks in public, unlike internal security forces such as the EF (Edwards 2010:665).

⁵² Some counter-terrorist experts do not agree that Hamas have separable wings (Levitt 2006:2, 3).

⁵³ Although an external group connected to Hamas already existed, until 1989 responsible for funding, logistic and advise (Tamimi 2007:60).

⁵⁴ The external leaders were deported from Jordan as a result of the Wye river agreement brokered by Jordan and international pressure upon Jordan (Tamimi 2007:119-130).

⁵⁵ Several political analysts I met during my fieldwork faced the same problem.

movement in the early years, strained the underdeveloped bureaucracy, and pushed Hamas into developing a more advanced bureaucracy (Amr 1993:13, 14). The separation of the internal and external leadership is thus important. Today a rough depiction of the movement shows that the internal part of Hamas consists of the Gaza branch, the West Bank branch and a prisoners committee.⁵⁶ On a larger scale, the major institutions of Hamas are considered to be the internal institutions, the external institutions and the al-Qassam brigades. I will first discuss the basic level of the organization, and use examples from the West Bank.

Grassroots level

Starting at the bottom of the current Hamas hierarchy, one will find local cells (*Usra*) consisting of a cell leader and cell members (Gunning 2008:98). This is the grassroots level, the backbone of Hamas, which carry out political decisions on the ground. It is important to highlight that Hamas has maintained a large grassroots support in the West Bank from the early 1990s. There can be several such local cells inside one larger area, depending on the area. In areas where Hamas enjoy strong support (such as Hebron) there will be several grassroots cells, spread in different villages. In other areas where Hamas has less support (such as Jericho) there will probably be fewer local cells. Mohammad Totah from Jerusalem indicated that the Jerusalem branch has developed differently than other areas, as the branch is inside the territory Israel considers its own. In practice, the Jerusalem branch has never built up a network of institutions comparable to e.g. the Hebron branch, and the branch was never allowed to compete for political influence by the Israeli government (Mohammad Totah in interview with author).

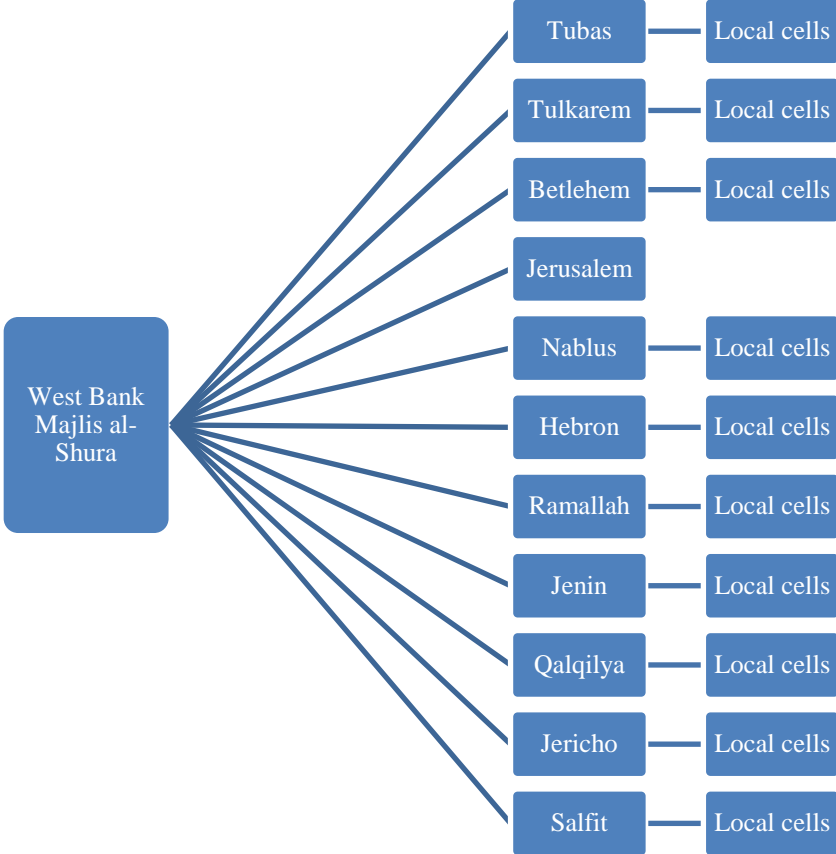
As indicated in *figure 2*, every local cell answers to their area branch in the West Bank. In turn this area branch answers to the West Bank *Shura* council. This council consists of an unknown number of elected leaders, which convene to take decisions, based on feedback from the area branches. Initially Hamas established five area branches in the West Bank, but has later adapted its organization according to Palestinian administrative developments.⁵⁷ Today Hamas has area branches in every governorate, although very different in size. Smaller governorates might periodically be united to one area branch when necessary. It is unclear if every area branch has its own *Shura* council, although this is perceived as likely by several senior political analysts I interviewed. The same structure exists in Gaza. Hamas originally

⁵⁶ Prisoners held inside Israeli jails (ICG 2004:11).

⁵⁷ The West Bank is today geographically split into eleven governorates, as noted in chapter four.

established seven area branches there, but at least until the Gaza takeover in 2007, it was divided into five area branches following the five administrative governorates.⁵⁸

Figure 2: An indication on the structure of the West Bank branch⁵⁹



The Internal leadership

The West Bank and Gaza *Shura* councils constitute the internal (inside OPT) leadership of Hamas. Leaders from the “inside” have always been promoted by internal elections (Hroub 2006:117).⁶⁰ The West Bank and Gaza *Shura* councils thus consist of a unknown number of representatives elected for a two year period, by Hamas members from within the particular area branches (Mishal & Sela 2006:158). These *Shura* Councils are consulted in political decisions by the outside leadership. They are also required to consult their respective local branches, to get feedback when decisions are to be made. The Gaza branch and its leaders are regarded as a key element in the overall decision-making process of Hamas (ICG 2004:11, Hroub 2006:118, supported by several sources during my fieldwork). This is due to their

⁵⁸ Anonymous political analyst in interview with author.
⁵⁹ I created and discussed this organizational outline with several political analysts during my fieldwork.
⁶⁰ The practice of members electing its leaders is also well established in other Islamist movements with a Brotherhood background (Hroub 2006:117).

influential position in the movement, from the outset (Ziad Abu Amr in interview with author). The Gaza branch has also been known to operate autonomously in certain matters regarding the OPT,⁶¹ and is allowed to do so because of its status. In general terms, the internal leadership controls the human resources of the movement, while the external leaders control financial resources and external contacts (Hroub 2006:118). In the period after Sheikh Yassin was released from a lengthy imprisonment in 1997, the Gaza branch gained substantial organizational influence in Hamas. In the period prior to 1997, an alliance between the external leaders and al-Qassam commanders dominated, which was more inclined toward using violent means. With the Gaza branch gaining influence from 1997, the behavior of Hamas gradually changed, toward a more pragmatic and participatory strategy (Løvlie 2008:9). The Gaza Strip branch was led by Yassin until his death in 2004, and is now led by Ismail Haniyya. Other leading members are and have been former Brotherhood and Mujamma members, such as Abd-al-Aziz Rantisi, Mahmud Zahhar, and Ismail Abu Shanab (ICG 2004:11).

The role of the West Bank branch

The West Bank branch has always been more fractured and less influential than the Gaza branch (ICG 2004:11). This is due to Israeli arrests and killings, PA crackdowns, Israeli settlements splitting the territory, Israeli restrictions on movement, and the strong PLO position in the West Bank. Compared to the influential Gaza leadership, the West Bank branch has a more secretive leadership structure. The West Bank branch has also relied more on the concept of the *Shura* council, and decisions made by the many. This is due to the security situation, which has made it more logical to make decisions in plural than to emphasize the influence of one specific leader, which would quickly lead to his arrest (Ziad Abu Amr and Bazem Ezbidid in interviews with author). There are thus several reasons explaining why the West Bank leaders have been less influential in the overall decision-making in the movement. The Gaza branch had a special role from the beginning, and its leaders have enjoyed strong influence. Islamist ideology has also had less popular support in the West Bank in general, and Ramallah also became the temporary Palestinian capital with the Oslo accords. Combined and withstanding heavy pressure against Hamas in the West Bank has also forced its leaders to go underground,⁶² and its institutions to hold a low profile. This has severed communication lines with the rest of the movement. Among the most

⁶¹ Gaza leaders represented Hamas in an inter-factional dialogue with the PA in 1995 (Kristianasen 1999:25).

⁶² In 1996, there was not even a centralized West Bank leadership (Kristianasen 1999:28).

influential West Bank leaders have been Jamil Hamami,⁶³ Husain Abu Kuwik, Fadil Salih, Aziz Dweik, Jamal Mansur, Jamal Salim and Mahmoud Musleh. Jamal Mansur is believed to have been the West Bank leader during most of the 1990s, until he was killed by Israel in 2001 (ICG 2007:25). From 2001 the West Bank branch has been led by Sheikh Hassan Yousef, although he has been imprisoned for long periods. His longest period in prison, from 2002, took the air out of the movement (Abu Amr in interview with author). The well known Islamist Bassam Jarrar has also been connected to the Hamas leadership (Abu Amr 1993:14).

The prisoners committee

It is also important to note that each prison containing Hamas members appears to have organized an equivalent of a *Shura* council (Gunning 2008:99). The prisoners committee enjoys a strong position in the movement,⁶⁴ although both Israel and the PA aim to limit this influence by isolating the prisoners. Despite being isolated, these prisoners take political initiatives, and at times work closely with “colleagues” from Fatah and Islamic Jihad too solve internal Palestinian political disputes (ICG 2004:11). One example is the “Prisoners document” from 2006. Their status inside the movement is so strong it is unlikely that any political initiative would succeed without the consent of the prisoners committee (ICG 2004:11). This is why they are considered one of the pillars in Hamas, on the same level as Gaza, and the West Bank in the organizational outline below. Their status is partly caused by the expectation that they will return to their former positions outside of prison, when released. Membership in the prisoners committee is thus considered temporary.

The external leadership

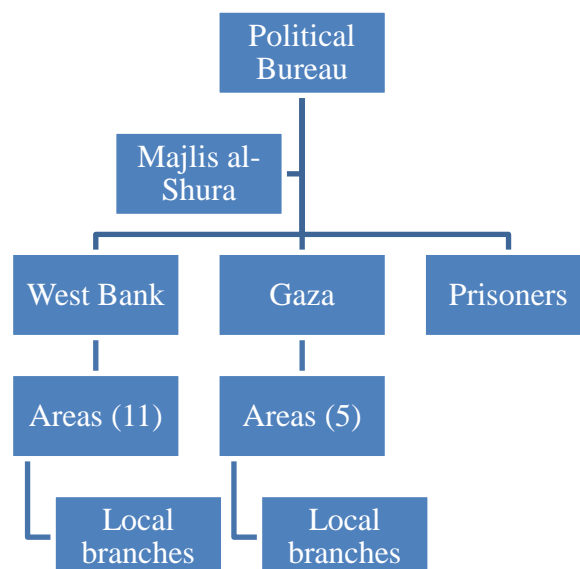
The combination of a political bureau (*Maktab al-Siyasi*) and a National *Shura* council (*Majlis al-Shura*) constitutes the external leadership, and thus the top level leadership of Hamas. The best way to understand the roles of these bodies is to compare them to respectively a (secretive) executive and legislative body at the state level (Gunning 2008:99, supported by Ziad Abu Amr in interview by author). In practice, the national *Shura* council (the legislative body) has final authority over formal policy decisions, and determines the strategy and the political aims of the organization. The *Shura* council bases its decisions on consultation within the organization, policy-notes prepared by the Political bureau, and different expert committees. These expert committees have their competence in fields such as social welfare, media relations, political activities or Islamic preaching (Gunning 2008:99,

⁶³ Hamami withdrew from Hamas in 1999 (Musleh 1999:25).

⁶⁴ Their imprisonment gives them a high level of sympathy and legitimacy within the movement (ICG 2004:11).

100). They consist of members from every level in the hierarchy, to ensure that policy is also made from “below” (Gunning 2008:100). The *Shura* council met regularly in Qatar until at least 2004 (ICG 2004:10). The council is made up of unknown representatives from the internal leadership, but also representatives from outside of Palestine, most probably representatives from other national Muslim Brotherhood branches (Mishal & Sela 2006:161, McGeough 2009:112). These representatives are elected to the council by members from different area branches. The total number of members is unknown, but estimates vary between twelve and twenty four (Mishal & Sela 2006:161,223), sixty plus (McGeough 2009:112) and between 70-90 members according to the Arabic daily newspaper Asharq Al-Awsat.⁶⁵ Shaul Mishal emphasized in interview that for Israel, a worst case scenario in terms of a security threat, would be a *Shura* member with Israeli citizenship (Shaul Mishal in interview with author). The newspaper article above also suggests that the Shura council has turned into a symbolic leadership, with the political bureau as the real force. The same newspaper also claims that the West Bank has a significant smaller representation than the Gaza Strip in the council. This claim was also supported by several sources during my field work, and it is a strong indicator that the West Bank branch is less influential. *Figure 3 below* indicate the overall structure of Hamas. However, the power relation between the *Shura* council and the Political bureau is somewhat unclear, due to strategic vagueness by Hamas (Interviews with Ziad Abu Amr and Basem Ezbidi by author).

Figure 3: Overall structure of Hamas



(Source: Mishal & Sela 2006:173, Løvlie 2008:73 and interviews with political analysts).

⁶⁵ <http://www.aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=3&id=15728>

Members of the national *Shura* council also appoints members to the Political bureau, which assumes the responsibility for foreign affairs, finances, propaganda, internal security, and military affairs (Mishal & Sela 2006:xix). According to Gunning, the bureau is equivalent of the executive at state level, and is responsible for the day to day implementation of the *Shura* council's strategy (Gunning 2008:100). The Political bureau is limited in the sense that it can't control every area branch in the OPT in detail. It gives commands, advice, policy recommendations, and it creates propaganda campaigns to the local branches. Still, local branches are allowed to make their own decisions as long as they don't contravene general instructions from the bureau. As is the case with the *Majlis al-Shura*, total number of members and their identity is not clear. International Crisis Group claimed the Bureau had between twelve and fourteen members in 2004, based outside of Palestine, primarily in Syria, Lebanon, Iran and Qatar (ICG 2004:10). According to Khaled Hroub, the number is between 10 and 20 (Hroub 2006:118). The bureau takes decisions based on consultations with different levels of the organization, including the National *Shura* council, the prisoners *Shura* council and the internal branches (Gaza and the West Bank) (ICG 2004:11). Mishal & Sela emphasize that the Political bureau has got a stricter internal structure than the *Majlis al-Shura*, and that members usually are people of a higher education (Mishal & Sela 2006:161, 162). The political bureau keeps close contact with other Islamic movements, and financial providers. It is well documented today that the Political bureau works from Damascus in Syria (Gunning 2008:100, Tamimi 2007:7). Musa Abu Marzook led the bureau until he was deported from Jordan in 1995 and later arrested in USA (Mishal & Sela 2006:162). Khalid Mishal took over the leading position in the Political bureau in 1995, and is also its current leader.

Historical perspective: Damascus or Gaza in power?

It is worth noting that political power inside Hamas has never been centered round the West Bank branch. In a historical perspective, the external leaders dominated Hamas de facto from the early 1990s, until they were deported from Amman in 1999. In this same period the military leaders from the al-Qassam brigades also held a strong position within the movement. As the external leader reside outside of the OPT, they are protected from the effects and consequences deriving from Hamas actions. The external leadership has thus tended to be more hard-line than the inside leadership, which has been the moderating part (Hroub 2000:59). The political bureau relied on three elements to retain the domination of Hamas: controlling the finances, controlling the da`wa work, and the internal affairs (Mishal & Sela 2006:162). By controlling the finances it could make a strong alliance with al-Qassam

commanders in need of weapons. To carry out daily activities and ensure control, it utilized two coordinating elements. One of these elements is an Administrative Unit, responsible for coordinating the *da`wa* activities, security and events, coordination with other units, and recruitment. The other element is a liaison unit between the political bureau, and the West Bank and Gaza branches (Mishal & Sela 2006:162). From 1998 the Jordanian government cracked down on Hamas offices in Amman,⁶⁶ ultimately leading to their deportation in 1999. This helped the Gaza leaders to balance the domination of the external leaders. In 1999 Sheikh Yassin even took personal initiatives on behalf of Hamas, which the Political bureau opposed.⁶⁷ This internal factional struggle for the domination of the leadership has at times influenced political decisions made by the movement, especially regarding electoral participation.⁶⁸ However, the external faction still dominates political, media and military decisions.⁶⁹ Several political analysts I met during my fieldwork also stated that the West Bank branch has only had marginal influence on every major decision taken by Hamas. *Figure 4* below indicate the historical power balance between the major branches of Hamas since the establishment:

Figure 4: Hamas leadership and internal organizational power

Branch	West Bank	Gaza	Amman/Damascus	Al-Qassam
Time period				
1987 - 91/92	Weak Influence	In power	Not established	Not established
1992 – 96/97	Weak Influence	Leaders in jail	In power	Strong influence
1997 – 2004	Weak Influence	Shared power	Shared power	Influence
2004 - 2007	Weak Influence	Decreasing	Increasing	Decreasing

Decision-making

It is important to remember that decision-making is a secretive process. Decisions are generally made according to the principle of consultation (*Shura*). The organizational outline mapped out above, indicate four sectors which are consulted before decisions are made (except local decisions taken by local leaders, in line with policy from the Political bureau). This is Gaza, the West Bank, the Prisoners and the external leaders. When all these sectors are

⁶⁶ As a response to Hamas`s opposition to the Jordanian brokered Wye agreements (Tamimi 2007:119-121).

⁶⁷ Yassin agreed to attend a meeting of the PLO Central Committee on behalf of Hamas (Tamimi 2007:196).

⁶⁸ For a detailed study on Hamas` electoral participation, see Løvlie 2008.

⁶⁹ <http://www.aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=3&id=15728>

consulted, the political bureau will take the decisions.⁷⁰ This chain in the decision-making of Hamas reveals one of its weaknesses. Israeli restrictions on movement inside the OPT, and the fact that top-leaders reside all over the Middle East, restricts the movement from taking quick decisions. The external bodies are the most influential and powerful parts of the movement. According to a newspaper interview with a member of the political bureau, Rafat Nasif, each of the four mentioned sectors will take an independent decision, without consulting any of the other sectors.⁷¹ As mentioned above, the Gaza and the West Bank sector convene their *Shura* councils, and takes decisions based on consultation within their area branches. The prisoners also convene in their *Shura* councils, but they obviously do not have a separate constituency. The Political bureau is then informed about the decision made locally, and based upon this information, will make a final decision. Note also that the opinion of the Gaza branch has been more important when it comes to overall decision-making than the opinion of the West Bank branch. Decision-making in the military wing of Hamas is even more secretive. However, one plausible scenario is that the leaders in the political bureau (and possibly the Majlis al-Shura) at times give general strategic long term directions to al-Qassam commanders. Accordingly, when it is in the political interest of Hamas to carry out militant attacks, al-Qassam commanders will be given free rein for an unspecified period of time. This period of operational leeway can also be cut off, if it is the strategic interest of the movement to halt attacks (Anonymous political analyst).

Conclusive remarks

The first structures of Hamas were based upon the forms of organization found in the Mujamma and the Brotherhood. These institutions were stronger in Gaza than the West Bank, which created an imbalance in terms of power and influence from the outset. Continued Israeli crackdowns on Hamas have influenced the way the organization is structured. The West Bank leaders had to keep a low profile, rely on decisions taken in plural, and depending on other parts of the movement for finances. It is clear that the West Bank branch is the marginal branch in terms of power and influence. The Gaza branch enjoys a stronger legitimacy as representing the core area of Hamas, it has stronger representation in the National *Shura* council, it has stronger links to al-Qassam commanders, and a stronger financial position. In addition, the external pressure has been harder on the West Bank branch, in terms of Israeli restrictions, and political competition from the PLO. As internal matters of

⁷⁰ According to Gunning, consultation with the whole movement serves to register popular sentiment, but the Political bureau is still in charge of making the final decision (Gunning 2008:109).

⁷¹ <http://www.aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=3&id=15728>

Hamas are secretive, it is only possible to speculate why power inside Hamas never has been centered in the West Bank. It could be a strategic consideration, as the external pressure against Hamas would have been insurmountable. On the other hand, Hamas has established several strong bases inside the West Bank, such as Hebron and Nablus, later also Ramallah, Jenin and Qalqilya. In these cities Hamas has built a large grassroots support, as the following chapter will show, partly from engaging in social welfare activities.

Chapter 6

Social activities in the West bank between 1993 and 2007. The source of political influence?

Introduction

As described in chapter four, the activities of Hamas during the first Intifada was focused on resistance, building the organization, and spreading the Islamic message to Palestinians. Furthermore, Hamas gradually inherited social welfare institutions from the Mujamma in Gaza and the Brotherhood in the West Bank. The focus on social and religious work quickly turned into the backbone of the organization, as Hamas received massive grassroots support from people depending on their social work. This support was invaluable for its later electoral success. In this chapter I aim to analyze the social activities of Hamas in the West Bank. I will argue that the social activity of Hamas in the West Bank has been directed more through what I have termed “external institutions”, than in their own directly Hamas-run institutions. I will also discuss controversies regarding these activities, before analyzing the impact of the external pressure upon these institutions. It is the aim of this chapter to show how Hamas conduct its social activities in the West Bank, and how this work has affected the political position of the movement in the West Bank.

How to approach the social and religious work of Hamas?

Hamas expert Khaled Hroub describes the social work of Hamas as providing structured educational, health and welfare services and help to the poor (Hroub 2006:70). These services are provided through extensive networks of charities, mosques, unions and sports clubs, which are recognized as honest and transparent institutions in contrast to Fatah and governmental institutions (Hroub 2006:70). In the Palestinian context, social and religious work often goes hand in hand. Religious work will thus be treated as part of the social activity of Hamas. In general, the recipients of emergency assistance or regular programs provided by these welfare institutions are low-income households, orphans, disabled, families headed by divorced women and widows,⁷² households where the husband is chronically ill, disabled or imprisoned, and children in need of moral or psychological support (ICG 2003:6, 7). In this chapter I will make a distinction between institutions established and operated only by Hamas, and institutions separate or external to Hamas, in which Hamas are influential. Moreover, I will argue that directly Hamas-run institutions have flourished more openly in

⁷² Financial assistance is also provided to families consisting of the surviving relatives of any Palestinian who meets his death as a result of the conflict with Israel, including relatives of suicide bombers (ICG 2003:23).

Gaza than the West Bank, where they have faced more favorable conditions. In the West Bank, directly Hamas-run institutions has been more exposed for restrictions. Hamas has thus worked more actively through external institutions in the West Bank, particularly *Zakat* committees and mosques, which will be elaborated.

According to an International Crisis Group report from 2003, Islamic welfare organizations fall into two broad categories: Charitable institutions and Service organizations. Charitable institutions provide alms in form of financial subsidies, food and shelter, while service organizations provide benefits such as education and medical relief (ICG 2003:7). However, these categories are problematic as the institutions discussed in this chapter typically are involved in both fields of work. In the case of Hamas in the West Bank, it still makes more sense to discuss charitable institutions, as the *Zakat* committees fall within this category. When discussing Hamas social activities, it is important to emphasize that Hamas engage in both legitimate (humanitarian) and illegitimate (terrorist) activities. The context is thus important, as Hamas operate under conditions of foreign occupation, and in an environment in which the recognized public sector (PA) often does not function (ICG 2003:2). When the PA was operative from 1994, NGO`s provided 60% of the health care in Palestine and 30% of the educational institutions (Jensen 2009:26). UNRWA was among the most important institutions, although it focused mainly on refugees in Gaza, not the West Bank. The PA has never been the sole provider of health care in the OPT, and the PA still relies on UNRWA and private actors to cover all welfare needs.

There is great controversy connected to the social and religious work of Hamas. In the aftermath of 11th September 2001, there has been raised great concern on state levels regarding the relationship between the social work of Hamas – and terrorism. According to research in the growing field of counter-terrorism studies, Hamas conceals its terrorist activity behind charitable, social and political fronts (Levitt 2006:1-7). According to Matthew Levitt, Hamas uses its social institutions to indoctrinate and recruit terrorists, and fund and facilitate terrorist cells (Levitt 2006:23, 79). Levitt makes no distinctions between internal and external institutions, and the social welfare activity of Hamas, such as in *Zakat* committees, is discussed in general as *Da`wa* activity (Levitt 2006:23-25). Literature from the field of counter-terrorism studies is however problematic. It leans mainly on disclosed intelligence sources, which often are biased, connected to government activity, and sometimes based on information extracted from detainees under interrogation (Schäublin 2009:13). I will however

argue that this literature should not be rejected completely. Read critically it can constitute a background for research, as in this thesis. Furthermore, this chapter rely on the academic literature on Hamas, as well as interviews from my fieldwork.

Researchers from other fields may agree with Levitt that *Zakat* committees and mosques stand out as the most important institutions for Hamas, especially in terms of activity and grassroots support. But they strongly disagree on the depiction of how these institutions function, their roles, and their links to Hamas (Schäublin 2009:11-14). In accordance with findings from my fieldwork, I will assume the position taken by Emaunel Schäublin and Jeroen Gunning regarding the role of West Bank *Zakat* committees. Accordingly, *Zakat* committees in the West Bank are viewed as institutions that also functions independently of Hamas, thus not an integral part of the Hamas organization (Schäublin 2009:11-14, Gunning 2008:115). Moreover, I will follow Gunning`s position that Hamas has worked to be represented in, but not controlling the decision-making completely in these institutions (Gunning 2008:115). This position was also supported by several senior political analysts during my fieldwork. There is considerably less disagreement between researchers on the fact that the social and religious work of Hamas has benefited the movement when it comes to political mobilization. As Khaled Hroub notes, “Hamas`s social thought and its political views and practices are intertwined” (Hroub 2000:233).

Early social and religious activity

As discussed in chapter three, the Brotherhood prioritized social and educational issues before politics and resistance until the late 1980s. Social development from below was seen as a necessary step in the path of political change (Hroub 2000:234). In the 1970s and 80s this project created a network of schools and social institutions, where religious preaching and education could take place (Mishal & Sela 2006:19, 20). This program was most successful in Gaza, where the Mujamma developed, administered, and controlled social, religious and educational Islamic institutions. An important factor in this success was the combination of religious and social work, by using the mosque as more than just a place of worship (Wiktorowicz 2004:127). Hamas then implemented the Brotherhood notion of building a coherent Islamic society from below, but combined this focus with the liberation of Palestine. Hamas inherited social institutions from the Brotherhood in a gradual process, and continued to build new ones (Hroub 2000:235). These institutions provided poor Palestinians in villages and refugee camps with food, medical services, clothing, books, schooling, orphanages,

kindergartens, summer camps and other social services (Edwards 2010:5). This growing network of institutions enabled Hamas to keep in touch with the concerns of the poor and working classes, and to influence their religious conduct and political choices (Hroub 2000:235). Part of this work was focused on *Zakat* committees. Some *Zakat* committees were partly established by Brotherhood and Hamas members, and from 1991 Hamas increased its focus on integrating its people from the political section, into existing committees in the West Bank (Schäublin 2009:54). However, the extent of the early social and religious activity in Gaza and the West Bank was not comparable. Gaza was the core area for Hamas, Israel allowed Islamic institutions to operate there, and the Gaza branch inherited a larger network of institutions (Ziad Abu Amr in interview with author). In addition, the Brotherhood mindset did not have the same influence in the West Bank, which also had a higher socio-economical profile than the Gaza strip, thus in need of less welfare assistance (Mishal & Sela 2006:25).

Hamas-run institutions in the West Bank

In 2003 it was estimated that Hamas operated between 70 – 100 social welfare institutions for the poor in the OPT (ICG 2003:11). Although there is no doubt Hamas has established and run its own institutions in the West Bank in the period under study, it is impossible to analyze such institutions in detail. The matter of affiliation is too unclear. A number of institutions in Gaza, such as the Islamic University, al-Mujamma, the Scientific Medical Association, the sports clubs *Nâdi al-Jami`iyya al-Islâmiyya* and the social organization al-Jam`iyya al-Islâmiyya are known to be controlled by Hamas (Jensen 2009:61-76). Other institutions can often be linked to political factions by their founders, their funding or their staffing (ICG 2003:11). According to political analysts I interviewed, Hamas in the West Bank needs to keep such information secret as a security measure, to avoid external pressure from Israel and the PA (Political analysts in interview with author). Findings in a FAFO report from 2010, does also indicate that schools and kindergartens run directly by Hamas are found more often in Gaza than the West Bank. The report specifically mentions the *Dar al-Arqam* schools and the *al-Salah* schools in Gaza (Høigilt 2010:31-33). Moreover, the FAFO study points out that there is reason to be careful when linking Islamic schools in the OPT directly to Hamas. Islamic schools might be run directly by Hamas, have loose ties to Hamas, no ties to Hamas, or be schools run by opposing Islamic movements, such as *Salafi* groups (Høigilt 2010:31, 32). The Young Men`s Muslim Association in Hebron may serve as an example of this complexity. The association was founded in 1985 by Talal al-Ayoubi Sidr, one of the

founders of Hamas in Hebron.⁷³ Today the charity is one of the largest in Hebron, and it provides a number of services, including the education of 1500 students (Høigilt 2010:56). However, a perceived link to Hamas made the Israeli military close down the association temporarily in 2005, as part of the campaign against “the terrorist infrastructure” of Hamas.⁷⁴ References to Israeli and PA raids in the West Bank, often found in the literature of counter-terrorism studies, are unfortunately the most publicly available information regarding Hamas-run institutions. However, according to the FAFO study, most of the Islamic schools in the OPT are charitable. This means they belong to a *Zakat* committee or another charitable association whose board has the financial and administrative responsibility for the school (Høigilt 2010:33). It is also worth noting that Hamas has a more positive image among Palestinians than the PA in delivering social services, as it is more efficient and not involved in corruption (ICG 2003:25).

West Bank Institutions, external to Hamas

It is interesting to observe that Hamas in the West Bank has been more active in external institutions. According to a political analyst on the West Bank, Hamas have prioritized to get members from its political section, elected or represented into different external social or religious committees or institutions in the West Bank society. Accordingly, this approach is safer for Hamas, as the risk is smaller for these institutions to be shut down by Israel or the PA, as they are not part of the Hamas organization (Anonymous political analyst in interview with author). An example is hospital governance, which is independent from Hamas in the West Bank. By installing a member in the governing body of the hospital, Hamas can exert indirect influence on governance and the finances of the hospital (Hilsenrath & Singh 2007:4). The *Zakat* committees and the mosques have however been the most important institutions. These are above all Islamic, traditional institutions with communal ownership, thus not integral parts of the Hamas infrastructure.

West Bank Zakat committees

The payment of *Zakat*, or almsgiving, is one of the five pillars of Islam and thus obligatory upon practising Muslims⁷⁵ (ICG 2003:3). For centuries, Palestinian mosques have been running informal voluntary committees charged with the collection and distribution of donations. *Zakat* committees received alms donations from individual Muslims,

⁷³ http://www.passia.org/palestine_facts/personalities/alpha_s.htm

⁷⁴ <http://palpress.ps/english/index.php?maa=ReadStory&ChannelID=1747>

⁷⁵ *Zakat* is not a formal tax in Palestinian law, and it is not collected by the PA. Muslim Palestinians are thus free to determine how much, when and to whom they will pay *Zakat* (ICG 2003:8).

organizations, corporations, governments and foreign *Zakat* funds, and in the case of the West Bank (until 2007) mostly from the Gulf-countries, Europe and the US (ICG 2003:8, Schäublin 2009:8). These incoming donations were then distributed to charitable projects. However, before I continue this discussion, it is important to note that the 2007 Hamas takeover of Gaza, led to radical reforms for the system of *Zakat* committees. The influential position Hamas had enjoyed in these committees, caused the PA emergency cabinet led by Salam Fayyad to dissolve *Zakat* committees in ninety-two West Bank towns and villages in 2007, and appoint eleven new central committees, one for each West Bank governorate (Schäublin 2009:9). By implementing this radical reform, the PA wanted to marginalize the political position of Hamas in the West Bank, by removing one of its fundamental components. It is thus worth having a closer look at how Hamas worked in these committees before 2007.

In the period up until 2007, *Zakat* committees were perceived as formally independent entities, and their political affiliations were therefore not immediately apparent. However, many existing committees were established or co-founded by Brotherhood members and other politico-religious movements, and some were co-founded by religious Fatah members (Schäublin 2009:61). By 2003, it was generally held that Hamas was far more influential within the social welfare sector than any other Palestinian political faction (ICG 2003:11). According to a 2009 report from the Centre on conflict, Development and Peacebuilding in Geneva (CCDP), by Emanuel Schäublin, a number of *Zakat* committee members claimed that sometimes, it was easier to access funds if the committee had a political leaning towards Hamas (Schäublin 2009:55). Historically, the Jordanian Ministry of religious affairs (*Awqaf*) started the formal registering of such committees in the West Bank from 1977⁷⁶ (ICG 2003:8). According to Schäublin, West Bank *Zakat* committees were for the first time under official Palestinian control in 1994/1995, when the PA took control of the administering, from the Israeli Ministry of Health. Furthermore, in 1997, all *Zakat* committees were officially registered by the PA (Schäublin 2009:34-39). Until 2007, membership in *Zakat* boards was reserved for the most respected men in the society, such as business men, entrepreneurs, imams, and some of the best educated and literate men (Schäublin 2009:8). Until 2007 candidates were proposed and appointed locally, but with the approval of the PA. *Zakat* committees often met in mosques, and they initiated charitable projects in their local communities (ICG 2003:8). By 1996, the PA had registered forty-seven *Zakat* committees in

⁷⁶ In 1977-1979 the *Zakat* committees of Nablus, Ramallah and Qalqilyah were registered. The Jenin committee were registered in 1984, the Hebron committee in 1987, and the Tubas committee in 1988 (Schäublin 2008:16).

the West Bank, and only three in Gaza⁷⁷ (Schäublin 2009:17). Committees were found all over the West Bank, several of them Hamas-affiliated.

Hamas in Zakat committees: Altruistic work or a foundation for terrorism?

My fieldwork in Ramallah presented me with two contradicting points of view regarding the nature of the social work of Hamas. First of all, on one side were the perspectives of Mahmoud Musleh and Mahmoud al-Ramahi, who both are, or have been members in the Ramallah and al-Bireh *Zakat* committees. During my interview with al-Ramahi, he proudly announced that he had been working in his medical clinic earlier that day, an institution connected to the Ramallah and al-Bireh *Zakat* committee (Mahmoud al-Ramahi in interview with author). Mahmoud Musleh stated that he had been the director of the al-Bireh committee between 1993 and 2004, and that the committee used to run 20 centers for the memorization of the Quran, 10 kindergartens, several schools for mutes, and secondary schools for females and men (Musleh in interview with author). Furthermore, Musleh also proudly described the success of the schools run by the Ramallah and al-Bireh *Zakat* committee. Accordingly, these schools always enjoyed great success, and he claimed the top five Palestinian students always came from one of these schools. Moreover, he claimed that as the PA took control of these schools (he did not mention when) they fired experienced teachers and changed the successful formula of the schools, something which the people did not like (Mahmoud Musleh in interview with author). When asked which social activities were most important for Hamas, Musleh emphasized that the most important thing for Hamas was to be able to offer Islamic alternatives to Palestinians: *“For example in wedding parties – singing and drinking – is not accepted by Islam. Instead of forbidding it – and saying it is taboo (which people will not accept – they want to celebrate) – we give Islamic alternatives – Islamic songs, music and singers. In Germany – people go to nudist beaches – this is not accepted by the Islamic society – so we give alternatives – we take people to see villages which have been demolished by the occupation – we take people to archeological areas, or to mosques which were made into bars”* (Mahmoud Musleh in interview with author). Hamas sympathizers are known to be working in all levels of the institutions run by *Zakat* committees. Some are teachers in schools, some play music in weddings, some have administrative positions, and some are directors of the charity. According to al-Ramahi, these people work with charity to help others. He also rejected what he termed the “western” view, that Hamas only engage in social

⁷⁷ The low number in Gaza was caused partly by the fact that the UNRWA focused its aid work on Gaza (Schäublin 2009:17).

work to facilitate suicide attacks and other militant attacks (Mahmoud al-Ramahi in interview with author).

The other and contradicting perspective regarding the social and religious work of Hamas is found in the aforementioned field of counter-terrorism research. In his book “Hamas: Politics, Charity and Terrorism in the service of Jihad”, Matthew Levitt claims that: “*the battery of mosques, schools, orphanages, summer-camps and sports leagues sponsored by Hamas, are integral parts of an overarching apparatus of terror*” (Levitt 2006:5). Furthermore, Levitt claims Hamas uses *Zakat* committees to channel money to the West Bank to use for political and military activities. Hamas activists working in the *Zakat*-run institutions thus have tactical functions such as gathering intelligence before suicide attacks, leading bombers to their targets and covering their identity (Levitt 2006:80). The network of charitable institutions affiliated with Hamas, thus fulfil three primary functions according to Levitt: recruiting, employing, and providing a cover of legitimacy for terrorists (Levitt 2006:81). Levitt also claims to possess documents seized by Israel in the offices of the Ramallah and al-Bireh *Zakat* committee after the Israeli Operation Defensive Shield in 2002. According to these documents,⁷⁸ the Ramallah and al-Bireh charity is but a branch of a larger charity, namely the al-Islah Charitable Society. Moreover, Levitt claims that the al-Islah charity spent their finances on three things: 1: Aid to families of Hamas “martyrs”, prisoners, and wounded operatives, 2: Administrative costs tied to running the Hamas charity’s office and similar expenses, and 3: Social welfare support to Hamas social service organizations (Levitt 2006:57). It is thus a major discrepancy between the statements from al-Ramahi and Musleh during my interviews, and the accounts made by Levitt. It is my impression that Musleh and al-Ramahi are obliged, as Hamas members, to make positive and innocent statements concerning their social work. Al-Ramahi thus stated on his own initiative, that Hamas is active in social work to help people, not facilitate suicide attacks. On the other hand, statements from Levitt appears to be somewhat exaggerated, as he claims the whole social welfare sector of Hamas is dedicated to terrorism. This statement fails to account for the altruistic motive most likely present in the *Zakat* committees (Schâublin 2009:13).

⁷⁸ The documents can be read from the homepage of an Israeli NGO – “The Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center” - http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/html/final/eng/sib/12_04/interpal_app_a.htm.

From yet other sources, it is possible to get a more nuanced image of how the social work of Hamas works. The aforementioned CCDP report on *Zakat* committees is based on fieldwork and case studies in six committees: Hebron, Ramallah, Nablus, Qalqilyah, Jenin, and Tubas (Schäublin 2009:10). According to the findings in this report, it is possible to identify at least eight major fields of activity common to such committees. Projects are run in orphan sponsorship, regular financial aid to poor families, direct aid for families in a situation of urgent need, in-kind aid, provision of sacrificial animals and distribution of their meat and other food items, medical services, education and job creation projects (Schäublin 2009:23-26). Educational work is one of the most elementary parts of Hamas's social and religious reform program. According to Jeroen Gunning, "Hamas proposes to educate society into willing an Islamic state through civic participation, consultation exercises and education" (Gunning 2008:265). The importance of educational work in West Bank *Zakat* institutions is also underscored by the FAFO report mentioned above, as most Islamic private schools in the OPT are run by *Zakat* committees (Høigilt 2010:19). Moreover, Jacob Høigilt of FAFO studied a number of these educational institutions in the West Bank, and he found no evidence that these schools seek to further Hamas's political ideology or methods, but at the same time it is no surprise that several activists in all levels of these institutions are sympathetic to Hamas (Høigilt 2010:50). In the history of Hamas, there is however no doubt that Hamas has recruited suicide bombers and members for the armed cells of the al-Qassam brigades in the West Bank, from institutions run directly by Hamas, or by the aforementioned *Zakat* committees (Edwards 2010:140).

Controversial funding

The contradicting perspectives mentioned above are closely connected to the funding of Hamas's social work. The welfare network connected to Hamas has been accused of diverting money to terrorism activities, facilitating recruitment and propaganda for Hamas terrorist activities, and helping maintain and strengthen Hamas's political role in the OPT (ICG 2003:18). However, this controversy is mostly based upon sources such as intelligence sources and bank-prints published online, which it is impossible to verify in this thesis. The funding of institutions run directly by Hamas, or indirectly through external institutions, is collected from both local Palestinians, and external financial contributors. In general, Hamas receives funding from several sources outside of Palestine, such as individual Palestinian, Arab or Muslim supporters, and foreign organizations. Iran is the only country accused of funding Hamas (Hroub 2006:137). Individual local Palestinians are also known to donate

money for Hamas activities, often when coming to the local mosques (Hroub 2006:138). Money used in the directly Hamas-run institutions thus probably comes from general financial contributions. External institutions such as the West Bank *Zakat* committees are funded independently of Hamas. Alms are often donated as cash, but the *Zakat* committees also own *Waqf*-property. *Waqf* property is pieces of land donated to the *Zakat* committee for ever, which use the land for charitable purposes⁷⁹ (Schäublin 2009:26). However, the core of this controversy is that Hamas continues to play a central role in directing money to selected institutions. Despite possible altruistic aims of these institutions, it has been documented that Hamas help generate support for the movement and its political program – including the violent resistance (ICG 2003:25). Hamas has thus been able to influence how money are spent by *Zakat* committees, and the most controversial example concerns the families of martyrs, which are made eligible to receive financial support (Hroub 2006:71).

The importance of West Bank Mosques

Mosques are important institutions for Hamas in the West Bank. Not only are they a place for worship, but they have an added social value as a meeting point where it is possible to discuss matters related to religion and politics (Gunning 2008:123). Furthermore, many Hamas leaders have traditionally been general prayer leaders or the holder of the important Friday prayer, which is an important role in the Palestinian society (Gunning 2008:123). Several *Zakat* committees are also tied to mosques, and perform their work in or from mosques. Hamas are also known to recruit candidates for their military wing, the al-Qassam brigades from mosques (Edwards 2010:140). In 1996, as part of a crackdown against Hamas, the PA assumed formal supervision of all mosques in Palestine. Still, Hamas managed to influence PA appointed imams, which during heightened confrontation with Israel delivered extremist sermons (ICG 2003:22). Hamas thus still exploited any possibility to use mosques for sermons and other activities. The PA thus lacked control of the mosques, or turned a blind eye to this activity. This phenomenon is a matter of general knowledge in the OPT, and people knows which mosques that are lenient towards Hamas (ICG 2003:11). The use of mosques in political ways has at times enhanced the political position of Hamas in the West Bank. People attending mosque sermons are a receptive audience to the Islamic message of Hamas, and by using mosques politically - Hamas are actually drawing more people into the political process and enlarging the political space in the society (Gunning 2008:173). Furthermore, mosques

⁷⁹ This could mean renting the land for educational institutions on preferential conditions, or to normal commercial tenants. The income deriving from these properties is used for charitable projects (Schäublin 2009:26).

were central in the early parts of Hamas's 2006 election campaigns. Election campaigns in mosques reinforced the message that Hamas were inspired by Islam, and that its leaders were "true Muslims". However, the success of this campaign threatened Fatah and the PA, and Hamas were forced to sign a code of conduct in January 2006, banning electioneering from mosques (Gunning 2008:161).

External pressure: Out of sight out of mind?

External pressure against social and religious Hamas-affiliated institutions is closely connected to the militant activity of Hamas, and its political influence in the West Bank. As will be elaborated in chapter seven, a series of suicide bombs launched by the al-Qassam brigades against Israeli targets in 1996 provoked a coordinated action against Hamas, by the PA and Israel. This was the first major campaign against the whole infrastructure of Hamas in both Gaza and the West Bank. The designated targets were militant cells, political leaders, and the source for Hamas support among the Palestinians; the social welfare network.

More than 1200 Hamas members were arrested in the 1996 campaign. A number of Hamas institutions were raided and closed down, including kindergartens, educational institutions and charities (ICG 2003:6). The perhaps most devastating blow for Hamas was that several hundreds of mosques, where Hamas had enjoyed a free rein, were suddenly placed under the direct authority of the PA (Jensen 2009:24). The PA also appointed new imams, and deprived Hamas of the opportunity to use mosques as a forum to convey political messages (ICG 2003:8). Furthermore, the pressure against Hamas-linked institutions continued throughout the rest of the 1990s, as the PA worked to consolidate its security forces and assert full authority over opposition groups (Hroub 2000:107). As will be elaborated in chapter eight, international peace summits in Sharm al-Sheikh, Hebron and Wye River between 1996 and 1998 had resulted in a "green light" for Israel and the PA to fight terrorism, which they both took full advantage of (Hroub 2000:109). Financial support for Hamas institutions was blocked and further restrictions were placed on *Zakat* committees and mosques (Hroub 2000:108). However, the PA knew that totally crushing the social welfare sector of Hamas would lead to protests from the population, due to the importance of this network in providing social services. The PA thus simultaneously sustained a quiet dialogue with the political leadership of Hamas, and left its social welfare infrastructure largely intact (ICG 2003:6). An International Crisis Group report from 2003 indicates a pattern of further crackdowns against Hamas-affiliated institutions in Gaza and the West Bank during the second Intifada

(elaborated in chapter eight). According to the report, every large-scale attack by Hamas on Israeli cities was followed by PA measures against Hamas institutions. The PA and Israel thus partly cooperated in targeting Hamas, although the PA never used its full force to wipe out all elements of Hamas. Hamas-affiliated institutions were frequently raided and sealed down. Between September 2000 and January 2002, the PA sealed the premises of 50 Hamas-affiliated social welfare institutions, froze the assets of 25 institutions, and imposed external supervision on their governing bodies (ICG 2003:16). Furthermore, the report claims that no certain allegations were made against these institutions, and the closure orders were often lifted after a short while. It was thus more a matter for the PA to show strength against Hamas and to alleviate foreign pressure, as Israel and the international donor society feared the financing of these institutions indirectly went to militant operations (ICG 2003:17).

The Israeli re-occupation of the West Bank during spring of 2002, in “Operation Defensive Shield”, is however and particularly interesting case. The operation followed one of the most violent months of the second Intifada.⁸⁰ Hamas was largely responsible for the latest attacks, but Israel blamed Arafat and the PA for not maintaining security (Edwards 2010:103). Israeli forces thus smashed PA ministries and offices, and detained numerous Hamas leaders and supporters (Edwards 2010:103).⁸¹ The operation led to the break-down of PA’s social health-care institutions, and thus an even greater need for social services provided by Hamas-affiliated institutions (Edwards 2010:105). As part of the operation, Israel persuaded the PA to freeze bank accounts belonging to Hamas charities in both Gaza and the West Bank. However, the network of Hamas-affiliated social welfare institutions continued to provide emergency assistance throughout the West Bank during the whole period of Israeli lockdown (Edwards 2010:105). The breakdown of PA health-care institutions came in addition to severe Israeli closures of the OPT, and restrictions on movement during the whole second Intifada. Demands for food and health-care were thus increasing, especially in refugee camps and West Bank villages. In numbers, *Zakat* committees in Gaza and the West Bank assisted 450 families with cash before the second Intifada, which increased to 7000 families in 2003. Furthermore, the four largest Islamic welfare organization in the OPT provided food assistance to 145,450 households in 2003, while a quarter of all food and other assistance in

⁸⁰ 88 Israel killed 40 Palestinians in Gaza 8th of March, Hamas’s suicide bombers killed eleven Israelis the 9th of March, another 30 Israelis on the 27th of March, and 3 Jewish settlers were shot the 28th of March (Edwards 2010:100-102).

⁸¹ Israel’s first target was Arafat’s compound in Ramallah, the Muqata, where Arafat was isolated until his death in 2004 (Edwards 2010:103).

the West Bank in 2003 came from Islamic welfare organizations (ICG 2003:15, 16). Effects of the Intifada, such as check-points hindering Palestinian in accessing official welfare providers, and later the re-occupation of the West Bank, thus partly served to increase the importance of Hamas as a social welfare provider in the West Bank. Furthermore, the public support for Hamas increased, as a result of its social welfare efforts. It is important to emphasize that the welfare apparatus of Hamas is noted for its efficiency, integrity and professionalism, in contrast to cronyism and corruption associated with the PA (ICG 2003:5).

The pressure on Hamas continued during 2003/2004. In this period the PA again yielded to Israeli/US pressure and took harsh measures against charities, including freezing the bank accounts of twelve charities in the West Bank and thirty-eight in Gaza (Hroub 2006:73). However, an International Crisis Group report from 2010 states that both the PA and Israel had, until recently, its main focus on armed Islamist resistance, not the Islamists` social institutions and informal networks (ICG 2010:28). This was visible during the Operation Defensive Shield, when the IDF and Palestinians from all factions engaged in hard battles inside Jenin and Nablus. The IDF targeted areas known to bring up suicide bombers, demolished their families homes, detained suspected Hamas and Islamic Jihad members and confiscated weapons (Edwards 2010:100-105). The goal was to deter future Palestinian terrorists. For the IDF, this focus changed in 2005. An intelligence unit initiated a comprehensive program to survey Islamist activism and map out its welfare institutions (ICG 2010:28).⁸² Between May and August of 2006, in the aftermath of the Hamas PLC victory, the IDF itself thus targeted Islamic charitable institutions in the West Bank. According to an OCHA report from 2006,⁸³ the IDF in this period attacked, raided or closed down 37 Islamic institutions, suspected of being used as a front for military attacks against Israeli targets.

As will be elaborated in chapter eight, Hamas won the local elections in 2005, and thus entered local municipalities as the official social service providers in the West Bank. It is important to note the ability of Hamas-affiliated social welfare institutions to continue their work despite heavy pressure from both Israel and the PA. Continuous attempts to shut them down have not been effective, and they remained functioning throughout the period under study, serving hundreds of thousands of poor Palestinians, and continuing its attacks against

⁸² Accordingly, information was passed along to the PA after Hamas had seized control of Gaza in 2007. This information has then been used to map out the networks and activities of West Bank Islamists and to close down 187 organizations in the West Bank after 2007 (ICG 2010:28).

⁸³ http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/OCHA_Special_focus_8_Nov_2006_Eng.pdf

Israeli targets (Hroub 2006:72). Moreover, as is clear from the Palestinian elections in 2006, efforts to close them down did not reduce its popularity among the West Bank population.

This was also emphasized by Mahmoud Musleh during my interview with him:

“For example they established projects for orphans, each orphan were given a guardian. Human aid projects, private education and schools. All these things enabled the movement to have large support from the people in the society. But some people think this support only comes because Hamas gives them welfare, – no it is not right – the people support us because our hearts are with them. But the PA has closed down our institutions in the West Bank. Does this mean that the people no longer support Hamas? No – we are against the proverb saying “out of sight out of mind”. We are out of sight – but not out of mind (Mahmoud Musleh in interview with author).

Conclusive remarks

The social and religious work of Hamas has grown substantially during the period under study. Hamas reach out to numerous Palestinians all over the West Bank with much needed social welfare assistance. The recipients of this work constitute the backbone of Hamas, in terms of popular support for the movement. In the period between 1993 and 2007, *Zakat* committees were among the most important external institutions for Hamas. By placing members in the *Zakat* committees, and having activists working in institutions driven by the committee, Hamas has been far more influential within these institutions than any other faction. The heavy Israeli/PA pressure upon Hamas in the West Bank throughout the period, also made it more logical for Hamas to be active in external institutions than create their own institutions. It is essential to be aware of the controversies surrounding the social and religious work of Hamas. It is thus worth noting the mixed-roles of Mahmoud Musleh and Mahmoud al-Ramahi. They were both serving as Hamas PLC members from 2006, and they were both important members of the Ramallah and al-Bireh *Zakat* committees. It is impossible to conclude on the allegations regarding Hamas institutions and their connection to terrorism. It is however my impression that Hamas leaders paint an over-glamorous picture of the welfare work, while counter-terrorism experts are exaggerating in their statements.

The external pressure on Hamas-run and external institutions has been massive and withstanding since at least 1996. The PA and Israel has partly coordinated crackdowns, including arresting members, freezing financial assets and closing down institutions.

However, the PA has not been willing to close down these social institutions completely, as it is relying on Hamas to provide such services. The humanitarian situation in the West Bank

worsened during the Second Intifada. Israeli military operations in the West Bank, especially operation “Defensive Shield”, paralyzed the PA and its ability to provide social services. In this context, Hamas emerged as one of the most important providers of social services in both Gaza and the West Bank. Although impossible to measure, this important role as welfare provider – with credibility compared to the PA - has given the movement large popular support in the West Bank. It is worth noting that several Hamas *Zakat* committee members from the West Bank ran for the Hamas-led Change and Reform bloc, which won the local and national elections in 2005/2006. It is thus my impression that the social work of Hamas gave the movement a solid grassroots support, which it could take advantage of in its political work. On the other hand, the popular support Hamas received from its social work in the West Bank pushed the PA and Israel to increase its pressure on Hamas in the political arena.

Chapter 7

In search of political influence; militant activity in the West Bank

Introduction:

This chapter will discuss the militant activity of Hamas in the West Bank between 1993 and 2007. In this period, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam brigades spread from Gaza and established cells in the West Bank. Violent attacks against Israeli targets and Palestinian collaborators, later including suicide attacks, became important strategic supplements to Hamas's ongoing social and political work. However, these violent attacks were met with harsh retaliation from Israel, at times with support from PA security services. The severity of these repercussions also affected Hamas's social and political work, and undermined the overall influence of the West Bank branch, both in absolute terms as well as vis-à-vis the other branches of Hamas. This chapter will first give a historical description of the militant activity conducted by the al-Qassam Brigades in or from the West Bank. I will then analyze the impact this activity has had on the position of Hamas in the West Bank between 1993 and 2007. As noted in chapter two, this chapter relies mostly on the academic literature on Hamas, but it is also informed by information from counter-terrorism research.

How to approach the militant activity of Hamas in the West Bank?

Unsurprisingly, as Hamas initially was established as an armed militia to violently resist the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the group has carried out numerous suicide attacks, shootings, and other violent acts since 1987. Violence was therefore originally the most important tool for Hamas to reach their stated aim of total liberation of Palestine – “from the River Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea” (Hroub 2006:21). As the decision to turn to violence against the Israeli occupation was the chief factor behind the establishment of Hamas itself, its leaders have consistently argued that violent resistance is a legitimate Palestinian right (ICG 2004:16). Article 13 in Hamas 1988 Charter, for example, states that peaceful initiatives, such as international conferences, to resolve the Palestinian problem is contrary to the ideology of Hamas. It also states that *Jihad* is obligatory for the liberation of Palestine, which in this context means the use of violence (Hroub 2000:274). As many of Hamas's activities are of a clandestine nature – and in particular its military operations – the exact chain of command between the different wings and branches in Hamas remains shrouded in secrecy (Hroub 2006:118). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to establish new facts regarding this issue. However, as established in chapter five, it is assumed that the political leadership decides on the general policy, signaling to the al-Qassam commanders when the latter are free to plan

and execute an operation, and when they should refrain from doing so. In this way, the political leadership remains isolated from militant operations carried out by al-Qassam Brigades, while at the same time keeping somewhat in control. When approaching the militant activity of Hamas, it is also important to note how physical separations and restrictions on movement have influenced violent attacks. Restrictions on movement came already in the mid-1990s for the people in Gaza, when Israel built the fence surrounding the Strip. Although Israel's strategic interests and settlement activity is focused mainly in the West Bank,⁸⁴ the border between Israel and the West Bank was more or less open until 2003. Thus while militant activists from the West Bank for a long time had open access to Israel, activists from Gaza had to re-focus on Israeli targets inside the Gaza Strip.

Early militant West Bank activity

As noted in chapter five, the al-Qassam Brigades were established in 1990. Note, however, that the Brigades were a continuation of a process initiated by the Mujamma in the early 1980s, when the Brotherhood in Gaza began to build their own military infrastructure. The first of these militant groups was the Mujahideen Filastine, established in 1984. It was cells from this group that killed the Israeli soldier Avi Sasportas in 1989, leading the Israelis to arrest Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and to end the relationship with Hamas. In 1990, Hamas established more militant cells, first in Rafah, Gaza, and later throughout Gaza (Edwards 2010:117). These cells were initially targeting collaborators, until seventeen Palestinians were killed by Israeli police in Jerusalem in 1990. This incident made Hamas wage *Jihad* against all Israeli targets with all means available (ICG 2004:7).⁸⁵

In 1991, Hamas activists restarted their militant activities under a new organization, partly in an attempt to isolate its military activities from its social and political work, and partly to avoid being compromised by fellow Hamas members already in Israeli custody. The first leader of the new al-Qassam brigades was Sheikh Salah Shehadeh, a former Mujamma and Mujahideen Filastine member from Gaza. Despite being small in size and numbers, the Qassam brigades quickly established itself as one of the most active and effective Palestinian fighting factions (Edwards 2010:112, 117). The al-Qassam brigades also spread to the West

⁸⁴ Israeli researcher Idith Zertal and journalist Akiva Eldar refers to Jewish settlement blocs around Jerusalem, the eastern and western slopes and hilltops of the Samarian hills, settlements in the Jordan Valley, settlements in the heart of Hebron, and Jewish suburbs touching Nablus and Ramallah (Eldar & Zertal 2007:xiv, xv).

⁸⁵ Hamas no longer limited its attacks to the military and symbols of the occupation, but it began to strike at every available target, including civilians, also within the occupied territories. Between November 1990 and February 1991, more than ten Israelis were killed (ICG 2004:7).

Bank in the early 1990s. One of the founders there, Sheikh Saleh al-Arouri from a village near Ramallah, was arrested by Israel in October 1992, and sentenced to fifteen years in prison (Edwards 2010:120). Quoted in Beverly-Milton Edwards, al-Arouri states that the first West Bank cell was established in Hebron in 1990 by current Hamas PLC-member (Jerusalem list) Mohammad Abu-Teir, and that members were recruited from Hebron, Jerusalem and Ramallah. This early al-Qassam network in the West Bank proved particularly attractive to students, especially students from Gaza. However, the al-Qassam Brigades on the West Bank suffered serious setbacks early on, as many of the new members were arrested by Israel (Edwards 2010:120-121, 212). Note also that the first al-Qassam cells in the West Bank were under the command of the outside headquarters (Mishal & Sela 2006:65).

Figure 5: logo of the al-Qassam brigades⁸⁶



The militant activities of Hamas became a serious political factor as the peace negotiations between Israel and the PLO ran into difficulties in 1992. Hamas gained support among hard-line Palestinians by stepping up militant attacks against Israeli civilians, soldiers and settlers, and condemning the nascent peace process. At this point, al-Qassam cells attacked solely with knives and small arms, as they did not have access to rockets, and the tactic of suicide attacks were not yet introduced to the conflict. The frequency of attacks by al-Qassam activists against both collaborators and Israeli targets increased in the course of 1992, culminating with the abduction and murder of an Israeli border policeman in December that year. This was the last straw for Israel. 415 Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaders, members and activists were arrested or removed from jail, and deported to southern Lebanon (Edwards 1996:158), effectively paralyzing the domestic decision-making capabilities of Hamas. Among the

⁸⁶ The al-Qassam logo, found on their website: www.qassam.ps.

deported were West Bank leaders such as Hassan Yousef and Husayn Abu Kuwik, but also al-Qassam commanders and activists (Abu Amr 1993:14).

However, despite the temporary setback, these deportations had a somewhat positive side effect for Hamas. The movement received massive international media attention, as the Israeli move was condemned by the international community as a breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention (Edwards 1996:158). According to Mahmoud Musleh, the deported leaders established contact with each other and planned future resistance strategies. The international pressure was on Israel to allow them back into the OPT, and when they returned they were well received. When asked about the implications of the deportations for the West Bank branch, Musleh referred to a quote from the Egyptian Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna: *“when you trim a tree – it gives you more fruit next year”* (Mahmoud Musleh in interview with author). Although the al-Qassam brigades also suffered from a lack of leadership after the deportations, it continued to function. During the early months of 1993, the al-Qassam brigades continued to attack Israeli targets, including the killing of soldiers, settlers and civilians (Edwards 1996:159). Hamas thus demonstrated that the compartmentalization of the militant wing had been a strategic success. Even under exceptional pressure, Hamas retained its military capabilities and was able to mount serious attacks against Israel.

The Hebron massacre and West Bank suicide attacks

When the PA was established in 1994, Hamas initially withheld attacks against Israeli targets for a few months in order to test the new Palestinian authority (Mishal & Sela 2006:69). However, the Hebron massacre in February 1994 completely turned the tables. The massacre, where the Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein killed twenty-nine Palestinians inside the Ibrahimi mosque in Hebron, provoked Hamas to resume its violent campaign (Mishal & Sela 2006:69). This incident was also the trigger for a new and more violent tactic by Hamas, largely originating from the West Bank. Yehia Ayyash, an engineer from Rafat in the West Bank, had joined the al-Qassam network during the first Intifada (Chehab 2007:55). The Hebron massacre infuriated Ayyash, which eventually led to a new phase in the use of force from Hamas. He gathered co-students and co-members of the al-Qassam network to create bombs, which was to be used in several suicide attacks during the next two years (Chehab 2007:54-56). The first attack came in April 1994, when a West Bank man killed eight Israelis with a suicide car-bomb in the city of Afula (Chehab 2007:56). By October 1994, the bombs

designed and constructed by Ayyash had killed at least seventy Israelis, with more than four hundred injured (Chehab 2007:57).

As noted above, Israel completed the security barrier between the Gaza Strip and Israel in 1996, forcing al-Qassam activists on the Strip to focus on Israeli targets inside Gaza. Among these targets were Israeli settlers and soldiers. As a result of the limited options available to the Gaza activists, the West Bank cells became increasingly important for Hamas to be able to carry out attacks inside Israel. Al-Qassam cells there had access to Israel through open fields from the West Bank, or by using fake IDs to get through Israeli checkpoints (Chehab 2007:58). As mentioned in chapter seven, Hamas agreed to hold a period of calm (*tahdiyah*) during the Palestinian elections of 1996. Also in this period, Israeli intelligence operatives managed to track down and kill their prime target, Yaha Ayyash. Ayyash was wanted for almost every suicide bomb between 1994 and 1996 (Edwards 2010:218). The murder on Ayyash was revenged by his West Bank students in four suicide bombings, all carried out in 1996. These attacks also had political ramifications, as they interfered with the Israeli elections in May 1996 (ICG 2004:9).

According to an International Crisis Group report, Hamas wanted to ruin the re-election of Prime Minister Shimon Peres in the middle of the Oslo period, and replace him with Benjamin Netanyahu. Netanyahu's uncompromising stance against the Oslo accords was perceived, according to this claim, to discredit the Accords and the PA more than Hamas could do themselves (ICG 2004:9, 10). However, at this point in time, the latest attacks were too much for Israel to bear, prompting another round of crackdowns on Hamas in 1996. In addition to the arrest of almost every political Hamas leader in the West Bank, the crackdowns were also devastating for its social and military activity. Several al-Qassam cells were uprooted in the West Bank, and their weapons confiscated. However, Benjamin Netanyahu did win the elections in 1996, which soon led to the suspension of the Oslo accords, just as Hamas had hoped. However, Hamas was also left largely paralyzed by the crackdowns, and Netanyahu claimed to have restored security for Israel (ICG 2004:10). Despite these crackdowns, a limited network of al-Qassam cells in Hebron, Jerusalem and the northern region of the West Bank continued to carry out attacks against Israeli targets between 1996 and 2000 (Mishal & Sela 2006:224). These cells were under the command of the outside leadership of Hamas, which is an indication of the limited power and control held by the West Bank political leadership within Hamas (Mishal & Sela 2006:224).

The second Intifada and “Operation Defensive Shield”

The second wave of suicide bombings were initiated during the second Intifada. Hamas did however not engage in violent attacks during the first month. But as clashes continued to mount, and Islamic Jihad unleashed the first suicide bomber of the Intifada, Hamas also decided to participate in the uprising. Hamas justified attacking Israeli targets with claims that there are no such thing as Israeli civilians,⁸⁷ and that it had popular support in the population for the use of force (Esposito 2005:86, ICG 2004:16, 17). Hamas thus kept track of public opinion for suicide attacks, and calculated that new waves of suicide bombers would increase their support.

According to Michele K. Esposito, Palestinian factions carried out 135 suicide attacks between 28th of September 2000, and 27th of September 2004. At least 38 of these attacks were perpetrated by Hamas operatives (Esposito 2005:108). West Bank cells of al-Qassam, directed by Salah Shehadeh in Gaza, were central in the training of suicide bombers destined for Israel. Although Ayyash was killed in 1996, he had passed his knowledge to other operatives. A report from the Israeli Intelligence and Terrorism Information Centre states that the first two suicide attacks by Hamas were initiated inside of Gaza against Israeli targets. But then, the next nine attacks during 2001 were initiated by West Bank operatives of the al-Qassam brigades, in various Israeli cities such as Kfar Saba, Netanya, Jerusalem, Wadi Ara and in the Jordan valley (http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/english/eng_n/pdf/suicide_terrorism_ae.pdf :281-296).

The suicide bombers were from West Bank cities such as Jenin, Nablus, Hebron and Qalqilya, all easily reachable across the Green Line separating Israel and the West Bank. One of the worst suicide attacks perpetrated by Hamas operatives was the bombing at the Dolphinarium night club in Tel Aviv the 1st of June 2001. This operation killed twenty-one Israeli youths (Edwards 2010:89). However, it was an attack against a Netanya hotel on the 27th of March 2002 which led to the most severe repercussions from Israel. The attack, during a Passover celebration, killed thirty Israelis (Edwards 2010:102). It was planned and carried out by al-Qassam operatives from Nablus and Qalqilya, but the Israeli Prime minister Ariel Sharon was determined to hold Palestinian Prime Minister Yassir Arafat responsible for the Palestinian violence (Edwards 2010:103). The IDF thus escalated its responses to the Intifada, and intensified the operation called “Rolling response to Hamas”, an ongoing campaign already

⁸⁷ It is argued by Hamas (and others) that no Israeli citizen is a civilian because the compulsory military service in Israel in reality makes all citizens soldiers (ICG 2004:17).

actively targeting Hamas inside the West Bank and Gaza (Esposito 2005:90). This campaign had led to massive raids into known Hamas-strongholds such as Nablus and Jenin during February 2002 (Esposito 2005:90).

Later, from March 9th to May 10th in 2002, Israel executed Operation Defensive Shield, an all-out assault on West Bank population centers and the Jenin refugee camp. The main goal was to isolate Arafat in Ramallah, but it was equally important to uproot terrorist factions such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and to confiscate their weapons and assets (Esposito 2005:91). Operation Defensive Shield was also followed by a series of other IDF operations, such as Operation Still-Water in late 2003, targeting Nablus and Jenin as these were major recruitment spots for suicide bombers (Esposito 2005:94). According to Mathew Levitt, Hamas cells from the Hebron area turned increasingly active from 2003. Members from a Hebron soccer team planned and executed five suicide attacks during the early months of 2003 (Levitt 2004:3), and several suicide attacks as listed in the aforementioned report between 5th of March and the 31st of August 2004 is linked to the Qawasmeh clan. This clan was supposedly strongly linked to militant Hamas-cells in the Hebron area until today (Interview with anonymous political analyst).⁸⁸ Israeli operations in the West Bank led to a high number of casualties, with 250-300 Palestinians and 32 IDF soldiers killed in Operation Defensive Shield alone (Esposito 2005:91). Hamas, however, continued to mount suicide operations despite severe retaliations from Israel.

The continuing Israeli military operations had devastating consequences for Hamas. From 28th of September 2000 to 27th of September 2004, the IDF assassinated 119 Hamas members, leaders and activists in Gaza and the West Bank (Esposito 2005:112-122). Among the most important were al-Qassam member Shehadeh in 2002, al-Qassam member Maqadmeh in 2003, Hamas member Ismail Abu Shanab in 2003, and Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and his deputy, Dr. Abdelal Rantisi in March and April of 2004 respectively (Edwards 2010:107, 108).

By 2003 Israel had also increased its security measures in the West Bank, erecting road-blocks, building checkpoints and implementing travel restrictions. The most radical measure, however, was the construction of the security barrier surrounding the West Bank, which also

⁸⁸ The Hebron area has in general had active militant-cells since at least 2003, which also killed four Israelis in the period before my fieldwork in October 2010 (<http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/four-israelis-killed-in-shooting-attack-near-hebron-1.311318>).

began in 2003 (Edwards 2010:148). Apart from the obvious humanitarian impact the West Bank barrier has for innocent Palestinians, it also made it more difficult for al-Qassam operatives to access Israel from the West Bank. It also made it increasingly difficult for Hamas operatives inside the West Bank to access weapons,⁸⁹ and the proliferation of checkpoints limited physical communication between West Bank leaders. Due to the elimination of almost every high-level West Bank leader in the period between 2002 and 2003, it was now the Gaza leaders in Hamas that took control of the movement.

It is also important to note that during Operation Defensive Shield and the following operations, the IDF not only fought Palestinian factions such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, but also the official PA security forces (ICG 2010:1). Many of these had joined the Intifada, and suffered the same consequences as other Palestinian militant factions. By mid-2002, however, the security forces were all but defeated, with their infrastructure in shatters, their headquarters in all Palestinian cities destroyed, and with significant amounts of their weapons confiscated. In the following period, Palestinian militias and even clans or families took control in lawless West Bank areas, until Palestinian security reform became an essential part of the Roadmap for Peace in 2003 (ICG 2010:1).

The Roadmap then resumed Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation from 2003, leading to the slow recovery of the Palestinian Security Forces in the West Bank. Coordinated security operations against all Palestinian factions suspected of having terrorist cells in the West Bank, has as a result characterized the West Bank since 2003/2004.

Such operations were at times initiated by the PA itself, by the PA under pressure from Israel, or through IDF incursions into the West Bank in search of suspects. Hamas has however continued to establish armed cells inside the West Bank, and suicide attacks also continued throughout 2005 according to the aforementioned report. According to another Israeli intelligence report, the Gaza branch has faced difficulties in perpetrating terrorist attacks against Israeli targets after Israel disengaged from Gaza in 2005. They have instead concentrated on guiding and sponsoring cells based in the West Bank (http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/ct_hamas_e.pdf). However, the continued pressure against al-Qassam-cells in the West Bank by Israel and the reformed Palestinian

⁸⁹ Contrary to the extensive network of smuggler tunnels from Egypt to the Gaza Strip, al-Qassam cells in the West Bank has not had the same access to weapons and later rockets (Edwards 2010:130-133).

security forces pushed them underground. The West Bank barrier did also limit West Bank operatives in conducting operations inside Israel, which in turn has forced them to focus more on West Bank settlements.

Conclusive remarks

Intentional use of violence through shootings or suicide attacks is an integral part of the means employed by Hamas in their resistance against Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. Such methods are legitimated for Hamas from the popular support it receives from the Palestinian population, from its charter, and by claims delegitimizing the Israeli occupational power. It is important to emphasize that Hamas also was very active in militant attacks from the Gaza Strip in this period. Attacks launched from Gaza increased after the Israeli disengagement in 2005, and it escalated in intensity as al-Qassam managed to bring rockets into the strip through tunnels. However, it was violent attacks launched from the West Bank, by both Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which led to retaliations in both 1996 and 2002 forward. Through coordinated crackdowns on Hamas in several West Bank locations, but particularly in Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah and Hebron, Israel and the PA tightened the grip on Hamas. However, these crackdowns did not stop with the armed militant cells of al-Qassam. They had ramifications for the whole movement, as discussed in chapter six and eight. Hamas in the West Bank, through its militant wing al-Qassam, was thus perceived by Israel and the PA as a powerful enemy in the period of interest.

Chapter 8

In search of influence; political activity in the West Bank between 1993 and 2007

Introduction

Hamas has been politically active in the West Bank since 1988, although it was not perceived as a viable political force until 1992/1993. Hamas's political work are based upon the same ideology and agenda both in Gaza and the West Bank. However, the political context in the West Bank has been more complex than in Gaza. The West Bank society has been more pluralistic, secular, and geographically varied in terms of political views, compared to the society in Gaza. Furthermore, Israeli military presence and strategic interests has focused on the West Bank, not the Gaza Strip.⁹⁰ In this chapter I will discuss specific examples from the political activity of Hamas in the West Bank. I will first analyze elections on universities and professional associations, and then turn to the political process leading up to the local and national elections in 2005/2006. The outcome of the elections in the West Bank will be analyzed, with emphasis on the external pressure upon Hamas. It is the goal of this chapter to indicate the political position of Hamas in the West Bank in the period of study. In doing so, this chapter relies on interviews from my fieldwork, and the academic literature on Hamas.

Political continuity: activity on universities and in professional associations

I will begin the discussion of Hamas's political activity in the West Bank with a focus on elections for university councils and professional associations. Political activity on university campuses in Gaza and the West Bank was a significant part of the Brotherhood's focus on building an educational, political and organizational infrastructure from the 1970s (Hroub 2000:215). The Brotherhood entered student council elections to challenge the perceived secular trend in the West Bank society, and even controlled the Islamic university in Gaza. Secular nationalism was stronger in the West Bank than in Gaza, and Fatah thus gave the Brotherhood stronger competition in the West Bank university elections than in Gaza (Edwards 2010:211). Hamas continued this practice, and discovered that winning student council elections gave it a powerful, popular momentum, and a basis for popular legitimacy (Hroub 2000:215). Mahmoud Musleh confirmed this notion in interview with author. When asked about the importance of student council elections for the movement, he stated that

⁹⁰ From 1967 to 2007 Israel established 121 settlements in the West Bank, and 16 in Gaza. Israel disengaged from the Gaza settlements in 2005. Approximately 290,400 Israeli settlers lived in the West Bank in 2008, protected by numerous soldiers (<http://www.btselem.org/english/Settlements/Index.asp>, ICG 2009:20).

students constitute the pillar of the movement, as they are much more active in the society than other sectors (Musleh in interview with author).

Universities and professional associations have regular elections for their councils or boards. Hamas has been a major contender for seats in these councils in order to increase its political influence. However, Hamas has not used its well-known name in this political activity. As a security measure they decided to create student blocs with other names. One of these blocs, the still existing “*Kutla Islamiyya*” (Islamic student group), can be used as an example. It is a network of student blocs closely linked to Hamas, found on several Palestinian universities (Edwards 2010:212). Hamas affiliated blocks has also used different names depending on time and place, and they have entered tactical alliances with other factions.⁹¹ The activity of these blocs has been funded by Hamas, and some members have also been active in other Hamas institutions (Lewitt 2006:129). Results from annual student council elections are important also beyond the university campus. Political scientists consider the results as an important barometer of political influence in the wider society, although these results fail to account for a range of factors⁹² (Bassem Ezbidi and George Giacaman in interview with author). Results are thus used to indicate political trends, in absence of local or national election results (Hroub 2000:81, Kristianasen 1999:35). The Birzeit University, being the biggest and most politicized university in the West Bank is often used as an example, also because of the wide geographical representation of students there (Hroub 2006:80). Hamas has also used favorable results from student elections during the 1990s, to indicate that the Palestinian population opposed the Oslo Agreements, and to emphasize the level of public support for Hamas (Hroub 2000:218, 229). Student elections, together with professional association elections have thus been among the major arenas for political activity in the OPT, partly because other arenas such as local and national elections has been closed.⁹³ All of the political factions in Palestine have been active in these elections from time to time. However, the Israeli military administration, and later the PA have managed to limit the influence of these institutions in the Palestinian society (Gunning 2008:144).

⁹¹ Hamas won the 1993 elections at Birzeit University in an alliance with the PFLP (Fadil al-Khaldi in interview with author).

⁹² Students tended to be more radical than the rest of the population during the Intifadas, and the left wing usually get more support in student elections than what is recognizable in the Palestinian society (Senior political analyst in interview with author).

⁹³ Local elections were not held between 1976 and 2004/2005
<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=16918>.

Hamas in student council elections

According to Fadil al-Khaldi at the Student Affairs Office in Birzeit University, the student group affiliated with Hamas kept a low profile there between 1988 and 1993. The Islamic bloc did not have the strength and influence in the West Bank society to challenge Fatah until 1993. Al-Khaldi also emphasized that it was after the 1993-elections that students agreed on a system of proportional representation for future student council elections. Until then the faction with the most votes won the whole council, which had favored Fatah (Fadil al-Khaldi in interview with author). The Jerusalem bloc, a Hamas-led coalition, hence won all nine seats in the 1993 elections at Birzeit. The victory in Birzeit represented a important infiltration of a traditional Fatah power centre in the West Bank, and was interpreted by Hamas as a victory for its political line in opposition to the Oslo process (Hroub 2000:217). Every year the student blocks on the West Bank pick their candidates for the student council, compete for votes in election campaigns, and participate in organized debates on campus before the elections. Their main objective is to advocate Islamic alternatives for the students (Senior-political analyst in interview with author). However, a special poll on voting behavior from the student elections in al-Najah (Nablus) university in 1995, and Birzeit in 1996, shows that student agenda and larger political agenda, was almost equally important for students when they chose which bloc to vote for.⁹⁴ It is also important for each bloc to compete for votes among new students every year, as they are expected to vote for the same faction throughout his/hers education (Anonymous student in interview with author).

Mahmoud al-Ramahi emphasized the long term effects for Hamas in winning student votes. According to al-Ramahi, students were likely to bring their political affiliation into their later occupations, thus influencing politics and elections further on (Mahmoud al-Ramahi in interview with author). University students have also been frequently recruited into the political leadership of different factions, because of their education and their political training from the election campaigns.⁹⁵ Several sources from my fieldwork also emphasized that through most of the period of interest in this thesis, there has been large numbers of students from Gaza in West Bank universities. Mahmoud Musleh stated that the influence of Gaza students have been significant, both in numbers and because many of these students became student bloc leaders.

⁹⁴ <http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/cprspolls/96/birzeit.html#factors>,
<http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/cprspolls/96/annajah.html#whovote>

⁹⁵ Examples are Marwan Barghouti of Fatah from Birzeit, Mahmoud Musleh of Hamas from Birzeit, Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas from Islamic University in Gaza (Hroub 2006:130).

Musleh also stated that: *“the leaders of the movement are in Gaza, and leaders at the universities are from Gaza. This was not by force – it was accepted to be this way by members of the movement. The leaders of Fatah here in the West Bank used to ask Hamas members – why do you approve of this situation? Everything concerning Hamas is in Gaza? Their answer was that the Gaza leaders and students were more qualified than us, and they relieve us from large responsibilities, so we are happy with that”* (Mahmoud Musleh in interview with author). This is an interesting statement, implying that the Gaza branch possibly also had a hand in the student councils on the West Bank.

A closer look at a selection of results from different West Bank universities before the second Intifada shows how the fight for student support in reality was a fight between Hamas and Fatah. The two factions were locked in a struggle to acquire dominant positions in Gaza and West Bank communities (Mishal & Sela 2006:90). Other blocs representing factions such as the PFLP won just a few seats annually. Election results from Birzeit are most available. *Figure 6* contains results from elections held between 1993 and 1999. It shows a close race between Hamas and Fatah for the 51 seats in the council.

Figure 6: Student council elections at Birzeit, 1993 - 1999⁹⁶

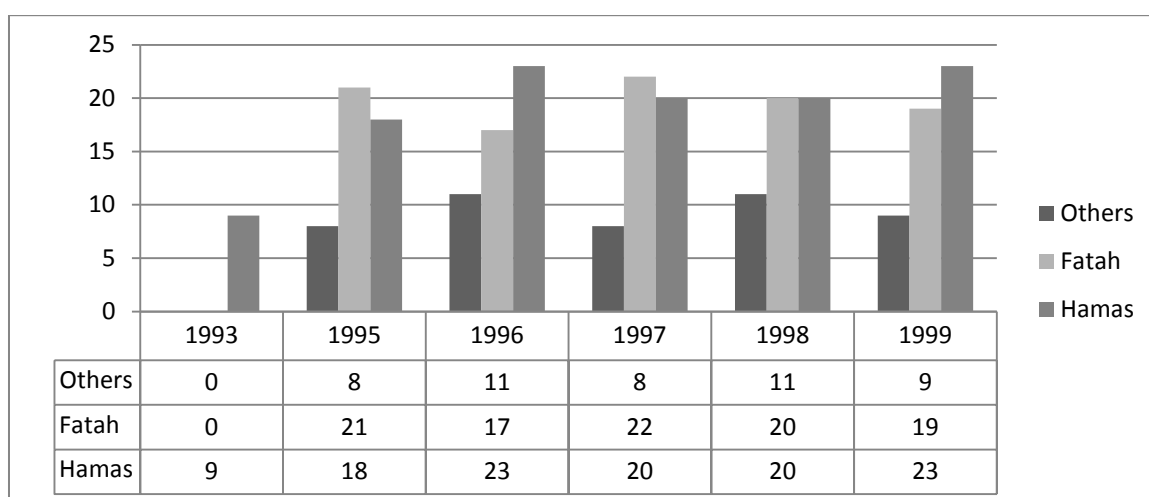
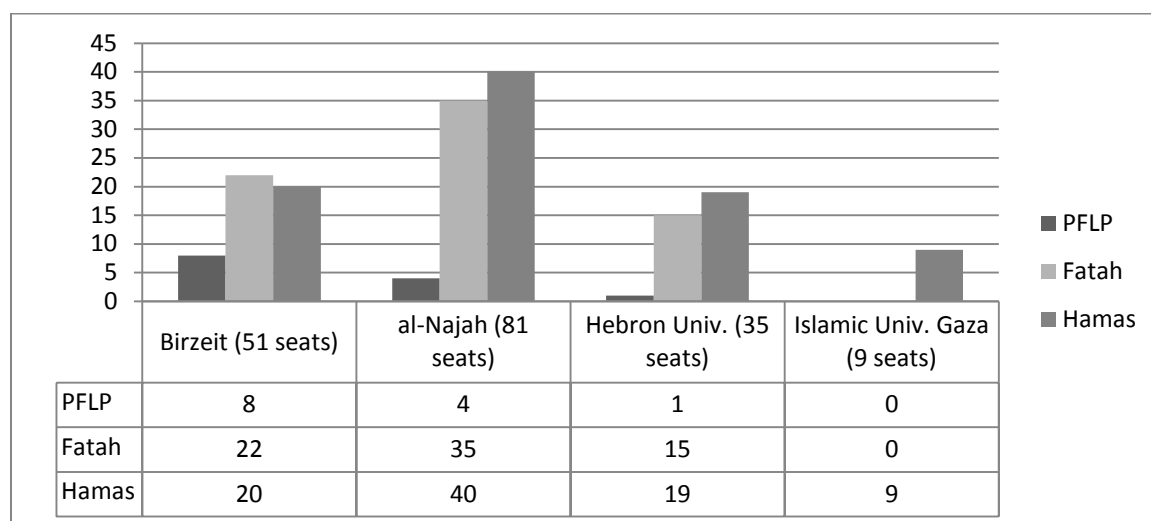


Figure 7 illustrates a comparative view on election results from Birzeit, al-Najah, Hebron and Gaza University in 1997. It is important to note different number of seats to vote for in the student councils, and the close competition between Hamas and Fatah.

⁹⁶ <http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/cprspolls/96/birzeit.html#results>, and transcripts of election results given to me at the Birzeit University.

Figure 7: Palestinian student council elections 1997⁹⁷



In Hebron, where the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas always have enjoyed great popular support, the Hamas-affiliated student bloc participated in elections as early as 1989. It won the student elections in the university between 1989 and 1992, but boycotted the elections in 1993 as Yassir Arafat increased his efforts to win back Hebron.⁹⁸ In 1998 Hamas won 15 out of 31 seats in the Hebron Polytechnic University (Fatah youth won 13) while the Hamas-affiliated bloc won 19 of the 41 seats at Hebron University in 2000 (Fatah won 18).⁹⁹

The al-Najah University is located further north in the West Bank, in the city of Nablus. Like Birzeit, al-Najah was traditionally a Fatah and PLO stronghold. However, when the first elections (during occupation) for the student council were held in 1996, Hamas surprisingly beat Fatah (Hroub 2000:218). In 1998 the Hamas bloc won 40 of the 81 seats, while Fatah won 35, and in 1999 the numbers were 42 for the Hamas-Islamic Jihad block, with 34 seats for Fatah¹⁰⁰ (Kristianasen 1999:36). These results are in stark contrast to the Islamic University in Gaza, one of two universities in the Strip. The Islamic University was founded by al-Mujamma leaders, and several key-Hamas leaders have been students, teachers and Deans (Hroub 2006:126-135). In student council elections Hamas usually wins landslide victories, such as 60% in 1987/88, 75.5% in 1996/97, 74% in 1999/2000, and 100% in 2005 (Irving Jensen 2009:107). An analysis of these elections must consider that the student

⁹⁷ Knudsen 2005:1380, Kristianasen 1999:36, IPS Chronology No.4 1997,

<http://www.nigelparry.com/diary/birzeit/elect97.html>

⁹⁸ http://articles.latimes.com/1993-05-11/news/wr-34103_1_student-council-election

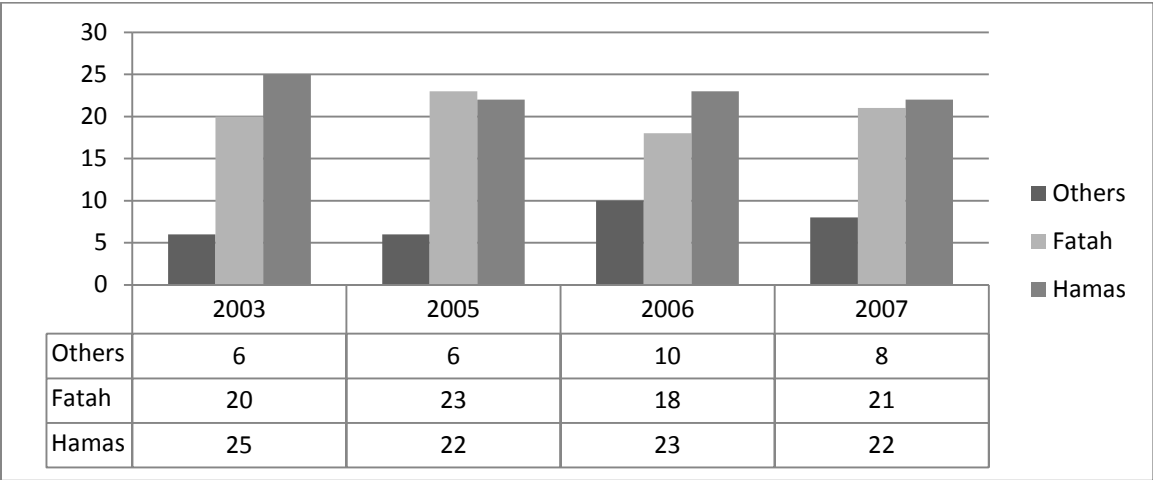
⁹⁹ http://www.passia.org/palestine_facts/chronology/2000.html

¹⁰⁰ http://www.passia.org/palestine_facts/chronology/1999.html

councils originally work for student rights, welfare and interests on campus. They do not have direct political influence on Palestinian politics beyond campus. However, as the elections carry prestige, the results may indicate the growth and popularity of Hamas in the West Bank between the first and second Intifada. Furthermore, major Israeli arrest campaigns on Hamas members, leaders and activists between 1996 and 2000 (elaborated below), did not affect the strength of Hamas in the university elections. Hamas-affiliated blocs continued to work, despite numerous students were arrested, and regular razzias were carried out on West Bank universities. In addition, student elections are regularly contested by all Palestinian factions, including opposition groups. This is rare in national politics.

The implications of the second Palestinian Intifada limited the ability of the West Bank universities to hold student elections between 2000 and 2003/2004.¹⁰¹ The elections held in 2003/2004 would thus reflect on how the students, and to a certain degree the society at large, perceived Hamas` s approach during the second Intifada. Birzeit University held its first elections in 2003, while the al-Najah university held its first elections in 2004. The Fatah-affiliated bloc won the elections in al-Najah with 38 seats out of 81, while the Hamas bloc won 36 seats.¹⁰² The close competition between Hamas and Fatah blocks thus continued after the Intifada. *Figure 8* show election results at Birzeit between 2003 and 2007.

Figure 8: Student council elections at Birzeit, 2003 - 2007¹⁰³



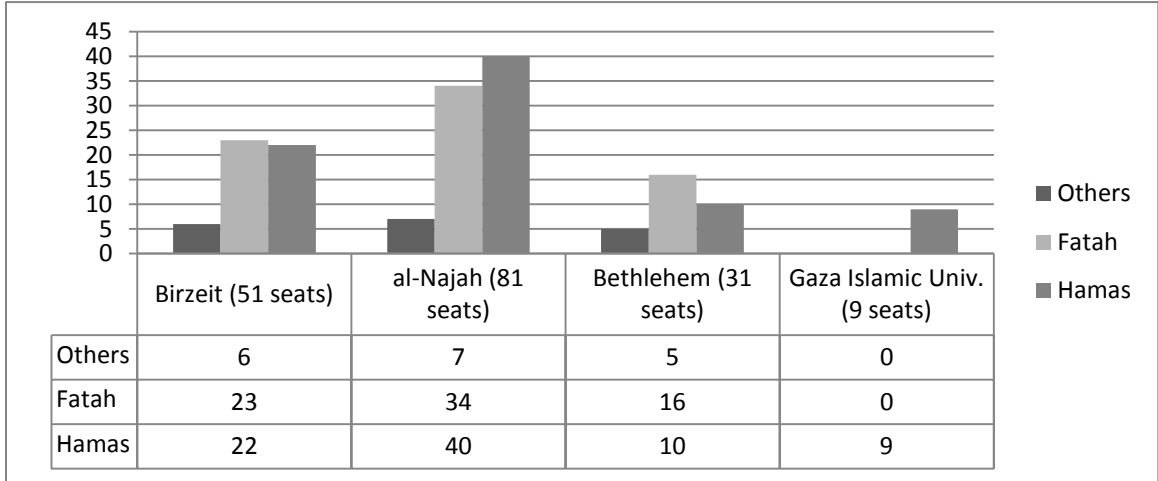
¹⁰¹ <http://www.birzeit.edu/news/16235/news>

¹⁰² http://www.zajel.org/article_view.asp?newsID=3884&cat=23

¹⁰³ Transcripts of election results given to me at th Birzeit University.

The Israeli re-occupation of the West Bank from 2002 and the subsequent arrest campaigns of Hamas members did thus not deter Hamas affiliated block from attending and winning the first elections after the Intifada. *Figure 9* below illustrate student council elections in Birzeit, al-Najah, Bethlehem and Gaza universities in 2005. Note the results from the university in Bethlehem, which is a Catholic institution cooperating with the Vatican.¹⁰⁴

Figure 9: Palestinian student council elections 2005¹⁰⁵



In 2006 Hamas won the elections in both Birzeit and al-Najah.¹⁰⁶ But it could only hold on to the Birzeit council in 2007, perhaps as a result of the intensified factional fighting between Hamas and Fatah during early 2007. In sum, Hamas was strong enough to win student elections repeatedly in West Bank universities from 1993. They challenged Fatah dominance on politics, by increasing the focus on Islam on campus, involving students in pro-Hamas campaigns, and recruiting students to other Hamas institutions. Hamas victories in student elections was thus a challenge on PLO`s position as the sole representative of the Palestinian people (Hroub 2000:216). Hamas and Fatah spend huge amounts of money and human capacity in these election campaigns. In interviews with author, Mahmoud al-Ramahi and Mahmoud Musleh of Hamas emphasized the political training students get from participating in student elections. From these interviews I will conclude that the student council elections are seen as a useful asset for Hamas as a movement and political party. Moreover, Hamas

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.bethlehem.edu/about/history.shtml>
¹⁰⁵ <http://www.haaretz.com/news/fatah-edges-ahead-of-hamas-in-bethlehem-student-council-elections-1.155894>, <http://www.birzeit.edu/news/16487/news>, <http://www.shiachat.com/forum/index.php?topic/70360-the-islamic-block-in-al-najah-university-victory/>, Irving Jensen 2009:107.
¹⁰⁶ <http://right2edu.birzeit.edu/news/printer360>, http://212.14.233.53/article_view.asp?newsID=7058&cat=23

members and students have learned that representational legitimacy could help them wrest control of traditional Fatah strongholds (Hroub 2000:218).

Activity in West Bank professional associations and unions

The Hamas branch in the West Bank has also been active in the civil society, especially elections in professional associations and unions. In a historical perspective, there has been significant change within professional associations in the West Bank. From being under Jordanian administration in the period 1948 – 1967, most professional associations accepted to serve Palestinian nationalist goals during the 1980s and 90s, including PLO guidance and directives (Brown 2003:21). During the 2000s, professional associations have generally been occupied with the transition from being nationalist institutions, to meet the professional needs of members. This includes health benefits, continuing education, pay, legal regulations, and working conditions (Brown 2003:36). Associations in the West Bank have generally enjoyed a greater level of official recognition and formalization than in Gaza, especially when they act as representatives for a sector. Many leaders of such associations have had dual positions throughout the 1990s and 2000s, thus also being PA or PLO officials (Brown 2003:22, 23).

Elections for boards and directors are held regularly, and similar to student council elections, Hamas candidates are often affiliated with an Islamic bloc (Hroub 2000:216). The competition between Fatah and Hamas has also been a major conflict in these elections.

A closer look at a few of these associations and unions will exemplify the extent of this political activity. Khaled Hroub lists the medical, lawyer and engineer unions, teachers` and nurses` unions, UNRWA employees` unions, and the chambers of commerce and industry as the institutions with most Hamas activity in Gaza and the West Bank (Hroub 2000:216).

Mahmoud al-Ramahi stressed the medical and engineer unions as most important in the West Bank, but he also called attention to the lawyers union (Mahmoud al-Ramahi in interview with author). These are influential and important institutions in the Palestinian society, and the practice of union elections is well-established in the OPT (Gunning 2008:46). Such associations have a broad outreach in the society, with activities and interests in fields such as education, foreign aid, trade and industry. Certain associations also have direct political influence on the Palestinian society. Examples are lawyers and medical associations which have extensive influence on licensing and training of lawyers and doctors (Brown 2003:26, 28). Considering that successful candidates in these elections probably are respected people within their associations, these associations have a high potential for political influence. In

contrast to student council elections, some of these elections are of single candidates. Personal qualifications of the candidate could thus be equally important as political affiliation (Hroub 2000:231). This has been noted as an advantage for Hamas, as their religious faith and Islamic discipline is highly regarded compared to corruption and nepotism associated with Fatah candidates (Hroub 2000:231). Hamas made considerable achievements in elections for professional associations and unions from 1992. This was the same year it began to win student elections, and it was part of the struggle between Hamas and Fatah to win dominant positions in the society (Mishal & Sela 2006:90). In 1992, Hamas won the Chamber of Commerce in Gaza, Hebron and even Ramallah (Gunning 2008:42). As with the student elections in 1993, the victory in Ramallah was a surprise victory for Hamas in one of Fatah's strongholds (Hroub 2000:218). However, records from professional elections are not publicly available in the same manner as student council election results. Still, according to Mishal & Sela, Hroub and Gunning, Hamas prioritized these elections, and ran in a close race with Fatah throughout the 1990s (Gunning 2008:42, Hroub 2000:216, Mishal & Sela 2006:90). But, winning elections in professional unions have brought little real power for Hamas beyond the mandate of the union. The real power is sought from local and national elections.

Political activity on the local and national level

Despite being a strong participant in student elections and professional unions, Hamas is better known for its political activity on the local and national level. When Hamas decided to make it a political goal to win seats in the government, it also made it possible to classify the movement as a political party (Harmel 1985:406, 407). In order to discuss local and national elections, I must present the larger political context in Palestine between 1993 and 2007. This includes political processes such as the Oslo period and the second Intifada.

Hamas on the sidelines during the Oslo period

I will begin this section with a discussion of the period between 1993 and 2000, or in other words the core period of the Oslo Agreements. As mentioned, Hamas was slowly rising as a political movement in the early 1990s. However, in 1994, the Hamas movement at large was left marginalized after the Oslo process and the establishment of the PA, which it had completely rejected.¹⁰⁷ Polls from the OPT in 1994 also showed that the Palestinian people saw no alternative to the Oslo Agreements (Kristianasen 1999:22). In December 1994, 16.6% of the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank supported Hamas, while 43.1% supported

¹⁰⁷ Hamas rejected both the negotiations and the final settlement, since the peace talks involved a splitting of Palestinian land, international intervention, recognition of Israel and because the deal would set the parameters for the future Palestinian state (Edwards 2010:71).

Fatah. In December the numbers were 10.1% versus 45.4% (Giacaman & Lønning 1998:138). Despite their opposition to the establishment of the PA, Hamas could not go openly against the will of the people by attacking it, and thus had to agree internally on other strategic options.¹⁰⁸ In this process, a few prominent Hamas members from the West Bank, Hamid Bitawi from Nablus and Mahmoud Salameh from Jenin even accepted official posts in the PA. At the same time West Bank leaders Sheikh Hamami and Husayn Abu Kuwayk opened up for a dialogue with the Israeli government (Muslih 1999:24, 25). Hamas was at the time also dragged into the larger discussion on democracy and whether to participate in the elections for the Presidency of the PA and the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), scheduled for 1996. Throughout 1993 and 1994 Hamas held internal discussions regarding the elections, and whether or not to establish a political party (splinter of the political wing) to represent its constituency and confront the PA (Edwards 1996:164, Mishal & Sela 120-126). The splitting of the Hamas leadership into the internal and external branches made communication difficult. For the West Bank branch communication was even more complicated by continued Israeli imprisonment of its leaders (as from 1994 also the PA) and continued Israeli occupation and settlement expansion (Kristianasen 1999:22). The internal and external leaderships reached somewhat different conclusions regarding the elections. Internal leaders, or more precisely the Gaza leaders, had a moderate approach, and preferred to establish a political party and participate in the elections. The external leaders on the other hand, linked the elections to the Oslo accords, and rejected the idea (Mishal & Sela 2006:162-166). Before Hamas reached a final conclusion on the issue, a few leaders in Gaza and the West Bank nominated themselves for elections. Among these were Sheikh Hamami from the West Bank, and Ismail Haniyeh from Gaza. However, they changed their minds after internal pressure and fear of low electoral support for Hamas, enabling the external leadership to insist on a boycott of the elections (Muslih 1999:9).

Hamas PLC member Mohammad Totah from Jerusalem, supported this by stating *“participation would imply unacceptable recognition of the Oslo accords,¹⁰⁹ Israel`s continued presence in the OPT and the inadequacy of the current election law”* (Mohammad Totah in interview with author). As the movement agreed on a boycott, a major internal split

¹⁰⁸ Hamas thus temporarily joined the rejectionist group “Damascus Ten” in February 1994, a group of ten organizations opposing the Oslo deal, despite their ideological differences (Edwards 2010:73).

¹⁰⁹ Elections for the PLC was based on the Oslo II agreement (signed in Taba 24/9 1995). The Oslo II was a continuation of the Oslo process, concerning the PLC, redeployment and security arrangements, legal affairs, cooperation and other miscellaneous provisions (<http://www.reut-institute.org/en/Publication.aspx?PublicationId=565>).

between Gaza and Amman were avoided.¹¹⁰ However, underlying differences had reached the surface. The external leaders did not feel the everyday effects of the Israeli crackdowns. It was thus easier for them to advocate the historical solution with violent resistance, not political participation (Gunning 2008:112). Hamas also boycotted the Presidential elections, as there was no real contender to Arafat.

It was the Gaza leaders who maintained contact with the PA on behalf of Hamas in this period. Meetings had been arranged on high levels since 1994,¹¹¹ discussing the election issue and Palestinian infighting. Hamas and the PA agreed that Hamas would keep a period of calm (*tahdiya*) in PA controlled areas (A and B) during the election period in 1996. As Hamas kept its promise, it was later rewarded with permission to open an official bureau in Gaza city (Kristianasen 1999:27).

There is no record of similar agreements with the West Bank branch. The West Bank was in practice divided into small enclaves of self-rule, which separated the local branches of Hamas geographically. This was a result of the Israeli redeployment in the West Bank, as part of the Oslo agreements. This separation of the West Bank cities and districts, and the emerging restrictions on movement, severely limited the ability of the West Bank branch to maintain communication, hold *Shura* meetings, and work in a coherent way. The Gaza branch also had the official spokesman in Mahmoud al-Zahhar in this period. Statements from West Bank leaders were more unusual (Hroub 2000:225). However, Jamal Mansur, a Hamas leader in the West Bank, stated that he was in favor of a boycott of the elections. His argumentation was that the elections would legitimize the DOP's fragmentation of the Palestinian people, and serve the interest of Israel (Muslih 1999:10). But the West Bank leaders had not decided on a common stance on the elections, and they did not have enough power to influence on the dispute between the Gaza leaders and the external leaders (Kristianasen 1999:28). According to Bassam Jarrar, a leading Islamic figure with connections to Hamas in the West Bank, there was no centralized leadership in the West Bank at the time (Kristianasen 1999:28). This implies that political power and influence inside Hamas balanced between Gaza and Damascus in this period, while the West Bank branch focused on the struggle against the occupation on the ground. In addition, the PLO also maintained its strong presence in the West Bank. In January 1996, Yassir Arafat thus won the presidential elections with 88.2% of

¹¹⁰ Still, Hamas leaders in Gaza convinced members to vote for independents known to be Hamas friendly (Kristianasen 1999:27).

¹¹¹ Meetings held in Gaza in April 1994, between Arafat, Haniyeh, al-Zahhar and others (Hroub 2000:104).

the votes. In the PLC elections Fatah won or controlled 68 of 88 seats in the Council (Edwards 2010:83). Despite the Hamas boycott, observers still claim that participation of Hamas supporters reached as much as 60-70% (Shikaki 1996:18). As Fatah entered office in 1996, the Hamas branch in the West Bank was further marginalized, both in terms of geographical separation and political influence.

Hamas under pressure in the West Bank

In the period between the 1996 elections and the second Intifada in 2000, the Hamas movement in general was politically sidelined. The security situation had deteriorated in both Israel and the OPT during 1995 and 1996. Several agreements were thus signed between Israel, the PA (PLO), and the international community to save the peace process and stop acts of terrorism. The first agreement was signed in Sharm al-Sheikh in 1996, following an intensified period of Hamas suicide attacks in Israel. In the period after 1996, the Jordanian government thus cracked down on Hamas leaders in Amman, as part of their commitment against acts of terrorism from the Sharm al-Sheikh summit. At the same time, the PA initiated the largest campaign against Hamas so far, covering the West Bank and Gaza. Over 1200 Hamas members, activists and supporters inside the OPT were arrested. In addition, Hamas controlled mosques were put under PA control, and as noted in chapter six, institutions in the network of social and political compartments of Hamas were raided and closed down (Edwards 2010:219). Among those arrested were al-Rantisi, al-Zahhar and Muhammad Taha from Gaza, and Jamal Salim, Jamal Mansur and Mahmoud Musleh from the West Bank (Tamimi 2007:195, Edwards 2010:219).

Mahmoud Musleh from Ramallah explained how Hamas as a movement, both in Gaza and the West Bank was more or less paralyzed between 1996 and 2000. Most of the internal leaders of Hamas were in and out of prison (including Musleh who was in a PA prison near for 16 months during 1997 and 1998), which made it difficult to communicate within the organization. But Musleh also emphasized the inherent force of Hamas, the support in the population although many leaders were imprisoned: *“The people were wondering at that time – where was Hamas? – was it crushed? But when the second Intifada started, the power and strength of Hamas re-emerged, and the street turned green once again”* (Mahmoud Musleh in interview with author).

In early 1997, the Hebron agreement was signed between Israel and the PLO.¹¹² The agreement included Israeli redeployment and the establishment of TIPH in Hebron.¹¹³ However, the security situation continued to deteriorate in Israel and the OPT during 1997 and 1998. Hamas continued its terrorist activity against Israeli targets. Israel responded with further arrest campaigns both in Gaza and the West Bank, and targeted killings of Hamas leaders.¹¹⁴ In October 1998 Israel and the PA agreed on the Wye River memorandum, in practice targeting Hamas like the Sharm al-Sheikh agreement (Tamimi 2007:89). Although Israel and the PA never fully implemented the agreed-upon measures, the PA did act decisively on its commitment to pressure Hamas. During 1999 and early 2000, the PA arrested numerous Hamas leaders and supporters in the West Bank and Gaza.¹¹⁵ The slow Israeli withdrawal and transfer of authority to the PA also created an environment of self-ruled enclaves in the West Bank, where Hamas had little political influence in the period.

The Second Intifada

In the wake of the failed peace negotiations in the Camp David summit, and the provocative visit of Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, the second Palestinian Intifada broke out on the 29th of September 2000 (Hroub 2006:49).

The Palestinian people had seen seven years of broken promises from the Oslo agreements, and became frustrated (Hroub 2000:48). The second Intifada started out as a non-violent uprising, but quickly turned so violent any chance of a peace agreement faded.

Demonstrations spread from Jerusalem to the West Bank, Gaza and even Israeli towns such as Nazareth. As the Intifada erupted, many Hamas leaders were imprisoned, and the focus of the movement was armed struggle, not politics. Hamas initiated a series of suicide attacks from early 2001, targeting Israeli public space in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. These attacks are discussed in chapter seven. Fatah leaders had also established its own militant wing in 2000, the al-Aqsa Martyrs brigades¹¹⁶ (Schanzer 2008:75). This radicalization of Fatah turned into a problem for Yassir Arafat. Israel did no longer see Fatah as a moderate alternative in peace talks, and the attacks by the al-Aqsa brigades put Fatah in the same category as Hamas. Israel responded to armed Palestinian attacks with missile and bombing raids into the OPT during

¹¹² The agreement was based on the Oslo II agreement from 1995, and it included responsibilities on both sides. The Hebron agreements included provisions from earlier negotiations, and new specific provisions regarding the city of Hebron (http://www.tiph.org/en/About_TIPH/Mandate_and_Agreements/Hebron_Protocol/).

¹¹³ The Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH) is a civilian observer mission in Hebron, with members from Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Turkey, Italy and Switzerland (See previous footnote).

¹¹⁴ <http://www.palestine-studies.org/files/pdf/jps/9701.pdf>

¹¹⁵ For details see "Chronology" from every edition of *International Palestine Studies*, between 1998 and 2001.

¹¹⁶ The al-Aqsa brigades co-opted Islamic symbols and slogans, and even criticized its own political leadership in Fatah for being corrupt and inefficient (Edwards 2010:99).

the Intifada. Furthermore, the Israeli military and political establishment blamed Fatah, the PA and Arafat for not maintaining security (Edwards 2010:103). March of 2002 turned into one of the most violent months of the second Intifada.¹¹⁷ Israel again blamed Arafat and the PA, despite Hamas being responsible for the latest attacks (Edwards 2010:103). The Israeli response was the largest military operation in the West Bank for years, “Operation Defensive Shield” during spring of 2002. As noted in chapter seven, Israeli forces re-occupied West Bank cities, crushed PA ministries¹¹⁸ and security offices, and detained thousands of prisoners, among them numerous Hamas leaders and supporters (Edwards 2010:103). The continuation of the Intifada and the rising death tolls led to the “Roadmap for Peace” in 2003, initiated by the US and the Quartet¹¹⁹ (Edwards 2010:107). According to the Roadmap, the PA would end the violence and implement democratic reforms, while Israel would end settlement activity and support the emergence of a reformed Palestinian government. In the midst of the Intifada, Israel increased its efforts to kill high level Hamas leaders. Already in 2001 Israel had killed two of the most important political leaders on the West Bank, Jamal Mansur and Jamal Salim, while Sheikh Hassan Yousef was imprisoned. Within the next two years, almost every high-level leader of Hamas in Gaza and the West Bank had been assassinated or imprisoned, including Sheikh Yassin and al-Rantisi (Edwards 2010:107). Needless to say this had serious ramifications on the activity of the movement. Hamas in the West Bank was thus paralyzed, and their main focus was to fight Israel and Fatah/PA, and to stay out of prisons. Its activity was thus confined to committee work on a local level, and social welfare which was important for Hamas in this period.

Hamas decides to participate in local and national elections

The 1996 boycott of the elections was not a clear cut decision, but needed long deliberations within the movement. Hamas was thus not opposing elections in principle, only the frame given to it by the Oslo agreements. Hints of a possible reorientation within the movement had first been announced in 1996, when Sheikh Yassin aired the idea of a truce with Israel (Edwards 2010:82). Later, statements by Sheikh Yassin in 2003 indicated a period of calm (*tahdiyah*), and in 2003 Hamas formally committed to a unilateral ceasefire with Israel (*hudna*) (Edwards 2010:108, 109). However, the turnaround was not made until 2005. Hamas

¹¹⁷ Israel killed 40 Palestinians in Gaza 8th of March, Hamas` suicide bombers killed eleven Israelis the 9th of March, another 30 Israelis on the 27th of March, and 3 Jewish settlers were shot the 28th of March (Edwards 2010:100-102).

¹¹⁸ Israel`s first and main target was Arafat`s compound in Ramallah, the Muqata, where Arafat was isolated until his death in 2004 (Edwards 2010:103).

¹¹⁹ The Quartet consists of The UN, the US, Russia and the EU.

decided to participate in both local and national elections, after long internal deliberations and consultations, according to the principle of Shura (Tamimi 2007:210, 212). Hamas wanted to capitalize on its growing political and military strength, as the Oslo process ran into difficulties in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Edwards 2010:232). The peace process had not been able to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, despite attempts in Camp David in 2000, and the Road Map from 2003. However, Hamas leaders had come to the conclusion that Yassir Arafat was getting closer to sign away Palestinian areas in those negotiations. Any possible peace agreement between Israel and the PA/PLO was thus viewed as a threat to Hamas's resistance project, and the only way Hamas could block such an agreement was to be a part of the PLC (Edwards 2010:233). International pressure mounted on Arafat by 2002 to reform the PA and announce new presidential and parliamentary elections. Palestinian factions began a series of talks on national unity and internal reform by late 2002. The talks were mediated by Egypt, and Hamas's prominent role in the talks was a sign of its renewed strength (Edwards 2010:237).

“Change and Reform” in local elections

On the 5th of May 2004, Yassir Arafat announced that local elections would be held in December 2004 (ICG 2006:3). Arafat probably intended the political inclusion of Hamas in these elections to be a mechanism where he could offer them power-sharing, in order to better control them (ICG 2006:3). However, Yassir Arafat died in November 2004, and the following presidential elections of 2005 were won by Mahmoud Abbas of Fatah (Edwards 2010:241). Local elections were supposed to be carried out in five parts, but the last stages were never completed.¹²⁰ During the first round, candidates were not asked for party affiliation when they registered, and thus run as independents (NDI report 1st round 2005:18). For the second round this was changed, and candidates could choose to be affiliated with a specific party-list (NDI report 2nd round 2005:5). The third and fourth rounds had party-lists with proportional representation (NDI report 3rd and 4th rounds 2006:1). These changes were made by the Higher Committee for Local Elections (HCLE), created by the PA. According to Mahmoud al-Ramahi, these changes were initiated as a response to the strong results of Hamas in the first rounds. In interview with author, Al-Ramahi discussed the preparations made by Hamas in the West Bank. He stated that Hamas carefully picked candidates who

¹²⁰ The first round was conducted in the West Bank and Gaza during December 2004 and January 2005. The second round was held during May 2005, while the third and fourth round was only partly completed. The fifth round was never held due to the situation in the OPT after Hamas won the PLC elections in 2006. Elections thus remains to be held in 60 towns and villages, including Gaza city and Hebron
<http://www.pogar.org/countries/theme.aspx?t=6&cid=14#sub5>

were seen as reliable, trustworthy and influential in their local areas, such as doctors or lawyers who could get strong support from the local population (Mahmoud al-Ramahi in interview with author). Many of these candidates were also closely linked to the local social welfare work of Hamas, which, as noted in chapter six, played an important role in the West Bank in this period. This tactic was thus intentional, and showed how Hamas was aware of the importance of winning grassroots support. Hamas also focused its election campaign on issues were the Fatah government had failed (Gunning 2008:149-151). The result was the “*Change and Reform*” bloc, which drew attention to corruption and lawlessness in the Palestinian society (Edwards 2010:254). According to Mahmoud al-Ramahi and Independent politician/researcher Ziad Abu Amr, Hamas candidates for the Change and Reform bloc were not necessarily members of Hamas. Some were asked to represent Hamas because of their political and religious merits (al-Ramahi and Abu Amr in interview with author). Hamas, or more precisely the lists supported by Hamas, won eighty-one municipalities throughout the OPT and Fatah won 121. A large number of these seats were in highly populated urban districts, where Fatah was expected to win (Gunning 2008:146). However, there were more Palestinians living in areas with Hamas-run municipalities than in Fatah controlled areas (Gunning 2008:147). In Gaza, Hamas won seven out of ten municipal councils in the second round, which increased the enthusiasm in the Gaza branch for participation in the legislative elections (Tamimi 2007:2010). This new situation was also significant in terms of the political influence of Hamas in the West Bank. For the first time, Hamas was in a position of power, and local Hamas representatives assumed important roles such as mayors. It was the first time Hamas was officially in charge of social service delivery, and a part of the official political system. Although the local authorities have little power, and their revenue base collapsed during the Intifada, they remain in many cases the largest local employer, and a focal point in the day-to-day relations with Israel (ICG 2006:10).

Hamas running local West Bank municipalities

The Palestinian local elections led to a fragmentation of the West Bank in terms of municipalities run by Fatah or Hamas. Hamas had won several key urban areas, such as Qalqilya in the West Bank and Rafah in Gaza. In addition Hamas won 74% in urban areas such as Nablus, al-Bireh, Ramallah and Jenin.¹²¹ Hamas immediately started to work in the local municipality councils it had won, aiming to show the Palestinian population what it would do if elected to national power (Gunning 2008:152). In local West Bank villages such

¹²¹ <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=16918> – Palestine section.

as Bidya and al-Shiyukh the Hamas-led municipalities began work to improve on infrastructure and safety and increased tax revenues to pay for water and electricity (Gunning 2008:152-154). Furthermore, International Crisis Group refers to several sources that praise the Hamas-run municipal councils for their work ethics, the enforcement of law, the handling of finances and their efforts to provide efficient services (ICG 2006:11, 12). Other media reports from the West Bank during 2005 and 2006 indicated that Hamas was able to limit corruption, modernize the running of the municipalities, handling budgets better than Fatah, cleaning the streets and increasing their credibility among the population.¹²² On the other hand, accusations have been noted on mismanagement and nepotism (ICG 2006:11, 12). Hamas-run municipalities also faced problems with the international community, which was increasingly reluctant to continue the financial support for municipal projects after the election victory in 2006.¹²³

It is interesting to note the perspective of Mahmoud al-Ramahi on this matter. He emphasized the challenges elected Hamas representatives faced when they entered their municipality offices during 2005. He cited the example of al-Bireh municipality, where local administrative staff was Fatah supporters, who immediately went on strike to protest against Hamas. Al-Ramahi claimed this also happened in other municipalities. He continued to state that the central government (PA) had put their own representatives into the municipality council to bloc certain projects, and that the PA “*strangled*” Hamas-run municipal councils throughout the West Bank financially, top-down. In addition, the PA security forces often arrested council members (Mahmoud al-Ramahi in interview with author). It is clear from al-Ramahi`s claims that Hamas as a movement felt Fatah sabotaged their political work. The suspension of aid from the international community in the aftermath of the Hamas election victory in 2006, also affected local governance, and especially Hamas-run municipalities. A report from CHF International, an organization sponsored by USAID working on local democratic reform, states that the suspension of aid led to financial problems in the municipalities, and no donor investment in local projects.¹²⁴ The freeze in Western donor support for Hamas-run municipalities, and according to Hamas, discriminatory budgetary allocations by the PA, cut deep into budgets and left a trail of broken commitments by Hamas.

¹²² <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/04/international/middleeast/04hamas.html?ref=hamas>
<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1151969,00.html>

¹²³ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8307465.stm>

¹²⁴ http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDACN957.pdf

To deal with the budget crisis, Hamas-run councils in Qalqilya, Bethlehem and al-Bireh have thus cut expenditures, raised taxes and leased or sold municipal assets (ICG 2006:12).

External pressure on Hamas

Israel never approved of Mahmoud Abbas` idea of integrating Hamas in politics and PA institutions to make it more moderate (ICG 2006:15). Israel also put pressure on the PA to arrest Hamas leaders and activists, and imprisoned several Hamas politicians, including the mayors of Qalqilya and Jenin, and council members in al-Bireh and Kufur Aqab.¹²⁵ The international society also made a policy U-turn during 2005, when it assessed its financial assistance to Palestinian municipalities. The EU-commission provided €30 million in emergency assistance to municipalities in 2002 during the Intifada, but ended the support in late 2005 as Hamas entered office (ICG 2006:25). Donor assistance was a critical source of support for the municipalities, and projects sponsored by USAID or European governments was quickly halted and not renewed. EU aid officials also instructed the PA to not pay money to Hamas-led municipalities, which led the PA to use their own governors as middlemen when disbursing aid (ICG 2006:27). Mahmoud al-Ramahi also emphasized that the PA increasingly made use of its governors in the period before the 2006 elections, as a measure to circumvent the Hamas-led municipalities, and bring power back to the Fatah-led PA centrally (Mahmoud al-Ramahi in interview with author). However, as the PLC elections drew closer, international aid was increasingly channeled through UN agencies, not the PA, including a \$10 million contribution from Norway (ICG 2006:27). Arrests (PA and Israel) and sanctions (economical) thus limited the ability of Hamas-led municipalities to function.

Hamas wins the 2006 PLC elections

By late 2005, Hamas viewed the Oslo agreement, the main obstacle for participation in the 1996 elections, as no longer relevant (Mohammad Totah in interview with author). Popular support for Hamas was rising, and its recognition regionally had increased. Hamas members in Gaza were enthusiastic about the PLC elections, encouraged by the local elections. However, in the West Bank, and according to Tamimi especially in Hebron, members were less eager to participate (Tamimi 2007:210). Still, once the decision was made, Hamas united behind the new strategy and deployed thousands of highly educated media advisers, teachers, and political analysts to design strategies and the election manifesto, and form the public rhetoric of Hamas (Edwards 2010:248, 249). The election campaign was successful, and the final results surprised Fatah, Israel, the international society and even Hamas itself. Hamas

¹²⁵ http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDACN957.pdf

won seventy-four seats in the 132-seat parliament, while Fatah won forty-five¹²⁶ (Tamimi 2007:218). Hamas won absolute majority in the parliament, and Hamas was for the first time in the head-seat of Palestinian politics (Edwards 2010:259). The election results from the West Bank was however more surprising than the results from Gaza. Hamas had excellent election results from the local elections in Gaza, and it had managed to turn the unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 into a claim of victory for their resistance (Edwards 2010:245). Support for Hamas had thus been rising in Gaza since the Israeli withdrawal. In the West Bank however, the election results were more complex. In Hebron, a conservative and religious city, Hamas won all of the nine seats. In Nablus, a traditional Fatah stronghold, Hamas won five seats and Fatah one seat. In Ramallah, the PA capital and a secular and liberal Fatah town, Hamas won four seats and Fatah just one (Edwards 2010:259). Fatah did better in areas where it put big name candidates in their home towns, such as Mohammad Dahlan in Khan Younis, Gaza, and Saeb Erekat in Jericho (Edwards 2010:259). The newly elected PLC with two thirds majority held by Hamas had its first session in Gaza on the 6th of March 2006. Negotiations between Hamas and other Palestinian factions regarding a national unity government failed during March, and Hamas proceeded to form its own government on the 29 of March 2006 (Tamimi 2007:228). The cabinet line-up was heavily dominated by Gaza leaders in the most important roles, including Ismail Haniyeh as prime minister, Mahmoud al-Zahar as foreign minister and Siad Siam as interior minister (Edwards 2010:271). Deputy prime minister/health minister Nasser al-Shaer and finance minister Omar abd al-Razaq both from Nablus were the exceptions.

External pressure on Hamas

The new Hamas government was immediately met with severe restrictions by Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas, Israel and the international community (Edwards 2010:261-270). Mahmoud al-Ramahi referred to this situation as a farce in interview with author, and stated “*the West promoted hypocrisy not democracy*”. Abbas used presidential decrees to strip the government of control of much of its institutional base, including the police force, the media, and the border crossings with Israel (Tamimi 2007:229). Abbas also began the planning of a parallel government and new security forces with the support of the international community (Tamimi 2007:229). The Quartet quickly stated that assistance to the PA would only continue if Hamas accepted its conditions.¹²⁷ Israel refused to deal with Hamas, as it is listed as a

¹²⁶ Independent candidates with Fatah ties run for the same seats as official Fatah candidates. Fatah thus competed against own candidates and lost up to eighteen seats in the parliament as a result (Edwards 2010:259).

¹²⁷ Renounce violence, recognize Israel and respect previous agreements (Edwards 2010:262).

terrorist organization, and threatened to hold back around \$60 million in customs revenues it collected on behalf of the PA each month (Edwards 2010:262). However, Hamas was determined that their electoral victory did not mean it would give up on the armed resistance (Edwards 2010:271). According to Mahmoud al-Ramahi, Fatah intentionally blocked all PLC sessions from the beginning. Furthermore, the staff he administered as Secretary General of the PLC, numbering 600, boycotted their work assignments. As with the local municipalities, he claimed that the staff was loyal to Fatah. In practice, the situation made al-Ramahi singlehandedly responsible for administrative and procedural affairs on behalf of the PLC (Mahmoud al-Ramahi in interview with author). Presidential decrees and measures by Fatah¹²⁸ and the PLO to bring down the Hamas government also increased the tension between Fatah and Hamas (Tamimi 2007:234). A national dialogue conference were held during May 2006, where Abbas gave Hamas the ultimatum to reach a deal with Fatah based on the “Prisoners document”,¹²⁹ or face new restrictions (Tamimi 2007:237). The conference ended without agreement, and both Hamas and Fatah instead increased their focus on controlling the security forces¹³⁰ (Tamimi 2007:238).

After the elections, Gaza was controlled politically by Hamas, while the security forces were controlled mainly by Fatah, leading to a deteriorating security situation (Edwards 2010:272). A power struggle between Hamas and Fatah was the inevitable result, centered on controlling the security forces in Gaza. At the same time Israel increased its border closures and targeted bombings in Gaza, to stop militant groups launching rockets into southern Israel (Edwards 2010:273). During a tunnel attack against a Israeli military installation close to Gaza in June 2006, a militant Hamas cell killed two Israeli soldiers and kidnapped a third, named Gilad Shalit (Edwards 2010:273). Israel retaliated with airstrikes on strategic targets in Gaza, and large arrest campaigns on Hamas members and PLC representatives (Edwards 2010:274). 64 Hamas members were arrested, most of them in a Ramallah hotel in the West Bank (Tamimi 2007:244). The arrests put almost all of Hamas` s West Bank leadership in Israeli prisons. Among the arrested were also top-level members of parliament such as Mahmoud al-Ramahi, and Nasser al-Shaer.¹³¹ The PLC was thus unable to convene throughout much of 2006.

¹²⁸ Desperate Fatah leaders worked to circumvent Hamas` PLC power back into the hands of president Abbas, by delimiting the power of the PLC (Edwards 2010:263).

¹²⁹ Officially the National Reconciliation Document, an 18 points document calling for a broad based National unity government, formally endorsed by Hamas and Fatah (ICG 2007:16).

¹³⁰ There were a myriad of security forces under the PA: Directorate of Internal Security (DIS), Presidential Guard, Preventive Security, the National Security Forces and General Intelligence (Edwards 2010:272).

¹³¹ http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article615087.ece

In February 2007 Hamas and Fatah agreed to form a national unity government, with Hamas holding nine Cabinet seats and Fatah six (Edwards 2010:277). According to Ziad Abu Amr, the Independent Minister of Foreign Affairs in the unity government, Hamas agreed to drop high level and hard-line names, to increase the chances of receiving the foreign aid which the Palestinians so much depended on (Ziad Abu Amr in interview with author). Hamas controlled the Prime Minister`s office, the Interior Ministry`s security forces, and other departments dealing with cultural, social, welfare and education issues. Fatah had gained a position in the government, but the most prestigious ministry had gone to the “Third Way party” established by Salam Fayyad, not Fatah (Edwards 2010:279). However, the national unity government did not manage to erase the Hamas-Fatah conflict or convince donors to resume the aid. Hamas had also outgrown Fatah in Gaza in terms of public support and weapons, and were better organized (Edwards 2010:278, 279). Violence resumed in April 2007, and turned into a violent military takeover by Hamas during June 2007 (Edwards 2010:286-288). Fatah was severely beaten, and by 15th of June 2007, Hamas was in charge of the Gaza Strip. This armed takeover constitutes a watershed in Palestinian history, and especially the history of Hamas. In the aftermath of the Gaza takeover, Hamas and Gaza was further isolated by the international community, and Mahmoud Abbas dissolved the national unity government. The international community, the Quartet and Israel began to focus on economical development in the West Bank, and to make sure that Hamas was completely marginalized there.

Conclusive remarks

Hamas has been politically active in the West Bank since 1988, although it did not have enough influence in the West Bank to compete with Fatah until 1993. The student council elections in the West Bank quickly turned into the most important political arena for Hamas in the early 1990s. Here it competed mainly with Fatah, and it maintained strong political influence on several West Bank universities throughout the period under study. The participation in student council elections, and professional association elections, has thus represented continuity in the political activity of Hamas. Moreover, these elections have been noted as the major arena for Hamas to challenge the dominating Fatah party for influence, in their competition to win dominant positions in the society. Hamas members and students learned that representational legitimacy could help them to wrest control from Fatah in

traditional Fatah areas, and it represented a challenge to the PLO`s position as the sole representative of the Palestinian people.

The Hamas branch in the West Bank has been severely wing-clipped by Israeli and (sometimes) PA crackdowns in the period of interest. In the period between 1996 and 2000 the movement was paralyzed, and further campaigns against the movement followed during the second Intifada. Still, as Hamas decided to turn from political boycott to participation, and run in the 2005 municipal elections, it managed to mobilize and win an unexpected victory. Hamas was thus for the first time in a position of political power in the West Bank, although arrests (PA and Israel) and sanctions (economical) limited the ability of Hamas-led municipalities to function. The 2006 elections also led Hamas into the political head-seat in national politics, winning major victories in the West Bank. The cabinet line-up in the first Hamas-led government was heavily dominated by Gaza leaders in the most important roles, signifying that the West Bank branch had less political leverage inside the Hamas movement. However, immediately after the victory, the external pressure mounted on the movement, in terms of economical sanctions, and political boycott. In the period leading up to these elections, Hamas had outgrown Fatah in Gaza, both in terms of militant strength, and popular support. As the first Hamas-led government broke down in 2006, and the National unity government of 2007 failed to restart international financial assistance, Palestinian infighting increased – centered on control of the Palestinian security forces in Gaza, and from 2007 - how to share the power. In the West Bank however, the international society succeeded in undermining Hamas by strengthening the position of Mahmoud Abbas and Fatah from 2006. The Hamas-Fatah conflict re-ignited on the 10th of June 2007 in Gaza, and Hamas completed the takeover the 15th of June.

Chapter 9

Summary and conclusive remarks

The starting point for this thesis was the political position of Hamas in June 2007. The movement initiated a militant takeover of the Gaza Strip, evicted Fatah officials, and continued the political governance of the strip. The takeover was facilitated by the strong military force of Hamas's Gaza branch, but was grounded in solid grassroots support and a strong political position. However, Hamas has also been politically active in the West Bank since 1988, which after all is the core area of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the largest part of occupied Palestinian land. An immediate effect of the Gaza takeover was an increase in the international society's focus on the West Bank, and the ongoing project of establishing a viable secular Palestinian state, seated in Ramallah. To do so, the PA, with international backup, has targeted Hamas leaders and institutions in the West Bank in the period from 2007 forward. The goal is to make sure the movement is completely marginalized both in terms of military strength and political position, to avoid a similar takeover in the West Bank.

This study of Hamas is based on a three-way dividing of the movement's main activities. This three-way divide is found both in Gaza and the West Bank, and it is focused on providing social welfare to poor Palestinians, initiate militant attacks against Israeli and Palestinian targets in adherence to the ideology and strategy of the movement, and to work for political influence in order to achieve its goals. This three-way approach proved successful for Hamas in Gaza in 2007. However, why did Hamas not attempt to take control in the West Bank at the same time? This leads directly to my research question;

- **What has been the political position of Hamas in the West Bank between 1987 and 2007?**

To be able to answer my research question, I began with a thorough investigation of the history of Hamas, and its roots in the Egyptian and Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood. The activity, ideology and goals of the Brotherhood have influenced Hamas in several ways. The internal organization of Hamas is inspired by the Brotherhood, the notion of *Jihad* is inherited from the Brotherhood, and the strong focus in Hamas to be a provider of social welfare, Islamic education and emergency assistance to Palestinians, is a continuation of similar Brotherhood activity. However, the Palestinian Brotherhood developed differently in

Gaza and the West Bank. For the West Bank branch of the Brotherhood, the period between 1948 and 1967 was an important period of political participation, in contrast to the Gaza branch and its focus on violent attacks against Israel. After a period of downfall until 1967, the Gaza branch of the Brotherhood re-emerged stronger and faster than the West Bank branch. This development was caused by socio-economical, ideological and political factors, which differed in Gaza and the West Bank. The Brotherhood ideology did not have fertile ground in the West Bank, which was dominated by secular and nationalist forces. Israeli policies also played a significant role in creating a stronger Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza than in the West Bank. Their direct and indirect support for the al-Mujamma in Gaza made it a strong social and political force during the 1970s and 80s, while Israeli strategic interests in the West Bank (settlements) led to restrictions against the West Bank Brotherhood. When entering the period of the first Intifada, the Brotherhood thus had its gravity in Gaza, including leaders, finances and institutions.

The political position of Hamas during the formative period, 1987 – 1993

The Gaza Strip was the core area for Hamas in the formative period. The movement itself was established first in Gaza, and then spread to the West Bank. The same was true for the first militant al-Qassam cells, the first Intifada strikes and communiqués. Hamas was also the hub for finances and the seat of the leadership (which held talks with Israel). The West Bank branch developed slower than the Gaza branch, and as Israeli arrest campaigns led to a restructuring of the movement, the West Bank branch were given a secondary role. The deportation of 415 Islamists in 1992 also hit the West Bank branch hard, as they had a small pool of leaders to recruit from. On the other hand, the West Bank initiated its social work in this period, including integrating political leaders into Zakat committees. However, as the Intifada ended, and the Oslo period started, the movement in general was left politically sidelined. The West Bank branch did only have the strength and influence to challenge Fatah politically in the West Bank in 1993.

The political position of Hamas as a result of its social work

Social work was the first activity of the West Bank branch, inherited from the Brotherhood. The scope of Hamas` social and religious work has grown substantially in the West Bank during the period under study. Recipients of Hamas` welfare services thus constitute the backbone of Hamas, the grassroots support. I have argued that Hamas in the West Bank has directed the main part of its social work through “external institutions”, especially institutions funded and operated by *Zakat* committees. Hamas has thus placed reliable and influential

members in these committees, as well as activists working in all levels of these institutions. During the 2000s, Hamas was the most influential Palestinian faction within *Zakat* committees, and one of the most important providers of social welfare in the West Bank. The role of Hamas as a social welfare provider was especially important during and after the second Intifada. The heavy Israeli/PA pressure upon these institutions began in 1996, and intensified after the 11th of September 2001. Note that the PA was reluctant to completely crush the social institutions affiliated with Hamas, as it relied on the services of these institutions. Islamic social welfare work is controversial, accused of being a smoke-screen for the recruitment, funding and facilitation of terrorists. Still, despite the withstanding pressure, Hamas has continued to be an important provider of social welfare, and this has been an important factor in the massive popular support for the movement in the West Bank during the local and national elections. However, there is no evidence to support claims that this welfare support is contingent upon conditional support in elections.

The political position of Hamas as a result of its militant activity

The aforementioned deportations of Hamas leaders in 1992, the heavy pressure upon political, social and military institutions in the period 1996-2000, continuing during the second Intifada (Operation Defensive Shield), is a result of the violent militant attacks perpetrated by the militant wing of Hamas, the al-Qassam brigades. The intentional use of violence through shootings or suicide attacks is an integral part of the means employed by Hamas in their resistance against Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. Hamas attacks from the West Bank turned increasingly important for the movement after 1996. The Israeli security fence surrounding Gaza forced the Gaza operatives of al-Qassam to focus on Israeli targets inside the strip. The West Bank cells of al-Qassam on the other hand, had more or less open access to Israel until 2003, which made the West Bank cells decisive in suicide attacks against Israeli cities. Through coordinated crackdowns on Hamas in several West Bank locations, but particularly in Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah and Hebron, Israel and the PA tightened the grip on Hamas. However, these crackdowns did not deter West Bank al-Qassam operatives in perpetrating attacks against Israeli targets. Although it is impossible to evaluate the actual military strength of the West Bank cells in terms of numbers, it is clear that Israel and the PA perceived Hamas, through its military wing al-Qassam, as a powerful enemy in the West Bank between 1987 and 2007.

The political position of Hamas in the West Bank

An important political development within Hamas was the success of the West Bank branch in university council elections from 1993 forward. Large universities such as Birzeit, Hebron and al-Najah (Nablus) became important political bastions for Hamas, and the political activity on West Bank campuses represents continuity for the political work of Hamas.

Together with professional associations, it has been a major arena for Hamas to exert political influence in the period of interest. However, in terms of local and national politics, Hamas was a marginal factor in the West Bank until 2005. During the Oslo period, the movement was completely left out, and it also boycotted the first national elections in 1996. From 1996 forward, Israel and the PA succeeded in marginalizing Hamas politically, as their leaders were imprisoned or forced to keep a low profile, and local elections postponed. Furthermore, during the second Intifada the main activity of Hamas in the West Bank was violent resistance and suicide attacks, not politics. During and after the Israeli Operation Defensive Shield, a large number of the West Bank political leadership were imprisoned, and large parts of the movement was paralyzed. Another important factor is the internal organization of Hamas, as discussed in chapter five. Political power inside Hamas has never been centered in the West Bank, but fluctuated between Amman/Damascus and Gaza. It is possible to speculate whether this was an intentional decision by Hamas, as the West Bank branch was under more heavy external pressure. This pressure from both Israel and the PA, and restrictions on movement inside the West Bank, has led to trouble in physical communication for the West Bank leaders, and it forced them to meet in secret and hold names of its leaders a secret.

The political turnaround in Hamas, from boycott of the 1996 elections, to participation in 2005 and 2006, makes it possible to discuss Hamas as a political party. The victory in 2005 set Hamas in a position of power in the West Bank, as their representatives assumed positions in the municipal councils. However, from 2005 forward, the external pressure mounted on Hamas, now also from the international society. The Hamas-led municipal councils faced economical sanctions, employee boycotts, political restrictions and arrest campaigns. As Hamas also won the 2006 national PLC elections with massive popular support in the West Bank, its political influence and power reached a peak.

The Hamas victory in the 2006 elections was however the beginning of the downfall for Hamas in the West Bank. Immediately after the victory, the external pressure mounted on the movement, in terms of economical sanctions, and political boycott. Internal fighting between

Hamas and Fatah re-ignited, focusing on the control of the security forces, and later disagreements on power-sharing in the unity government. Furthermore, the 2006 government broke down, several Hamas PLC members were arrested, and the 2007 National unity government failed in its attempt to regain international support and aid. Hamas was outgrowing the Fatah party in Gaza, while Fatah still was the strongest party in the West Bank. In the fighting between Hamas and Fatah forces during 2007, Hamas thus managed to overtake Gaza, while Fatah maintained control in the West Bank.

In sum, Hamas in the West Bank has thus been a significant social and militant force in the period under study, but a range of combining factors has undermined its political influence. The Fatah party and the PLO thus dominated West Bank politics until 2005, while Israel, the PA and the international society has directed political events in the West Bank since 2006.

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Appendix

List of interviews

Anonymous Political analyst. Interview conducted in Ramallah. 21.10.2010.

Anonymous Political analyst. Interview conducted in Jerusalem. 18.10.2010.

Anonymous student at Birzeit University. Talks conducted before, during and after interview with Fadhil al-Khaldi. 13.10.2010.

Kamal Abdulfatah. Professor, Faculty of Geography, Birzeit University. Interview conducted in his office in Birzeit University. 13.10.2010.

Ziad Abu Amr. Foreign Minister in National Unity Government 17 March – 14 June 2007, Member of Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). Interview conducted in his office in Ramallah. 16.10.2010

Bassem Ezbidi. Professor of Political Science, Birzeit University, associate researcher at the Muwatin Institute. Interview conducted in Ramallah. 14.10.2010.

George Giacaman. General Director Muwatin, Professor at Birzeit University, Program in Democracy and Human Rights. Interview conducted at Muwatin Institute. 12.10.2010 and 25.10.2010.

Fadhil Al Khaldi. Dean`s assistant, Student Affairs Office, Birzeit University. Interview conducted in his office, Birzeit University. 13.10.2010.

Shaul Mishal. Professor, Department of Political Science, Tel Aviv University. Interview conducted in his office, Tel Aviv University. 28.10.2010.

Mahmoud Musleh. PLC member, Hamas`s Ramallah list. Interview conducted in his Ramallah office. 27.10.2010.

Nicholas Pelham. Palestinian affairs correspondent, The Economist. Interview conducted in Jerusalem. 25.10.2010.

Mahmoud Ahmad `Abd al-Rahman Ramahi. Secretary of the PLC, elected from Hamas` party list (8). Interview conducted in his Ramallah office. 24.10.2010.

Mohammad Totah. PLC member, Hamas`s Jerusalem list. Interview conducted in the Red Cross premises, Sheikh Jarrah, East Jerusalem 20.10.2010.

PALESTINE MAPS

Oslo II, 1995



Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA)