

► **Abstract:**

This study deals with the practices and politics of the student movement at Birzeit University during first and second Intifada in occupied Palestine and their impact on Palestinian social structure. By studying the various activities of the student movement(s) at Birzeit University within the context of the Palestinian experience, this thesis explores a new lens by which to read social structure under the brutality of colonialism and occupation. The “disappearance” of Palestinian institutions in the first intifada as a direct result of Israeli occupation as well as the post-Oslo colonial constructions of “Palestinian” institutions in the second Intifada affected the role and nature of social movements over this historical period.

The aim of the study is to shed light on the practices of the student movement at Birzeit University in two different periods that are fundamentally important in contemporary Palestinian society, the periods of the first and second intifada. By discovering and investigating the quality of changes in the practices and the activities of the student movement, allowing for the possibility that the notion of change needs to itself be interrogated, this thesis explores the influence of the student movement practices on the Palestinian community by answering a series of questions such as: Were there any changes in the role of the student movement in the second Intifada compared to the first Intifada? Did the changes of the student movement practices indicate a decline in the social role of the student movement in the second intifada, or not? Was there any impact on the student movement practices -in the first and second intifadas- due to its association with the Palestinian political parties? To what extent did the practices of the student movement play a role in promoting/weakening the social fabric of Palestinian?

The importance of this study lies in it being among the few studies that have addressed the issue of student movements in Palestine as well as it being the only comprehensive comparative study among the previous studies. Also, this study is important because it is an attempt to concentrate on the practices of the student movement in a period where the Palestinian people lived under different manifestations of Israeli occupation. So this study

tries to disclose the influence of the student movement practices as a strengthening or weakening factor of the Palestinian social fabric among the circumstances that accompanied the student movement in Palestine. In particular, this study focuses on the nature of the student movement within one of the most important institutions of Palestinian society whose presence and importance remained relevant through both intifadas.

In this study a descriptive approach is used, the data collected through content analysis. The research was based on a set of important primary sources that examined the main ideas around which this research revolves. In addition to secondary sources and literature, the study's primary sources focused on interviews, original documents of student parties and the student council at Birzeit University, Palestinian newspapers (*al-Quds* and *al-Fajr*). .

The interviewed sample of the study was prospectively chosen. I preferred to choose a sample of individuals that possess a wealth of information, its asset being - no matter how small - the ability to give an in-depth understanding of the subject.

In this study I interviewed 30 people from following categories:

- Students in Birzeit university: active and non active in the student movements from both first and second Intifada periods.
- Teachers from the first and second intifada periods
- Employees from both the first and second intifada periods

The main conclusion of the study was that there are changes in the type of the student movement practices from a purposeful and organizational practice, to scattered activities and practices which resulted in deepening differences and problems among students and their movement. This, in retrospect, reflects the change of objectives of the student movement in the second intifada in comparison to the first intifada. This was clearly seen in the shift of its aims of education and patriotism in the first Intifada, and the importance of consolidating Palestinian identity before and during the first intifada to a set of fragmented demands and aims that do not fall under any clear goal in the second intifada.

The second result in this study is the absence of activities that worked to strengthen the social fabric in the first and second Intifada. For example, student movements in the second Intifada no longer focused on activities that were concerned with Palestinian women and families that lost one of its members by being killed or arrested by Israel soldiers as was case in the first Intifada.

In addition, this study concludes three main reasons for student movement dispersal:

First: Deepening of the gap between the university as an institution that, on the one hand, is supposed to be a location and space for knowledge production to further a society's intellect and between the student movement, which, on the other hand, is supposed to translate this knowledge through its practices towards achieving its social movement agenda.

Second: The nature of occupation changed under the quasi-state that preceded the second intifada created by Oslo Agreement. Since its inception, for seven years prior to the outbreak of the Intifada, the Palestinian Authority proceeded to unload social movements of its content, including the student movement.

Third: The absence of a united Palestinian leadership which led to the emergence of problems and differences between Palestinian political parties. This division between Palestinian parties as well as its intervention among the student movements body affected the student movement in Birzeit University in a negative way This negative intervention caused the dispersal of their aims, which resulted in the absence of institutional thinking and the existence of individual trading decisions producing a negative impact on the effectiveness of the activities of the student movement as a whole.

The final conclusion in this study is the contemporary absence of the concept of social movements of the student movement at Birzeit University. The changes of the student movement goals, from clear objectives during the first Intifada, to activities within no

domestic (and certainly not national) agenda during second intifada, showed us that there was a student movement in the first intifada, whereas it was absent in the second intifada. The mere presence of a specific goal of any group is the basis for any social movement.