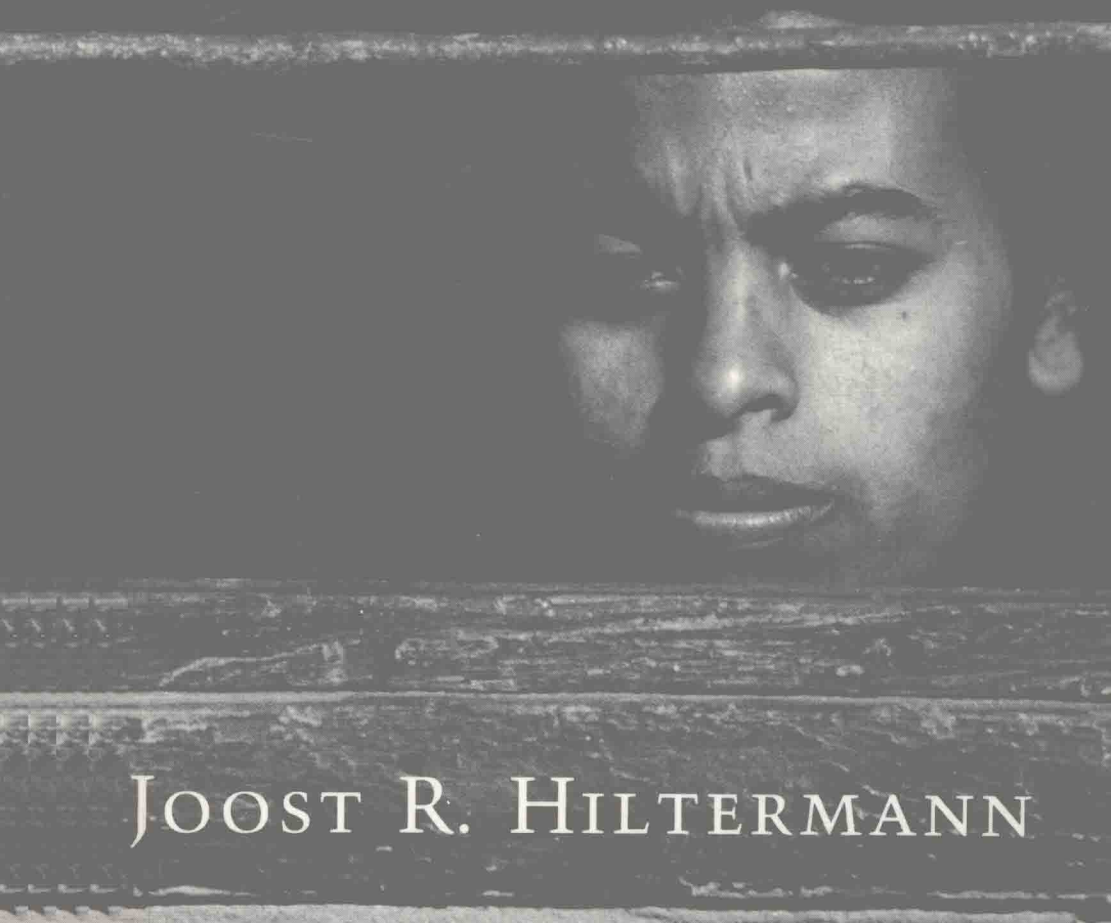


BEHIND THE
Intifada



JOOST R. HILTERMANN

Behind the Intifada

LABOR AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Joost R. Hiltermann

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Behind the Intifada

PRINCETON STUDIES ON THE NEAR EAST

*This book is respectfully dedicated
to the memory of*

*Tamam Miz'el Ghanam al-Furoukh
(Um Jamal)
(Sa'ir, 1944–Ramallah, 1986)*

PREFACE

FEW ARE THE RESEARCHERS who find themselves graced with a subject population that, on completion of the research project, rises in unison and validates the study's main findings. I am one of those who have been so fortunate, although I must confess at the outset that my subjects' behavior had less to do with their feelings about my research (of which the great majority were blissfully unaware) than with the concrete conditions they had been forced to endure in their everyday lives for decades. No sooner had I completed a study of mass mobilization in the West Bank and Gaza Strip than the Palestinian population rose in mass protest to reject and undo the structure of Israel's military occupation, coordinating its collective effort through the very infrastructure of popular organizations that, I had concluded in my study, had come to constitute the backbone of Palestinians' resistance to Israel's occupation in the 1980s.

I had arrived in the West Bank in the autumn of 1984 with the firm plan of spending no more than a year conducting field research for a doctoral dissertation in sociology on the blocked proletarianization of the Palestinian peasantry. Lacking friends and an institutional affiliation in my new abode, I was fortunate to make the acquaintance of activists in a local human-rights organization called Law in the Service of Man during the first month of my stay. Soon they asked me to contribute to a research project in which a colleague of theirs was involved. In the following months, a strong bond was forged between this organization (later to be renamed Al-Haq) and me, a bond that continues to this day.

Through my association with and work for Al-Haq my academic research became suffused with a new concern, not merely for socioeconomic processes or the historic injustice inflicted on the Palestinians, but more important, for Palestinians' efforts to assert and actualize their right to change adverse conditions and resist unjust rule. Thus my focus shifted from analyzing the political obstacles that have blocked the process of proletarianization under occupation to studying the mechanisms used by Palestinian activists to mobilize the masses in an attempt collectively to resist an oppression whose outstanding feature is a peculiar combination of colonial exploitation and military rule.

This has not been an easy study to undertake. Aside from the language barrier (which did not begin to crumble until I had completed the bulk of my fieldwork), I found in my path two hurdles: people's initial uneasiness concerning the foreigner's "true intentions," and factional infighting

that renders all information one collects automatically suspect. The first hurdle I cleared—to the extent one can—once I had succeeded in establishing myself in the local community, and had made friends. But I stumbled badly on the second.

In the early stages of my research I was drawn like a magnet to those who were most eager to provide me with the type of data I was seeking. One particular group of activists was more open and willing to be interviewed than others. My mistake was to believe that these were the only data that mattered, and that the picture I had pieced together at that point was complete. The result was that in an article published in *MERIP Reports* in the autumn of 1985 I leaned heavily toward an interpretation of political mobilization in the West Bank that appeared favorable to one particular faction of the Palestinian national movement. At least I was accused of having done so by one of the aggrieved factions. That it had not been my intention to play partisan politics mattered little. In an area that has become so profoundly politicized and emotionally charged as the West Bank and Gaza, to allot a fair amount of space to discussing one side at the expense of another is tantamount to taking sides. It is also, I must add, a reflection of poor scholarship and poor judgment.

I believe I have rectified my initial erring in the course of later research and writing, although I now fear that by favoring no one I may incur the wrath of all. That, however, is one of the hazards of academic research.

This is perhaps the place to clarify my role in the Palestinian community, which has played host to me so generously for more than five years. I am not an active participant in the Palestinian struggle for national liberation, however sympathetic I may be to that unfortunately elusive goal. My only task has been to contribute in a minor way to the writing of a collective historical document about the Palestinians' struggle to throw off the yoke of foreign occupation. I have done so in my research by recording a particular aspect of this struggle, the mobilization of workers and women in trade unions and women's committees.

Such documentation is long overdue. The field of Middle Eastern studies has been cluttered with discussions about the parameters of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict rather than clarified by in-depth field studies. It has also been dominated by writers whose prejudice against Arabs has colored their findings. Because these writers generally receive an uncritical reception in the West, they have helped shape the negative perceptions that prevail in the United States and Western Europe of Palestinians and their struggle. One of the early and significant victories, therefore, of the Palestinian uprising that began in December 1987 was that Palestinians for the first time succeeded in convincing the West that there was more than just one side to the issue. By compelling journalists and others to cover the uprising, they set in motion the process of de-

colonizing their own history. Palestinians no longer have to waste their energy arguing that they have a case and that they deserve to be heard. They are now being heard and can argue their case.

This, I believe, is a momentous change that will shape discourse on the issue in the years to come. I am happy to have been a witness to this metamorphosis, which was long overdue but sudden all the same, and I will be satisfied if the present study contributes to a better understanding in the West of how Palestinians went about taking their fate into their own hands.

Research for this book was made possible by grants from the International Organisation for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD) in London and the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam.

A number of people in the West Bank provided invaluable help collecting and processing data: Khaled 'Omar and his friend 'Issa from Jalaazon refugee camp, Yusef Nimr from Kharbata, and 'Adnan Isma'il from Sa'ir. Others helped me with the translation of interviews and articles: Serin Heleileh, Muhammad Mas'ad, Wadah 'Abd-al-Salam, Musaddaq al-Masri, Hisham De'is, Akram Safadi, and Khaled Hassan. I want to thank them for their crucial assistance during my fieldwork.

I could not have written this book if my "employers" at Al-Haq in Ramallah had not given me their personal support and allowed me to use office time and resources, even during the early months of the intifada when there were pressing demands on our time and resources. I want to thank especially Raja Shehadeh, Emma Playfair, and Mona Rishmawi. I also wish to thank Suheil Jaber, whose house in Ramallah was partially demolished by the Israeli army in June 1987, for letting me use one of his computers for half a year out of pure generosity, despite all his problems.

I am very grateful to those who reviewed the various drafts of what was first a Ph.D. thesis and then a book. I thank especially Salim Tamari, who teaches sociology at Bir Zeit University. He first got me excited about the subject and provided support along the way, if not always by reading drafts, then at least by telling good jokes. I owe him a good deal more than the few cigars I bring him from Schiphol Airport each time I travel. I also wish to thank Walter Goldfrank, who guided me through my graduate career at the University of California, Santa Cruz; Lisa Tarkaki at Bir Zeit University; Barbara Harlow at the University of Texas, Austin; Zachary Lockman at Harvard University; Susan Rockwell in Ramallah; and my editors, Jane Lincoln Taylor and Margaret Case at Princeton University Press. They are in no way responsible for any errors.

I also want to give a special word of thanks to three Palestinians for the assistance they gave me in my research. One is 'Ali Abu-Hilal, the head of the Workers' Unity Bloc in 1985, who was always ready to talk to me

and help me. He was issued a deportation order by the Israeli military authorities at the end of October 1985—coincidentally, a few hours after I had left his house in al-Bireh, where we had chatted about developments in the labor movement under the “Iron Fist.” The Iron Fist came knocking that night; he was deported to Jordan in January 1986.

The second person is 'Adnan Dagher of the Construction Workers' Union in Ramallah, who supplied me with a wealth of information about the labor movement, and who ran one of the most active unions in the West Bank. 'Adnan was deported to Lebanon in 1988 for alleged membership in the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising. I was both pleased and sad to see him again, in Moscow in September 1990, where he is now working as a journalist, unable to return home.

The third person is Sami Kilani, a poet from the village of Ya'bad, who teaches at Al-Najah University in Nablus when it is open. Sami has been a friend since I met him in 1985. He helped me in setting up my research when I arrived; he arranged interviews; and he distributed my questionnaires in Ya'bad, producing some of the richest material of all my research in the West Bank. Sami has had regular run-ins with the military authorities. He was under town arrest in Ya'bad for three and a half years, and was then placed in administrative detention, without charges or trial, on several occasions. I owe him and his wonderful family in Ya'bad special thanks for their friendship and encouragement.

Finally, my most heartfelt thanks go to my friends who put up with me on a daily basis, in the West Bank and in Washington, D.C. They know who they are, but I would like to single out Susan Rockwell, Joe Stork, and Priscilla Norris for their extraordinary forbearance in the face of my usual antics.

This book is respectfully dedicated to the memory of Tamam Miz'el Ghanam al-Furoukh, or Um Jamal, into whose house I once dashed, rather irresponsibly, as I was being pursued by soldiers during a curfew in Ramallah in April 1985. From that moment she considered me part of the family and treated me like a son, while her own sons intermittently disappeared behind bars. She died too young, too soon. I shall not forget her.

INDEX OF ORGANIZATIONS

POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

ANM: Arab Nationalist Movement, an organization espousing Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s. Precursor of the PFLP faction of the PLO.

Ba'ath: Political movement in Syria and Iraq. The Syrian version was a precursor of the Saiqa faction of the PLO.

DFLP: Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a left-wing faction of the PLO. Was first to propose the “national authority”/two-state solution in the early 1970s. Supports armed struggle. Marxist-Leninist in ideology. Has traditionally backed Soviet policy in the Middle East. Leader: Nayef Hawatmeh. Illegal in the Occupied Territories; underground.

Fatah: Largest PLO faction, founded in 1965. Has controlled the PLO since 1969. Mainstream movement, comprising groups from across the ideological spectrum, from Marxists to Islamic fundamentalists. Has supported the two-state solution since the mid-1970s, and has advocated a combination of political and armed struggle to attain national liberation. Leader: Yasser Arafat. Illegal in the Occupied Territories; underground.

GUPW: General Union of Palestinian Women, the women’s organization of the PLO. Also: the General Union of Palestinian Workers, the trade-union arm of the PLO, later renamed the PTUF.

HAMAS: Arabic acronym for the Islamic Resistance Movement (Haraket al-Muqawwamet al-Islamiyya). Founded in early 1988, it is the political organ of the Muslim Brotherhood. Supports armed struggle in pursuit of the liberation of all of Palestine, and the establishment of an Islamic state.

Islamic Jihad: A small but very militant Islamic fundamentalist organization that supports the establishment of an Islamic state in all of Palestine. Banned by the military authorities in 1990.

JCP: Jordanian Communist Party, the continuation of the PCP in Jordan (including the West Bank) after 1948. The West Bank and East Bank parts of the JCP were separated by the 1967 war. The West Bank JCP was eventually renamed the PCP.

NGC: National Guidance Committee, a pro-PLO leadership committee founded in the West Bank and Gaza in 1978. Operated openly until outlawed by the military authorities; disappeared in the early 1980s.

NLL: National Liberation League, an offshoot of the PCP formed in 1944.

PCP: Palestine Communist Party. Founded during the British Mandate, it merged with the JCP in the West Bank after 1948. It continued to be referred to as the JCP during the first decade of Israeli occupation, but then reverted to its original name. A member of the PLO since the eighteenth PNC meeting in Algiers in April 1987, it has been active primarily inside the Occupied Territories, unlike the other PLO factions. Marxist-Leninist in ideology, at least until 1990 when changes in Eastern Europe forced a reevaluation of the party's constitution and program. Has opposed armed struggle and supported the two-state solution. Leader: Suleiman al-Najjab. Illegal in the Occupied Territories; underground.

PDFLP: Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the precursor of the DFLP.

PFLP: Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a left-wing faction of the PLO. Longtime advocate of a secular national state in all of Palestine, but threw its support behind the two-state solution at the nineteenth PNC meeting in Algiers in November 1988. Calls for armed struggle. Marxist-Leninist in ideology. Has traditionally backed Soviet policy in the Middle East. Leader: George Habash. Illegal in the Occupied Territories; underground.

PLO: Palestine Liberation Organization, the executive organ of the Palestine national movement. Founded in 1964. Chairperson: Yasser Arafat. Illegal in the Occupied Territories; underground.

PNC: Palestine National Council, effectively the Palestinian parliament-in-exile.

PNF: Palestine National Front, a pro-PLO leadership committee founded in the West Bank in 1973. Semiclandestine until its demise in the late 1970s.

PTUF: Palestine Trade Union Federation, the trade-union arm of the PLO.

PWA: Palestine Women's Association, a women's organization established in the West Bank in 1964. Banned by the Jordanian authorities in 1966. Ideological precursor of the modern women's movement in the Occupied Territories.

UNLU: Unified National Leadership of the Uprising, a pro-PLO leadership committee founded in the West Bank and Gaza during the uprising in 1988. Illegal in the Occupied Territories; underground.

POPULAR ORGANIZATIONS

Action Front: Popular movement supportive of the PFLP.

AWC: Arab Workers' Congress, a Palestinian trade-union movement after 1945, replacing the FATULS.

FATULS: Federation of Arab Trade Unions and Labor Societies, a Palestinian trade-union movement in the Mandate period that was founded, in 1942, as a rival to the PAWS. It continued as the AWC after 1945.

FPWAC: Federation of Palestinian Women's Action Committees, the women's organization of the Unity Bloc. First such organization to be founded in the Occupied Territories, in 1978. Focuses on organizing housewives in addition to working women.

GFTU: General Federation of Trade Unions, a formal trade-union structure that incorporates West Bank trade unions. Established according to the Jordanian labor law. Headquartered in Nablus.

GFTU-Ghanem: Separate GFTU comprising the PWB, the WUB, the PUAf, and the WVB under Secretary-General 'Adel Ghanem from August 1981 to September 1985. Headquartered in Nablus.

GFTU-PWB: Separate GFTU controlled exclusively by the PWB from September 1985 to March 1990. Headquartered in Nablus.

GFTU-WUB: Separate GFTU controlled exclusively by the WUB since January 1986. Headquartered in Ramallah.

GFTU-WYM: Separate GFTU controlled exclusively by the WYM from August 1981 to March 1990. Headquartered in Nablus.

HWC: Higher Women's Council, a coordinating committee incorporating the four strands of the women's movement in the Occupied Territories. Established in December 1988, at the height of the intifada.

PAWS: Palestinian Arab Workers' Society, the first Arab trade union in Palestine, established in Haifa in 1925.

Progressive Bloc: Popular movement supportive of the PCP.

PUAF: Progressive Unionist Action Front, the unionist arm of the Action Front.

PWB: Progressive Workers' Bloc, the unionist arm of the Progressive Bloc. Oldest of the union movements in the Occupied Territories.

"Reunified" GFTU: Separate GFTU comprising all main trade-union blocs except the WUB, as well as some smaller groups whose unionist character remains unclear. Established on 1 March 1990.

Unity Bloc: Popular movement supportive of the DFLP.

UPMRC: Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, a grass-roots organization of health professionals in the Occupied Territories, established in 1981.

UPWC: Union of Palestinian Women's Committees, the women's organization of the Action Front.

UPWWC: Union of Palestinian Working Women's Committees, the women's organization of the Progressive Bloc. It has focused on organizing working women.

Vanguard Bloc: Popular movement borrowing its ideology from the ANM of the 1950s and 1960s. Historically close to the Syrian Ba'ath, it currently has few active supporters in the Occupied Territories.

WCSW: Union of Women's Committees for Social Work, the women's organization of the Youth Movement.

WUB: Workers' Unity Bloc, the unionist arm of the Unity Bloc. Founded in 1978, it has focused on organizing Palestinian migrant workers employed in Israel.

WVB: Workers' Vanguard Bloc, the unionist arm of the Vanguard Bloc.

WWC: Women's Work Committee, a women's organization set up in 1978, later renamed the FPWAC.

WYM: Workers' Youth Movement, the unionist arm of the Youth Movement.

Youth Movement: Popular movement supportive of Fatah.

FOREIGN AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

FNV: Federatie Nederlandse Vakverenigingen, a Dutch trade-union federation.

Histadrut, the largest Israeli trade-union federation, an affiliate of the ICFTU in Brussels.

ICFTU: International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, an international trade-union federation based in Brussels.

ICRC: International Committee of the Red Cross, a Swiss relief organization with a mission in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

ILO: International Labor Organization, a United Nations organization headquartered in Geneva. It sends an annual fact-finding mission to Israel and the Occupied Territories.

UNRWA: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees, headquartered in Vienna, with operations in several Arab countries and the Occupied Territories.

WCL: World Confederation of Labor, an international trade-union federation based in Prague. The PTUF is one of its affiliates.

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