



PARTY SYSTEM UNDER OCCUPATION:  
A CASE STUDY OF PALESTINE, 1987-2011

BY

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines and analyzes the Palestinian party system after the establishment of Hamas movement, within the period 1987 -2011. Most of the data required to analyze and examine the Palestinian party system was obtained from the government and party documents in addition to personal interviews. Because the Palestinian party system operates within two internal and external environments, the researcher used the System Theory of David Easton so as to analyse the internal and external factors affecting the Palestinian party system. After discussing the emergence of the most important Palestinian parties, their thoughts and development, the researcher moved to identify the most important elements of the internal and external environments, where the impact of media, civil society, clans, the Israeli occupation and the foreign interference on the Palestinian party system were examined. It was found that the internal environment of the Palestinian party system was affected by the parties more than they affect it, while the external environment played an influential role on the party relations. In order to understand the Palestinian party system, the emergence of these parties and the most important characteristics of the Palestinian party system like pluralism, competitiveness and the absence of the party law were examined. Moreover, both environments led to the instability of the party system in particular and the political system in general. The governments were not stable and the first experience of the government alliances failed. The final result was a political and security conflict that affected the Palestinian social and economic structure negatively.

## ملخص البحث

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى فحص وتحليل النظام الحزبي الفلسطيني بعد تأسيس حركة حماس وذلك في الفترة الواقعة بين 1987-2011. معظم المعلومات التي تطلبها تحليل وفحص النظام الحزبي الفلسطيني تم الحصول عليها من الوثائق الحكومية والحزبية والمقابلات الشخصية. نظراً لعمل النظام الحزبي الفلسطيني ضمن بيئتين هما الخارجية والداخلية، فقد تمت الاستعانة بنظرية النظم لديفيد إيستون من أجل تحليل العوامل الداخلية والخارجية المؤثرة على النظام الحزبي الفلسطيني والمتأثرة به، فبعد أن تم نقاش نشوء أهم الحركات والأحزاب الفلسطينية وأفكارها وتطورها، تم الانتقال إلى تحديد أهم العناصر المشكلة للبيئتين الداخلية والخارجية، حيث تم فحص أثر الإعلام والمجتمع المدني والعشائر والاحتلال الإسرائيلي والتدخلات الأجنبية على النظام الحزبي الفلسطيني، حيث تبين أن البيئة الداخلية للنظام الحزبي الفلسطيني تتأثر بالحركات والأحزاب أكثر مما تؤثر فيها، فيما البيئة الخارجية تلعب دوراً مؤثراً على العلاقات الحزبية، دراسة نشوء هذه الحركات والأحزاب وأفكارها وبيئتها أتاحت التوصل إلى أهم خصائص النظام الحزبي الفلسطيني كالتعددية السياسية والأيدولوجية وغياب قانون الأحزاب والتنافسية. كلتا البيئتان أدتا إلى عدم استقرار النظام الحزبي تحديداً والنظام السياسي بشكل عام، حيث لم تتمتع الحكومات باستقرار، فيما فشلت التجربة الأولى للتحالفات الحكومية، فكانت النتيجة النهائية حدوث صراع سياسي وأمني أثر سلباً على البنية الاجتماعية والاقتصادية الفلسطينية.

## **APPROVAL PAGE**

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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A CASE STUDY OF PALESTINE, 1987-2011**

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*To my beloved late friend Hamed Abu Thabet*

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

CECP	Central Elections Commission – Palestine
CRB	Change and Reform Bloc
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
DSC	Development Studies Center
ICHR	Independent Commission for Human Rights
PA	Palestinian Authority
PANI	Palestine News and Info Agency
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PLC	Palestinian Legislative Council
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND THE GENERAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

The Palestinian society has experienced many historical changes that have significantly influenced its structure, culture and political behaviour. Britain established the Mandate over Palestine in 1917, and began to facilitate the establishment of a national home for the Jews by supporting them with money and weapons and the rule over the Arab territories, granting the general Zionist privileges in Palestine (Leonard, 2004). The Palestinians started to move politically to cope with the British policy. That stage marked the beginning of the Palestinian political activity. The political struggle against the mandated policies needed to be directed by institutions, but during the early period the leadership of the community belonged to the families, not to political institutions (Sochen, 2004). The political parties were not effective because they directed their attention towards unity with Syria, which meant that the Syrian movements and political parties represented the Palestinians as well.

The Palestinian national movement was eventually divided into two. The first was under the leadership of al-Husseini's family, who adopted a stance of resisting Britain, and the second was under the leadership of al-Nashashibi who adopted a position of calling for negotiation with Britain. Britain's relationship with al-Husseini's family was strained especially with Amin al-Husseini at the time when al-Nashashibi's family was given positions and privileges such as being appointed as mayors

However, the dispute was finally resolved in favour of resisting the British and the Zionist presence and the situation intensified with the emergence of *Shaykh ‘Izz al-Dīn al-Qassām* movement and its military activities against Britain (Gad, 2004). The outbreak of the 1936 revolution lasted until the beginning of World War II (Charles, 1989) and the issuance of the White Paper in 1939.<sup>1</sup>

Although the Palestinian party system was not clear at that time; the political groupings were spontaneous and not organized, often dominated by resistance movements or political committees rather than parties. But theoretically speaking, there was a party system, which can be described as a competitive party system represented by two clear political streams: al-Husseini’s family and al-Nashashibi’s family, in addition to a group of other small parties. These parties were not operating within an independent state and their activities were social rather than political.

The next phase of resisting the British mandate and the Zionist organizations was resisting the state of Israel. Since 1948, the Palestinians have resisted the state, and the Jews are no longer simply gangs. When Britain withdrew and left the Jews behind in command, the Arab armies could not prevent the Jews from occupying the rest of what is known today as the 1948 territory (Rogan & Avi, 2001; Ronen, 2008). Indeed, the region witnessed another war against Egypt in 1956 (Avi, 1997) prompting Palestinians to establish an entity to sponsor the military resistance against the Israeli occupation.

The Palestinian efforts to establish an entity to represent them crystalized in the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964 (‘Abdulrahmān, 1987). A year later, the Palestinian National Liberation Movement

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<sup>1</sup> “The 1939 White Paper reversed the recommendations of the 1937 Peel Commission Report by calling for an independent and unified Palestinian state to be created within ten years, while Jewish immigration would be halted after five years unless approved by the Arab majority” (Norris, 2008: 25–45).

Fatah began its activity in public (Abu Fakhr, 2003) and after a short time in 1967, the region witnessed a new war in which the Israeli army overcame the Arab armies of Egypt, Syria and Jordan. The outcome of that war was Israel's occupation of the rest of Palestine and parts of Syria, Egypt and Jordan. At that time, the Palestinians had no choice but to resist Israel from Jordan, then from Lebanon because of the expulsion of the PLO and thousands of Palestinian fighters to Lebanon, as a result of the Jordanian War that began in September 1970. A few years after, the PLO was also expelled from Lebanon as a result of the Israeli war against Lebanon in 1982.

The Palestinians realized that they could not fight Israel except from the inside. Those ideas were generally acceptable to most Palestinians until one of the Israelis ran over Palestinian workers with his truck. As a result, Palestinian demonstrations and protests escalated and then in 1987, the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) issued its first statement (Hroub, 2000, 2006). All Palestinian parties and movements, including two leaderships, participated in the uprising better known as the *Intifāḍah*. (Shabīb, 1988; ‘Abdulrahmān, 1989). There appeared to be some kind of rivalry between Fatah and Hamas on who enjoyed more popularity and who was best qualified to direct things.

The conditions remained as they were until the Gulf War broke out in 1991 in which the PLO and Fatah movement supported Saddam Hussein, who was defeated in the war (Sāyigh, 2003). The PLO and the Palestinians were at the losing end because most of the Gulf countries laid off Palestinian workers which meant losing their most important financial source. Politically, Yasser Arafat found himself isolated from the world, banished regionally by Arabs and internationally because he supported Saddam. Despite these developments, the Palestinian *Intifāḍah* continued.

Perhaps all of those reasons forced the PLO to accept negotiations and participate in the Madrid Conference 1991, which resulted in the establishment of the Palestinian Authority 1993 controlled by Fatah leaders but opposed by Hamas.

Between 1948 – 1987, the Palestinian party system was marked by the existence of many secular and left-wing, noncompetitive parties. Things changed only with the beginning of the first *Intifāḍah* when Hamas began to represent a strong competitor to the Fatah movement. When the Palestinian Authority (PA) began to prepare for general elections in 1996, there was a competition between the two groups. Hamas called for boycotting the elections while Fatah called for participation, which was a measure of the popularity of both parties in the Palestinian society at that time.

Political events which affected Palestine, most notably the failure of Camp David in 2000, *al-Aqṣā Intifāḍah* in 2000, the political collapse of the negotiations as well as the death of Yasser Arafat 2004, caused Hamas to change its position in participating in local and legislative elections, which reinforced and transformed the system in the direction of a more competitive party system in Palestine. This time, the competition was through the ballot box, which resulted in Hamas as a ruling party in 2006 and removed Fatah from the ruling party position for the first time.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The study of the Palestinian party system differs from the study of the party system in many countries of the world as the problems the Palestinian party system faces are caused by both internal and external factors. Although each party system is exposed to effects of similar factors, the effects of external factors on the Palestinian party system are clearer. In brief, the Palestinian party system is exposed to internal and external

variables, so it is not possible to have an independent party decision. In light of democratic elections, the Palestinian political decision cannot be independent when there is no independent party decision.

Internal factors that affect the Palestinian party system are clans, the media and more specifically, weak civil society institutions. As for external factors, the Palestinian parties are financially and politically dependent on regional and international powers. This allows these powers to impose their opinion on the parties which creates some sort of division and discord among the Palestinian parties; in fact these are divided at the regional and international levels. Moreover, the Palestinian parties are affected by the policies of some international political, legal and financial institutions and the influence of these institutions has an impact on the policies of the PA.

The external factors and their role in influencing the Palestinian party system were important due to the fact that the Palestinian party system operates within the environment of the Israeli occupation, meaning that the party activities would be affected by the Israeli occupation and vice versa. This also creates instability within the Palestinian party system as a result of the partisan division on the mechanism of dealing with the Israeli occupation.

Furthermore, the party which follows a pro-negotiations stance has obligations toward Israel and the international community limits its relationship with the pro-resistance party. On the other hand, the pro-resistance party which opposed negotiations has commitments towards its members and some regional powers which forces the party to adopt inflexible stand vis-à-vis the pro-negotiation party. In general, the impact of these factors appears in the following aspects: Parties' attitudes

and political drafts, internal party relations, Palestinian relations with the world and civil peace.

Thus the study aims to identify the characteristics of the Palestinian party system between 1987- 2011 in depth. The study will identify these characteristics in light of the Palestinian political environment which includes external and internal variables. Moreover, there will be analyses of the relationship between the Palestinian parties, especially Fatah and Hamas. In addition, the study will try to find out the reasons for forming party coalitions after 2006, and the causes of their failure.

### **CENTRAL ARGUMENTS**

This study will discuss the following arguments:

- The decisions of the Palestinian party are not completely independent. It is influenced by the policies of some international powers. As such the Palestinian party division is a reflection of a split in the international attitudes toward the Palestinian issue. The West, led by the U.S, considerably influences the Fatah movement and its policies politically and financially, while Hamas movement is influenced by Iran and Syria. Even though this was not clear, at least there is political harmony with the current Syrian and Iranian political regimes. Also, the Israeli occupation enhances the absence of independence and the instability in the Palestinian party system through the agreements with Fatah, the PLO by adopting repressive measures against parties refusing negotiations.
- The characteristics of the Palestinian party system and the political system increase the need for forming party coalitions, but the political environment in which the system operated controlled the possibility of

making Palestinian parties achieving compromise in order to ensure the efficiency of the political system, including the influence on the fate of the Palestinians.

- Despite the continuous development and modernization of the civil institutions and the urban expansion, the Palestinian society is still influenced by tribes and influential families. This effect is very clear in the southern West Bank and Gaza Strip, and this has coloured the Palestinian last elections in 2006, especially the municipal elections, where an entire family follows one particular party while another family follows another, in other words, family members are committed to the decisions to support a particular political orientation according to the interests of that family but not according to their convictions.
- The media has great impact on Palestinian internal stability, and the Palestinian parties established their own media including satellite and local channels, newspapers, radio stations and websites which increase its role whether in influencing the parties or the citizens.
- The Palestinian civil society institutions have limited impact as most of them are located in the city of Ramallah, and their activities are limited to specific categories of the society, yet these institutions have the capacity to converge views between the parties, to put forth solutions to the problems of the parties, and to cope with the Palestinian division.
- Achieving independence in the Palestinian party decision requires mitigating the financial dependence on foreign aid and loans from the international institutions, while stabilizing the party system requires

consensus on the Palestinian attitude towards Israel, and how to communicate with the international community.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1 - What were the characteristics of the Palestinian party system during the period 1987-2011?
- 2 - What were the internal and external environmental factors that influenced the Palestinian party system?
- 3 - Did Fatah and Hamas make any substantive compromises in order to make the system more effective and workable?
- 4 - Why did Palestinian parties try to form a coalition after 2006 and why did they ignore it previously?

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the study are to:

- 1 – Discuss the characteristics of the Palestinian party system between 1987-2011. It will study the Palestinian parties which act as liberation movements as well as political parties. In addition, the parties will be analysed to see how they perform in an unstable and occupied environment.
- 2 – Analyse the internal and external environmental factors of the Palestinian party system. This study will focus on the influences of the mass media, the role of elites and clans. It will also explain the external factors that

affect the internal party dynamics which are the Israeli occupation and foreign interventions.

- 3 – Investigate if Fatah and Hamas had made any substantive compromises in order to make the system more effective and workable. It is clear that the relationship between the parties determines the Palestinian policy of the present and future. The Palestinians have suffered a lot due to the conflict between Fatah and Hamas, so it is important to try to understand the incentives for division and the incentives for unity between them so as to cement Palestinian unity.
- 4 - Explain the need for parties to form a coalition and the reasons for their failure in Palestine; the explanation will be in light of the Palestinian parliamentary system. In addition, the study will clarify the differences between forming party coalitions in independent countries and occupied countries. Moreover, the study will explain the effect of the internal and external environment on forming a coalition.

### **JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY**

This study is important to the political science field. It examines political organizations that have combined the functions of being the liberation movements and political parties; in addition to what can be newly added to the understanding of party work in unstable or occupied environments. Furthermore, this study examines the party system within the internal and external environment. This makes it distinct from most studies which study party systems at the domestic level.

The Palestinians' future depends on the nature of the relationship between political parties since they play different roles at one time because Palestine is an

occupied country. This increases the need to study its party system and the factors influencing it because political stability is linked to the interaction within the party system.

In addition, this study can be a valuable addition to research on political Islam, where studying the Islamic movement Hamas' relationship with the secular Fatah is considered an opportunity to understanding the relationship between Islamic movements and secular ones. This can be a stepping stone to build upon in subsequent studies.

Another argument that motivates such a study is that previous studies focused on movements and parties within the framework of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the position of each movement towards occupation. This means that most of these studies consider these movements as liberation movements only by taking into account their relationship to the occupation, without searching into their internal dynamics and the party system in which they operate. Despite the importance of this type of studies, the Palestinian reality indicates that the most influential factor in the Palestinian daily life is no longer the Israeli occupation, but rather the nature of the relationship between Fatah and Hamas, and the nature of the relationship each has with the regional and international community.

It is expected that this study will contribute effectively to this field, where the characteristics of the party system will be clarified in such regimes, and the possibility of having stable competitive party system. In addition, this study will discuss new factors and their impact on the Party System, such as, occupation, international intervention and the partial implementation of democracy. All of these will not be understood without studying the Palestinian party system characteristics like the interaction among parties and the determinants of their relations.