

Memory and Mobilization? Identity, Narrative and Nonviolent Resistance in the Palestinian Intifadas

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Abstract

To what extent did first Intifada memories and experiences influence nonviolent activism in the second Intifada? Specifically, how did prior individual or collective identities contribute to activists opting for nonviolent strategies in the post-Oslo period, and how effective were such identities in mobilizing others? This article examines how activists' lived experiences with resistance in the first Intifada influenced their decisions regarding tactics and strategy in the second Intifada. It also discusses the limitations of using memory for mobilization in the face of new challenges, arguing that nostalgia for past eras can be a double-edged sword in motivating participation in later attempts at nonviolent struggle. The study is based on interviews with activists in the West Bank conducted by the author during the second Intifada.

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Introduction

Many scholars and activists have emphasized the importance of mobilizing memory to fuel processes of social change. This process typically involves the intentional recall of an event or experience, related to a past grievance, abuse, or violation of rights, which might serve as a catalyst for new processes of activism. In other words, historical memory might contribute to the development of an injustice issue frame, which is necessary for mobilization.¹

¹ For more on movement frames, see William A. Gamson, "Constructing Social Protest," in *Social Movements and Culture*, eds. Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1995).

In the case of Palestine for example, the interest in documenting the history of the Nakba represents an attempt to mobilize memory of Palestinian displacement to effectively document the past, but also to influence current framings of the conflict.² There is another process at work in Palestine however that is related to but distinct from mobilizing memory. Rather than (or in addition to) focusing on the memories of dispossession or victimization, many Palestinian activists also actively engage in remembering high points of Palestinian activism and resistance. For many of today's activists, this process of remembering mobilization relates primarily to the first Intifada, a peak period of popular resistance that many recall with pride and even nostalgia. Indeed, according to interviews conducted by the author, most adult activists who were active in organizing community-based resistance during and after the second Intifada referred specifically to their first Intifada experiences as activists and/or prisoners in informing their efforts in the second Intifada. To be sure, their initiatives were motivated largely by an effort to reclaim the spirit of resistance and solidarity remembered from the first Intifada. The fact that these memories might be more idealistic than the reality is secondary to the fact that these memories drive current mobilization efforts for some by recalling an earlier culture of resistance.³ In this way, these activists have not just been mobilizing memory, but rather remembering mobilization as a means of engaging community members, especially youth, in popular resistance.

Yet is the memory of resistance enough to mobilize others, especially in regards to youth who have inherited the memories but were not born or old enough to remember that earlier period? Does it matter if historical memory is always 'true' in the factual sense or if it is influenced by the glow of 'nostalgia'? This article examines these questions by exploring the opportunities and limitations of mobilizing the memory of past tactics, strategies, and movement frames in later periods of activism by examining how first Intifada identities and narratives influenced resistance in the period during and after the second Intifada. I argue that positive memories of resistance can and do influence later activism for some individuals, but the role of memory is limited in mobilizing others for collective nonviolent action, especially in situations of protracted conflict and political constraints.

² See for example Laleh Khalili, "Places of Memory and Mourning: Palestinian Commemoration in the Refugee Camps of Lebanon" *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25/1 (2005): 30-45; Julie Peteet, "Refugees, Resistance, and Identity" in *Globalization and Social Movements: Culture, Power, and the Transnational Public Sphere*, eds. John Guidry, Michael D. Kennedy, and Mayer N. Zald (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Rosemary Sayigh, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries*, (London: Zed, 1979).

³ For more on distinguishing between types of memory, see Rafi Nets-Zehngut, "Internal and External Collective Memories of Conflicts: Israel and the 1948 Palestinian Exodus" *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 6/1 (2012): 126-140. Nets-Zehngut distinguishes between popular, official, autobiographical, and historical memory, and also between internal and external sub-memory.

Methodology

This article relies largely on semi-structured interviews conducted by the author, grounding the research in personal narratives about involvement in nonviolent popular resistance. As Clandinin & Connelly (2000) argue, narrative research is uniquely capable of capturing individuals' stories and investigating how they perceive their experiences in the temporal, spatial, and personal-social dimensions.⁴ Furthermore, when considered collectively, interviews can indicate how individual, group, and cultural stories and identities intersect to inform social phenomena and are in turn informed by that phenomena. To be sure, narrative research inherently probes beyond the mere reporting of events, and even beyond the individual's role in or opinion of such events. Rather, because interviews rely on the story-telling aspect, the participant's interpretation of the phenomena, as well as his/her interpretation of his/her role in the phenomena, narrative research offers multiple dimensions of analysis. As Ricoeur explains, narratives are both lived and told, mediating between the world of action and the world of recollection/interpretation.⁵ Accordingly, narratives include dialectics that combine innovation and sedimentation, fact and fiction, and neutral description and ethical prescription.⁶ In addition, narratives undergo further interpretations by both the researcher and the reader. Although some researchers may worry that the various levels of interpretation in narrative research undermine its validity as a method, I deliberately included elements of interpretation and perception in this research to allow for the investigation of the roles of memory and identity.

I conducted total of 88 interviews during three to six month visits to the West Bank and East Jerusalem between May 2005 and August 2007, with 61 interviews conducted during the main fieldwork period of March through August 2007, 19 interviews conducted between May and August 2006, and 8 interviews conducted between May and July 2005. I then returned to the region in the summers of 2008-2010 and 2012 for other research on nonviolence that also informed this study. I aimed to achieve diversity of participants in terms of geographic location, profession, gender, religion, age, political affiliation, and socioeconomic class as reflected in the tables below.⁷

⁴ D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*, (San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers, 2000).

⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative I*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative III*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); *Oneself as Another*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁷ It should be noted that the numbers listed do not include the countless informal conversations I had with individuals in shops, cafes, busses, etc., which informed my overall research experience, and some of which are incorporated into my fieldnotes. The numbers also do not include individuals who participated peripherally in the actual interviews, such as co-workers who added their input during interviews conducted in offices, or family members who

Table 1. Interview Participants: Gender and Location

	Male	Female	Total
Urban	48	14	62
Village/Rural	22	2	24
Refugee Camp	2	0	2
Total	72	16	88

Table 2. Interview Participants: Date and Organizational Affiliation

	Professional (Paid/NGO)	Grassroots (Volunteer/CBO)	Political (PA/Political Party)	Total
Summer 2005	8	0	0	8
Summer 2006	9	10	0	19
Spring-Summer 2007	17	39	5	61
Total	34	49	5	88

Theoretical Framework: Strategic Nonviolent Action and the Palestinian Intifadas

Although the term ‘nonviolence’ has many meanings, the idea of strategic nonviolent action forms the foundation for the kinds of resistance discussed in this study. According to Gene Sharp, strategic nonviolence is based on the idea that “the exercise of power depends on the consent of the ruled who, by withdrawing that consent, can control and even destroy the power of their opponent.”⁸ From this viewpoint, it is believed that “governments depend on people, that power is pluralistic, and that political power is fragile because it depends on many groups for reinforcement of its power sources.”⁹ Thus, people can transform situations of oppression by withdrawing their consent

commented during interviews conducted in participants’ homes. These comments were documented in the interview notes.

⁸ Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973), 4. The influence of Gene Sharp on the Palestinian nonviolent movement is discussed also in the essay by Erin Dyer in this issue, pp. 162-184.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

through refusal of cooperation, withholding of help, and disobedience and defiance.¹⁰

Direct action refers to strategic nonviolent tactics that deliberately challenge the authority of the oppressor. Direct action is usually the most visible form of popular resistance and is the approach typically associated with civil resistance. Nonviolent direct actions can include acts of omission, when people refuse to perform acts that they are required to do by practice, custom, or law; acts of commission, when people perform acts that they are not usually expected or allowed to perform; or combinations of the two. Both acts of omission and acts of commission can be categorized in the areas of protest and persuasion, noncooperation, and intervention.¹¹

Acts of protest and persuasion include public actions such as mass demonstrations, marches, and vigils; formal statements such as petitions, declarations, and public statements; symbolic acts such as displaying flags, colors, and symbols; and communicative acts such as hanging banners and posters, distributing newspapers and leaflets, and holding meetings and teach-ins. While often used strategically throughout nonviolent movements, acts of protest and persuasion usually emerge early in a struggle, and can function as tools for mobilization and consciousness-raising.

Protest and persuasion techniques have several objectives. First, actions of this nature seek to provide a signal to oppressive forces that the participants seriously object to certain policies or acts. Moreover, these actions serve to show the wider oppressed population that the opposition movement is challenging the oppressor, thus encouraging others to critically analyze their situation and, ultimately, work for change. Finally, persuasive actions can raise consciousness about the situation outside of the region, thus calling attention to the situation and increasing international solidarity. In these ways, protest and persuasion tactics serve as challenges to the oppressor on the one hand, and as appeals for local participation and external support on the other hand.¹² In the case of Palestine, regular Friday marches and demonstrations in protest of construction of the separation barrier during the second Intifada illustrated this form of nonviolence, publicly voicing opposition to the barrier while also attracting local and international support.

Often considered the most powerful category of nonviolent tactics,¹³ noncooperation includes acts of social, political, and economic noncooperation. Social noncooperation includes acts such as shunning and ostracism, suspension or boycott of social events, and disobeying social norms,

¹⁰ Ibid., 64.

¹¹ Ibid., 68-69.

¹² Ibid., 68-69.

¹³ Robert Helvey, *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: Thinking about the Fundamentals*, (Boston: Albert Einstein Institution, 2004).

thus marginalizing the oppressive community. Acts of economic noncooperation, including boycotts, strikes, and nonpayment of taxes, aim to impair the means available to a government to provide goods and services to its supporters, thus decreasing supporter loyalty. In addition, reducing government means can ultimately hinder its ability to carry out oppressive policies. While nearly all non-violent acts are political to a degree, acts of political noncooperation refer specifically to actions that aim to reject the authority of the occupying power, such as withdrawal of political support, boycott of government bodies, and refusal to recognize government institutions.

The objective of noncooperation is to make it difficult for the government to function by withdrawing the people's consent to the occupying power. While impairing the oppressor, noncooperation can also increase solidarity within the community and strengthen civil society.¹⁴ In the case of Palestine, acts of noncooperation such as strikes and internal boycotts did take place during the second Intifada, however, because of the effective separation of the Israeli and Palestinian populations, these actions often went unnoticed in Israel. However, there were still numerous incidents of noncooperation, including many daily interactions between Palestinians and Israeli soldiers at checkpoints.

Intervention refers to acts of civil disobedience, such as sit-ins, pray-ins, defiance of blockades, land seizure, hunger strikes, and use of alternative social, economic, transportation, and communication systems.¹⁵ Interventionist tactics aim to disrupt established practices and policies with the aim of creating new relationships, institutions, and patterns of behavior.¹⁶ Because they are more confrontational, interventionist acts often put activists at greater risk for repressive responses, including detention, arrest, personal injury, and even death. However, because they are provocative, interventionist actions are sometimes more effective than other tactics in forcing attention on the issue. Even when the oppressive power responds to interventionist tactics with violence, such harsh responses can bring about change by initiating political jiu-jitsu. According to Helvey, political jiu-jitsu occurs when 'negative reactions to the opponents' violent repression against nonviolent resisters is turned to operate politically against the opponents, weakening their power position and strengthening that of the nonviolent resisters.'¹⁷ In this way, harsh responses by an occupying power to activist tactics can convince other bodies, such as international organizations, institutions, and states, to put pressure on the regime or lend support to the movement. For example, the May 2010 Israeli raid on the Mavi Marmara, which resulted in the deaths of nine activists, also brought international attention to the situation in Gaza, as well as the efforts of

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*.

¹⁶ Helvey, *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: Thinking about the Fundamentals*.

¹⁷ Ibid., 150.

the Free Gaza movement and the global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction (BDS) campaign.

Acts of protest and persuasion (such as marches, demonstrations, and protests), noncooperation (such as boycotts and strikes), and direct intervention (including civil disobedience) characterize some of the most visible nonviolent tactics in Palestine and elsewhere. This article focuses primarily on mobilization related to these direct actions, but also explores indirect actions, including civil society initiatives and everyday acts of resistance, which characterized the broader sphere of nonviolence in Palestine in both the first and second Intifadas.

The largely non-violent nature of the first Intifada (1987-1993), especially in its early years, has been documented by numerous scholars. Mary King provides perhaps the most comprehensive study on the use of nonviolence in Palestine during the first Intifada, concluding that Palestinians at that time “conceptualized new ways of waging struggle for basic civil and political rights and in so doing reshaped the sources of power within Palestinian society, causing shifts away from adherence the dogma of military means [and] building leadership structures that emerged from the organizing of a civil society.”¹⁸ Other scholars have likewise examined the nonviolent nature of the first Intifada. As Souad Dajani summarizes, “Stone-throwing demonstrations and individual armed attacks (...) notwithstanding, the intifada was consciously and deliberately envisioned as an organized and universal unarmed civilian struggle against the Israeli occupation.”¹⁹ Ackerman and DuVall also explain how “Palestinians from every walk of life were willing to protest, strike, and improvise” in the first Intifada.²⁰

In contrast to the non-violent foundation of the first Intifada, the second Intifada (2000-2008) was characterized by heightened use of violence from both sides, resulting in the deaths of 4,826 Palestinians and 482 Israelis (as of December 2008), many of whom were civilians, with thousands more wounded.²¹ As Andoni explains, “Intifada 2000 started explosively, with many confrontations and high casualties, quickly escalated into militant clashes... and then normalized into less intense clashes with frequent military operations

¹⁸ Mary Elizabeth King, *A Quiet Revolution: The First Palestinian Intifada and Nonviolent Resistance*, (New York: Nation Books, 2007), 343.

¹⁹ Souad Dajani, “Nonviolent Resistance in the Occupied Territories: A Critical Reevaluation,” in *Nonviolent Social Movements*, eds. Stephen Zunes, Lester R. Kurtz, and Sarah Beth Asher, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 52-74. 58. See also Andrew Rigby, *Living the Intifada*, (London: Zed, 1991).

²⁰ Peter Ackerman, and Jack DuVall, *A Force More Powerful*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 420.

²¹ See ‘B’tselem, Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories,’ Fatalities, <http://www.btselem.org/statistics/fatalities/any/by-date-of-event>, accessed 23 May 2013.

from both sides.”²² Israeli strategies included military raids and incursions, air strikes, and targeted assassinations, as well as home demolitions, curfews, arrests, detentions, and use of checkpoints, while Palestinian tactics included suicide bomb attacks, as well as the use of imported assault rifles, hand grenades, and homemade Qassam rockets. This resulted in the Intifada becoming a cycle of violence between armed groups such as ‘Hamas’, ‘Islamic Jihad’, and ‘Al-Aqsa Brigades’ and the IDF, with both sides justifying their violent actions by the violence of the other.

Despite the prevalence of armed resistance, Palestinian nonviolent activism was by no means absent during the second Intifada. Despite the apparent dominance of violent resistance during the second Intifada, nonviolent resistance did, and continues to, take place throughout Palestine in various forms. Perhaps most notably, direct action campaigns, consisting of acts of protest and persuasion, boycotts, and civil disobedience, have emerged in numerous villages, usually led by local popular committees.²³ While these campaigns typically have transpired in response to the construction of the separation barrier,²⁴ the village campaigns have come to constitute a nexus of resistance to the occupation itself. Successful campaigns were coordinated in many areas of the West Bank, in villages like Bil’in, near Ramallah, Budrus in the northern West Bank, and Al-Tawani in the south. However, widespread popular participation in nonviolent resistance remained fragmented and limited, in contrast to the mass mobilization of the first Intifada.

Remembering the First Intifada: Golden Age of Resistance?

The first Intifada (1987-1993) did not emerge spontaneously, but rather built on years of resistance and organizing from political movements, civic organizations, unions, and individual activists. The actual start of the Intifada is typically referenced as 9 December 1987, following an automobile collision between an Israeli truck and two cars of Gazan laborers, whose funerals turned into mass protests in Gaza, especially in Jabaliya refugee camp. Protests then broke out across the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt), as Palestinians from

²² Ghassan Andoni, “A Comparative Study of Intifada 1987 and Intifada 2000,” in *The New Intifada*, ed. R. Carey, (London: Verso, 2001), 209-218, 212.

²³ Many village-based campaigns have been supported by international groups like the ‘International Solidarity Movement’ (ISM), the ‘Palestinian Solidarity Project’ (PSP), and the ‘Christian Peacemaker Teams’ (CPT), as well as by Israeli groups like ‘Anarchists Against the Wall,’ ‘Ta’ayush,’ and ‘Peace Now.’ The efforts of these groups are worthy of additional discussion, but are beyond the scope of this article. For more on international interventions, see Nancy Stohlman and Laurieann Aladin, *Live from Palestine*, (Cambridge: South End Press, 2003).

²⁴ The separation barrier, still under construction in some areas, is a 723-kilometer long barrier that the form of a six-to-eight meter concrete wall in some parts and barbed wire and electric fence in others. The barrier roughly separates 1967 Israel and the West Bank, but it is not built directly on the Green Line, the recognized border between Israel and the West Bank.

all walks of life participated in the ‘shaking off’ (the literal translation of *intifada*) of the occupation. Acts of defiance included shouting and wailing to prevent soldiers from entering people’s homes, blowing car horns at designated times, wearing the Palestinian *keffiyeh* (traditional headdress), burning tires, and writing on public walls. Flying the Palestinian flag, which was illegal, was also encouraged as a symbol of resistance. Other nonviolent tactics included methods of resistance such as demonstrations, sit-ins, marches, mock funerals, and teach-ins. In addition to boycotting Israeli products, economic noncooperation extended to strikes, withdrawal of work from Israeli factories and farms, and withholding taxes.²⁵

While trying to frustrate Israeli systems, Palestinians were at the same time creating alternative institutions in the forms of specialized committees in towns, villages, and camps throughout the oPt. These committees performed a variety of functions, from providing humanitarian aid to mobilizing and organizing the general population, to serving as an alternative civilian administration. Perhaps one of the most noteworthy groups to emerge during this time was ‘Al-Qiyada al-Wataniyya al-Muwahhada lil-Intifada’, the ‘Unified Nationalist Leadership of the Uprising’ (UNLU). Comprised of representatives from all the major political parties, including ‘Fatah’, the PFLP, the DFLP, and the PCP, the UNLU became the primary initiator of calls for action and civil disobedience, which it disseminated through a series of leaflets of communiqués. As Mattar writes, “The leaflets, usually two pages in length and giving instructions for the coming week or two weeks, announced... strikes, mass demonstrations, and other protest activities. Most of the directives issued by the UNLU advocated civil disobedience and called for action of a nonviolent character.”²⁶ According to a report completed by the Palestine Center for the Study of Nonviolence, over 95 per cent of the 163 actions called for in the initial 17 leaflets were specifically nonviolent, and over 90 per cent of the 291 calls in leaflets 18-39 were nonviolent.²⁷ The UNLU complemented the popular committees, or community leadership councils, that organized actions, provided social relief, and functioned effectively as government institutions at the local level, especially in villages and non-urban areas.²⁸

Many activists noted the strong sense of a collective national identity that emerged during the first Intifada. According to Polletta and Jasper, collective identity is ‘an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution.’²⁹ Similarly, Melucci

²⁵ Julie M. Norman, *The Second Palestinian Intifada: Civil Resistance*, (London: Routledge, 2010); Mary E. King, *A Quiet Revolution: The First Palestinian Intifada and Nonviolent Resistance*, (New York: Nation Books, 2007); Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000).

²⁶ Phillip Mattar, *Encyclopedia of the Palestinians*, (New York: Facts on File, 2005), 228.

²⁷ Souad R. Dajani, *Eyes Without Country*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 194.

²⁸ Norman, *The Second Palestinian Intifada*, 25-26.

²⁹ Francesca Polletta, and James M. Jasper, “Collective Identity and Social Movements,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 283-305, 285.

describes collective identity as a process that extends across time and space, involves a network of active relationships, and contains a sense of emotional investment that establishes a common unity between individuals.³⁰ Though dynamic in nature, collective identity “channels words and actions (...) [and] provides categories by which individuals divide up and make sense of the social world.”³¹ In this way, the first Intifada translated the collective identity of national struggle into a veritable *movement* identity, a shared identity based on participation in a movement.

Many activists remembered their experiences in the first Intifada with an element of nostalgia, noting the empowering effect of reclaiming the Palestinian movement for the people, and thus restoring to it a sense of united hope and optimism. As Mahmoud, an activist, explained:

The Palestinian people have a long history of resistance, but the highest point of our resistance was the first intifada (...). Our resistance then was unprecedented, in that we used stones and simplicity in confronting a big army, and we faced guns with our chests open to them. The intifada is deeply rooted in people’s minds as the main resistance. We mobilized all the people in the streets, and mobilized the entire community for confrontation.³²

With this spirit of community solidarity, the first Intifada translated the idea of national struggle into a veritable movement identity, a shared identity based on participation in a movement.³³ As Nour, another activist described, “It was the intifada of the people... If there was a demonstration, you wouldn’t only see the younger generation, you would see mothers, old people, the whole village participating.”³⁴ Majdi, a nonviolence trainer in Bethlehem likewise recalled, “Everyone was together. You could go to any house if you needed to eat or you needed to sleep, and people would welcome you. Whether you were Christian or Muslim, it didn’t matter, because all were open to each other.”³⁵ Another activist, Alex, added that communities worked together to become self-reliant, holding classes for students in different houses when schools were closed, and planting gardens to grow food. As he summarized, “We knew how to make a community together, and to support each other for food, shelter, education, everything.”³⁶

³⁰ Alberto Melucci, “The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements” *Social Research* 52/4 (1985): 789-816.

³¹ Francesca Polletta, and James M. Jasper, “Collective Identity and Social Movements,” 298.

³² Interview of the A. with Mahmoud, Ramallah 11 June 2007. (Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from activists are from interviews with the author, and names have been changed or omitted to maintain anonymity.)

³³ See Gamson, “Constructing Social Protest,” for more on movement identity.

³⁴ Interview of the A. with Fuad, Ramallah 4 June 2007.

³⁵ Interview of the A. with Majdi, Bethlehem 16 May 2007.

³⁶ Interview of the A. with Alex, Bethlehem 30 April 2007.

The emphasis on civil-based, unarmed resistance in the first Intifada proved to be both individually and collectively empowering, thus further reinforcing a veritable movement identity. As Majdi recalled, “The best part was that Palestinians were in control of their own revolt (...). You could feel the pride, because we were in action.”³⁷ Abu-Nimer agrees, describing the first Intifada as an excellent example of a political movement in which the masses of people were able to take control of their destiny and bring political change into their environment by organizing themselves to fight oppression using nonviolent tactics.³⁸ The first Intifada thus not only strengthened local communities, but also contributed to the articulation of a national Palestinian identity of resistance. As Majdi commented, “My generation was organizing people for the national aspiration and revolting against the oppression of the occupation. We were sending out a message saying, ‘Hey, we are a people here’.”³⁹ Although the idea of a Palestinian nation was not new, the shared experience of popular resistance in the first Intifada firmly articulated a collective identity of resistance.

The shared experience of popular struggle also informs the individual identity of activists. As Polletta and Jasper note, participation marks activists’ personal identities even after the movement ends.⁴⁰ This was the case for many activists in Palestine, particularly those who were youth during the time, as the first Intifada provided them with a sense of purpose and a place in society. As Nour remembered, “When you were holding the flag, you felt like you were deciding things, coordinating things, and deciding where the cause was going. It was a great feeling.”⁴¹ Likewise, Majdi recalled, “There was such a feeling of power, and of love, and of friends. The feeling was beautiful. I found myself there, and I found the Palestinian way.”⁴² As Polletta and Jasper suggest, “Core collective identity continues to shape an individual’s sense of self.”⁴³ In this way, the collective experience of resistance in the first Intifada informed the individual identity of then youth activists, who drew from that experience to initiate popular struggle in the second Intifada.

Historical Narrative and Contemporary Activism

Activists’ experiences in the first Intifada influenced their actions in the second Intifada in several ways. Primarily, prior experiences often had an impact on decisions of individual participation, that is, *if* former activists would engage in

³⁷ Interview of the A. with Majdi.

³⁸ Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Nonviolence and Peacebuilding in Islam*, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003): 180.

³⁹ Interview of the A. with Majdi.

⁴⁰ Polletta and Jasper, “Collective Identity and Social Movements,” 296.

⁴¹ Interview of the A. with Nour, Ramallah 4 June 2007.

⁴² Interview of the A. with Majdi.

⁴³ Polletta and Jasper, “Collective Identity and Social Movements,” 296.

resistance. However, even more importantly, first Intifada memory also proved instrumental in *how* activists decided to resist, illustrated in efforts to bring back former community-based tactics and organizational models; and also in how activists attempted to mobilize their communities, by seeking to recreate the collective activist identity.

In terms of tactics, interviews indicated that first Intifada experiences as activists, militants, or prisoners were instrumental in motivating resistance leaders to reclaim a space for popular resistance in the second Intifada. The majority of civil resistance leaders in the second Intifada based their actions on a core activist identity that they attributed to their involvement in the first Intifada. As Nour commented, “During the first intifada, I felt that I did something, and it gave me a commitment to continue. I felt something in my heart, and I adopted that feeling afterwards.”⁴⁴ This activist attributed his motivation for his efforts during the second Intifada to a foundation of activism developed during the first Intifada. Likewise, when describing his decision to launch the Stop the Wall campaign, which employs unarmed protest, boycotts, and other nonviolent strategies to challenge the separation barrier, Mahmoud stated, “We created the campaign out of our experiences (...) looking to get back the way of resistance that we admired.”⁴⁵

Many first Intifada activists thus sought to bring back some of the unarmed tactics used in earlier years, aiming to reclaim a space for popular resistance in the new Intifada based on first Intifada memories. For example, in some villages, first Intifada generation activists were instrumental in initiating campaigns of weekly demonstrations by re-establishing the local popular committees, which had been essential in coordinating resistance efforts in the 1980s. As noted above, many of the campaigns emerged in response to the construction of the separation barrier, but they developed into nodes of resistance to the occupation itself. For example, the village of Bil’in, located 12 kilometers west of Ramallah, has been holding weekly demonstrations against the wall and the occupation since January 2005, and has served as a gathering place for activists (Israeli and international as well as Palestinian), and has also served as a model for other village campaigns.⁴⁶ Village resistance included conventional acts, such as protests, marches, and boycotts, but also included creative acts such as erecting “scales of injustice,” creating make-shift playgrounds in separation barrier construction sites, dressing up as the “oppressed” race in the popular film *Avatar*, and building a house overnight on land slated for confiscation to ensure access.⁴⁷ While these actions included many young people, as well as many Israeli and international supporters, the popular committee leading the actions was largely comprised of activists with

⁴⁴ Interview of the A. with Nour.

⁴⁵ Interview of the A. with Mahmoud.

⁴⁶ See Maia Carter Hallward, “Creative Responses to Separation: Israeli and Palestinian Joint Activism in Bil’in” *Journal of Peace Research* 46/4 (2009): 541-558.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

first Intifada experience, who were seeking to reclaim the spirit of creative activism.

Not all second Intifada leaders came from the same activist background. Indeed, many of the older civil resistance leaders in the second Intifada were former militants who had engaged in various forms of armed struggle, mostly through the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in the years prior to the first Intifada. Yet even some of these activists with militant backgrounds made a conscious decision to use unarmed tactics in the second Intifada over armed resistance, considering it to be more personally empowering and collectively strategic for Palestinians. As Hassan, an activist based in a village near Bethlehem, stated, “I became interested in a new kind of resistance, and started investing in new groups... As the situation changes, we must react also, and change to resist in different ways. So I still consider most of my work to be resistance against the occupation.”⁴⁸

While some activists who had militant backgrounds made a more deliberate decision to engage in unarmed resistance than those without such direct experiences with violence, they still saw strategic nonviolence as a natural extension of their former resistance, and considered it to be in accordance with the activist identity cultivated in the first Intifada. Indeed, the notion of ‘engagement’ was a primary draw of popular resistance for some activists who saw civil resistance as more empowering and strategic than violence by enabling people to take action to change their situation. Khaled, an activist-journalist based in Hebron, commented that he did not feel this same sort of empowerment from armed resistance, in which he stated, “the gun was leading us, not the other way around.”⁴⁹ He thus sought to sustain the sense of resistance that he remembered from the first Intifada, but through alternative means.

Several activists noted that they gained experience with unarmed resistance tactics in prison, in which nonviolence was the only means of struggle available. Hassan, who had been affiliated with Islamic Jihad spent significant time in both prison and administrative detention, where his six-month term was renewed repeatedly, resulting in him being held in jail for several years without charge. He used his time to organize demonstrations and hunger strikes with the other prisoners, and managed to produce some small results regarding their treatment. As he explained, nonviolence was the only option for resistance in jail:

In jail you don’t have anything you can use to throw at the soldiers or use to resist violently. What are you going to use? Even if we had something that would work, you needed to hold on to everything you had, so we just didn’t do it. Yet through this other kind of [unarmed]

⁴⁸ Interview of the A. with Hassan, Husan, 1 March 2007.

⁴⁹ Interview of the A. with Khaled, Hebron, 12 June 2007.

resistance, even in jail, we still had a way to struggle, and we still produced spots of hope.⁵⁰

Activists' time in prison clearly affected their later activism, by giving them experience with alternative forms of struggle and different ways of thinking. Despite suffering abuses and having severe grievances, many former prisoners chose unarmed resistance as their preferred means of struggle, seeing it as more strategic than violence, and incorporating the memories of those resistance experiences into their activist later identity.

Activists' decisions to engage in civil resistance in the second Intifada were clearly informed by their sense of an activist identity, shaped by memories of experiences in the first Intifada. Whether their prior participation involved civil resistance, armed struggle, or time in prison, these activists' prior experiences influenced not only their choice to resist in later years, but also their decisions to employ unarmed tactics and seek to rebuild a more widespread popular movement.

Power of the Past? Limitations of Memory in Political Mobilization

While memories of first Intifada certainly influenced some individuals, how far does 'remembering mobilization' actually extend? Indeed, if the first Intifada attracted participation from the majority of the population, there are clearly many Palestinians who did participate in the first Intifada who did not actively engage in the second Intifada. Furthermore, the youth demographic, while growing up with stories of the first Intifada, did not share those same memories, and while they still heard of experiences from older family members, the nostalgic glaze on these memories may have actually made such activism appear nearly impossible to reclaim. Finally, new realities of repression of activism from both the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and the Palestinian Authority (PA) have frustrated attempts to reclaim civil resistance, even when community members have succeeded in mobilizing memory.

To be sure, while many of the challenges faced by activists resulted from internal factors, nearly all activists commented that mobilization for nonviolent resistance in the second Intifada was hindered by new realities on the ground, most notably in terms of movement restrictions, as well as new policies of repression, including increased use of force at demonstrations and widespread imprisonment. In regards to movement restrictions, the separation barrier, checkpoints, and roadblocks fragmented the movement by limiting contact amongst Palestinians, and between Palestinians and Israelis.⁵¹ These limitations

⁵⁰ Interview of the A. with Hassan.

⁵¹ According to Israeli human rights group 'B'tselem,' as of November 2008, the IDF maintained 63 permanent checkpoints within the West Bank, 49 of which were regularly staffed. In addition, according to the UN 'Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (OCHA), the IDF maintained flying, or surprise, checkpoints throughout the West

decreased mobilization for and coordination of resistance efforts, by making it difficult for activists to plan and participate in actions, and by restricting the types of actions that could be implemented.⁵² Meanwhile, beatings, detentions, and arrests were commonplace at weekly demonstrations at villages like Bil'in, and punishments often extended beyond the events themselves, in terms of denial of permits to village residents to access work, school, or hospitals. While some activists expressed concern for their own wellbeing, they also explained that the IDF often targeted their family members as another tactic of intimidation. As Yousef, an activist in the South Bethlehem area recounted,

Recently they broke into my brother's house next door during the night and arrested him, and he is still in jail. They shot one of the panes on his door and said they would keep shooting out the glass unless he came out, then they arrested him. I heard the commotion and was about to go outside, but when I saw them, I stayed hidden. But I would prefer it was me who was arrested, and not my brother.⁵³

Activists themselves were frequently arrested as well, with nearly all those interviewed for this study having spent time in administrative detention or prison, ranging days to years. According to 'B'tselem', approximately 8,000 Palestinians were under the custody of Israeli security forces in 2008, nearly a third of those in detention.⁵⁴ As Naser, another activist, stated, "People often ask, 'Where is the Palestinian Gandhi?' My response is that there are hundreds of Palestinian Gandhis, but they are all in the prisons."⁵⁵

It should be noted that the risks of personal injury or imprisonment were not so different from the first Intifada. Indeed, as mentioned above, much of the collective identity formed in the first Intifada grew from experiences of shared hardship or time spent in the jails. However, for many, the cost-benefit analysis of such risks was different in the second Intifada context. Many first Intifada activists, who had in fact risked their lives and livelihoods in the 1980s, were frustrated with the outcomes of the first Intifada and the subsequent Oslo period. Rather than seeing their sacrifices lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state, these activists perceived a worsening of conditions with

Bank, which are temporary, staffed checkpoints set up for several hours and then dismantled, averaging 89 per week between September 2007 and April 2008. Further restrictions on movement within the West Bank, documented by OCHA in October 2008, included physical barriers such as roadside fences, trenches barring vehicles from crossing, locked entrance gates to villages, and dirt and debris piles blocking roads or entrances to villages, with a monthly average of 537 obstructions documented. Additionally, as reported by 'B'tselem,' 430 kilometers of roads within the West Bank were restricted or forbidden to Palestinian traffic as of July 2008.

⁵² See Norman, *The Second Palestinian Intifada*, for more on the effects of movement restrictions.

⁵³ Interview of the A. with Yousef, Um Salamouna, 2 May 2007.

⁵⁴ B'tselem, "Statistics on Palestinians in the custody of Israeli security forces," http://www.btselem.org/statistics/detainees_and_prisoners, accessed 20 March 2013.

⁵⁵ Interview of the A. with Naser, Bethlehem, 4 April 2007.

increasing settlements, a declining economy, and steps towards democratic self-governance frustrated by both the Israeli occupation and the PA. As Zeinab, an activist and journalist, commented, “The biggest challenge is to feel that your work is actually going somewhere. I look at the accumulation of my work, of trying to communicate rights, justice, and the right picture of Palestine, and I wonder sometimes if it has really amounted to anything.”⁵⁶ Some in the older generation thus experienced a sense of activism fatigue that altered the form or extent of their resistance, indicating how the memory of the idealism of past activism can also temper later actions. Furthermore, for both the older and younger generations alike, the cost-benefit analysis of participating in activism was further problematized by the social and economic hardships of daily life for most Palestinians during the second Intifada. As many activists noted, the majority of Palestinians did not have the liberty to engage in a long-term campaign because the situation made even day-to-day survival a struggle for many, regardless of location. As Alex explained, “It’s hard for people to work for a goal that seems far-off. It’s gotten to a point where most people need to work and are more focused on that. People need to think about food before strategy.”⁵⁷ Majdi agreed, noting that, during the second Intifada, “because of the severity of the conditions, the need for survival was so huge that we couldn’t really attract the human resources from the community that we need for civil-based resistance.”⁵⁸ This did not mean that individuals divorced themselves from resistance, but rather shifted their focus from protests and demonstrations to daily struggles. As Wendy Pearlman notes, “for most Palestinians, ‘participation’ in the [second] uprising meant suffering through checkpoints and repression, and pledging to continue doing so until independence was achieved.”⁵⁹ In this way, much of the struggle in the second Intifada took the form of *sumud*, or steadfastness, rather than direct action or resistance.

Direct crackdowns on activists, combined with the struggles of daily life, certainly contributed to the lack of popular mobilization in the second Intifada. However, it is possible that such challenges might have been overcome with a more political unified leadership. Indeed, as noted above, the UNLU proved essential in the first Intifada in organizing widespread participation and enabling the movement to withstand both internal challenges and external shocks. In contrast, in the second Intifada, the PA proved unable or unwilling to play this role, and political factions were focused more on internal competition than uniting to resist the occupation. As Pearlman states, “the Palestinian national movement no longer possessed the organizational structure necessary for nonviolent protest on a national scope. The social ties, norms, strategic clarity, and dense network of civic groups that generated

⁵⁶ Interview of the A. with Zeinab, Jerusalem, 10 April 2007.

⁵⁷ Interview of the A. with Alex.

⁵⁸ Interview of the A. with Majdi.

⁵⁹ Wendy Pearlman, *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 163.

cohesion and facilitated broad based nonviolent [action] in 1987 were scarce in 2000.”⁶⁰ To employ Pearlman’s useful terminology, while the movement was ‘resilient’ in the first Intifada, able to withstand challenges such as crackdowns, imprisonment, and economic hardship, the national movement in the second Intifada was ‘brittle,’ crumbling and fracturing under similar pressures.⁶¹ This was due in part to the inherent structure of the PA as a state-like institution operating under a military occupation, however, activists also expressed disillusionment and frustration with the individuals and parties within the PA. As Zeinab commented, “The political parties in recent years have been part of the corruption (...). They could play a much larger role, as they did in the first intifada. People feel the absence of a charismatic leader who could lead people with a common vision.”⁶²

In regards to the PA specifically, many Palestinians not only perceived a lack of leadership for resistance, but also a complicity between the PA and Israel and the PA and the international community. As Monjed, an activist in Bethlehem, explained, “For the seven years of Oslo, it was like the leadership was giving the people sedatives, and people became content with the promise that everything would be better, and they stopped resisting. So in reality, the PA was shutting up the resistance before the wall.”⁶³ According to Parsons, the PA adopted a ‘mandate for social demobilization’⁶⁴ that it applied to violent and nonviolent activists alike. This phenomenon has become more visible in recent years as some IDF mandates have shifted to PA security forces. As one activist described a demonstration in 2012:

After the confrontation started with the Israeli soldiers, the Palestinian [security forces] came and occupied the street, closed the street, and pushed people back. They were actually protecting the Israeli watchtowers. This kills the readiness to resist, because people don’t want to make a battle with the PA. At the end, all of us are Palestinians (...) but it puts people in a dilemma.⁶⁵

To return then to the cost-benefit analysis of political struggle, even if individuals can commit to facing the risks of imprisonment or loss of livelihood, the chance of resistance being successful when the Palestinians’ own leadership is quelling protests makes activism seem futile. When

⁶⁰ Ibid., 162.

⁶¹ Pearlman writes, “The more cohesive the movement, the greater will be its ability to bend like rubber in the face of repression, and thereby preserve its organizational structure and strategy. The more fragmented the movement, the more repression will cause it to shatter like glass” (21).

⁶² Interview of the A. with Zeinab.

⁶³ Interview of the A. with Monjed, Bethlehem, 31 May 2007.

⁶⁴ Nigel Parsons, *The Politics of the Palestinian Authority: From Oslo to Al-Aqsa*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 175.

⁶⁵ Interview of the A. with Sami, Bethlehem, 19 June 2012.

combined with a common public perception of nonviolence as passivity at best and ‘domestication’⁶⁶ at worst, it is clear that the memory of mobilization from the first Intifada was not enough to re-spark a widespread movement in the face of contemporary challenges.

Re-Imagining the Now: Challenges and Opportunities

It is clear that the ‘memory of mobilization’ was a motivating factor for many individual activists seeking to reclaim a community spirit of resistance in the second Intifada. However, it is also evident that the activist identity shared by many of these individuals was more visible at the personal level than the collective level, as a widespread popular movement never truly emerged in the second Intifada. In other words, memories of past mobilization proved instrumental in influencing individual participation in the second Intifada, but activists were unable to leverage those memories for collective resistance. Such limitations were due in part to the physical barriers, socioeconomic conditions, and political constraints discussed above that made resistance difficult or unfeasible. Yet it is also important to consider the challenges and opportunities inherent in attempting to use memory and history for mobilization.

Indeed, while memory can act an inspiration, it can also function as a burden or weight. As noted above, the fact that first Intifada mobilization did not yield the anticipated outcome of an independent Palestinian state may have contributed to a sense of ‘activism fatigue’ for some. In this way, recalling past sacrifices and struggle dampened the will to mobilize for some, since it appeared that such sacrifices were in vain.

Another challenge of using the past for mobilization is distinguishing between historical reality and memory. While the majority of activists interviewed spoke of being disillusioned with the ‘peace process’ during the Oslo period, nearly all recalled the first Intifada itself with a sense of nostalgia, remembering it as a golden age of sorts. Was this actually the reality at the time? For the purposes of later mobilization, it can be argued that individual memory of the past is just as important, if not more so, than historical reality. Memory provides retrospective rather than direct accounts, in that, as Davis argues, “events earlier in time take their meaning and act as causes only because of how things turn out later or are anticipated to turn out in the future.”⁶⁷ Indeed, as noted above, it is precisely the empowering memories of first Intifada struggle that inspired many activists to continue resistance. Yet, nostalgia can be a double-edged sword, as, for others, it can lend an era a sort of mystical quality, implying a sense that it can never be regained. This was indeed the case for

⁶⁶ Ava Leone, “Civic Education in Post-Oslo Palestine: Discursive Domestication,” in *Nonviolent Resistance in the Second Intifada: Activism and Advocacy*, eds. Maia Carter Hallward and Julie M. Norman, (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2011), 13-31.

⁶⁷ Joseph E. Davis, *Stories of Change: Narrative and Social Movements*, (Albany: SUNY, 2002), 12.

many individuals who saw the 1980s as such a distinctly memorable period that it would be futile to try to recreate it in the contemporary political context.

This double-edged sword of nostalgia applies to youth as well. While many second Intifada youth did not have direct memories of the first Intifada, they had grown up with friends and family members who related stories from that time. For some, these stories were inspiring narratives that motivated youth to engage in activism themselves in the second Intifada. Yet, for others, stories of the past suggested a climate of resistance that they could never hope to achieve in their present reality. No matter how much they were willing or able to mobilize, there was a sense that they would never be able to recreate that golden age.

Is it ever possible then to leverage the memory of mobilization for collective action? I argue that activist memory can still function as a source of inspiration, but it requires remaining grounded in the reality of the past as well as the present. That is, looking to the past not as a broad, idealistic expanse, but as a resource for drawing real lessons about strategies and tactics, and adapting and applying those lessons creatively to present realities.

Many groups are already doing this. For example, the 'Lajee Center' in Aida Camp near Bethlehem works with youth to record stories of the past while also confronting the realities of the present. Youth have produced short films, radio broadcasts, and photo essays that document community experiences extending from the Nakba to the second Intifada, yet also explore issues affecting them presently, including women's rights, access to education, access to water, and youth imprisonment, approaching these current issues as part of a broader historical narrative. Regarding the issue of imprisonment in particular, community members with experience in prison have worked with the younger generation to not only share their stories, but to prepare youths for the potential experience of arrest and interrogation through drama and role-playing. One young man described how participating in these activities made him better prepared to handle interrogations and avoid collaborators when he was later arrested.⁶⁸ The older generations are not just remembering experiences for memory's sake, but are passing on lessons learned about struggle and resistance that are necessary for today's youth. The 'Lajee Center' has also been successful in linking oral history with new media, such that youth can explore themes of the past while gaining technical expertise in video production, photo editing, and website development. This approach again accounts for present realities in which many youth are engaging in media activism instead of, or in addition to, traditional tactics such as demonstrations and boycotts.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Interview of the A. with Yared, Bethlehem, 29 June 2012.

⁶⁹ For more on the 'Lajee Center,' see <http://www.lajee.org/>, accessed 18 May 2013

Other community groups are also seeking to link the past to the present in specific ways. ‘Stop the Wall’ (STW), though focusing on the current issue of the separation barrier, designed a program for youth during the second Intifada that consisted not only of learning about the history of Palestinian struggle through lectures, but actually taking trips throughout the West Bank to talk to activists, visit sites of past struggles, and view the effects of measures like the separation barrier.⁷⁰ As Ahmed, the youth coordinator for Stop the Wall commented, “If we want to educate youth (...) we should teach them about the history of the struggle, about the leaders, and about why we have spent our lives fighting.”⁷¹

These initiatives and others⁷² manage to leverage memories without falling victim to the ‘nostalgia effect.’ They accomplish this first by focusing on specific issues and incidents, rather than ‘The Past’ as a broad, elusive whole, allowing for more nuanced understandings of the processes, strategies, and tactics that were (or were not) successful in previous times of struggle. Second, these initiatives do not make the mistake of overemphasizing the past to the exclusion of the present. Rather they approach historical narratives as tools for better understanding and engaging with the present. In this way, they remain grounded in current realities, recognizing that past modes of resistance, while providing guidance, cannot be replicated without adapting to present constraints and opportunities. To be sure, in the present context, the influence of recent uprisings in the Arab world and the climate of civil-based resistance in the region may yet re-open a space for popular struggle in Palestine and a renewed interest in past lessons of mobilization.

Conclusion

Historical memory of activism can play a role in subsequent efforts to mobilize for popular resistance. In the case of Palestine, this was true at the individual level for many first Intifada activists whose experiences in the 1980s influenced their decisions to organize or participate in civil resistance in the second Intifada. Indeed, these activists were motivated not only to respond to grievances imposed by the occupation, but to re-engage their communities with the spirit of collective activism that resonated so strongly in the past. However, many individuals with first Intifada experiences did not have this response, indicating that the influence of memory varies by individual. Furthermore, activists proved unable to leverage past memory for mobilization

⁷⁰ For more on ‘Stop the Wall,’ see <http://www.stopthewall.org/>, accessed 18 May 2013

⁷¹ Interview of the A. with Ahmed, Ramallah, 11 June 2007.

⁷² In another example, the ‘Jenin Freedom Theatre’ combined artistic and mobile elements to organize ‘freedom rides,’ in which actors, musicians, puppeteers, and other performers traveled around the West Bank and engaged community stories of loss and suffering through drama and music. For more on the ‘Freedom Theatre,’ see <http://www.thefreedomtheatre.org/>, accessed 18 May 2013.

at the collective level, failing to attract widespread participation in civil resistance in the second Intifada.⁷³ It is thus important to be cautious when evaluating the influence of historical memory on later mobilization in protracted conflicts. First, the nostalgic glow that often accompanies historical memory can make efforts to reclaim the same spirit seem naïve or futile. Second, the past may not be powerful enough to override present grievances and political constraints, especially in the absence of unified leadership, worsening economic conditions, and continued violence, arrests, and oppression.

I thus conclude that, in Palestine, the memory of past resistance has functioned as an inspiration for some individual mobilization, but efforts to draw from the past have not yet yielded widespread collective resistance, due largely to the political realities of the present. However, as noted above, many villages, organizations, and individuals are leveraging the past effectively, suggesting that there is potential in using historical memory to inform current creative activism. As James Green writes, the past can be powerful in “building the progressive movements of the present and the future. Ongoing struggles for (...) justice are seen as extensions of older stories still unfolding.”⁷⁴ In the case of Palestine, past memories of mobilization alone may not be enough to inspire a widespread, collective nonviolent movement, but such memories, still unfolding, can be instructive in inspiring tactics and strategies as the struggle adapts to new challenges.⁷⁵

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⁷³ It should be noted that some villages such as Budrous, Bil'in, Biddo, and others did mobilize successfully, but these cases were very localized, and activists emphasized that a true national movement failed to emerge.

⁷⁴ James Green, *Taking History to Heart: The Power of the Past in Building Social Movements*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 21.

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