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Laetitia Bucaille: Growing Up Palestinian

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CHAPTER ONE

The Palestinian Intifada: The Revolt against Israeli Occupation, 1987–1994

April 2001: an evening in Nablus. The air was heavy because the *kham-sin* was still blowing. Waves of heat flowed across the town, boxed in by the surrounding hills. Suddenly, a crackle of gunfire. A group of *shebab* was attacking an Israeli Army post on one of the hilltops above Nablus. Over the last six months, the army had reoccupied certain strategic points, which allowed it to protect Israeli settlements or to defend against potential attack from the Palestinians.

That day, a few young men had gone up the hill with M16s slung on their backs and portable phones at their belts. They were prepared to take risks. They approached the Israeli soldiers in a stealthy attempt to take them by surprise. But they were spotted by the soldiers, who returned fire, protected by their bullet-proof vests and the walls they had built around their position. The *shebab* did not immediately retreat. The soldiers quickly outflanked them, and the group was beginning to wonder if this might turn out to be their final sortie, when Sami's cell phone (*jawal*) rang. The caller was Sami's girlfriend, Iman, who had heard the gunfire from where she was, in her family's house down in the Balata refugee camp. Sami was far from reassuring. "This is goodbye," he said. Iman was speechless.

Two hours passed. Iman, down in the camp, was torn between her desperation for news and her fear of endangering Sami's life by distracting his attention. Meanwhile Sami and his friends searched for a way out of the trap that was steadily closing on them. They called the

mayor of Nablus on his cell phone to demand that he switch off the street lighting immediately in the zone where they were stranded. After a few hours, the shebab managed to slip back to the Balata camp in the darkness.

Later Sami and three others were sitting in his bedroom, drinking coffee and steadily filling an ashtray with butt-ends. Najy and Bassam were Sami's childhood friends, companions in battle, detention, and exile; the third youth, Fuad, was also from the camp.* When the wave of anger engulfed the Territories in the fall of 2000, they set up their group as a presence to be reckoned with on the ground. The earliest confrontations with the Israelis took place around the tomb of Joseph in Nablus, which was kept under guard by soldiers because a few Jews came there regularly to pray. This place was a flashpoint during the confrontations of September 1996, which were set off by the opening of an archaeologist's tunnel adjoining the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Several Israeli soldiers lost their lives there. In October 2000 the tomb of the prophet again became a flashpoint for conflict, when Israeli soldiers as well as Palestinian civilians and police were killed there. The Israeli losses were sufficiently high to induce the IDF to negotiate a retreat, abandoning the holy place to the protection of Palestinian forces. After the evacuation of the tomb, tensions fell for a while. The cycle of confrontation began again in March 2001, at which time several teenagers were shot by the Israeli army in the course of demonstrations on the road from al-Quds (Arabic name for Jerusalem), leading to an Israeli Army roadblock. In reprisal, armed groups of Palestinians began firing on Israeli positions.

Sami, Najy, Bassam, and Fuad made their attacks less frequently, while keeping themselves supplied with weapons and staying on the alert. They knew they were wanted by the Israeli Army, and because of this they kept constantly on the move, within an area of several square kilometers. By day, they avoided the high ground around Nablus where they might be arrested at army checkpoints or recognized by soldiers watching from the hilltops. Sami spent part of the day asleep, and a lot

*Sami, Najy, and Bassam are the main protagonists in this book: like everyone else mentioned here, they are real people, but pseudonyms are used throughout this book. Their life stories are recounted in chapters 1, 2, and 5.

of time talking to Iman on his cell phone. His friends assembled in his room, where he lived with his bed, a television, a computer, armchairs, a coffee table, and a few pieces of furniture containing his clothes and possessions.

Sami and Najy have been inseparable since childhood. Their families are both large and impecunious, neighbors in the camp; the two boys went to school together. At first sight Sami seems calm and poised, serious and brooding. This first impression soon fades when he unleashes his savage sense of humor. He is never without his windbreaker, as if he's planning to jump up and leave at any moment.

Najy would be handsome, if it weren't for his deeply lined face and air of lurking aggression. His manner is brusque; he's impulsive when he speaks and quick to pull his gun. Meeting him with Bassam for the first time, you would take them for brothers. They are the same medium height, and their thin bodies bear the marks of their present clandestine existence and of the hunger strikes they endured in jail. Bassam is the oldest in the group. He has a mature, responsible side that makes him more accessible than the others.

When Najy was seven, he sewed together a Palestinian flag and went with Sami to join a Palestinian demonstration that was marching by the camp. That evening his parents thrashed him. A year later his father died, leaving Najy's mother with eight sons and three daughters to take care of.

Najy was always a handful. When they were thirteen, he and Sami physically threatened a teacher who had expelled one of them from school for a few days. Shortly after, they and some other boys cobbled together a home-made gun and let it off in the general direction of an Israeli settlement. Sami got off scot-free and nobody denounced him. But in 1985 Najy, who wasn't yet fourteen, was arrested and sentenced to five years in prison by an Israeli military court. He remembers how he burst into tears when he heard the verdict. Then he became overwhelmed with fury. "When the judge handed down the sentence, I punched my lawyer [who is Palestinian] and I spat on the judge. I said: 'You're sending a kid to prison, but you'll see, a man will walk out again!'"

What sort of man? If the goal of the Israeli military administration was to neutralize adolescents like Najy, it failed spectacularly. Behind bars, the men of Najy's generation were hardened, and in addition they

received a solid political education. Intrepid, rebellious youths were turned into highly politicized militants, fully integrated into a structured organization. The Israeli prisons provided a veritable school for thousands of young men like Najy. Taken in hand by their elders, who had created the first resistance networks affiliated with the PLO and who were serving long stretches as a result, the younger generation found themselves beginning or completing an ideological and militant apprenticeship.

In prison Najy found himself with Bassam, who raised his spirits. Bassam had already served several months of his first sentence. At fifteen, he had been a member of Fatah for two years, one of a group that had tried to attack Israeli patrols with Molotov cocktails. Najy, who also identified with Fatah, officially signed up with the organization in prison.¹ Sami, meanwhile, did not share his friends' fate until two years later, when he also went to prison.

Fatah, a political party founded in the 1950s by members of the Palestinian diaspora, originally became popular in the Territories when its fedayeen distinguished themselves in guerrilla warfare against Israel in the 1970s. At that time, Fatah's leaders, first in Jordan and later in Lebanon, did not count on Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank to open a front to resist Israel. But during that decade contacts were made and the first networks were built up in both locations. After the PLO's defeat in Lebanon and its exile in Tunisia, Palestinian militants within the Territories concluded that political structures and engagements had to be created within Palestinian society as a whole. The Israeli military occupiers banned Fatah, and the army relentlessly hunted down its people. They responded in 1981 by founding an association, the Youth Committee for Social Action, better known as the Shabiba. Officially, its objective was nonpolitical, but in fact the Shabiba was a vehicle for recruiting militants and for providing Fatah with a legal front.

Groups proliferated in the secondary schools, universities, and certain city quarters. At first they focused on cultural activities and mutual assistance. Through this association, Fatah rapidly increased its membership, catching up with the leftist groups that had been operating in the Territories since the 1970s. The movement could call on considerable financial resources, and its message was both accessible and attractive: as a self-proclaimed revolutionary group, it refused to lock itself into any given

ideological dialectic. Its broad, stated purpose was to unite the Palestinian people, whatever their individual beliefs and political convictions.

As a result, by the 1980s Fatah had become the most popular political movement in the Territories. All its energies now had to be concentrated on the liberation of Palestine, which, as the PLO's founding charter made crystal clear, was incompatible with the existence of Israel. Ideology was put aside, and priority was given to ways and means of waging the war for independence.

INSIDE ISRAEL'S PRISONS

Bassam likes to make comparisons between the prisons he has known. His first was in Hebron, where he endured a series of interrogations. "To begin with, it was really tough. Fifteen is very young to go through that. The winter in Hebron was freezing and our cells were bitterly cold. It was snowing outside, but in spite of it there were cockroaches everywhere. The interrogations stretched me to the limit, physically and psychologically. Some guys had serious after effects; a few lost their minds completely."

After that Bassam was transferred to the Nablus jail, where he was warmly welcomed by the other prisoners and included in a program of activities that local Fatah leaders had developed. As a revolutionary organization, Fatah expected steady discipline and sustained moral effort. The forty inmates in each cell woke at 7 every morning. After a cursory wash, the prisoners were counted by the administrators. After this, the duties and obligations established by the Palestinians themselves came into play. The prisoners were expected to study subjects of their own choice for several hours. Later, an extended period was allowed for group discussion of political topics, the purpose being to instruct the younger inmates in the history of Palestine and to sow the seeds of a political education. Sports were also practiced, and prisoners were allowed two hours a day to themselves. From morning to night, their time was precisely regulated.

Hussam Khader, ten years older than Bassam, was one of the initiators of this program in the Nablus prison.² A Fatah official in the Balata camp, Khader had an appetite for organization and responsibility. For

him the struggle against the occupation required quasi-military discipline and a thorough purging of personal habits. Najy says he found his own rebellious spirit at odds with Hussam's plans on an almost daily basis. For example, the older man and his friends were set on banning the use of strong tobacco by the young prisoners. This provoked such a backlash that rationing cigarettes had to be adopted as a compromise. Hussam Khader, a man of principle, could be harsh, but in the end he won the respect of shebab like Bassam and Najy. Khader too had been sent to prison very young. He was first arrested in 1979, at the age of seventeen: "I was in jail for eighteen days and I met prisoners who talked about Fatah and the revolution," he recalls. "That's when I started taking an active interest in politics."

After a couple of years in the Nablus jail, Bassam was sent back to Hebron. The Israeli administration had not changed its attitude, indeed its violence had considerably intensified. "Two or three times a month, the soldiers tossed tear gas canisters into the cells. Or else there was a collective punishment and we had to stand stark naked in the yard while they beat us with sticks and iron rods. Most of the soldiers came from the settlements and were ultrareligious; they were the ones who really loathed us. They were totally different from the more liberal type of Israeli. In the Nablus jail, a prisoners' representative could go and see the governor and present him with requests. At least he listened, even though most of the time he said no. And every time he said no, we went on a hunger strike," explains Bassam.

Family visits were authorized once every two weeks, for half an hour. Prisoners' relatives stood waiting patiently outside the gates, in all weather. At the Hebron detention center they were often mistreated by the Israeli guards, even though it was a longish trip from Nablus, which is at the northern end of the West Bank. The visitors first had to take a collective taxi to Ramallah, fifty kilometers away, then another from Ramallah to Bethlehem. If they had no valid pass to cross Jerusalem, they had to skirt the Holy City and take a route three times longer. Even when they reached Bethlehem, it was still another twenty kilometers to Hebron.

Bassam's mother was the one who visited him most often. Every Friday she went to see one of her three sons, each of whom was in a different jail.

After Hebron, Bassam was transferred yet again. His last two years of incarceration were spent in the prison of Jneid, near Nablus, a special detention center for men serving long sentences. Here too the penitentiary regime was ferocious. But Bassam derived a certain comfort from being with prisoners who were older than he was, more experienced and more hardened. During this period, he read a great deal. He learned Hebrew along with a little English. The sessions were cut short when the cellmate who was teaching him the language of Shakespeare was moved to another prison before he could impart all he knew.

In this way many a Palestinian schoolboy and student serving a sentence managed to acquire some form of knowledge in prison. Foreign languages, notably Hebrew, were popular. Mastery of the occupier's tongue was necessary for anyone who wanted a diploma, and the prison administration authorized prisoners to follow the program of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the only one available to them. Correspondence courses were given in Hebrew and had to be paid for; prisoners were forbidden to take courses in Arabic given by a Palestinian university. From time to time, a professor came out to answer questions on each subject; exams were organized in the prison. As a rule, the Palestinians who chose the academic option tended to be those serving very long sentences.

Bassam was released on January 16, 1991, the day the international coalition began its attack on Iraq.³ On that day, and thereafter for the duration of the Gulf War, the Occupied Territories were placed under a blanket curfew while Iraq—intent on spreading the conflict throughout the region—bombarDED Israel. For two hours a day, every other day, the Israeli Army lifted its restrictions so Palestinian families could go out and buy food and supplies. For forty consecutive days, the people of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were unable to work or study—indeed, the majority were unable to earn any money at all. They just sat at home, locked in, fainting with anxiety and boredom; the only relief was an occasional visit to neighbors or a game of cards.

So Bassam came out of prison to find his hometown empty and deserted. He was unable to get his bearings, let alone find his way home. Soldiers detailed to supervise the curfew apprehended him, then let him go. Alone again, he knocked on a stranger's door: he was welcomed and plied with tea, and an ambulance was called to take him out to

the Balata refugee camp. His family, neighbors, and friends flocked around, but he soon found out that the freedom he had returned to was limited in the extreme. For over a month, until the end of the Gulf War, Bassam was confined to the darkened interior of his family's house. Palestinian society, sorely tried by these events, became completely turned in on itself.

THE PALESTINIAN UNDERGROUND

In the spring of that year, life returned to a semblance of normality. The pressure exerted by the army was relaxed a little in the towns. Bassam passed his exams and resumed his political activities. This was soon noticed, and in the fall a detachment of Israeli soldiers ransacked his house and demanded that he turn himself in. Bassam's response was to go underground. He stopped sleeping at home and kept moving quietly from one house to another—always within the Balata camp. Najy, suspected of taking part in the killing of a collaborator, was also wanted by the Israeli Army, and at this time Bassam joined forces with Sami and Najy to form a secret armed cell. Seven other young men from Balata volunteered, making contact with the PLO in Amman and Tunis to obtain material support. They maintained links with the local resistance command structures while preserving complete freedom of action. Armed with a few light weapons, they concentrated their attacks on army patrols and Israeli settlers. Most of the time they hid alongside roads, waiting for targets to pass by, then briefly opened fire and ran. A few times they were successful. Bassam says: "Our goal has always been to liberate our country. We're realists and we recognize the principle of the two states living side by side. To win back our rights in our own land, we must use both political and military means. The occupation prevents us from living as we wish to. We need a revolution to force a change."

The shebab agreed with Fatah's stance. They disapproved of attacks on Israeli civilians and restricted their operations to the perimeter of the Occupied Territories. Furthermore they avoided facing the awkward question of collaborators. Informers recruited by the Israeli Army were legion in the Territories, and whether attracted by the prospect of gain, victims of blackmail, or otherwise manipulated, they provided the occu-

pation forces with a constant trickle of intelligence. When the Intifada began, its leaders attempted to neutralize the network of collaborators. Some were kept under surveillance and placed under a kind of de facto house arrest; as a warning, they might be physically attacked, perhaps shot at. The ones that were thought to be irrecoverably dangerous were killed. The job of doing the killing was left to the shebab, and some of them even made it a specialty, leaving the battle against the Israeli Army to others. Executions proliferated, and often the vigilantes did not bother to doublecheck on what might have been no more than baseless suspicions against certain individuals. The campaign reached such a pitch that Yasser Arafat himself finally intervened, calling for a halt to the murders of collaborators in the Territories.

Bassam's group tried to distance itself from the vigilante role. All the same, on two separate occasions Najy was compelled to take action. "I shot one collaborator near the Nablus town hall. He was a well-known intelligence agent, and he openly consorted with the army. I went up to him and asked if his name was such and such. He said yes, and I shot him dead. You mustn't think it's an easy thing, to kill somebody. I was shaking like a leaf and I had nightmares all the following night. But the second time wasn't so bad. The target was a Palestinian policeman who went on working for the Israeli government even though he'd been told to resign several times. He was at the wheel of his car. I climbed in beside him. I verified his identity in the same way; he realized what was up and there was a struggle. That really annoyed me and I let him have it—six bullets in the body. Sami came and got me out of there and we ran like hell, because the Israelis were starting to show up."

It wasn't so much the regular army patrols that worried the shebab, it was the Israeli special forces. With a view to raising the effectiveness of the repression and destroying all Palestinian military and political networks, the IDF adopted new tactics. Special units were formed, made up of Israelis who were identical in looks and speech to the Palestinians themselves. They even took "integration courses" in Arab villages. To avoid suspicion and look as harmless as possible, they disguised themselves as women or old men. A parcel swaddled like a baby, a veil, a false beard, a cane, a *keffiyeh* knotted in the fashion favored by masked shebab who wanted to stay anonymous—these were some of the ruses

of the Israeli military elite. They invariably knew everything about the Palestinians they targeted, and when they struck it was with lightning speed. They would suddenly materialize, shoot their victim, and melt away as quickly as they had come.

In 1992 Bassam's group found itself caught in the toils of Israeli military intelligence. The army arrested five of their number. Twice in the space of a few weeks, special forces swept into the Balata camp. The first attack left dead three young men who had been scheduled to meet Bassam, Sami, and Najy a few minutes later. The second time, Bassam himself had a close call: he was in a narrow alley in the camp, talking to Khaled, one of his group, and Yussef, a Fatah member who was also wanted by the Israelis. For some trivial reason, Bassam had to drop by his home for a couple of minutes. On his way back to the other two, he heard shots and immediately grasped what was happening. He yelled at the boys in the street to pelt the special forces unit with stones and cause a diversion. Khaled was mortally wounded, but Yussef managed to get away—though he was picked up a few weeks later and sentenced to twenty-five years in jail. Again, Bassam had missed death by a whisker. The Israelis grabbed Khaled's body and melted away.

Because of the boldness of these attacks, the Balata camp was no longer a secure base for the group's operations. The shebab had to resort to more radical measures; it was no longer enough simply to avoid sleeping at home. The army now came by at regular intervals and pressured families to make their militants give themselves up. Objects and furniture were smashed, and brothers and nephews arrested. The shebab spent more and more time concealed in the hills, sometimes in holes underground. Hidden like this, they kept themselves fed as well as they could, chain-smoked cigarettes, watched, and waited for the information and supplies brought to them by their contacts. They shivered in freezing temperatures, rain, and snow as they moved deeper into the countryside. All the time they struggled to maintain contact with other armed groups in Nablus and the West Bank. Only occasionally did they risk a sortie to the camp or the town. The shebab could count on the support of the families that lodged them, fed them, and kept them informed of the army's movements; nevertheless, life was precarious in the extreme. Despite the tip-offs they received and the elaborate precautions they took, despite their weapons and their practiced guile,

Bassam, Sami, and Najy were living on borrowed time, and they knew it. The IDF's intelligence services had never given up trying to capture or kill them—far from it.

In July 1992 the three went to al-Najah University, in the hills of Nablus. They had a rendezvous there with one of their contacts. The meeting was not expected to last very long, but even so there was time for the Israeli Army to swoop down and seal the entire campus. The three wanted shebab were alerted, but too late. Nevertheless, they had no intention of giving themselves up, and consequently the army laid siege to the university. Not a single student, teacher, or administrative employee was allowed to go in or out of the campus zone. Life went on—more or less—in the classrooms, in the cafeteria, and on the grounds, except that the five thousand students were not allowed to leave.

There was overwhelming support for the three shebab among the students. They insisted that the outlaws in their midst should stand up to the Israeli Army, even if they themselves suffered for it. The armed shebab were greatly admired, seen as heroes ready to sacrifice themselves for a political ideal. Their courage and coolness were remarkable under the circumstances, and the mystique surrounding their actions raised their status among the students to great heights. Bassam, Sami, and Najy were deeply moved when people offered to surrender in their stead. After seventy-two hours, the cafeteria ran out of water and provisions and some of the students were taken ill. Outside, negotiations were under way among the Israeli military, the International Red Cross, and the Palestinian political representative. The IDF began by demanding that thirty-nine people be turned over to them, but this was flatly refused. The number was finally negotiated down to six. This compromise averted prison for the activists but did not exactly let them go free: they were banished from Israel on the spot. A vehicle supplied by the Red Cross transported them over the border to Jordan. The siege had lasted four days.

FORCED EXILE

Throughout their journey to the border, the shebab had the impression that the army was on their heels. They were afraid they would be shot. But in the end they crossed the Jordan unscathed and drove on to Amman, where they were met by the Palestinian ambassador and some Fatah officials from the West Bank who had been thrown out by the Israelis four years earlier. Marwan Barghuti, the Fatah leader in Ramallah, and Tayssir Nasrallah from the Balata refugee camp, who was president of the Shabiba committee in Nablus, were among them; they were now employed in the PLO's western department.⁴

Bassam spent his first two months in Jordan being interrogated every morning by Jordanian intelligence. "It was incredible! Here were these Jordanians, who were supposed to be our allies and supporters, squeezing me as hard as they could for information about Fatah. For two months they never left me alone. When I realized what was going on, it was a heavy blow. Today they won't let me back into Jordan."

As soon as they had their Jordanian passports,⁵ in late 1992, the three friends moved on to Iraq, where they lived for two years and concentrated on their studies. Bassam opted for a management diploma, while Sami and Najy studied for, and received, their bachelor's degrees. Every three months they went back to Amman to pick up the funds the PLO had allotted for their upkeep.

Despite the effect of the Gulf War on Iraqi society and the Iraqi economy, the shebab of Balata were happy in Baghdad. Bassam says it was the happiest time of his life. "I felt free. I could go wherever I liked. It was nothing like Jordan. Even though it wasn't much of a democracy if you were an Iraqi, and even though there were real economic problems as a result of the embargo, as a Palestinian I felt completely free—free to move around, to say what I chose. And at last I saw something of the world outside. I made plenty of friends. The Iraqis appreciated us."

Najy too reveled in his newfound freedom. He'd heard there were prostitutes in Baghdad, but at first he didn't know where to find them. In the restaurant of a hotel, a woman accompanied by children beck-

oned him across to her table. Najy suspected nothing at the time—it was only later that one of the hotel employees tipped him off that the woman was turning tricks. Najy came across her a second time; he was intrigued and decided to ask her why she was doing what she did. The reply was, to pay for her youngest daughter's eye operation. Shocked, Najy immediately offered to pay for the whole lot. The mother became his first lover.

During his stay in Iraq, he also tried alcohol for the first time and discovered its effects. In the house where he and his friends lived, there was no objection to girls and drinking. Bassam, who prayed every day of his life, tended to distance himself from all this. Not so Najy: as time went on his sexual experiences multiplied, along with his mistresses. He remembers how he found out that one of them was the wife of a colonel in the Iraqi intelligence service, and how he panicked and abruptly cut off all relations when he found out. Then he fell in love with a woman whose husband was frequently traveling away from home. Najy spent night after sleepless night in her bed. Her name was Hanan, and he named his eldest daughter after her.

On one of their trips to Amman, the three friends were introduced to Yasser Arafat as the heroes of Nablus. Najy couldn't believe it. He kept saying to Marwan Barghuti beside him: "Did I really just meet Abu Ammar?" All he can remember is that Arafat was tiny, and his hand as he shook it was tiny, too.

As time went by, the Palestinian exiles saw more and more of each other and forged close friendships. Najy became Barghuti's protégé; Tayssir Nasrallah and his wife took good care of the three shebab, and together they contrived to re-create some of the atmosphere of Balata.

They were paying the price of the Israeli policy of banishing Palestinian activists, which began in the 1970s and was steadily stepped up throughout the 1980s. Considering that men like Barghuti and Nasrallah bore a heavy responsibility for political agitation in the Territories, the Hebrew state hoped to smother the rebellion by simply removing them from the scene. But this policy failed to stop either the planning or the perpetuation of the Intifada. Operating out of Amman, Baghdad, or Tunis, by hook or by crook the first generation of Fatah activists managed to stay in touch with their successors in the field.

THE MANAGEMENT OF THE INTIFADA

After serving his sentence in Nablus, Hussam Khader was forced to leave the Occupied Territories in early 1988, before the outbreak of the Intifada. Tayssir Nasrallah was obliged to follow a year later. Both men had a long history of militant action. Born in the early 1960s in the Balata refugee camp, they had worked together as Fatah operatives setting up a political structure in the place where they lived. They recruited from the Shabiba and formed networks that covered the entire camp. The various quarters were defined and named after the towns or villages from which the refugees had come. Each was placed under the responsibility of its own team of militants. The committees organized camp sanitation, helped the poorer families, and planned anti-Israeli demonstrations.

The struggle against the Israeli occupation also required that Balata should be purged of people whom the militants felt to be negative and harmful, such as consumers of hashish and alcohol, Israeli informers, and common delinquents. All these were ordered to change their ways and bow to the code of morality imposed by the militants. The latter belonged to a new generation that had known little else but the Israeli occupation; driven by a deep sense of outrage, this generation was now gradually mobilizing, and its political idealism led it to embrace principles of outright revolution. Society had to transform itself, to work on itself until it was strong enough to confront the Israeli enemy head on. The militants were both rigorous in their organizational methods and relentlessly single-minded. They caught up many young people in their slipstream. In the Balata refugee camp, their isolated clashes with the Israelis turned out to be a prelude to the general outbreak of the Intifada.

The *Fathahoui* (Arab term for Fatah member) of the camp are adamant that in fact the Intifada began with them, in 1982, at Balata. According to them, the people of the camp were made to pay dearly for their struggle against the occupants. Under the aegis of the Shabiba, Balata initiated its own form of rebellion. "Stones were thrown day and night in Balata, even though there were army lookouts on the rooftops for weeks on end. Molotov cocktails became such a problem that the

IDF patrols avoided the center of the camp as much as they could.”⁶ The refugee camps, traditionally the main flashpoints of rebellion in the Occupied Territories, indeed provided the earliest symptoms of a more general uprising. In this sense, the Intifada demonstrated that a new group of young men from the ordinary working classes had broken into the political arena.

On December 9, 1987, an IDF jeep crashed into a vehicle carrying Palestinian workers employed in Israel, four of whom were killed. A rumor quickly spread that the accident had been deliberately set up to murder Palestinians. Within hours, a wave of spontaneous fury had engulfed the Jabalya camp at the northern end of the Gaza Strip, and Israeli Army observation posts were attacked by hundreds of angry demonstrators. The revolt spread through the other camps, the working class areas and the towns of Gaza and the West Bank.

The political cells quickly understood the broad nature of this movement and resolved to take control of it using the structures already in place. They plunged into the breach and transformed what had begun as a spontaneous rising into a prolonged revolt. A National Unified Command (NUC) was created, bringing together the four factions that made up the PLO, namely, Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and the Palestinian Communist Party (PCP). The goal was to ally the different political forces with a view to assembling the widest possible spectrum of Palestinian society. Representatives of the different formations, now members of the NUC, worked out a program for the rebellion. On a basis of compromise, they regularly set out their strategic aims and circulated written communiqués containing precise directives. Thus the people’s committees that had formed spontaneously in each quarter came under the control of the politicians. They now not only relayed the orders put out by the NUC but also took responsibility for carrying them out. Within a very short time they were outlawed by the Israeli military administration and forced underground.

The Islamist organizations, however, refused to subscribe to the NUC, preferring to stay independent. Yet they remained fully active, producing their own tracts, forming action groups, and maintaining leadership contacts with the NUC to coordinate their efforts.

Thus the political movements were directly responsible neither for the outbreak of the Intifada, nor for the demonstrations, nor for the forming of people's committees in December 1987. Instead they reaped the harvest from years of careful groundwork. The militants trained by the Shabiba, the Muslim Brothers, or the Marxist left in the 1970s and 1980s were now operational, and it was they who filled the ranks and command structures of the Intifada.

The NUC now developed a plan of action aimed at disconnecting Palestinian society from the structures of the occupying power. Its tracts advocated a boycott of Israeli administrative acts and products, nonpayment of value-added tax by shopkeepers and traders, and the resignation of functionaries employed by the Israeli civil service, notably the police. Moreover, a communiqué exhorted Palestinian workers to stop selling their labor within Israel. Impelled by its political militants, the general population threw its support behind the civil disobedience movement, and the Intifada's first year ended with the population still overwhelmingly favorable to it.

On several occasions, the leaders of the movement re-evaluated the objectives they had set, in light of the population's capacity to adapt. The call to quarantine Israeli employers was abandoned—obviously, because far too many families in the West Bank and Gaza depended on the wage of a father or a brother working in an Israeli restaurant or building site. On the other hand, the injunction against Palestinians in the Israeli police force was upheld; anyone disobeying could expect a visit from the shebab whose job it was to enforce obedience to the NUC's decrees. The timing of strikes and demonstrations was also decided in this way, and the application of orders emanating from the NUC demonstrated such unity among the population that, in order to break it, Israel's military actually forced tradesmen to raise their steel shutters and do business under duress.

Demonstrations consisted of confrontations between the population (mostly young people) and Israeli troops. The former threw stones; the latter responded with tear gas and rubber bullets. This unequal struggle became a daily occurrence. People even got used to it. In the eyes of the wider world, the televised images of street combat in occupied Palestine came to symbolize the resistance of the entire Palestinian people to the power of Israel. The Intifada was seen as a war in which

one side threw stones and the other fired guns. But this was only the visible side of the struggle. Its basic dynamic was very different.

The leaders of the NUC had to find means of satisfying the human needs that had been exposed by the military repression. In the short term, provisions were needed to keep families going during the curfews. More systematically, the planners of the Intifada sought to create the conditions for genuine self-sufficiency by establishing alternative Palestinian networks that were in no way connected to Israel. Their program of action aimed to prove that the Palestinians within the Occupied Territories had sufficient resources to run their own affairs, thus demolishing the argument whereby the integration of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip into Israel was an irreversible and necessary process. This effort of internal organization also demonstrated a determination to transform Palestinian society and its members, to improve their sense of responsibility and collective interest along with their aptitude to resist the occupation and subvert its rules. Every skill and every ounce of goodwill available was thoroughly tapped. After the Israeli military government closed the schools and universities, Palestinian teachers gave classes to students in private houses and apartments, and doctors offered free medical treatment. In support of the boycott of Israeli products, specialist agricultural advisors began distributing advice to families on how to raise fruit and vegetables of their own.

The strategy of the Intifada was resolutely innovative, a clean break with the tradition of armed struggle preached and practiced by the PLO for decades past. Through civil disobedience, it sought to build a mass movement and encourage certain forms of self-management. Communiqué after communiqué called for nonviolent actions, or at least for actions whose violent nature was limited.

DAILY LIFE UNDER THE OCCUPATION

Another important aspect of the Intifada was its ritual of sheer bravura. Masking the face with a *keffiyeh*, scrawling political slogans on walls, flying Palestinian flags, escaping the army's vigilance during curfews, distributing and reading NUC communiqués: all these things were strictly prohibited on pain of arrest. The idea was to create a daily series

of acts of defiance whereby the people of the territories could stand up to the IDF and reaffirm the personality and the existence of the Palestinian nation. This affected the relationship between occupied and occupiers by giving the former a dignity that had been suppressed since the imposition of Israeli martial law. In this sense, the Intifada was a revolt against surrender and humiliation.⁷

Despite the privations and difficulties that accompanied their struggle and its repression, the very fact of mobilization gave hope to Palestinians. During this period, the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza gained fresh confidence in themselves. They began to view the future of Palestine in a resolutely optimistic light. Despite their structural weakness in comparison with Israel, they were displaying determination and even heroism—and they were proud of what they were doing. Women, young men, and countless ordinary people who had little or no connection with political militancy were all rising to the challenge.

Such was the case of Jane, a schoolgirl of sixteen. Jane was the youngest of five daughters in a Christian family, living in a comfortable house in a quiet area of Beit-Sahur, a few miles from Bethlehem. Her father was a foreman who made a good living working for Israelis on the other side of the green line between Israel and the Occupied Territories. He also spoke fluent Hebrew; prior to the uprising, his Israeli associates were often invited to his house as guests. Like her parents and her brothers and sisters, Jane was a supporter of George Habash's PFLP; the fact that the head of this left-wing faction was a Christian may have had something to do with it. Jane looked forward to a future of service to the Palestinian nation: "Unfortunately, we Palestinians have no airplanes. If we ever do, I'll be at the head of the queue to get a pilot's license." In the meantime, she belonged to a group of young people her age who were learning the *dabka*. The *dabka* is a traditional Palestinian dance for both sexes that demands good physical shape as well as agility, given that the dancers are expected to carry out a series of different leaps. Because it involved meeting with a number of other people, the *dabka* was forbidden by the Israeli military—which of course made it all the more popular. Thus not only was it a part of local folklore symbolizing Palestinian identity; to dance it was also an act of political resistance.

Occasionally, in defiance of their mother, Jane and her sisters went out to throw stones at the soldiers. Once Israeli soldiers came to order the head of the family to take down a flag hanging on an electric pylon in front of their house. Jane's father, Abu Lana,⁸ refused point blank to do so, and as a result his identity card, which he needed to travel inside and outside the West Bank, was confiscated. He had to go to the headquarters of the local civil government and fight to get it back, which he eventually did, after paying a fine.

One winter evening the family was gathered at home, crouching around a heater and discussing a recent NUC communiqué. There was a rap at the door; Abu Lana had no time to answer before three soldiers burst onto the veranda leading to the living room. Jane's mother called out, "It's the army!," giving Jane just enough time to crush the illegal tract into a ball and slip it into her mouth. It took several minutes to swallow, while the soldiers inspected and searched every room in the house. They left empty-handed, though the boldness of Jane's elder sisters and their determination not to be pushed around almost caused a disaster.

In April 1992 the little town of Beit-Sahur was relatively calm; the political engagement of its people had waned somewhat, and the soldiers of the IDF were no longer present. The most visible signs of the continuing intifada were the closed shops in the afternoon and the absence of nightlife or anything happening after dark. At Abu Lana's house, the evenings were spent in front of the TV. Two of the girls were married, and one of these now lived in Amman, Jordan; the other had stayed on in Beit-Sahur. Some of the family had been unable to go to Jordan for the wedding because the father and one of the sisters had been refused an Israeli permit to cross the border. Now there were only three sisters at home. The eldest, who was studying to be a nurse at the University of Bethlehem, tried to renegotiate the amount of her pocket money with her father; the family was having real trouble adjusting to a steep decline in its living standards. While Abu Lana still worked in Israel and still earned a reasonable wage, the forty-day curfew imposed by Israel during the 1991 Gulf War had prevented him from going to work and had bankrupted his own small subcontracting firm. Umm Lana, his wife, could not make ends meet. She raged against the Israelis,

but at the same time she felt that the young men coming out of prison were showing off a bit too much.

Early one April afternoon, news spread through Beit-Sahur that a university student had been shot by Israeli soldiers in the center of town. The student, whose name was Anton al-Chomal, had been hit in the stomach or the head—nobody was sure. Jane was worried: she knew Anton; his family was related by marriage to hers. Suddenly the bells of the church started tolling, and a muezzin-like message came over the municipal loudspeakers. A man's voice, half aggressive and half terrified, announced that comrade Anton al-Chomal had "suffered martyrdom" a few hours earlier. Jane burst out sobbing and ran with her sister to join the stream of neighbors rushing to the church. The building was packed, no longer a place of prayer and reflection but a seething mass of people, mostly young, shouting, weeping, and jostling. The priest had lost control of the situation. Some of the girls were standing on chairs, staring at Anton's lifeless corpse being carried along on a board by four shebab. When it was hoisted above the heads of the crowd, draped in the Palestinian flag, the din reached a crescendo. The dead boy's friends were hard put to keep their balance as they shoved their way gradually to the church door: it was a wonder the body didn't fall off. Outside, the cortege proceeded to the cemetery, accompanied by ritual chanting. "With our souls and with our blood, we will sacrifice ourselves for you, Anton."

The cemetery at Beit-Sahur was too small to contain all the people. Some stayed outside. Others pushed forward to be as close as they could to the graveside. Young men of twenty, shebab, friends, and fellow students, pressed forward passionately to kiss the martyr's cold cheeks and drape themselves over his body. Anton's family stood aside as if the son or brother they had known had vanished utterly behind the image of a political militant and popular hero. Jihad, a member of the PFLP like the dead student, clambered on top of a tomb and delivered an impassioned speech. In the name of the party, he paid homage to a fellow activist cut down by IDF bullets and exhorted everyone present to carry on the Intifada. One last time, Anton's body was raised high and shown to the people. The board he lay on was tilted upright; the crowd whistled and shouted. In the presence of death, all restraint was abandoned; everyone gave full vent to their emotions. Anton was finally buried, and

the people made their way in groups back to his family's house, higher up in the town. On the way an Israeli jeep stumbled across the mourners, and the heavily outnumbered soldiers launched a few tear gas grenades before beating a hasty retreat. This scattered the crowd into running groups. Two bystanders passed out from the fumes.

Later, a vigil was organized. The women gathered inside, with Anton's mother and sisters; the men stayed in the street. For three days the people of Beit-Sahur lingered around the al-Chomal house to show their sorrow, their solidarity, and their support for the bereaved family. Political militants took a leading part in all this. They made speeches, marched in step like soldiers, hoisted Palestinian flags, and hung banners and pictures of the martyr. After a few days they were dispersed by Israeli troops. Stones were thrown, and the IDF retaliated with tear gas.

Jane was still weeping. Her elder sister finally shook her and told her to control herself. "Stop crying. People will gossip," she said.

PURITANISM AND SOCIAL REVENGE

The Intifada imposed its own strict moral order. Its leaders took the view that the behavior of individuals should conform to the principles and objectives of the political revolution. On this point, the nationalist and Islamist movements were agreed: before it could confront the enemy, Palestinian society had to cleanse itself. The potency of Palestinian nationalism depended on the vigor of Palestinian society. To revive it, the community of the Palestinian people had to be reinvented and restructured around traditional and religious values.

The ideology of resistance forbade any calling in question of the social order defined in this way, and it frowned on all forms of pleasure and amusement. In the view of the leaders and militants of the Intifada, it was vital to avoid dissipating valuable energy in futile distractions. The people needed to concentrate fully on the struggle ahead. As a result, night life was nonexistent. What cafés and restaurants there were stayed closed in the evenings. In the Gaza Strip, Palestinians were anyway obliged to abstain, since the Israeli Army enforced a permanent curfew between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m. each night. By day, family or school-organized excursions to Israel were a thing of the past, and the Gaza

militants even forbade families to go to the beach. Everybody in the West Bank and Gaza adopted a Spartan way of life, either by conviction or by obligation. Marriages were celebrated with extreme discretion, and the dowry system, whereby a bridegroom was expected to spend large sums of money on a celebration, was condemned as retrograde. Such celebrations as there were, were halted any time a martyr was killed.

All this stemmed from a wish to build a healthy society, one that had rid itself of behavior viewed as socially reprehensible and religiously wrong. The revolutionary spirit of the Intifada had a strongly puritanical dimension. One of the arguments used to justify its moral rigor was purely tactical: people who contravened the moral order created a flaw in the wider community, one that could be exploited by the occupying power. A drunkard, a drug addict in need of his dose, or a young woman who defied sexual taboos were all easy prey for the enemy. The Israeli Army could take advantage of the weaknesses of Palestinians to recruit spies among them. The enemy, or those who collaborated with the enemy, could easily extract information from such people, and this fact served as a pretext for the shebab to maintain an iron grip on the workings of Palestinian society.

The values and norms endured by the people of the Territories for the sake of the Intifada have determined the course taken by an entire generation. For the most youthful participants in the uprising, or for their younger brothers growing up during this period, not to conform to the rules of strict traditional and/or religious morality was tantamount to political treason. Anyone who succumbed to the lure of sex or any other forbidden pleasure was suspected or accused of conniving with the Israelis. Even though these people might not have crossed the threshold of collaboration, they were viewed as being well on the way to doing so. Jihad, who led Anton's funeral march in April 1992, was caught in the arms of his girlfriend a few weeks after. Confirmed PFLP militant though he was, active at the university and a man who had spent time in an Israeli jail, he still received a warning through a member of his entourage: "Watch your step: you'll end up a collaborator."

But women, far more than men, bore the brunt of this moral pressure. In the Gaza Strip in the late 1980s, they were gradually corralled into wearing the veil. The movement began with a small number of

women from poorer backgrounds, mostly living in the refugee camps. As the sisters, daughters, and wives of men killed, wounded, or imprisoned by the Israelis, they stopped using makeup or wearing pretty clothes as a spontaneous sign of mourning and grief. *This was no time for finery.* Progressively, in the working class areas that were most heavily mobilized for the battle with the Israelis, social pressures forced all women to cover their heads. The veil became a patriotic obligation, a uniform proclaiming that its wearer supported the Intifada. The contribution of the female sex to the purging of society was an essential one; the good conduct of a family's young women and wives was a proof of its honor.

Very quickly, women from bourgeois backgrounds gave in to the threats of the shebab, embracing the new rules of modesty and surrendering to the general Islamization of morals that had swept the Territories. Before long, any woman walking bareheaded in the streets of Gaza was liable to be insulted or stoned. Brutal intimidation quickly persuaded those few who resisted that they would have to obey the laws laid down by militant gunmen, who had no political training or experience but retained a monopoly on physical coercion.⁹

An awareness of the often hostile relations between social classes in Palestine is essential to any understanding of the Intifada. The political ambition of some militants reflected a repressed desire for social vengeance, insofar as compelling the bourgeoisie to adopt the behavior of ordinary conservative working people was a triumph and a vindication in itself.

When the first signs of trouble emerged, many members of the wealthier and more powerful Palestinian families were suspicious of this proletarian invasion—after all, the wealthier bourgeoisie was the traditional repository of political influence and had steadily increased its holdings in industry and real estate over the years. Economic muscle had enabled representatives of the various dominant clans to create broad networks of patronage among the general population. Some had occupied what might be termed an “interface position” with the Israeli military administration, negotiating various accommodations with it. The NUC broke with this line, excluding any possibility of cooperation with the occupying authorities. The NUC began by implicitly sidelining the traditional leaders of Palestinian society, in

the sense that it claimed control of the armed struggle as well as of society's way of functioning. Thereafter it explicitly threatened those representatives of leading families who ventured to criticize the PLO or showed any kind of interest in the "Jordanian option." The latter was a plan endorsed by a section of the Israeli political class, which involved the West Bank's integration into the Hashemite Kingdom; it had won the favor of certain prominent Palestinian families in Nablus and Hebron. In general, these were people who had close political and economic ties to the Jordanian government and distrusted the PLO leadership.

With the exception of these few marginalized families, Palestinian society was firmly behind the objectives and actions prescribed by the NUC, and because of this the early stages of the Intifada were remarkable for their unanimity. The success of the mobilization was undoubtedly due to a temporary but strong alliance among the shebab of the working classes, the intelligentsia, and the commercial milieu.

The universities of the West Bank and Gaza were hotbeds of political agitation, with students and professors pouring out ideas and new militants every day. They made sure that the principles and procedures of the Intifada were spread through every level of the population. The faculties of Bir Zeit near Ramallah and Najah at Nablus brought together students from every conceivable social and geographical background: young men and women from the cities, the villages, and the refugee camps; rich and poor.

The commercial and shopkeeping classes made a significant contribution to the rising, merely by applying the NUC's directives. As a rule, this sector of society had tended to hang back; now they joined the nationalist cause. Trapped as they were within a system of constraints that regulated economic exchanges between Palestinians and Israelis, and bled white by a fiscal system that was heavily stacked against them, they had every interest in changing the rules. Thus the shopkeepers wholeheartedly participated in a boycott of Israeli products, observed strikes when they were called, and refused to pay taxes. Initially the shebab and the shopkeepers supported one another, and young fighters would come to repair the shopkeepers' steel shutters when they were damaged by Israeli troops. But before long the relationship began to go sour when

Nablus activists started looting shops on the pretext that their owners were failing to respect the boycott on Israeli goods.

A turning point was reached when the army finally broke the shopkeepers' resistance by forcing them to pay their taxes; this they did when their property began to be seized for debt. A rift now opened between the shebab, who had nothing to lose, and the middle classes, who needed to survive the devastating consequences of Israeli repression. The excesses and summary methods of some of the radical militants were beginning to cause outrage. After several years of privation, the population was drained; the fact was that the economic crisis brought on by the Gulf War had caused altogether too much hardship, and the collective élan and unanimity of Palestinian society had been shattered.

The petering out of the uprising can also be explained by the effects of the repression, which decapitated the movement by imprisoning or banishing its leaders. Bereft of its battle-hardened political leaders, the Intifada was taken over by younger and younger militants with progressively less experience. These men resorted all too easily to violence, including violence directed against Palestinian society itself. There were clashes between rival groups, with particularly savage competition between Fatah and Hamas¹⁰ activists eager to carry off some spectacular coup. In some places, however, the activists appeared to be more interested in consolidating their local power than in fighting the Israelis.

The militarization of the Intifada accentuated these turf rivalries. Armed groups proliferated, as support money flowed in from the PLO in Tunis and Amman. The Palestinian central command, struggling to maintain control over the uprising, did its best to stay in contact with the militants in the field and provide funds for them, but it was itself sapped and confused by internal rivalries.

Probably it was to the advantage of the Palestinian leaders abroad to maintain a certain level of disorder in the West Bank and Gaza, with a view to weakening the emergent alternative power structure that had taken root in the Occupied Territories. The proliferation of armed groups tended to sow confusion, insofar as it was hard to identify activists because they were masked in public. Being armed, albeit lightly, the activists themselves found it all the easier to fall back on the use of force.

Thus the failure of the first Intifada was largely due to its protagonists' failure to articulate their nationalist and social aspirations. Young people from poor backgrounds gave the movement its early impetus. After 1990 they cut themselves off from the rest of society and fell back on threats and brute force to prolong their movement's earlier unanimity. Nevertheless, their credit ebbed away. The civil resistance and limits on violence that had been the Intifada's greatest strength now receded, leaving a growing culture of brutality that chiefly worked against the Palestinians themselves—for in the end Palestinians were the only ones to suffer from the witch-hunts of real or imagined collaborators, and from the gangsterization of activist groups.

THE INTIFADA ADRIFT

In the course of 1995, the final spasms of the Intifada shook Nablus. The soldiers of the IDF and the Israeli settlers of the surrounding area went unmolested, even though Israeli newspapers were taking a close interest in events. A group from the working-class areas of the old town decided to clean up Nablus and eliminate those elements it considered harmful, notably collaborators and drug dealers. Three individuals were executed, and ten more were shot and injured as a warning to others. The gang responsible took full advantage of the Israeli Army's passive attitude. At that juncture, the Palestinian Authority's takeover of the West Bank cities looked to be just around the corner, and the Israeli Army was no longer concerned to keep the peace in zones that it knew were about to pass under Palestinian sovereignty.

Ahmed Tabuq was the head of the group that now occupied center stage in Nablus, where events suggested that a certain number of shebab might give considerable trouble to the Palestinian Authority, which had come into being in 1994. These shebab, having been active from the start of the intifada, had already founded and dissolved several successive armed groups, variously named the Ninja Forces, the Black Panthers, and the Falcons. In 1989 the Ninja Forces took the lead in hunting down collaborators; some of them were arrested, and others were shot down in the old city center by Israeli army commandos. A year later the Black Panthers took over, as young men from the old town

center waged a campaign against Israeli agents and skirmished with groups belonging to Hamas, Fatah's Islamist rival.

In spite of the contacts and funds they received from outside Palestine, the shebab flatly disobeyed the directives of the PLO when it ordered them to stop executing collaborators. If they needed money, they addressed themselves to the wealthier citizens of Nablus. The bourgeoisie gave in to their demands, either because they were intimidated, or because this was the best way to secure some measure of protection.

Between 1990 and 1991, Ahmed Tabuq and his companions were all arrested and jailed for life, only to be given amnesty later under the terms of the Oslo accords when Palestinian autonomy was installed in Gaza and Jericho. The shebab were released on condition that they remained under Palestinian jurisdiction, meaning that the original gang from the old town of Nablus had now to live in Jericho, under the watchful eye of the Palestinian security services. It was out of the question for the nascent Palestinian Authority to imprison these "heroes" of the Intifada, and thus Tabuq and his friends escaped without difficulty, made their way home, recovered their weapons, and built up another group, the Falcons, which quickly won control over the medina of Nablus and its surrounding area. Tabuq himself, nicknamed the "Palestinian Rambo" by the Israeli newspapers, created something of a media sensation. His followers were all of very humble origin; none had stayed in school beyond the age of fourteen, and they were drunk with the power they wielded over the local population. In an interview, Tabuq claimed that his ultimate reference was "the people." "We are trying to promote the power of the people, for the people, and what we decide comes from the grass roots, in the absence of a Palestinian Authority here."¹¹ Nevertheless, Tabuq was ready to swear loyalty to Yasser Arafat, whom he recognized as the paramount leader.

To be fair, Tabuq's gang strongly identified with its community, and it strove to represent the deprived people of the old city of Nablus. In this way, even though these young men were allied with other Fatah groups like the ones in the refugee camps on the edge of Nablus, they nevertheless remained a distinct, self-sufficient faction. Their grounding and their popular approach set them on a collision course with the entrenched Nablus bourgeoisie.

Half a dozen families had controlled the political and economic life of the town of Nablus for over a century past. The position and authority of these few respected names also rested on a circle of people who were under obligation to them, as part of a system built up over the years as a form of social patronage. The sheriff's role that Ahmed Tabuq and his entourage wanted to fill had to be placed within the context of the social segregation and domination that were particularly strong in Nablus. The Fatah activists in the medina were more eager to punish members of their own society than to work for the liberation of all, and nationalist rhetoric legitimized this, though the initiative was obviously marred by a desire for social vengeance. It was no coincidence that the "enemies of the Palestinian nation" who were most under attack by the shebab nearly always belonged to the upper echelons of Nablus.

The group went on the offensive against its perceived enemies a few months prior to the end of the Israeli military occupation. The move was condemned by the Fatah organization in the city. Struggle against the bourgeoisie had no part in Fatah's revolutionary training program; on the contrary, the idea was to prevent the fragmentation of Palestinian society after the cessation of the war with Israel, amid the power struggles that would certainly follow. The career of Ahmed Tabuq seemed all the more dangerous because it looked very much as if the ruling families of Nablus had earlier used Tabuq and his like to commit crimes and settle personal scores. Secrets are well kept in Nablus; nevertheless, the shebab quickly became potentially troublesome witnesses for certain leading personalities in the city.

The story of Tabuq is instructive in a number of ways. For one thing, it shows why the first Intifada fell apart. In the absence of their natural political leaders, who had been neutralized by Israeli repression, the youngest militants took control of the movement and imposed their own crudely violent methods. In this way they wrecked the logic that gave credibility to civil disobedience, while at the same time deepening divisions within society. Moreover, coming just before the creation of Palestinian autonomy in the Occupied Territories, the shebab's demonstrations of force raised the question of submission to the new authority. How could leaders coming in from the outside consolidate power over these militants, as well as over the rest of society? The task was a tricky one. To start with, they were the promoters of a peace agreement

with Israel, the terms of which were far below Palestinian expectations. Next, they had to convince the shebab to give up both their role and their status, at a time when the shebab were firmly convinced that it was their own decisive pressure that had brought the Israelis to the negotiating table in the first place.