



Transnational Histories of Palestinian Youth Organizing in the United States

Loubna Qutami

ABSTRACT

This article explores the transnational histories that have conditioned Palestinian youth organizing in the United States from the 1950s to the present day. It examines the organizational vehicles of earlier generations of activists such as the Organization of Arab Students (OAS) and the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) to trace the formation of the U.S. chapter of the transnational Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM). It argues that in the Oslo and post-Oslo eras, which severed the Palestinian diaspora from the national body politic and the rich Palestinian organizational histories of the pre-1993 period, the lessons of their forerunners are instructive for PYM's new generation of organizers. The article posits that transnational connections have profound implications for localized U.S. political organizing and that contemporary Palestinian youth organizing is part of a historical continuum. Drawing on oral history and scholar-activist ethnographic methods, the article situates contemporary youth organizing in its transnational and historical contexts.

KEYWORDS

OAS; GUPS; PYM;
transnational movements;
youth movements; Oslo
Accords

IN THE SUMMER OF 2019, fifty Palestinian/Arab youth from the United States gathered in the San Bernardino Mountains of California for a weeklong congress hosted by the U.S.-based Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM). Participants engaged in political education sessions on the history of Palestinian/Arab organizing in the United States, focusing on the vibrant role played by students and youth in the national liberation struggle. Affirming the indispensable nature of these contributions, participants insisted that more powerful student and youth movements were needed to promote the cause of Palestinian liberation in the United States. The youth present envisioned how to strengthen their organizing, both in terms of transnational¹ and U.S.-based Palestinian/Arab communities and with joint-struggle causes locally, nationally, and globally.

Analyzing what lay ahead, participants identified the factors that make Palestinian youth organizing particularly challenging: ruthless Zionist culture wars, which erase or punish meaningful expressions of Palestinian identity and/or aspirations to freedom; the widespread and growing criminalization of Palestinian activism in the diaspora;² the ideological, political, and social fragmentation of Palestinian communities both locally and transnationally; a fractured and ineffective national leadership; limited financial resources and human capacity; the new generation's insufficient grasp of history; and the absence of organized forums to equip youth with the political education and skills-training needed to develop into community leaders.

The challenges identified were not unique to PYM's specific formation in the United States, as the post-Oslo era had uncovered the shared dilemmas, aspirations, and strategies of Palestinian youth organizers worldwide. Under PYM's banner, hundreds of youth across

thirty-three countries had engaged for a number of years (2006–14) in addressing the collective challenges that resulted from the signature of the Oslo Accords in 1993. A cross-generational examination of Palestinian/Arab youth movements reveals that the Oslo process exacerbated but did not construct those challenges, some of which had bedeviled youth organizing for generations.

Many scholars argue that Palestinian organizing in the United States was historically shaped by reconfigurations in Arab regional and transnational politics and the shifting racialization of U.S.-based Arab communities.³ Much of their work explores the intertwining of the two domains, with a specific focus on the racialized repression of Arab Americans following the 1967 war and in the wake of the ongoing “War on Terror.”⁴ However, fewer works offer a primarily cross-generational study of student/youth movements in the United States in terms of their relation to domestic Palestinian politics in historic Palestine and transnational Arab/Palestinian politics.

This article analyzes the formation of the U.S.-based arm of PYM (2009–present), placing the movement’s organizational praxis in conversation with that of the Organization of Arab Students (OAS, 1952–80) and the U.S. arm of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS, 1980–89).⁵ Despite the changes over these seven decades of Palestinian student/youth movement building in the United States, the revolutionary ethos that informed such organizing and the challenges endured in the process are paralleled across these distinct generations. Some fundamental similarities are found in all three organizations: functioning nationwide across the United States on the basis of a centralized, democratic structure; a membership comprising students/youth with pluralistic political beliefs; and ties to transnational Arab/Palestinian politics. Palestinian youth organizing in the three periods involved has taken place within a historical continuum of transnational connections that have profound implications for localized U.S. political organizing.

Turning to movement histories in an attempt to shape a grounded scholar-activist research methodology, I challenge the political and epistemological discontinuities that characterize Palestinian experiences. I also explore how transnational Arab/Palestinian political movements and reconfigurations of institutional power in the Arab world influenced the formation, composition, activity, and political trajectories of youth formations in the United States, including their dissolution. While political reconfigurations in the Arab world consistently influenced U.S.-based youth movements, this phenomenon assumed new forms in the aftermath of the 1993 Oslo Accords. A comparative analysis of the post-1993 period also sheds light on visions and strategies for liberation in Palestinian/Arab transnational politics today.

The internal histories of movements deserve close and deep examination, something often undervalued in scholarship and in movement praxis. While the question requires more intentional engagement than the scope of this article allows, here I illustrate some of the lessons that can be drawn from youth movement histories and examine how they can be used to inform debate and praxis attuned to the shifting dynamics of the Palestinian struggle post Oslo. Methodologically, I bring together the work of diasporic Palestinian as well as Arab American and other scholars with semi-structured oral history interviews of twelve former and current Palestinian/Arab youth organizers. As a cofounder and member of PYM, I have been conducting scholar-activist ethnographic research on the organization while writing about its theorizations over the last decade.⁶ My involvement with PYM has enabled me to attend over forty-five transnational youth convenings, to interface with over a thousand

Palestinian youth worldwide, and to access a wide array of internal documents, including meeting minutes and position papers. PYM's engagement in the broader communal landscape and its commitment to intergenerational cooperation have intimately exposed me to the organizational histories and dilemmas of past generations, as well as the personalities involved.⁷

Overcoming Discontinuity: A New Generation and the Retrieval of History

Recuperating buried histories is vital to maintaining steadfastness in the face of settler-colonial erasure.⁸ The power of knowledge and the (re)making of history serve as foundational tools to make and maintain collective Palestinian sociopolitical life as it faces annihilation. Palestinian scholars have long attested to the importance of a self-determined narrative to shaping and maintaining revolutionary struggle. Yet the challenge of retrieving the contents of our histories persists for both scholars of Palestine and movement organizers as they confront their own severance from Palestinian institutional history. The Palestinian leadership's trajectory shift at Oslo—exchanging an anti-colonial liberation framework for a state-building paradigm—resulted in the permanent liquidation of many grassroots institutions in the diaspora, leaving Palestinians politically debilitated: the leadership had surrendered Palestine as one indivisible territorial unit and the Palestinian people as one nation, despite their geographic dispersals.⁹

For a new generation of Palestinian thinkers and organizers, retrieving these organizing histories is both pressing and difficult. In a sharp identification of the problem, Palestinian historian Mezna Qato notes, “As the door begins to close on the possibility of conducting oral histories with those with memory of the second half of the 20th century, let alone the first, and as Arab archives grow even more difficult to access amidst repression or shorn by rubble, to search and ask those who might have otherwise not recorded their stories becomes an act of methodological urgency.”¹⁰ It is in this context that a new generation within the U.S.-based diaspora is attempting to extrapolate the transnational liberation organizational histories of their past to guide their current work.

Among the greatest obstacles to organizing identified by the new generation of Palestinian youth at the 2019 San Bernardino congress was their inadequate understanding of history as a solid departure point. They expressed the feeling that they were starting from scratch without any clear references for the development of organizing sensibilities, skills, or visions for the struggle, rendering them ill-equipped to organize within existing activist spaces and their communities. The decimation of institutional knowledge and history and the absence of vehicles for the transmission of collective, intergenerational, and transnational political lessons characterize the Palestinian struggle across generations. In each phase of struggle, Palestinians have had to grieve loss of life and land and to cope with the dismemberment of their collective effort: destroyed archives; assassinated, deported, or imprisoned leaders; a collapse of organizational infrastructure and strategies; new exoduses; political betrayals; concessions on the principles of the struggle; and violences inflicted on people in their everyday lives and communities.

To address how the persistence of such conditions poses important methodological questions for historians of Palestine,¹¹ Qato and a number of scholars have explored innovative ways to salvage and assemble what has seemingly been reduced to rubble.¹² However, the

commitments to such retrieval are not only necessary for Palestine's scholarly community. George Bitar, a former member of the OAS National Executive Committee, argues that such intellectual work is key to creating a "transfer of knowledge and experience," which can more properly equip young people in their organizing pursuits.¹³ PYM organizers have demonstrated a commitment to grounding their present realities within the historical contexts that also shape the present. In 2012, the international PYM developed and adopted a position paper that emphasized "the fundamental role of youth in bringing about sociopolitical transformation, particularly in the Palestinian case historically," citing how the learned lessons of the youth movements that formed in the wake of the Nakba established the foundations for present-day organizing.¹⁴

Eight years later, the commitment to such intellectual labor shapes a new generation of organizers in the United States. Mohammed Nabulsi, a PYM National Executive Board member, explains why historical retrieval is especially important for the new generation:

PYM views its project as a continuation of the efforts of previous generations of students and youth movements in the U.S. . . . With the dissolution of GUPS [in the United States] following the signing of the Oslo Accords, Palestinian students and youth became increasingly disenfranchised and were relegated to a position of solidarity as opposed to [being regarded] as a segment of a broader national movement. In a way, PYM is an answer to the vacuum . . . whereby we reclaim our position as Palestinian students and youth as a leading segment in the broader national liberation movement.¹⁵

The "continuation" of previous generations' efforts points to how youth view history as a conditioning force in their lives and movement practice. Nabulsi goes on to state:

We draw on this historical legacy through our continued engagement with the generations that came before us, including through engagement with the existing institutions, such as social and cultural organizations that currently house the previous generations of organizers, or through direct engagement with the organizers on a one-on-one basis, such as our interviews with multiple former student and youth organizers. . . . This sort of engagement is critical because it allows younger organizers to draw on the successes and mistakes of previous generations, to better understand the political landscapes of our communities, and to forge a concrete and material link between previous efforts and projects and our current efforts.¹⁶

Per Nabulsi's articulation, it is clear that retrieving history is not only a foundation to learning about the past but also an ongoing political and intellectual engagement. Aligned with this pedagogical praxis, members of PYM's Michigan chapter conducted an oral history interview with longtime Palestinian organizer George Khoury, in which Khoury attests to the urgency and importance of revisiting history: "I want to tell our students your age who are going to college now [to] take advantage of the people who went through that era [1960s–1980s] and who organized [then], before—heaven forbid—they pass away. . . . Because this is history. [They were] the first generation that grabbed the Palestinian revolution in the diaspora, and they made something out of it."¹⁷

The sociopolitical forces that threaten Palestinian knowledge making, narratives, and retention of histories, coupled with the *longue durée* of the Palestinian struggle and the institutional ruptures resulting from the Oslo Accords, as well as the ongoing colonial dispossession and occupation of Palestine and the Palestinians, have made a turn to, and recuperation of, history even more pressing. While the scholarly community has acknowledged the need to prioritize work committed to Palestinian liberation, new generations of youth/students with no formal

academic standing/training have also recognized the urgency of the task, and they are committed to the process of reassembling these histories from fragments.

A comparative study of PYM with OAS and GUPS reveals that such pedagogical praxis is not new. All three movements reinforced the attachment of their diaspora constituencies to the Arab region through educational delegations; staged educational events, including speaking tours among their local constituencies; followed similar pedagogical approaches to politicization, including rigorous political and intellectual debates at their national conventions and summer schools; and deeply engaged the study of theory and history to strengthen their movement praxis. I offer this essay as one fragment that might be analytically useful to Palestinian youth organizers and scholars exploring and developing visions, strategies, and knowledge for liberation in the present.

Transnational Politics and the Formation of National Student/Youth Bodies

PYM started out as the Palestinian Youth Network (PYN) at a 2006 convening in Barcelona, which brought together thirty-five Palestinian youth from historic Palestine, the Arab world, and Europe. The initiative was fueled by a desire to assess how the Oslo Accords had impacted the role of Palestinian youth in national politics. That year also marked the emergence of the split in the Palestinian national movement between the two dominant factions, Fatah and Hamas,¹⁸ which persists to this day. At the forefront of these youth organizers' preoccupations was the question of Zionist colonization and how it had become subordinated by the internal divisions between the Palestinian factions—even as Palestine continued to be colonized, and refugees continued to have their right of return denied. Addressing the dismemberment of the national body politic, which once included all Palestinians despite dispersed geographical locations and ideological differences, PYN was born of an urgent sense that youth needed to mobilize to reverse the paralysis, fragmentation, and crisis debilitating Palestinian political life.

In 2007, PYN partnered with the French chapter of GUPS to host an eleven-day summit, which saw expanded participation by Palestinian youth from Latin America, North America, and Australia, in addition to Europe and the Arab world.¹⁹ Participants identified the difficulties they faced as members of a younger generation in playing an active role in the struggle. Arguing that they were often tokenized through credibility rivalries between factions, they expressed the desire to play a more meaningful role in Palestinian politics. They argued that the NGO-ization of Palestine following Oslo had depoliticized Palestinian youth inside the homeland, prompting Band-Aid solutions to structural problems rooted in a colonial condition. They discussed the effectiveness of international solidarity movements while pleading for diaspora Palestinians to engage within a national liberation framework rather than simply from a solidarity- or rights-based approach—the alternative being that they become positioned as allies rather than as stakeholders in their own struggle.

Concluding that the dismal conditions in Palestine demanded a radical break with the status quo, the assembled participants decided to build the needed collective network, officially launching the organization with 160 youth/students from thirty-three countries at the founding conference in Madrid in 2008. Until 2011, the aim was to gather Palestinian youth from across the world to revitalize national consciousness based on the principle of liberation combined with a shared sense of responsibility to the struggle despite ideological and geographic dispersals. At its peak, PYN connected over 1,000 Palestinian youth, representing student/youth

associations globally: it ran several popular education campaigns, summer camps, schools, and conferences in Syria (2009), the Basque Country (2010), France (2011), and beyond.²⁰

While Palestinian youth from the United States played a part in the early development of the transnational network, it was Israel's devastating 2008–9 attack on the Gaza Strip that generated urgency among young U.S.-based Palestinians to officially form the U.S. PYM in January 2009. Until 2015, the U.S. PYM had developed in tandem with the international PYM, and joined the growing student movement and community organizing arena within the United States. However, between 2009 and 2015, the U.S. chapter's structure and membership participation were in constant flux. The chapter struggled to anchor the national organization in a strong and stable foundation in part because its efforts were largely geared toward building up the transnational organization. Its members comprised Palestinian students and youth (aged eighteen to thirty-five years) who were mostly born and raised in the United States and were eager to partake in a Palestinian national politics by reconnecting with their youth counterparts transnationally.

At first glance, the formation of PYM appears to mirror that of earlier Palestinian and Arab student/youth organizations in the United States. In the first half of the twentieth century, U.S.-based Arab organizing reflected the porousness of Arab diasporic and regional politics, with the diaspora playing an important role in the development of the early ideological underpinnings of Arab nationalism. According to Hani Bawardi, young Arab immigrants arriving in the United States in the early 1900s had strong Syrian nationalist sensibilities in exile, and their organizational endeavors always hinged on political reconfigurations in their homelands.²¹ Some of the most important Arab diasporic institutions—including the Free Syria Society, set up in 1915; the New Syria Party in 1925; the Arab National League in 1936; and the Institute of Arab American Affairs in 1944—established the foundation for U.S.-based organizing linked to unfolding power realignments in the Arab region.²²

Like that first generation of U.S.-based Arab organizers, PYM members in the United States were engaged in establishing the political and ideological tenets of the transnational network in response to regional changes. Whereas earlier generations had responded to changes in the overarching power structures—from the Ottoman Empire to European imperial rule and to Zionist colonialism in the shadow of the Balfour Declaration and the Sykes-Picot Agreement—PYM found itself having to address the near obliteration of the Palestinian liberatory project by the Oslo Accords, which entrenched the subsequent fragmentation of the Palestinian national movement/body politic shorn of a unified political vision for liberation. In both instances, and in order to overcome their ideological differences, the youth organizers/activists in question had to construct a shared identity based on unifying political principles. Such comparative histories remind us that political fragmentation is neither new nor restricted to the Palestinian political arena or Arab geographical context. Rather, it has been a persistent challenge across generations in diaspora.

By the late 1940s, the leadership at the helm of U.S.-based Arab institutions were losing steam, and as organizing waned, a new generation of youth organizers rose up from the political void to establish the first nationwide Arab student organization, OAS. Alongside the formation of OAS in the United States in 1952, two Palestinian organizers in Egypt, Yasir Arafat and Salah Khalaf (later Abu Iyad), were elected as president and vice president, respectively, of the Cairo-based Palestinian Student Union (PSU) just as a young Gamal Abdel Nasser was being recognized for his role in Egypt's Free Officers Movement that same year.²³ Like its

predecessors, OAS was closely entwined with regional Arab aspirations: it drew inspiration, for example, from Al-urwa al-wuthqa, a Beirut-based cultural student society with Arab nationalist leanings where the young George Habash made his political debut as the organization's secretary-general before going on to found the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM).²⁴ In this period, Arab student formations were being established or reorganized simultaneously in Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, and Amman, as well as the United States,²⁵ and while they differed in their ideological bent, they all shared a fundamental political belief: that the Arab people had to defend their interests against imperialist and Zionist aggression and that regaining Palestine was key to securing Arab sovereignty.

From its founding in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1952, OAS never shied away from this staunchly anti-imperialist stance.²⁶ Developing in tandem with the political transformations sweeping through the Arab region, the organization's membership was composed of Arab students who had come to North America for degrees in higher education.²⁷ By the mid-fifties, OAS was mobilizing under the slogan "One Arab Nation," and chapters proliferated on campuses across the United States.²⁸ Despite encompassing a wide spectrum of ideological views—from Baathism to Nasserism and from ANM to new Marxists, which counted among the organization's strongest political influences—the ideals of Arab unity, that is, the unity of Arab peoples and lands, were the bedrock of the organization's political ethos throughout the 1950s and 1960s.²⁹ Baathists dominated the national leadership structure until 1963, when they were sidelined by a coalition of students with other political leanings who successfully mobilized and won a majority on the national executive committee.³⁰

While there were always disputes within OAS, the liberation of Palestine remained a unifying element that tethered the organization to the budding Palestinian student movement on a transnational level. In 1959, Palestinian students (including from PSU and Al-urwa al-wuthqa) established the very first transnational Palestinian student organization, GUPS, in Cairo.³¹ In 1964, GUPS convened an international meeting in Gaza, which was attended by then OAS president Nabil Shaath. He recalled working hard to resolve the impasse that had arisen between students with conflicting ideological stances, and how this echoed similar schisms within OAS.³² Until 1965, when the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) became more influential, GUPS leaders were predominantly drawn from among ANM adherents,³³ and the growth of OAS in the United States paralleled that of the student movement unfolding in the Arab region and in parts of Europe.

Following Shaath's 1963 electoral victory as OAS president—thanks to the support of a broad coalition of constituencies—the organization ballooned to 127 chapters, comprising some six thousand members across North America, making it the most active and powerful Arab-centric organization in the United States.³⁴ Recognizing that strength, Arab regional actors sought out OAS as a vital political partner to advance their cause in the United States. Shaath recalls arranging meetings in 1963 between Ahmad Shuqayri, the soon-to-be founding chairman of the PLO, and U.S.-based Palestinian students to discuss their support for the creation of the PLO. In addition, Shaath directly coordinated with Nasser on strategies to foster stronger ties between U.S.-based Arab students and their Asian and African counterparts. He recalls:

Nasser asked me actually whether the OAS can help create relationships between the African leaders and Egypt, and he promised that he would use such support to facilitate support for Palestine as well. I remember very much that the African students who came to the U.S. went

back to their homes to become prime ministers and foreign ministers and so on. Those African students we created a relationship with were part of the role we played to get African support and relationships between Egypt and African countries. This was really a period of revolution, independence of African liberation movements, and so on.³⁵

In addition to strengthening relations between Third World nations and Arab movements, OAS members played an important role in placing Palestine and Arab issues at the heart of internationalist analyses and commitments. Whether in support of the anti-colonial struggle in Algeria, Palestine, or across the region, OAS was a direct expression of the Arab world in progressive politics in the United States.

There remain some fundamental differences between OAS and the U.S. PYM. Most obviously, OAS was the first official U.S.-based national student body with a centralized democratic structure and a pan-Arab membership. While PYM shares some structural similarities, it is not restricted to students, and its constituency was specifically Palestinian to begin with. The leading Palestine *student* movement of our time, National Students for Justice in Palestine (National SJP), comprises Palestinian and other Arab, as well as non-Arab, students. Second, although the formation of both OAS and PYM was spurred by political developments in the Arab world, OAS was the direct outcome of a wider sociopolitical context, namely the Cold War, which determined the organization's work to advance a shared internationalist vision for ending imperialism and Zionist colonialism. Regional state apparatuses at the time also promoted such ideals. As Shaath's recollections attest, Arab leaders saw OAS as the most important pan-Arab political vehicle in the United States—the one that had the broadest base and furthest reach. Arab leaders came to rely on OAS to strengthen relationships of global solidarity, especially in newly decolonizing Arab nations that strove to shield themselves from the threats of neo-imperialism by building internationalist cooperation. Where such Arab nations relied on OAS students to work in tandem with their political interests, PYM's relations with the region's political leaderships differ considerably. Although anti-colonialism was a prominent feature of its genesis, PYM's transnational development was partly an act of protest against the Palestinian political establishment, which PYM considered to have abandoned the struggle's anti-colonial objectives since Oslo. While many Palestinians at the grass roots were frustrated with the Palestinian leadership, there was no widespread momentum either to establish some kind of alternative vehicle for national politics or to revitalize liberatory movements within the formal Palestinian political arena. That is why PYM's emergence was not immediately welcomed or nurtured in the region, where rival forces were competing for recognition and legitimacy in an already overcrowded arena.

In 1965, the United States passed the Immigration and Nationality Act, which greatly increased immigration from Third World nations, including of Palestinian/Arab immigrants. According to Shaath, after the 1967 war, new immigrant communities brought with them a greater sense of Arab national identity and pride; they also harbored anti-colonial sentiments and the belief that Arab populations/countries needed a more militant revolutionary strategy.³⁶ The social transformations engulfing the region at the time, including the launch of the Palestinian revolution and the rise of the fedayeen movement, were reflected in the political spirit of these new Arab immigrants, particularly the student organizers who joined OAS.

Although many immigrants planned to return to their homeland, their plans did not hamper a deepening sense of reciprocal solidarity. Forming alliances with oppressed people on their

campuses and in their communities was a natural extension of the broader trajectory shaping regional politics, in line with the global revolutionary ethos of the 1960s. Students increasingly voiced their opposition to the war in Vietnam and their support for radical racial justice movements in the United States and for anti/de-colonial movements globally. Throughout the 1960s, OAS's commitment to liberatory Third World coalitional work was reflected in the organization's cooperation with other groups, such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The strength of that alliance was such that SNCC cofounder Kwame Ture (then Stokely Carmichael) was invited to give the keynote address at the seventeenth annual OAS national conference in August 1968, where he addressed the threats posed by the brain drain to anti-colonial projects in the Third World.³⁷ Ture's point was an important one in terms of OAS membership: although a few second- and third- generation Arab Americans were active in the organization, OAS was largely composed of international students whose goal was to return home after completing their studies.³⁸ These students understood that their ultimate political responsibility was to go back to their homelands, and they were also very clear in their understanding of the United States as an imperialist nation that supported Israel.

Conversely, while the U.S. PYM adhered to the principles of joint struggle with other oppressed communities and causes, the organization mostly comprised U.S.-born students and youth eager to carve out a role for themselves in a Palestinian national framework. Thus, the social, cultural, and political composition of PYM's membership differed drastically from that of OAS, presenting both challenges and benefits. It is important to note that these youth experienced degrees of linguistic, cultural, social, and political distance from their land of origin, even as they expressed varied forms of sociopolitical alienation as Palestinians living in the United States, particularly following the launch of the "War on Terror." This is important because, for many of the youth who founded the U.S. PYM, it was their racialization within the United States and their socialization into U.S.-based anti-war, anti-racist, and anti-imperialist movements that formed the initial entryway into political organizing; for OAS members, largely comprised of international students, it was the Arab/Palestinian political landscape that formed the primary reference point in their politicization. While both groups engaged in joint-struggle praxis, they did so from different vantage points: OAS was able to transfer joint-struggle relationships back to the region (because many African, Asian, and Arab students were returning to their countries of origin), while PYM's joint-struggle relationships primarily stayed localized, even while informing the analytics and political outlooks of the international PYM.

Although OAS considered the international GUPS a vital partner and saw itself as part of the transnational Palestinian student movement, by the late 1960s GUPS had been completely folded into the PLO's operational infrastructure. (After 1965, the overwhelming majority of GUPS membership worldwide was aligned with Fatah, the dominant PLO faction.) Bitar explains that early on, the high proportion of Arab students within OAS did not diminish the organization's importance to the Palestinian national movement, but that this changed over time: "The PLO leadership agreed that Palestine work in the U.S. should go through the OAS, even though Fatah supporters were a minority in the OAS; in spite of that, Fatah supporters had a tendency to go organize on a Palestinian level—promoting the idea to create a GUPS long before its realization because that's where they thought they could flourish and play a leadership role that they lacked in the OAS."³⁹

Here, it is critical to examine comparatively the composition of GUPS in the United States and that of OAS. OAS was composed of both Palestinian *and* Arab students, all of whom unreservedly espoused Arab nationalism as a framework. Palestinian students who were committed to Arab Nationalist and/or Marxist approaches had significantly more credibility within OAS than students who supported Fatah. However, within the strictly Palestinian framework of GUPS, non-ideologically committed Palestinian nationalists, namely Fatah supporters, held majority power in the organization, reflecting their strength within the international GUPS since 1965 and the PLO in general.⁴⁰ For example, at its formation in 1980, nine of the eleven GUPS national executive committee members were Fatah supporters; the politics of the organization were thus deeply tied to institutional developments in transnational circuits of power, namely Fatah and the PLO.⁴¹

Despite the majority status of Fatah within the national student body, GUPS was still a pluralistic organization, its student members espousing a variety of ideological views and belonging to diverse social backgrounds. By July 1983, the U.S. GUPS counted 4,617 active members. In descending order, they hailed from the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon (30 percent), the Gulf states (25 percent), Jordan (20 percent), the West Bank (10 percent), the Gaza Strip (5 percent), and '48 Palestine (5 percent). The remaining 5 percent were born in the United States.⁴² As Gloria Khoury, a GUPS member from San Francisco, says: "I was the only local board member who was born in the U.S. I was specifically responsible for recruiting Palestinian Americans and encouraging them to play a role within the student movement, teaching them about Palestine and making them feel an emotional commitment to the struggle."⁴³ She found the task difficult because the Palestinian students who were U.S.-born sometimes felt ambivalent or even fearful about joining the organization. This was in contrast to many of those born in the Arab world who did so from an automatic sense of allegiance to the Palestinian struggle.

Although the GUPS membership exhibited a significant level of political pluralism, most of the students (who were by and large newly arrived from the Arab world) were informed, inspired, and supportive of the political formations that comprised the PLO, which was dedicated to mass-based resistance at the time. Due to their social, temporal, and geographical distance from the region and its history, and as a result of the reconfigurations pursuant to Oslo, PYM members, by contrast, knew much less about the Palestinian political arena and the ideological frameworks that once mobilized Palestinians across the diaspora. All but cut off from the national body politic, and given its fragmentation on the question of liberation after Oslo, a large number of U.S.-based Palestinian youth were either very critical of the transnational Palestinian body politic or poorly politicized in relation to the Palestinian national movement. It was actually through their involvement in PYM that they came to understand Palestinian national politics.

In its heyday, the U.S.-based GUPS was deeply connected to the fabric of Palestinian and Arab organizing, lifting up the voices of Palestinian students in the transnational arena through umbrella national bodies. Former GUPS president Ismail Noor recounts that the Palestine Congress of North America, in which the organization held a leadership seat, brought together Palestinian groups with different ideologies and constituencies, including village- and town-based community associations.⁴⁴ National coordination enabled the U.S. Palestinian diaspora to be engaged locally and nationally in a united front that communicated to transnational Palestinian political structures. By the time the U.S. PYM launched, Palestinian communities

within the United States were in a very different situation. The U.S. PYM members participated in national forums, conferences, and initiatives intent on mobilizing the Palestinian diaspora and voicing their aspirations on a popular level.⁴⁵ However, no serious solutions ever emerged to permanently rekindle the severed ties of the diaspora to the Palestinian transnational body politic, a crisis that affected the Palestinian diaspora in the United States and globally. While PYM benefited from the support of sister U.S.-based Palestinian organizations, many of these groups were newly forming alongside PYM and not yet ready to incubate the youth movement. Older Palestinian institutions that survived the Oslo Accords had largely shifted their orientation to political organizing following the demise of PLO militancy and what was known as *al-thawra* (the revolution). Albeit one of the most active and important organizations, GUPS, by contrast, was just one component of a broader communal landscape of women's unions, village associations, and cultural centers, each of which played a distinctive role in the overarching political framework in support of revolutionary objectives such as liberation and return.

Those differences point to the importance of student and youth movements, especially as incubators, in the broader communal landscape of organizing. Rabab Abdulhadi recounts how, in the 1970s and early 1980s, she was mentored across multiple networks as a GUPS member in Madison, Wisconsin, by the graduate student community and the Palestinian scholars who engaged her and other young Palestinians in important intellectual debates; by local Palestinian community organizers in Chicago and progressive student alliances on campus; and among U.S.-based internationalist and feminist movements. These networks enabled GUPS members to be anchored in a much larger environment that strengthened their politicization.⁴⁶

In the late 1980s, the U.S. GUPS began its slow decline in parallel with a series of crises that shook the PLO and resulted in the decline of transnational Palestinian grassroots organizations, including the General Union of Palestinian Women and others. The PLO's diminishment was prompted by numerous factors, including the 1989 collapse of the Soviet Bloc, which had been a steady and significant source of support and aid; the 1991 Gulf War that led Arab countries to radically slash funding or cut it altogether; and the new leadership that emerged organically from the streets of Gaza and the West Bank during the First Intifada. Many Palestinian unions in the diaspora all but closed during the period between the Gulf War and the signing of the Oslo Accords. Nadine Naber's analysis of political organizing and cultural revival programs by Arab leftist activists in the Bay Area in the late 1980s demonstrates the extent of the Oslo Accords' impact on the U.S. diasporic organizing. According to Naber, "Bay Area activists argued that the Oslo Accords crushed the Palestinian movement in Palestine, eventually leading to a similar diminution in the United States and Bay Area."⁴⁷

It was not only student/youth organizations that were rendered irrelevant by Oslo but the broader grassroots infrastructure and spirit of collective resistance that had long given ordinary Palestinians and Arabs, wherever they resided, a meaningful role in the struggle. After the signing of the accords, only a few GUPS chapters remained active in the United States, but they were disconnected from the history out of which the organization was born, and they grew estranged from the few overseas chapters that survived the collapse, such as those in Greece, France, and Chile.⁴⁸ Not until 2007 was one U.S.-based chapter reintegrated into this history by participating in a transnational convening of the then newly founded PYN in coordination with GUPS-France.

Discord, Dissolution, and Transnational Politics

From 2006 to 2011, PYN engaged in a collective political process to define the nature of the struggle and diagnose the multiple layers of crisis Palestinians faced both historically and in the contemporary period. In 2011, PYN transformed into PYM during its second international general assembly, held in Istanbul,⁴⁹ where the organization prepared to issue a set of political articulations drawing on the consensus generated by its pluralistic constituency. In Trémissac, France, in 2011, at a three-week summer school devoted to synthesizing the political lessons to be drawn from previous years of organizing into a well-formulated set of internal position papers, youth leaders challenged the nationalist confines of their political framework: how might the 2011 Arab revolutions/uprisings and related regional developments affect Palestine, they asked, and how could Palestinian organizing serve to bring about justice and freedom for the Arab masses struggling against authoritarianism, political repression, neo-imperialism, and capitalist warfare? On the basis of those deliberations, PYM expanded its membership to Arab youth and organized the 2012 Arab Youth Conference for Liberation and Dignity (AYCLD) in Tunisia, which was sponsored by the office of President Mohamed Moncef Marzouki.⁵⁰ There, 150 Palestinian and Arab youth discussed the linkages between the liberation of Palestine and the realization of justice, freedom, decolonization, and dignity for the Arab masses through grassroots mobilizations.

The international PYM then entered a difficult phase when regional developments outpaced the group's ability to respond, which impacted morale in many chapters.⁵¹ Additionally, the leadership of the movement struggled to navigate the broader Arab political landscape riven by the question of Syria. In the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority (PA) had quickly suppressed emerging youth movements sparked by the Arab uprisings, which demanded an end to the split in national unity and to security cooperation between the PA and Israel in an attempt to break the Oslo deadlock.⁵² As Arab youth in the region attempted to overthrow repressive regimes, many Palestinians were celebrating the (symbolic) recognition of Palestine at the United Nations, and by the end of 2012, the opportunity that the Arab uprisings had presented for bringing about significant change had passed.

Shifts in the broader Palestinian/Arab political arena, coupled with ideological strife within the politically and financially precarious organization, led to the slow decline of PYM's activities internationally. Following the 2014 Third International General Assembly in Amman, PYM's transnational leadership agreed to shift their focus from transnational coordination to the gradual work of base building in translocal contexts. Across the world, chapters ground to a halt, beset by a monumental sense of political despair and insufficient resources, which only further paralyzed the international PYM's political and executive functions. While the power reconfigurations precipitated by the 2011 Arab uprisings resulted in the slow liquidation of PYM's transnational body, the U.S. PYM did not falter but instead grew—something that stands in distinct contrast to the organizational experience of OAS and GUPS, whose fortunes declined with the severance of their transnational ties.

Bitar recalls that OAS was greatly impacted by the fallout from the 1967 war: “Many supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood withdrew from OAS and joined the Muslim Student Association,” while “supporters of the Palestinian [national] resistance came forward to play a leading role” within OAS just as fedayeen militancy gained ground in the region.⁵³ OAS remained committed to the complete end of U.S. imperialist intervention in the region and

to the liberation of Palestine. During the 1970s, OAS grew to over seven thousand members, and it held one of its largest and most politically charged national conventions at the University of California, Berkeley in 1975.⁵⁴ Political discord grew within the organization at the same time, reflecting the growing political rifts between rival Arab states and mirroring regional power shifts. During the 1975 convention, a resolution was adopted, basically stating that “any compromise that works against people of the Gulf would be rejected.”⁵⁵ The resolution was to protest agreements recently reached between Iraq and Iran that left supporters of the Iraqi Baath Party open to attack by their OAS counterparts, since they were aligned with the government of Iraq, leading to their temporary withdrawal from the organization’s leadership positions.

While Palestine had long been central to OAS, it became one of the only unifying issues around which Arab students could continue political activity without fearing repression upon returning home. Bitar explains, “It was easier to join the student struggle over here under the banner of Palestine than to bring their [own] issues [to the fore] because they would pay the price back home.”⁵⁶ In discussing the complexity of navigating debates over Arab issues in OAS during this period, Sadeq Zarour, a former member of the local executive board of the East Lansing chapter (1973–74), argues that while OAS welcomed internal debate and critique of Arab regimes as well as the Palestinian national movement, there was always a strategic calculus at play: “We were walking a fine line between being vocal about the Arab causes, freedom of Arab people, denouncing the dictatorships in general, the monarchies that were rotting in the Gulf area and saying so in public. . . . We could not just go ahead and do a workshop on the struggles of the Arab people in the Gulf area against the internal dictators and monarchs. . . . There were a lot of Saudi students, for example, who were against what was going on in Saudi Arabia, but they could not go public.”⁵⁷

Zarour attests that the authoritarian character of Arab regimes limited OAS members’ ability to openly share their political perspectives in the public arena or reach consensus with other OAS constituents because of the imminent risk such declarations exposed them to upon returning to their home countries. In one incident, he recalls, Libyan students who spoke out against the regime of Mu’ammār Qaddafi had their scholarships revoked. This did not mean that OAS never issued public critiques or positions; Abdulhadi recalls that Palestinian students often read the critical statements of the Gulf monarchies to protect students from the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf from retaliation by these regimes. In another example of students dissenting against the corruption or oppression of Arab regimes recounted by Zarour, one issue of *al-Masira*, the OAS newsletter, sharply criticized Yasir Arafat’s post-1974 political trajectory.⁵⁸ Zarour adds: “Deep down inside it was obvious we supported the freedom of everyone at that time who were struggling for independence or liberation, including some African causes—we were supporting the people of Mozambique and Zimbabwe/Rhodesia and South Africa.”⁵⁹ But Zarour recalls that he and his student comrades had no illusions about the possibility of some revolutionary actors in Third World movements going back to their homelands to become dictators themselves.

Zarour’s and Bitar’s analyses index some of OAS’s challenges during this time. On the one hand, Palestine as a unifying, anti-colonial catalyst sustained the praxis of a broad Arab student movement, which nonetheless experienced many fissures due to political and ideological fractures in the Arab world. On the other hand, because Palestine’s liberation and Arab regional politics were intricately linked, the perceived need to subordinate other Arab issues to the

question of Palestine partially resulted in OAS's eventual dissolution as a broader Arab national formation in the United States.

By the late 1970s, OAS reached an internal impasse that contributed to its eventual dissolution. At the 1977 convening in Michigan, Noor recounts, Arab nationalist and Fatah students fought over the question of inviting a senior Fatah leader to give the keynote address.⁶⁰ By 1979, contested viewpoints on the impending Iraq-Iran war and support for the Iranian Revolution also became sources of intense debate. Monadel Herzallah avers that “we were calling ourselves a liberation movement . . . we could not stand silent as people were revolting against an oppressive regime,” and yet Iraqi Baath supporters were opposed to the adoption of an OAS resolution in solidarity with the 1979 Iranian Revolution.⁶¹

The persistence of these internal conflicts led OAS to host its final convening in Youngstown, Ohio, in 1980. While there are contested accounts regarding the cause, process, and timeline of the organization's dissolution and GUPS's emergence, it is clear that Fatah supporters withdrew from OAS and established a U.S. chapter of GUPS the same year OAS held its final conference. Herzallah believes that the split and the resignation of many Palestinians from OAS “devastated the Arab students”⁶² and left them politically homeless since GUPS was a specifically *Palestinian* formation. There was an attempt to reorganize OAS by creating a new confederation of national Arab groups at a regional level. But Palestine had been the glue that kept the diverse Arab membership together, and absent the Palestinian issue, the confederation faltered. Only GUPS survived.⁶³ Bitar describes the attempt to form a new Arab umbrella organization as a form of “wishful thinking,” something that is echoed in Abdulhadi's initial reluctance about the formation of GUPS. Abdulhadi says she was hesitant about an organization that was “narrowly focused on Palestinian nationalism,” believing it “undermined the Arabness of the Palestinian cause.”⁶⁴

Others saw value in the creation of GUPS. Tayeb Abdulrahim, the chairperson of the San Francisco State University GUPS chapter (1981–83), argues that the decision for Palestinians to separate was right because the divisions within the Arab political arena were too great for Palestinians to bear. Abdulrahim believes that OAS did not foster sufficient space for other Arabs to engage their own issues and that forming independent national groups would be useful. He did, however, value the important foundation OAS laid for the emergence of GUPS.⁶⁵ Such sentiments are echoed in the first issue of a U.S. GUPS publication titled *Filastinuna* attributing the organization's birth to the groundwork laid by OAS in earlier decades. It emphasized that the creation of GUPS was not meant to undermine the political importance of OAS, but that it was essential to tend to the particularity of the Palestinian experience.⁶⁶ By 1981, OAS ceased to exist on a national level, and GUPS became the new national student vehicle that housed Palestinians.

In 1974, the PLO issued its ten point program, signaling its turn to diplomatic channels to advance the liberation of Palestine. In 1975, it became embroiled in the outbreak of what was to be a seventeen-year war in Lebanon. And by 1978, Egypt was negotiating a peace deal with Israel that culminated in the Camp David Accords. These developments gestured to the decline of Arab nationalism as a powerful ideological force in the Arab world. As they mounted in the region, ideological and strategic rifts also manifested in diasporic organizing, and although OAS was still growing during this period, the Palestinian struggle became one of the sole issues that garnered consensus.

While OAS was a student formation that revered Arab nationalist ideals, it was greatly affected by the rise of Islamist groups at the end of the 1970s and the growing fragmentation

of the Palestinian national movement prior to the PLO's expulsion from its base in Lebanon in 1982. In contrast, PYM started as a non-ideologically bound Palestinian formation, which pivoted toward a more revolutionary outlook in 2011, following the Arab uprisings. In their search to mobilize within an overarching Arab political framework, however, the two organizations shared a common characteristic, although the challenges of operating within that paradigm eventually led to their dissolution. As described above, the region's emerging sociopolitical trends slowly extinguished Arab nationalist ideals, the bedrock of OAS's twenty-eight years of operation. PYM, despite the bold visionary leap seeking to deepen the linkages between the Palestinian struggle and Arab popular demands for freedom, the geopolitics at play in the region and the absence of a welcoming political landscape limited the group's ability to pursue its activities, and the international PYM dissolved soon afterwards. For both groups, Palestinian liberation was inseparable from the liberation of the Arab world, yet OAS and PYM were similarly unable to maintain their internal unity in the face of mounting political fractures in the Arab world and the threat of repression by Arab regimes.

Similar forms of discord sent GUPS into a state of organizational paralysis. Although GUPS was founded as early as 1959, its emergence in the United States in 1980 was directly linked to the changes in the political order in the Arab region. Like OAS, GUPS attracted students of diverse social and ideological backgrounds, but it was restricted to Palestinian students. At first glance, it appears that GUPS was predominantly concerned with and affected by the Palestinian political terrain rather than the Arab political arena. However, a deeper look at such fissures reveals that rivalries between Palestinian factions also hinged on regional actors and events.

The pluralism of GUPS's membership, while healthy, also became its undoing as rival political trends competed for domination of the organization, in a similar vein to what had happened in OAS. "We spent half our time strategizing on how to compete with each other over elections rather than concentrating on our activism," Abdulrahim avers, while Noor affirms that the factionalist tendencies resulted in poor behavior of a "childish" character.⁶⁷ Herzallah reads these factional disputes as evidence of the students' deep passion for their struggle and serious belief that their national aspirations, as expressed within GUPS, could influence the overall trajectory of the Palestinian national movement.

Working in a space with such varied political orientations became especially challenging following the PLO's August 1982 withdrawal from Beirut during the Israeli invasion and the subsequent War of the Camps. The PLO's forced exodus from Lebanon drastically affected the PLO's infrastructure across the world.⁶⁸ No longer able to maintain a centralized resistance struggle in a frontline country, the PLO was increasingly co-opted into the diplomatic track, and its grassroots unions lost momentum and power. GUPS chapters across the world stagnated, even as GUPS in the United States was just starting up and quite active. Many Palestinians, including Fatah adherents, grew disillusioned with what they viewed as Arafat's failure to lead the military struggle effectively, which led to monumental losses, as well as atrocities, and eventually the PLO's expulsion from Lebanon to Tunisia.⁶⁹

In 1983, Fatah was riven by a deep internal split that resulted in an insurgency by several senior cadres against what they viewed as Arafat's corruption and nepotism and his betrayal of the masses. The insurgency led to the formation of the dissident group, Fatah al-Intifada, otherwise known as the Abu Musa group. After declaring its solidarity with the insurgency, the U.S. GUPS was singled out for punishment.⁷⁰ "That did not make Yasir Arafat happy,"

Noor recalls. “So, the decision was made in Tunis to dismantle [the U.S.] GUPS because they could not change our mind to support Arafat and his group.” A Fatah delegation sent to the United States to investigate the organization’s dissenting stance “put us on trial,” according to Noor, and although the PLO disavowed the U.S. GUPS, the organization managed to remain active.⁷¹ In 1986 it held a national conference in Austin, Texas, at which the famed Palestinian artist Naji al-Ali was the keynote speaker. This was a milestone because al-Ali was regarded as one of the most critical voices within the Palestinian intelligentsia to call out the corruption, nepotism, and questionable ethics of senior Palestinian leaders. The selection of al-Ali as their keynote speaker was a brave gesture on the part of the U.S. GUPS against the established leadership, but the organization was ultimately unable to sustain itself.

In 1986, various attempts were made to reconfigure the U.S. GUPS with Arafat loyalists at the helm, but these were short-lived and sporadic. Some of the original GUPS chapters, both campus and city based, tried to carry on with their activities, particularly to leverage activism in support of the First Intifada that broke out in 1987. In 1988, GUPS held one of its final national conventions, electing U.S.-based delegates to attend the international GUPS convention. The Palestinian struggle was undergoing major changes during this time, and notwithstanding continued GUPS coordination nationally and internationally, there was no circumventing the PLO’s determination to join what had become known as the peace process. By the late 1980s, the U.S. GUPS had dissolved as a national vehicle, like its sister groups worldwide.

The experiences of both GUPS and OAS in the United States demonstrate how fracturing divisions within transnational Arab/Palestinian politics effectively destabilized the organizations’ abilities to operate within a centralized structure in the United States. Whether the end of Arab nationalism as a political force and the rise of powerful Islamic movements following the 1979 Iranian Revolution, or the conflicts within the PLO, its exodus from Lebanon, and the disappearance of its Eastern Bloc sponsors, it was the transnational contexts in which GUPS and OAS operated that ushered in their demise.

While the 2012 AYCLD gestured to the change that the Arab uprisings represented, the international PYM did not have the ability to navigate the resulting political minefield that stoked internal division, causing serious political fatigue and eventually the international organization’s paralysis. That notwithstanding, the U.S. chapter survived and expanded both its base and its programming. National Executive Board member Ramah Awad attributes this accomplishment to the organization’s relative independence from developments and institutions in the Palestinian and Arab political arenas, despite the concomitant challenge of maintaining the diaspora youth’s consistent attachment to the struggle.⁷² Awad also notes that political conditions in the United States were ripe for new youth formations to emerge as the broader U.S.-based Palestine solidarity movement had grown in influence, resources, and size.⁷³ By 2010, the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) campaign had taken off and SJP chapters were proliferating throughout the nation’s campuses, creating a welcoming climate for the U.S. PYM.

Hatem Mohtaseb, the organization’s general coordinator, also sheds light on why the transnational organization’s dissolution did not disrupt the growth of the U.S.-based chapter.

Our removal from the Palestinian formal political institutions allowed us to continue to grow. . . . I think it has to do with the larger political changes of the struggle since Oslo and the shifts in strategy of the Palestinian leadership. Because they [the leadership] have emphasized the role of diplomacy, and following the rise of movements like BDS, America and Europe became more

important battlegrounds for the Palestinian struggle . . . like this is the front lines of the battle . . . in the past, it was the [refugee] camp and the occupied homeland that was considered first in line for the struggle. So, this has affected the need for a stronger Palestine movement in the U.S., and the movement has grown.⁷⁴

As Mohtaseb suggests, the reconfigurations ushered in by Oslo undermined Palestinians' grassroots power but paradoxically shifted the center of gravity to the international arena because the question of Palestine was now primarily being advanced through diplomatic means, including international law and rights-based advocacy, as well as the power of narrative. Mohtaseb's comments also single out characteristics specifically associated with the new generation of youth organizers in the United States and how this has been instrumental to the growth of the U.S.-based chapter.

I really do think there's a freedom of movement in the U.S. that youth back home don't have, both political movement and physical mobility. . . . These freedoms are important, and in Palestine and the Arab countries that situation has only gotten worse. . . . And the fact that they [PYM members] are born in the U.S., there is something to be said about the movement's relationship with other communities too. PYM is surrounded by other movements like us, Filipino, Native, Black, Latino, movements still fighting [a] political struggle—there is a space where lessons and resources can be exchanged and where PYM can be strengthened.⁷⁵

Attesting to the strength of joint-struggle cooperation as an asset that contributes to the sustainability of the U.S. PYM, Mohtaseb also recognizes distinct forms of privilege Palestinian youth organizers have in the United States, something denied to their counterparts in Palestine and the Arab region. For Mohtaseb, such privilege warrants a higher sense of responsibility among youth in the U.S. diaspora.

Although transnational and Arab/Palestinian regional politics have stoked political discord in student movements in the United States historically, the relationship between Palestinian students and youth movements with transnational Palestinian/Arab politics shifted radically following Oslo. The membership of the U.S. PYM maintained emotional bonds to what many consider their homeland and its cause, despite largely comprising youth with no sense of obligation to the Palestinian political establishment and despite the absence of a transnational organized liberation project. This detachment from transnational Palestinian/Arab politics does not diminish these youth's commitment *as Palestinians/Arabs* residing in physical dislocation vis-à-vis their struggle to rebuilding relationships with their counterparts in Palestine and the broader region.

As PYM evolves in the United States, youth acquire the necessary knowledge of movement building through the work. Among the most important areas of work is the organizational and political education PYM offers a new generation severed from the transnational histories and relationships that conditioned the organizing of past generations. As youth engage in community, student, joint-struggle, and transnational organizing, they learn about GUPS, OAS, and various local, community-based unions, associations, and groups, and their transnational linkages and influences. It is incumbent on these youth organizers in turn to scale these lessons up to contemporary realities to chart new, relevant paths forward.

As Palestinian youth find ways to retrieve these histories, they are learning to build upon lessons from previous generations rather than start from scratch, demonstrating the vitality of understanding the Palestinian struggle within a historical continuum, despite temporal and spatial ruptures. With an eye to how these histories inform the present, a new generation of

youth organizers is recognizing how local and national organizing in the United States hinges on—and is molded by—transnational reconfigurations of the Palestinian/Arab struggle. Scholarship on Palestine can make use of what readily exists to help new movements overcome the fragmentation of Palestinian social and political movement history across time and space. Far from a novel scholarly or movement praxis, this pedagogical approach has *always* been a quintessential component of *every* generation's national burden.

About the Author

Loubna Qutami is an assistant professor in the department of Asian American Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. Qutami is PYM's former international general coordinator and also a former executive director of San Francisco's Arab Cultural and Community Center.

Endnotes

1. While "transnational" commonly refers to cross-national bonds between different groups, I utilize the term specifically as it refers to sociopolitical cooperation among Palestinians scattered across different nation-states.
2. As Karma Nabulsi states, "Neither the use of the term diaspora nor that of 'refugees' is sufficient to capture the totality of the current Palestinian dispersal, and the different legal statuses recognized under international law." See Karma Nabulsi, "Justice as the Way Forward," in *Where Now for Palestine? The Demise of the Two-State Solution*, ed. Jamil Hilal (London: Zed Books, 2007), p. 251.
3. See Sameer Y. Abraham and Nabeel Abraham, eds., *Arabs in the New World: Studies on Arab-American Communities* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University, Center for Urban Studies, 1983); Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber, eds., *Race and Arab Americans before and after 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008); Steven Salaita, *Anti-Arab Racism in the USA: Where It Comes from and What It Means for Politics Today* (London: Pluto Press, 2006); and Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Alsultany, and Nadine Naber, eds., *Arab and Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, and Belonging* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011).
4. Louise A. Cainkar, *Homeland Insecurity: The Arab American and Muslim American Experience after 9/11* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009).
5. Today, the largest and most active movement for a free Palestine in the United States has been developed through the activities of over two hundred chapters of SJP and its national vehicle (National SJP). While the work of National SJP has been monumental in advocating for Palestinian freedom, the organization largely comprises non-Palestinian students. Because this article examines the relationship between Palestinians in the United States and transnational Palestinian/Arab politics, I believe PYM is a more fitting comparison to OAS and GUPS.
6. For more on activist ethnography, see Rabab Abdulhadi, "Activism and Exile: Palestinianness and the Politics of Solidarity," in *Local Action: Cultural Activism, Power, and Public Life in America*, ed. Melissa Checker and Maggie Fishman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 231–54.
7. I am indebted to many organizers and thinkers within PYM who have contributed to the theoretical and political optics that have informed my scholarly and pedagogical pursuits. For more on my own scholar-activist research praxis and PYM, see Loubna Noor Qutami, "Before the New Sky: Protracted Struggle and Possibilities of the Beyond for Palestine's New Youth Movement" (PhD diss., University of California, Riverside, 2018), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6kn3k8jk>.
8. Omar Jabary Salamanca et al., "Past Is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine," *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): pp. 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2012.10648823>; Rana Barakat,

- “Writing/Righting Palestine Studies: Settler Colonialism, Indigenous Sovereignty and Resisting the Ghost(s) of History,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 8, no. 3 (2018): pp. 349–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2017.1300048>; Rabab Abdulhadi, “Israeli Settler Colonialism in Context: Celebrating (Palestinian) Death and Normalizing Gender and Sexual Violence,” *Feminist Studies* 45, nos. 2–3 (2019): pp. 541–73, <https://doi.org/10.15767/feministstudies.45.2-3.0541>.
9. While ample scholarship on Oslo has traced its colossal effects within Palestine and its devastation of the PLO’s transnational and national infrastructure, few works have shed light on the ways it cemented the devastation of Palestinian grassroots, collective organizing infrastructure in the far diaspora, including in the United States.
 10. Mezna Qato, “Forms of Retrieval: Social Scale, Citation, and the Archive on the Palestinian Left,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 51, no. 2 (2019): pp. 312–15, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743819000096>.
 11. Qato, “Forms of Retrieval.”
 12. See Omnia El Shakry, “‘History without Documents’: The Vexed Archives of Decolonization in the Middle East,” *The American Historical Review* 120, no. 3 (June 2015): pp. 920–34, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/120.3.920>; Rosemary Sayigh, “Oral History, Colonialist Dispossession, and the State: The Palestinian Case,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 5, no. 3 (2015): pp. 193–204, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2014.955945>; Maha Nassar, *Brothers Apart: Palestinian Citizens of Israel and the Arab World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017); Lila Abu-Lughod, “Palestine: Doing Things with Archives,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 38, no. 1 (May 2018): pp. 3–5, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/696615>.
 13. George Bitar (member of OAS’s national executive committee in 1976, 1978, and 1980), in discussion with the author, December 2020.
 14. PYM, “PYM Youth,” position paper, 2012, internal document.
 15. Mohammed Nabulsi (National Executive Board member of PYM, 2017–present), email correspondence with the author, September 2020.
 16. Nabulsi, email correspondence with the author.
 17. George Khoury (member of the U.S. Palestinian Community Network), in discussion with the PYM-Michigan chapter, 2019.
 18. In January 2006, the PA held its first democratic parliamentary elections under pressure from the United States and Israel. In a surprising turn of events, Hamas achieved a monumental victory, signaling the dissatisfaction of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories with Fatah’s leadership. Following the elections, the United States, Europe, and Israel issued sanctions on Palestine, which was almost entirely dependent on aid as a result of the neoliberal economic reforms that went into effect post Oslo. Deteriorating economic conditions and political fragmentation since Oslo have caused major fractures within Palestinian political life. The rivalry of the factions eventually resulted in a Fatah takeover of the PA in the West Bank and a Hamas takeover of the PA in the Gaza Strip. For more on the elections, see Mahjoob Zweiri, “The Hamas Victory: Shifting Sands or Major Earthquake?” *Third World Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (2006): pp. 675–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590600720876>. For more on aid dependency in Palestine following Oslo, see Tariq Dana, “The Structural Transformation of Palestinian Civil Society: Key Paradigm Shifts,” *Middle East Critique* 24, no. 2 (2015): pp. 191–210, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2015.1017968>.
 19. See “Al-Jazeera TV Palestinian Youth Network France-2007,” posted by Nemcert, 14 May 2008, YouTube video, 5:30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EVBrHMGUKE>.
 20. Ruba Salih, Lynn Welchman, and Elena Zambelli, *The Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM): Transnational Politics, Inter/national Frameworks and Intersectional Alliances*, Power2Youth, working paper no. 27, April 2017, http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/p2y_27.pdf.
 21. Hani J. Bawardi, *The Making of Arab Americans: From Syrian Nationalism to U.S. Citizenship* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2014).
 22. Bawardi, *The Making of Arab Americans*.
 23. Laurie A. Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World: Institution Building and the Search for State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

24. "Politicians: George Habash," Palestinian Journeys, accessed 28 March 2021, <https://www.pal-journeys.org/en/biography/6564/george-habash>.
25. Mjriam Abu Samra, "Palestinian Transnational Student Movements, 1948–1982: A Study on Popular Mobilisation" (PhD diss., Oxford University, forthcoming).
26. Pamela E. Pennock, *The Rise of the Arab American Left: Activists, Allies, and Their Fight against Imperialism and Racism, 1960s–1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), p. 59.
27. Pennock, *The Rise of the Arab American Left*, p. 59.
28. Pennock, *The Rise of the Arab American Left*, p. 59.
29. Camilia Odeh (member of OAS at Michigan State University, 1972–76), in discussion with the author, December 2020.
30. Nabil Shaath (OAS president, 1963–64), in discussion with the author, November 2020.
31. Abu Samra, "Palestinian Transnational Student Movements."
32. Shaath, in discussion with the author.
33. Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World*.
34. Shaath, in discussion with the author.
35. Shaath, in discussion with the author.
36. Shaath, in discussion with the author.
37. Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 41.
38. Pamela Pennock, "Third World Alliances: Arab American Activists at American Universities, 1967–1973," *Mashriq and Mahjar* 2, no. 2 (2014): pp. 55–78, <https://doi.org/10.24847/22i2014.40>.
39. Bitar, in discussion with the author.
40. Ismail Noor (former GUPS president), in discussion with the author, May 2020.
41. Noor, in discussion with the author.
42. "G.U.P.S Members: July 1983," from the private collection of Monadel Herzallah (member of the executive board of the OAS-Sacramento chapter, 1978–80), San Francisco, CA, accessed 6 June 2018.
43. Gloria Khoury (member of the San Francisco local executive board 1985–90), in discussion with the author, April 2020.
44. Noor, in discussion with the author.
45. The formation of Al-Awda: the Palestine Right to Return Coalition in 1999 and of the United States Palestinian Communities Network in 2006 are two examples of community-based initiatives that launched to reverse the crisis in the political life of the U.S.-based Palestinian diaspora.
46. Rabab Abdulhadi (member of GUPS leadership at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1982), in discussion with the author, December 2020.
47. Nadine Naber, *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics, and Activism* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), p. 179.
48. Saliem Shehadeh, "Social History of the General Union of Palestine Students," (MA diss., San Francisco State University, 2017).
49. For a comparative assessment of transnational youth movements at this time, see Mark Muhannad Ayyash, "Carrying the Burden of Past Violences: A Comparative Analysis of Transnational Palestinian Youth Movements," *Sikh Formations* 9, no. 3 (2013): pp. 279–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17448727.2013.861695>.
50. To hear the concluding remarks by PYM members at the Tunis convening, see "Arab Youth Conference for Liberation and Dignity P1," posted by AYCLD, 30 December 2012, YouTube video, 2:40, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzvVuo_TTbE.
51. Qutami, "Before the New Sky."
52. For more on the 2011 Palestinian youth movements, see Ibrahim Natil, "Palestinian Youth Movements and 'the Arab Spring,'" in *Non-Western Social Movements and Participatory Democracy*, ed. Ekim Arbatli and Dina Rosenberg (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017), pp. 33–42; Noura Erakat, "Palestinian Youth: New Movement, New Borders," *Al Jazeera*, 4 May 2011, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/05/201153101231834961.html>.

53. The regional events of the late 1960s had a profound impact on the project of Arab nationalism, and they stoked deep ideological conflicts within OAS. Partly as a result of the Arab side's humiliating defeat in the 1967 war, Palestinian guerrilla groups—*fedayeen*—gained popular legitimacy, especially among the Arab masses seeking leadership with a vision and strategy to liberate Palestine. The Arab states, for their part, often instrumentalized the *fedayeen*'s militancy to shore up their own legitimacy. While critical for the launch of the Palestinian revolution led by the *fedayeen*, these developments also signified the weakening of Arab nationalism and the Palestinian nationalization of the struggle. See Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).
54. Sadeg Zarour (member of the executive board of the GUPS-East Lansing chapter, 1973–74), in discussion with the author, December 2020.
55. Bitar, in discussion with the author.
56. Bitar, in discussion with the author.
57. Zarour, in discussion with the author.
58. Zarour, in discussion with the author.
59. Zarour, in discussion with the author.
60. Noor, in discussion with the author.
61. Monadel Herzallah, (member of the executive board of the OAS-Sacramento chapter, 1978–80), in discussion with the author, June 2018.
62. Herzallah, in discussion with the author.
63. Bitar, in discussion with the author.
64. Abdulhadi, in discussion with the author.
65. Tayeb Abdulrahim (chairperson and secretary of the Office of GUPS at San Francisco State University, 1981–83), in discussion with the author, March 2020.
66. “G.U.P.S. Second Conference,” *Filastinuna*, 26–28 June 1981, private collection of Monadel Herzallah, San Francisco, CA, accessed 6 June 2018.
67. Noor, in discussion with the author.
68. Abu Samra, “Palestinian Transnational Student Movements.”
69. Noor, in discussion with the author.
70. Noor, in discussion with the author.
71. Noor, in discussion with the author.
72. Ramah Awad (member of the PYM National Executive Board, 2019–present), in discussion with the author, September 2020.
73. Awad, in discussion with the author.
74. Hatem Mohtaseb (PYM general coordinator, 2019–present), in discussion with the author, October 2020.
75. Mohtaseb, in discussion with the author.