

## CONSTRUCTING POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY: 1987—THE PALESTINIAN YEAR OF DISCONTENT\*

Eitan Y. Alimi<sup>†</sup>

*This article challenges the portrayal of the 1987 Palestinian Intifada as a spontaneous, sudden outburst of contention. Drawing on content analysis data obtained from several Palestinian print news media sources (N=84), it is suggested that a Palestinian shared perception regarding ripe conditions to rebel was constructed throughout 1987. The findings indicate that throughout 1987 there was (a) a significant gradual increase in calls for action and (b) a convergence among newspapers representing various political factions of the Palestinian movement regarding a framing process of an opportunity to act contentiously. Such findings support recent calls in social movement literature to integrate perceptual with structural aspects.*

Recent calls in the study of contentious politics have emphasized the need for harmonizing various research perspectives in the field, such as the role of perceptions with issues of mobilization (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, 2001; Aminzade, Goldstone, McAdam, Perry, Sewell, Tarrow, and Tilly, 2001). At the heart of these calls stands the idea of re-emphasizing the dynamics of contention. Instead of being preoccupied with the existence of specific factors, the researcher should be attentive to the analysis of processes. Such processes comprised of mechanisms of contention such as diffusion of ideas or innovative action by movement activists. By analyzing how specific mechanisms concatenate into broader processes, it is possible to capture how mobilization works over time and across places, and in different manifestations of contentious politics (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001).

The dynamics of contention research agenda focusing on processes and mechanisms (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, 2001; Aminzade, Goldstone, McAdam, Perry, Sewell, Tarrow, and Tilly, 2001) is important and impressive in scope, but the question remains as to the “back stage” subprocesses that can bring about the recurring features of a given mechanism in cycles of contention. For example, while activists’ attribution of threat or opportunity may be a common mechanism in a wide array of contentious episodes, it is important to probe the underlying actions and interactions that lead to such a collective attributions. These interactions, in themselves, can be contentious and should not be seen as invariant, especially when viewing social movement as a field of actors (Gamson and Meyer 1996). Thus, this article contributes to the study of contentious mechanisms by examining how social movement actors construct shared perceptions of conditions leading to increases or decreases in mobilization for action—the social construction of opportunity or threat.

To examine such processes, I shall use the case study of the “first” Palestinian *Intifada*, 1987-1992 (hereafter *Intifada*). Research that deals with the role of perceptions in the *Intifada*’s mobilization focus on Palestinian grassroots activists’ attempt to sustain the com-

---

\* I am indebted to William Gamson, Charlotte Ryan, Robert Kunovich, Diane Vaughan and Gadi Wolfsfeld for their valuable and insightful comments on earlier versions. I thank Dimitry Epstein and Sharon Ashkenazi for their assistance in conducting the research, and three anonymous *Mobilization* reviewers for their useful suggestions.

<sup>†</sup> Eitan Y. Alimi teaches on Political protest and political violence at the Political Science Department, the Hebrew University, e-mail: alimien@012.net.il.

mitment and fervor of their constituents through the use of serialized leaflets and graffiti (Mishal with Aharoni 1989; Nassar and Heacock 1990; Oliver and Steinberg 1993). Other research has examined the Palestinian insurgents' attempts to frame their struggle to Israelis through non-militant actions and peaceful messages (Abu-Amr 1988; Siniora 1988), and Israeli society's responses to these framings (Kaufman 1991; Tessler 1990). Still others have concentrated on Palestinian insurgents' framing of their struggle to Western news media and the international community and how these framing efforts affected the international community's attitudes towards the 1987 uprising (Gilboa 1993; Lederman 1992; Noakes and Wilkins 2002; Wolfsfeld 1997). Notwithstanding this scope of research, the issue of Palestinian activists' attempt to activate mobilization by constructing an "opportunity frame"—a shared perception of ripe conditions to act contentiously during the run-up to the *Intifada*—has been overlooked.

The possibility that Palestinians strategically framed the opportunity to act so as to trigger the uprising questions the common perception that the *Intifada* was a sudden outburst of a madding crowd. Indeed, much research on the *Intifada*'s timing promotes a volcano-like, spontaneous explanation (Bassiouni and Cankar 1989; Gilbar 1992; Shif and Yaari 1990; but also see Lesch 1990). Twenty years of Israeli occupation, so it is argued, caused profound and intolerable grievances and deep humiliation among the majority of Palestinians, resulting in indignation, frustration, and rage. Under such unbearable objective—and, equally important, subjective—conditions, it took only a spark to ignite the uprising. A truck accident at the Erez military checkpoint located at the outskirts of Gaza on December 8, 1987, resulting in the death of four Palestinians, is commonly identified as such a spark.

Some scholars, however, have looked closely at statistics on protest levels during the previous twenty years of occupation (1967-1987) and have identified a longer trajectory of Palestinian protest, calling into question the volcano-like imagery of the *Intifada* (Farsoun and Landis 1989; Tamari 1988; Alimi 2003). Others have noted that there was high level of contention throughout 1987, leading to the label, "the year of discontent," being applied to the entire year (Robinson 1997). Nevertheless, any attempt to examine how Palestinian insurgents may have constructed a shared opportunity frame for collective action during the run-up to the "first" *Intifada* is absent in the literature.

### CONSTRUCTING POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY

A focus on political opportunities has been for a long time the cornerstone of the political process model in social movement analysis (Eisinger 1973; McAdam 1999; Tarrow 1989, 1998; Tilly 1978). The key variable in this model is *political opportunity structure* (hereafter POS), elaborated by Doug McAdam to account for variations in contention and levels of support for the Black civil rights movement (1999 [1982]). McAdam showed how changes in political context interacted with other factors, such as the mobilization of resources, previously existing organizations, and the recognition of grievances and injustice, to explain the trajectory of the civil rights movement. Sidney Tarrow subsequently provided a working definition to POS. In his words, political opportunities are

consistent—but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national—dimensions of the political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics. By political constraints, I mean factors—like repression, but also like authorities' capacity to present a solid front to insurgents—that discourage contention. (Tarrow 1994: 83)

The logic of the political opportunity approach is that while contentious politics may *begin* in earnest when ordinary people collectively make claims on others—claims which if realized would affect those others' interests—the process is actually *triggered* when changing oppor-

tunities and constraints create *incentives* for social actors who lack resources on their own to increase contention.

Compelling as this logic is, there has been a growing recognition that structural changes must be interpreted as conducive and that shared definitions of political opportunities are socially constructed.<sup>1</sup> The focus on how movement members fashion shared understandings of their environment and of themselves for legitimating and motivating their actions has been the main thrust of the framing perspective. Drawing largely on the conceptual work of Goffman (1974), framing scholars call for the study of how, “by rendering events and occurrences meaningful, frames function to organize experiences and guide action, whether individual or collective” (Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford 1986: 464). Frames do not only function as a cognitive mechanism for selection between events or occurrences (i.e., on what to think), but also a cognitive mechanism that suggests *how to think about* events or occurrences (Benford and Snow 2000; Benford 1997; Klandermans 1997; Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988).

While the possible influence of political events and occurrences on framing processes—whether for reinvigorating the predominantly held frame or for engaging in a process of reframing—has been a recurring theme in the framing literature, conceptual and empirical integration of an opportunity structure approach with the framing perspective has tended to be the exception rather than the rule (with a few exceptions, see Diani 1996). However, it is essential that both approaches be brought together because, as Benford and Snow have observed, “the extent to which [opportunities] . . . constrain or facilitate collective action is partly contingent on how they are framed by movement actors as well as others” (2000: 631). Only recently has the promise in linking perceptual and structural analysis in the study of contentious politics started to take root.

Specifically, I have in mind the way that the dynamics of contention project has elaborated *processes* of contention and various cognitive, environmental, and relational *mechanisms* that specify the process-sensitive trajectories of contentious politics (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001; Aminzade et al. 2001). A central contentious process is *actor constitution*, i.e., “the constitution of new political actors and identities within contentious episodes” (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001: 314). A key mechanism of this process is “attribution of opportunity/threat.” According to McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly,

Rather than look upon “opportunities and threats” as objective structural factors, we see them as subject to attribution. No opportunity, however objectively open, will invite mobilization unless it is a) visible to potential challengers and b) perceived as an opportunity. (2001: 43)

This mechanism entails attentiveness to two factors: first, the influence of transformative events (McAdam and Sewell 2001) on activists’ sense of opportunity or threat in the context of mobilization for action; and second, an awareness of movement activists’ framing efforts to “assign meaning to or interpreting relevant events and conditions in ways intended to mobilize potential adherents” (Benford 1997: 415). Indeed, what links framing process and the temporal rhythm of a social movement is the function of events—rather than events themselves—in triggering collective interpretations about the potential or lack of potential for increasing mobilization (McAdam and Sewell 2001).

Whether or not movement members attribute opportunity or threat to events is contingent upon a process of social construction of shared perception. Specifically, events may serve as catalyst for triggering framing process by “*apparently* distilling and expressing the potential for insurgent action inherent in a particular environment” (McAdam and Sewell 2001: 119), thereby influencing the timing of contention. In such cases, opportunity or threat is not just objectively present for everyone to see but rather events or contentious episodes engender interpretative processes, resulting in the construction of a shared perception of opportunity or

threat, which in turn affects movement strategy for contention.

In the analysis that follows, I draw upon these theoretical insights in three ways. First, instead of focusing on the specific structure of political opportunities, I examine the public discourse inside the occupied territories during 1987 concerning possible Palestinian attribution of opportunity to trigger contention. Instead of a suggestive *post factum* analysis of how political opportunity influences insurgents' perceptions, my approach offers an analysis of these influences in the making. Second, I analyze this discourse over three consecutive waves of protest during 1987, thereby providing the possibility to capture a process-sensitive analysis of framing. Third, I focus on various organizations within the Palestinian movement by examining how their newspapers' coverage (each with its own declared political orientation) varied along the three waves of protest. In doing so, I offer a dynamic analysis of contention of various social movement "voices" among which convergence or divergence is possible as to how each constructed its preferred meaning to the situation.

## RESEARCH STRATEGY AND RATIONALE

My research relies on West Bank print news media in order to trace the construction of collective perceptions during the run-up to the "first" *Intifada*. The decision to use media discourse for measuring shared perceptions rests on a constructionist approach (Gamson and Modigliani 1989), according to which media discourse and public discourse are seen as two interacting systems. When analyzing media discourse, Gamson and Modigliani (1989) suggest that it is useful to focus on the relative prominence of a given media frame that not only casts attention to a specific issue, but also suggests how to think and what should be done about the issue at stake.

### *Why Palestinian Print News Media?*

Palestinian print news media in the occupied territories are the only systematic, available source of data on the public discourse during the period under examination. Upon their establishment during the early 1970s, Palestinian newspapers became an important asset in the development and propagation of national awareness where topics of liberation and identity were strongly emphasized, leading several scholars to label these newspapers as "mobilized" or "committed" media (Rekhess 1987; Shinar 1987). Indeed, for Najjar (1994) who studied the issue of mass media in Palestine, print media organizations became the central forum of internal Palestinian discourse within the occupied territories and a tool for liberation. This is especially true beginning in the summer of 1982, when the PLO went into exile. From that time onward, editors and journalists assumed greater autonomy and importance in political mobilization (Rekhess 1987). These print news media organizations coordinated the Palestinian debates and competed for the hearts and minds of less active Palestinians, while functioning under the Israeli censor's eye. In this sense, West Bank print media differ from PLO print media (e.g., *Filastin al-Thawra* [The Palestinian Revolution] or *Shu'un Filastiniya* [Palestinian Affairs]) that were based outside the occupied territories and tended to reflect issues and concerns of the PLO and Palestinian nationalism broadly defined.

Each chosen newspaper was oriented to one of the Palestinian political organizations, a fact that enabled me not only to assess each political organization's agenda, but also capture trends within the Palestinian public discourse within the territories. Since these newspapers were in part used as resources for political mobilization, I assumed a strong level of congruence between their discourse and the public discourse of each paper's readers. Specifically, because each newspaper tended to reflect the political agenda its political sponsor, because journalists' and editors' practices and routines were influenced by these political orientations, and because each political organization attempted to resonate with as many

Palestinians as possible in the occupied territories, overlap between a given newspaper's point of view and that of its readers can be confidently assumed.

Caution is necessary in advancing claims about media discourse being the only forum of public discourse because of the repressive setting in which the newspapers operated. All operating newspapers experienced harsh restrictions under Israel's military censorship, including journalists' inability to travel, confiscation of materials, arrest of journalists, and so on (Falloon 1986). Still, Palestinian editors developed various techniques for coping with such constraints. For instance, they used translated Israeli articles that expressed what they wanted to promote (Shinar and Rubinstein 1987). Geographical relocation was another technique. Several newspapers relocated their offices to East Jerusalem where censorship regulations were less strict, as Israeli law had been implemented there by 1968, which meant political instead of military censorship (Hofnung 1991). It should also be stressed that commitment to the political affiliation of the various news organs was so strong that threats (e.g., deportation) did not prevent Palestinian editors or journalists from "taking the heat." Additionally, when a specific newspaper was banned in the occupied territories, it was often still available in East Jerusalem. On such occasions, the latest news continued to reach the occupied territories through the oral culture of the Palestinians whereby news was collectively shared in public gatherings and thoroughly discussed (Ayalon 2000; Longrigg and Stoakes 1970). Such social ritual compensated for the relatively narrow scope of distribution of the chosen newspapers.

#### *Data and Sample*

By obtaining data from a variety of newspapers, the ability to cover a wide array of "voices" increases substantially. One is also in a position to trace the development of internal discourse on the eve of the *Intifada* and follow trends of agreement and disagreement among factions in the Palestinian movement.

The four newspapers used in the study are *al-Sha'ab* (The People) representing the radical factions inside the PLO, the Fatah organ *al-Fajr* (The Dawn) representing the more conservative factions inside the PLO, the traditionally pro-Jordanian *al-Kuds* (Jerusalem),<sup>2</sup> and *al-Ahad* (The Covenant), a news organ of the Islamic organization, the Hezbollah. With the exception of *al-Ahad*, the newspapers were published and distributed inside the territories and/or East Jerusalem. The first three were published on a daily basis with only few rare exceptions and were the most widely distributed newspapers in the territories, with an overall distribution of approximately 35,000 readers per day (Benvenisti 1987; Najjer 1994; Rekhess 1987; Shinar and Rubinstein 1987). They also were easily available for research. In contrast, Hezbollah's news organ *al-Ahad* was published on a weekly basis and affiliated with a political organization located outside the territories. Even though it was not an integral part of the Palestinian movement, I used it because it was important to include the voice of one of the radical Islamic movements. Hezbollah's ideology was similar to Islamic Jihad's, both adopting the model of the Iranian revolution of 1979. Copies of *al-Ahad* were also readily available for research purposes.

The three protest waves began on May 7, October 7, and December 8.<sup>3</sup> Each protest wave represented an intense period (more than three days) of clashes and involved a variety of incidents such as strikes, demonstrations, and terrorist attacks. I treated the waves of protest as time frames for measuring a movement's attempts to activate mobilization through discourse—a specific public discourse dealing with attribution of opportunity or threat. By deciding to analyze a series of consecutive waves of protest, focusing on the subsequent media coverage of each (see below), I structured the research in such a way as to analyze possible changes in media discourse, reflecting changes in public discourse and permitting comparison between various voices in the Palestinian movement. I chose the December wave, commonly dated as the outburst of the *Intifada*, as the baseline for comparison to see if there are sig-

nificant differences with the previous waves.

Following each protest wave, I randomly sampled the front pages of the three territory-based newspapers for one week of coverage, adding up to thirty-three issues. For the fourth newspaper, Hezbollah's *al-Ahad*, since it was published on a weekly basis, I sampled the two ensuing issues published after each wave of protest. Thus, I provided a sufficient length of coverage in order to deal with the possibility that a wave might have occurred toward the end of a weekly coverage. I ended up with a sample of 84 items, upon which I performed several descriptive and inferential statistical procedures and tests of significance.

### *Measurement of Variables and Coding*

The unit of analysis was a combination of the headline, sub-head, and the first paragraph of each front-page article dealing with local confrontations. I decided on such a combination because I was interested in capturing more than just the information in headlines. The criterion for including a specific article was whether it dealt with the confrontations and their *direct* effects inside and outside the territories. Thus, articles dealing with Arab states' diplomatic accord, health issues in the territories, or Israeli financial issues were not included. The texts were content analyzed with an emphasis on coding the latent messages in the articles. The coding sheet had seventeen questions/variables. There were those that dealt with the latent messages such as "whose action is being emphasized" or "reference to the possibility of change," and those that dealt with manifest information such as "issue date" or the "main actor in an article." Finally, in interpreting the emergent discourse as constructed by the various newspapers also I followed Billig's suggestions to keep in mind that "an attitude in a favor of a position is always simultaneously a stance against the counter-position" (1995: 71) and to locate utterances in their social context.

I coded the content of all articles according to Gamson and Meyer's (1996) strategy of distinguishing between two basic framing packages: *rhetoric of action* and *rhetoric of reaction*. The authors suggest that the rhetoric of action package typically stresses three sub-themes: urgency, agency, and possibility. Similarly, the rhetoric of reaction package is typically comprised of three sub-themes: jeopardy, futility, and perverse effects. These sub-themes guided our coding. Note that these themes correspond to the three central framing tasks suggested by Snow and Benford (1988): diagnosis, prognosis, and rationale. Table 1 describes the two main framing packages (or types of rhetoric), their sub-themes, and their relationship with Snow and Benford's framing tasks. The present analysis, however, focuses exclusively on the general trends, looking only at broad variations in types of rhetoric, namely, occurrences of an action-framing package versus reaction framing package. I assume that numerous occurrences of rhetoric-of-action articles socially construct the perception of an *opportunity for contentious action* and that rhetoric-of-reaction articles would construct the *perception of threat*. If indeed political opportunity for the *Intifada* was constructed during 1987 (rather than it being a spontaneous outburst) one would expect to see a preponderance of action framing in the media that *constructs the opportunity to act*. Also one might expect to see the number of articles that portray and action frame to increase as the year progresses.

As to interpreting the text according to the two framing packages, I used the relative prominence of the different components in each package to make coding decisions, namely urgency, agency, and possibility for *action framing* and jeopardy, futility, and perverse effects for *reaction framing* (Gamson 1992). Thus, an article in *al-Fajr*, dated 12/21/1987, whose headline stressed Palestinian casualties by Israeli shooting, was coded as stressing *action framing* given its emphasis on the wide range of ongoing strikes and demonstrations throughout the territories and the futility of Israeli counter measures to restore order. In this way, qualitative data obtained were quantified for analysis and interpretation. In sum, my analysis focuses on variation of "type of rhetoric" along the three waves of confrontation. Rhetoric type is comprised of two framing packages: "action framing" and "reaction framing."

**Table 1.** Action-Reaction Framing Packages

	<i>Diagnosis</i>	<i>Prognosis</i>	<i>Rationale</i>
<i>Rhetoric of Action:</i>	Urgency: One must act promptly as any delay would make things worse.	Agency: Action is the way, and through it things can get better.	Possibility: Change is possible and within reach; this is the time to act since the conditions are ripe.
<i>Rhetoric of Reaction:</i>	Jeopardy: Let's stick to what we have; things are not necessarily bad.	Futility: There is no sense or utility in action.	Perverse Effects: Conditions are not ripe; action may turn out to be a self-defeating strategy

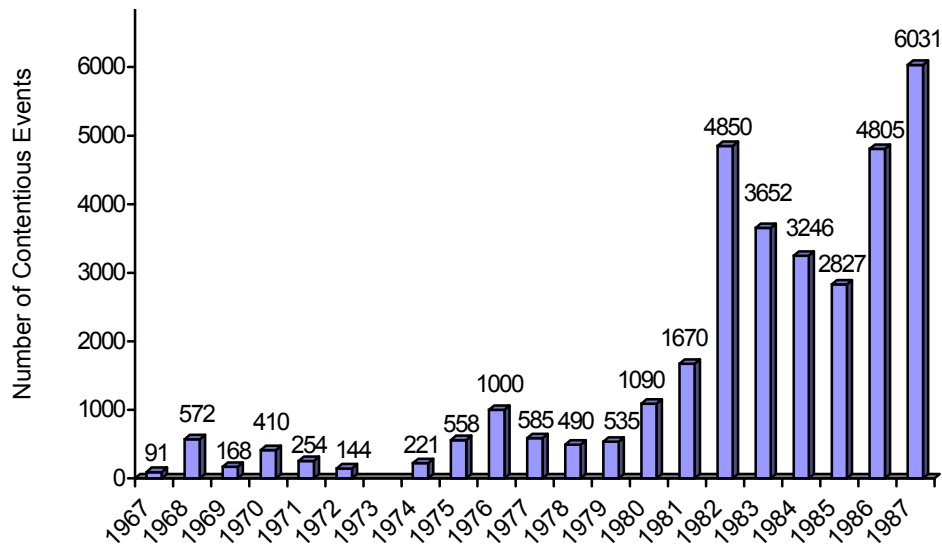
Specifically, I examined framing functions of diagnosis, prognosis, and rationale to how they constructed a discernable framing package: (1) urgency vs. jeopardy; (2) agency vs. futility; and (3) possibility vs. perverse effects (see table 1).

Two independent coders performed a pilot test of eighteen randomly selected articles. Both received guidance and specific instructions on the coding process, and went through a training session of coding based on several articles. Following the pilot, several changes, such as adding or omitting categories, were made. The two coders then performed an inter-coder reliability test. We performed two rounds of coding of thirty randomly sampled, different articles for each round, using the Scott's Pi coefficient as our statistical index. The results of the raw agreement percentage and the Scott's Pi showed a high level of agreement for our key variable "type of rhetoric," with 86% agreement and coefficient level of 0.78, an acceptable value given the fact that the index is considered to be highly conservative (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken 2002).<sup>4</sup> Finally, the possibility of substantial difference between the unit of analysis and the rest of the article was tested as well. Here, I randomly sampled three articles for each protest event and carefully read each to see whether consistency existed. All nine articles revealed an adequate consistency in their content.

In sum, I examine the possibility of Palestinian attribution of opportunity to increase mobilization for action. By analyzing variations between two framing packages (rhetoric of action/reaction) along a series of three protest waves during 1987, as constructed by a variety of Palestinian print news media, I am able to examine the following relationships: (1) *Between the framing packages.* What type of framing package was more prominent? Was there any change in prominence? Was there a discernable pattern along the sequence of confrontations? (2) *Within the framework of the different newspapers.* Was there any difference between the various newspapers' coverage? If so, what was it, and between which newspapers? Was there any pattern of variation along the sequence of confrontations? In analyzing these relationships, no causal claims are being made, nor am I arguing that events and/or media discourse cause changes in public discourse.

### THE FINDINGS: DISCOURSE IN CONTENTION

The thrust of my research is to analyze the Palestinian public discourse (measured by media discourse) during 1987. In a wider perspective, figure 1 shows that Palestinian contention rose steadily up to 1987, a year that marked the start of what turned out to be the most intensive cycle of protest. Indeed, between 1988 and 1992 the level of contention did not go below twenty thousands contentious events per year.<sup>5</sup> However, 1987 should not be decontextualized. Commencing in 1976, which several scholars (Alimi 2003; Khawaja 1994; Tamari 1988) dated as the beginning of contentious in the occupied territories, two additional cycles followed, indicating a much higher degree of intensity and duration.

**Figure 1.** Palestinian Contentious Events by Year

Source: Shalev (1990) and Department and Ministry of Information (1992). Common to the two sources are the criteria for contentious events (categorized as “public disturbances”), namely, stones throwing, illegal demonstrations, mounting barricades, distribution of leaflets, terrorist activities, and waving PLO flags.

The question of whether the *Intifada* was truly a sudden, spontaneous challenge was triggered by this pattern. Contention between Palestinians and Israeli forces was on the rise during 1987. Through contention, Palestinian activists were capable of sensing the heartbeat of the situation they were facing; whether they sensed Israeli response as reactive or as initiated initiated could be indicative of the risk of heightened contention. Specifically, from the vantage point of the Palestinians in the occupied territories, a growing hesitance on the part of Israeli soldiers’ to respond to Palestinian provocation, say stone throwing, could have been interpreted as indicating ripe conditions for an increase in contention.

First, I examined the association between the time axis and type of framing package. “Date” acted as the indicator for the time axis divided into the three waves’ subsequent coverage: May 1987, October 1987, and December 1987. “Type of rhetoric” acted as the indicator for the two framing packages: action framing or reaction framing.

The distinction between the two types of rhetoric can be seen by contrasting the following excerpts. An article in pro-Jordanian *al-Kuds* from October 10, 1987 was coded as reaction framing. In its coverage of the escape of Palestinian activists from a Gaza prison and the ensuing armed confrontation with Israeli forces during which several activists were killed, *al-Kuds* emphasized the perverse effects of events. The following is an excerpt from the newspaper’s coverage. Headline: “*Wide scope military measures and searching activity in the Gaza strip*”; sub-head: *Military sources: we shall check under each rock and in each corner*; first paragraph: *wide searching operations were initiated in order to capture the remaining fugitives.*” On the same event, the PLO-oriented *al-Fajr* had different coverage emphasizing agency, and therefore was coded as action framing. Headline: “*Armed confrontation in Gaza*”; sub-head: *Palestinian spokesperson: many Israelis were killed; Israeli spokesperson: four Palestinians and an [Israeli] intelligence man were killed*; first paragraph: “*During a confrontation between Israeli forces and armed Palestinian squad of the Islamic Jihad organization.*” Clearly, the article by *al-Kuds* was framing reaction as it stressed the military’s



**Table 2.** Type of Rhetoric by Date

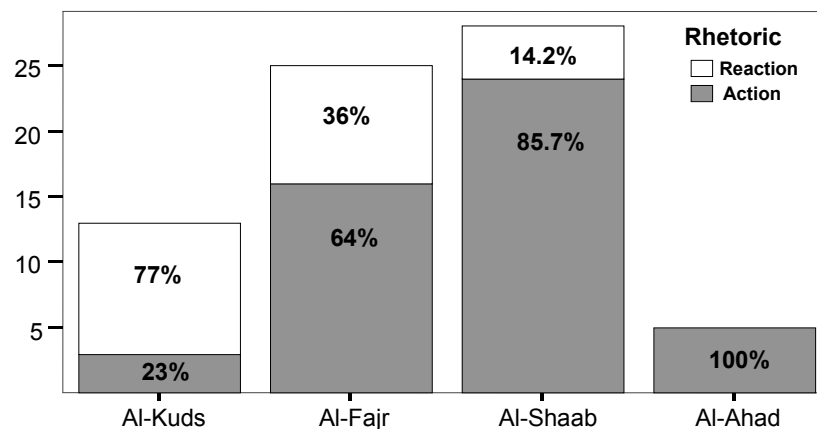
Framing Package	Issue Date		
	May 1987	October 1987	December 1987
Reaction Framing	50.0% (14)	29.4% (5)	15.4% (4)
Action Framing	50.0% (14)	70.6% (12)	84.6% (22)
Totals	100.0% (28)	100.0% (17)	100.0% (26)
N=71 $\chi^2$ : 9.76 * p < .05 Cramer's V: .37			

Note: \* Missing cases are excluded

threatening reaction and used an Israeli source. The article by *al-Fajr* was using action framing for its relying on Palestinian source coupled with the fact it reported on the death of “many Israelis” during a confrontation that followed the escape, a confrontation not mentioned by *al-Kuds*. The results of a cross-tabulation together with the appropriate tests and measures of association are presented in table 2.

Does timing affect the type of rhetoric? Reading across the row for “reaction framing,” we find that the majority of cases occur in May 1987 (50%) with a gradual decrease in October (29.4%) and December (15.4%) and, conversely, reading across the row for “action framing,” that the majority of cases occur in December 1987 (84.6%) following a gradual increase from May 1987 (50%) and October 1987 (70.6%). Clearly, the closer we get to the end of 1987, the likelihood of “action framing” increases; a sharp, contingent increase in action framing in December 1987 compare with May 1987, as conveyed by the volcano-like explanation to the *Intifada*, however, is far from being the case. These findings seem also to fit with the data on contentious events during 1987, presented in figure 1 above.

Can we speak of meaningful differences among the various newspapers? Does controlling the association between the time axis and type of rhetoric have any effect? In order to examine this, a second cross-tabulation between “type of rhetoric” and “newspaper” was performed. “Newspaper” acted as our indicator for the political factions according to the formal affiliation of each news organ: *al-Kuds*, a traditionally moderate pro-Jordanian group;

**Figure 2.** Type of Rhetoric by Newspaper

*al-Fajr*, the more conservative PLO-faction Fatah; *al-Sha'ab*, radical PLO factions; *al-Ahad*, Islamic militant Hezbollah. The results of cross-tabulating "type of rhetoric" by "newspaper" turned out to be statistically significant at the level .05 with a strong measure of association (Cramer's  $V = .51$ ). A preliminary view of the distribution of cases between "type of rhetoric" and "newspaper" using bivariate frequency is presented in figure 2.

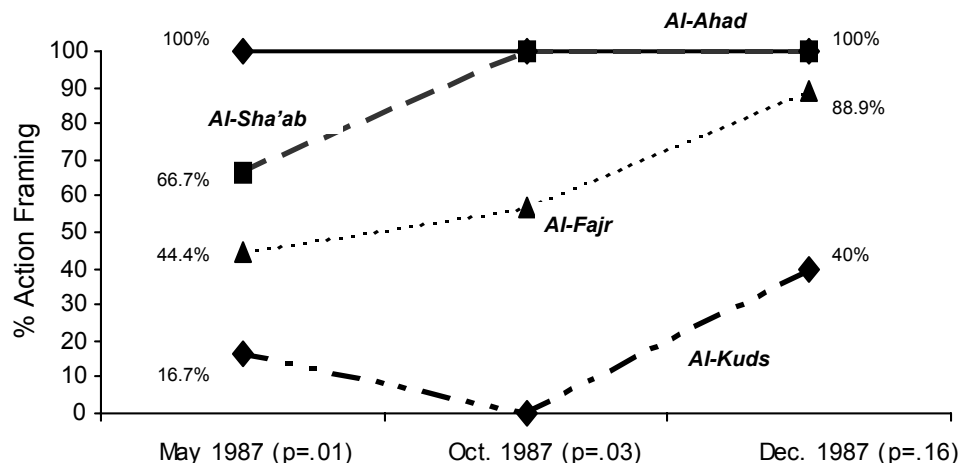
Evidently, although the pro-Jordanian *al-Kuds* shifted in its orientation towards the national cause as of 1985, the bivariate distribution readily shows its moderate style of coverage during 1987 (77% reaction framing), compared with the other three newspapers. On the other side of the continuum, the Hezbollah's news organ *al-Ahad* introduces an absolute action-oriented frame (100% action framing). Interestingly, there is not even one article reflecting reactive framing. Such an anomaly should not be surprising. Traditionally the Hezbollah (and, to a large extent, the Islamic Jihad) has been promoting a non-compromising, militant approach toward Israel, backed by a rigorous religious ideological flavor (Hatina 2001), a fact that makes the idea of political opportunities secondary. A less clear-cut pattern surfaced with both PLO-oriented newspapers *al-Sha'ab* and *al-Fajr*, which showed a mixture of framing packages, yet with a clear prominence of action framing. This difference in framing, consistent throughout the analysis, can be said to reflect the tension between the ideologies and action strategies vis-à-vis Israel of the Nationalist and Islamist movements within the Palestinian movement as both vied for dominance among the Palestinian populace.

What kind of pattern surfaced when the association between type of rhetoric and newspaper and was controlled by date? The results of the cross-tabulation are graphically illustrated in figure 3.

It seems that the statistically significant association between type of rhetoric and newspaper and was conditioned by timing. While remaining statistically significant in the May's protest wave ( $p=.01$ ) and October's ( $p=.03$ ), in the December wave of protest the original statistically significant association disappeared ( $p=.16$ ). Extremely revealing, also, is the surfacing of an interaction effect, that is, the relationship between "newspaper" and "type of rhetoric" varies across the three waves of protest. Evidently, a converging trend supporting rhetoric of action emerged among the newspapers along the time axis, showing a shift toward Hezbollah's *al-Ahad*'s framing by all other three newspapers.

While this pattern is more straightforward with regard to the PLO-oriented *al-Sha'ab* and *al-Fajr*, the pro-Jordanian *al-Kuds*' coverage show a less clear-cut trend. A baseline explanation would be that the lack of proactive framing by the pro-Jordanian *al-Kuds* in October 1987 and that even during December the portion of its action framing does not go above 40%

**Figure 3.** Percent Action Framing Rhetoric by Newspaper and Date



can be related to the newspaper's lack of explicit orientation with the Palestinian nationalist movement (see note 2). A second possible explanation can be traced in the expected influence of other factors not included in this study. Such is the case with the level of Israeli counter-measures to the growing level of confrontation and the interaction with counter-movement of Jewish settlers, both known to be highly intense during the 1987 (Lesch 1991). Additionally, while the research focused on the effects of the contention between Israel and Palestinians within the occupied territories on the latter's perception of opportunity to act, other external factors unquestionably played a role in the consolidation of the *Intifada* in that specific time context. As such, the marked relative rise in the pro-Jordanian *al-Kuds*'s action framing in December may be attributed to the Palestinian disappointment by the Amman Arab summit disregard of the PLO (Abu-Amr, 1988).

## CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I have offered an alternative explanation to the specific time context during which the Palestinian 1987 *Intifada* consolidated. I argued that the common volcano-like imagery of the *Intifada* is inconsistent with pattern of Palestinian contention in the occupied territories. Inspired by the theoretical and methodological guidelines of the research agenda outlined by McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) and recent calls to integrate perceptual with structural analysis of contentious politics and social movements (Aminzade et al. 2001), I examined the possible construction of Palestinian public discourse regarding the possibility of attribution of an opportunity to act contentiously during 1987.

While inclusion of additional voices in the Palestinian movement (such as the Muslim Brotherhood—systematic data did not exist for 1987) and incorporation of other indicators of public discourse may have strengthened the analysis, my findings nonetheless undermine the portrayal of the *Intifada* as sudden outburst of contention. The analysis demonstrated that the mechanism of attribution of opportunity was constructed through the relative prominence of action framing package: *urgency* to act, the elevation of *agency*, and that *change is possible* in the print media discourse. Statistical procedures revealed that, first, during 1987 a significant gradual increase in calls for action occurred; and, second, a convergence in framing the opportunity to trigger contention among the various newspapers representing various political factions within the Palestinian movement took place.

The potential for a theoretical contribution in such a mode of analysis lies in the attempt to maintain what I see as a fruitful dialectical tension between structure and agency in the study of contention. The mechanism of "attribution of opportunity/threat" contains both structure and agency, namely the collective meaning attached by social movement activists to changes in the structure of political opportunities. Yet, such a mechanism is the end-product of underlying contentious processes that may (or may not) result in such a collective attribution; the decision between what would count as a *mechanism* of contention and as a *process* of contention is, as acknowledged by McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly themselves (2001), fairly arbitrary. Therefore, without paying sufficient attention to such underlying processes we may run the risk of nominalistic analysis of contentious politics. Once the separate roles of agency, structure, and historical context are defined so as to guide the analysis, the relative weight of a given mechanism, and the ways other *mechanisms* and *processes* are influenced accordingly, are illuminated, hence the possibility to enrich a dynamic analysis of contention.

The Palestinian situation of military occupation and extant conflicting ideologies and action strategies within the movement is a useful reminder that the very ability to develop oppositional consciousness and to develop a shared attribution of opportunity must necessarily act as the starting point of the analysis. Extending the research to the periods before and after 1987 for learning about fluctuations in the precise nature of the Palestinian's sense of

opportunities and threats may be useful in further capturing the dynamics of Palestinian contention.

A promising research venue would be the analysis of how changes in the Israeli structure of political opportunities affected the framings of various actors within the Palestinian movement and how, in turn, such framings affected intra-factionalism, patterns of mobilization, and developments in action strategies. Given the conflicting ideologies and strategies of action within the Palestinian movement, the ability of Palestinian insurgents to influence Israeli politics through innovative action, to manage intra-factionalism and competition, and to scale-shift their contention from the national to the international level through strategic framing is revealing.

Such a Palestinian competence is also a useful reminder that the research on contentious politics should be more attuned to fundamentalist social movements such as the Hezbollah or the Islamic Jihad (Wiktorowicz 2004) and to how political processes affect, and are affected by relationships between fundamentalist and non-fundamentalist movements. It may well be that the internal relationships with other actors within the Palestinian movement will influence the Islamic Jihad's mode of action and strategy. Such was the case not only with the PLO during the 1970s, but also with the Hamas during the second half of the 1990s.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> While McAdam's original outline of the model pays attention to how POS is defined by activists as favorable (what he labeled "cognitive liberation"), this aspect is fairly underdeveloped. Additionally, relying on surveys to measure collective attribution, as McAdam did, is problematic for two main reasons. First, we are forced to attribute the existence of collective, shared perceptions based on an aggregated set of individual responses and, second, surveys provide snapshot-like evidence (even when using panels), which makes it difficult to measure process.

<sup>2</sup> As from 1985 *al-Kuds* changed its orientation becoming more nationalistic. Nonetheless, *al-Kuds* is still considered moderate in its coverage comparing with the other newspapers together with its intentional lack of orientation to any clear political faction.

<sup>3</sup> Between May 7 and 10, 1987, there were confrontations between Palestinians and Israeli forces and settlers in Kalkilia and Nablus. Between 7 and 12 of October mass demonstrations and commercial strikes took place in Gaza, East Jerusalem, and Ramallah. On December 9, 1987, mass demonstrations and clashes starting in Gaza spread all over the occupied territories.

<sup>4</sup> Scott's Pi is an appropriate choice as it commonly used for nominal level variables and two coders. The results from the first round were 76% agreement and 0.67.

<sup>5</sup> During 1988 the number of contentious events reached the high of 23,053, during 1989: 42,608, during 1990: 65,944, during 1991: 30,948, and during 1992: 24,882. The source of this data is Shalev, A (1990) and Israel Defense Force Spokesperson Department and Ministry of Information. *1987-1992: Five Years to the Uprising – data*. IDF Spokesperson, Jerusalem.

## REFERENCES

- Abu-Amr, Ziad. 1988. "The Palestinian Uprising in the West Bank and Gaza Strip." *Arab Studies Quarterly* 10: 384-405.
- Alimi, Eitan Y. 2003. "The Effects of Opportunities on Insurgencies." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15(3): 111-138.
- Aminzade, Ronald R., Jack A. Goldstone, Doug McAdam, Elizabeth J. Perry, William H. Sewell, Jr., Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, eds. 2001. *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ayalon, Ami. 2000. *The History of the Arab Press*. Israel: Ministry of Defense Press.
- Bassiouni, Cherif M., and Louise Cainkar. 1989. *The Palestinian Intifada -- December 9, 1987 -- December 8, 1988: A Record of Israeli Repression*. Chicago, Illinois: DataBase Project on Palestinian Human Rights.
- Benford, Robert D. 1997. "An Insider Critique of the Social Movement Framing Perspective." *Sociological Inquiry* 67: 409-430.

- Benford, Robert D., and David A. Snow. 2000. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 611-639.
- Benvenisti, Meron. 1987. *The West Bank Handbook*. Tel-Aviv: The Dayan Center for Middle East and Africa Studies.
- Billig, Michael. 1995. "Rhetorical Psychology, Ideological Thinking, and Imagining Nationhood." Pp. 64-81 in *Social Movements and Culture*, Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans, eds. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Department and Ministry of Information. 1992. *1987-1992: Five Years to the Uprising—data*. Jerusalem: IDF Spokesperson.
- Diani, Mario. 1996. "Linking Mobilization Frames and Political Opportunities: Insights from Regional Populism in Italy." *American Sociological Review* 61: 1053-1069.
- Eisinger, Peter. 1973. "The Conditions of Protest Behavior in American Cities." *American Political Science Review* 67: 11-28.
- Falloon, Virgil. 1986. *Excessive Secrecy, Lack of Guidelines*. The West Bank: Al-Haq.
- Farsoun, Samih K., and Jean M. Landis. 1989. "Structure of Resistance and the "War of Position"." *Arab Studies Quarterly* 11(4): 59-86.
- Gamson, William A. and David S. Meyer. 1996. "Framing Political Opportunity." Pp. 275-290 in *Comparative Perspective on Social Movements*, Doug J. McAdam, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gamson, William A. 1992. *Talking Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1990. *The Strategy of Social Protest*. 2d ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Gamson, William A., and Andre Modigliani. 1989. "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach." *American Journal of Sociology* 95(1): 1-38.
- Gilbar, Gad. 1992. "Economic and Demographic Patterns as Causes of the Intifada." Pp. 20-39 in *At the Core of the Conflict: The Intifada*, Gad Gilbar and Asher Susser, Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hamehuad.
- Gilboa, Eytan. 1993. "American Media, Public Opinion, and the Intifada." Pp. 93-115 in *Framing the Intifada: People and Media*, Akiba A. Cohen and Gadi Wolfsfeld, eds. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. NY: Harper Colophon Books.
- Hatina, Meir. 2001. *Islam and Salvation in Palestine*. Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies.
- Hofnung, Menahem. 1991. *Israel – Security Needs vs. The Rule of Law 1948-1991*. Jerusalem: Nevo.
- Kaufman, Edy. 1991. "Israeli Perceptions of the Palestinians' 'Limited Violence' in the Intifada." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 3(4):1-38.
- Khawaja, Marwan. 1994. "Resource Mobilization, Hardship, and Popular Collective Action in the West Bank." *Social Forces* 73: 191-220.
- Klandermans, Bert. 1997. *The Psychology of Social Protest*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lederman, Jim. 1992. *Battle Lines: The American Media and the Intifada*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Lesch, Ann M. 1990. "Prelude to the Uprising in the Gaza Strip." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 20(1): 1-23.
- Litvak, Meir. 1991. *Palestinian Leadership in the Occupied Territories*. Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle East and African Studies.
- Lombard, Matthew, Jennifer Snyder-Duch, and Cheryl Campanella Bracken. 2002. "Content Analysis in Mass Communication – Assessment and Reporting of Intercoder Reliability." *Human Communication Research* 28: 587-604.
- Longrigg, Stephen H., and Frank Stoakes. 1970. "The Social Pattern." Pp. 61-81 in *Readings in Arab Middle Eastern Societies and Cultures*, Lutfiyya, Abdulla M. and Charles W. Churchill, eds. The Hague and Paris: Mouton.
- McAdam, Doug. 1999. *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*. 2d ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- McAdam, Doug, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly. 2001. *The Dynamics of Contention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McAdam, Doug and William H. Sewell, Jr. 2001. "It's About Time: Temporality in the Study of Social Movements and Revolutions." Pp. 89-125 in *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*, Ronald R. Aminzade, Jack A. Goldstone, Doug McAdam, Elizabeth J. Perry, William H. Sewell, Jr., Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, eds. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Mishal, Shaul, with Reuben Aharoni. 1989. *Speaking Stones*. Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hamehuad.
- Najjer, Orayb A. 1994. "Palestine." Pp. 213-228 in *Mass Media in the Middle East*, Yahya R. Kamalipour and Hamid Mowlana, eds. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Nassar, Jamal R., and Roger Heacock. 1990. *The Intifada: Palestinians at the Crossroads*. NY/London: Praeger.
- Noakes, John A., and Karin G. Wilkins. 2002. "Shifting Frames of the Palestinian Movement in US News." *Media Culture & Society* 24: 649-671.
- Oliver, Anne M., and Paul Steinberg. 1993. "Information and Revolutionary Ritual in *Intifada* Graffiti." Pp. 1-26 in *Framing the Intifada: People and Media*, Akiba A. Cohen and Gadi Wolfsfeld, eds. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Rekhes, Eli. 1987. "Media Ktuva Ba'shtahim—Profil Politi." *Monthly Report Vol. 1*: 12-15.
- Robinson, Glen E. 1997. *Building a Palestinian State*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Shalev, A. 1990. *The Intifada*, Tel-Aviv: Papirus.
- Shif, Zeev, and Ehud Yaari. 1990. *The Intifada*. Tel Aviv: Shoken Books.
- Shinar, Dov, and Danny Rubinstein. 1987. *Palestinian Press in the West Bank: The Political Dimension*. Jerusalem: The West Bank Data Base Project Series.
- Shinar, Dov. 1987. "The West Bank Press and Palestinian Nation Building." *The Jerusalem Quarterly* 43: 37-48.
- Siniora, Hanna. 1988. "An Analysis of the Current Revolt." *Journal of Palestinian Studies* 17(3): 3-13.
- Snow, David A., E. Burke Rochford, Steven K. Worden, and Robert D. Benford. 1986. "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation." *American Sociological Review* 51(4): 464-481.
- Snow, David A., and Robert D. Benford. 1988. "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization." Pp. 197-217 in *From Structure to Action: Comparing Movement Participation Across Cultures, International Social Movement Research*, Bert Klandermans, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Sidney Tarrow, eds. Greenwich, CT: JAI.
- Tamari, Salim. 1988. "What the Uprising Means." *Middle East Report* 152(28): 24-30.
- Tarrow, Sidney. 1998. *Power in Movement*. 2d ed. NY/Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1989. *Democracy and Disorder*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Tessler, Mark. 1990. "The Intifada and Political Discourse in Israel." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 19(2): 43-61.
- Tilly, Charles. 1978. *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Mass: Addison-Wesley.
- Wolfsfeld, Gadi. 1997. *Media and Political Conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wiktorowicz, Quintan, ed. 2004. *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.