

Conference report

Perspectives beyond war and crises?
Donor politics and gender orders in the
Israeli-Palestinian-Conflict



Conference documentation:

Perspectives beyond war and crisis?

**Donor politics and gender orders
in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict**

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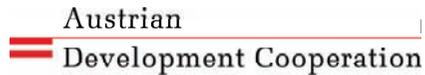
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Contributors

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Siham Barghouthi is the chairperson of the Association of Women's Action in Palestine. In this function she has organized activities of the UNDP in cooperation with the Ministry of Governance in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. She was the General Director of the Local Rural Development Program at the Ministry of local Government and co-founder of Women's Affairs Technical Committee as well as of the Women's Action Committees. From 1982 to 1984 Siham Barghouthi was detained in Al-Ramlah Israeli prison for women, due to her political activities.

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Gila Svirsky was born to Jewish parents in the US and moved to Israel after graduating from Brandeis University. She holds an MA in communication from Hebrew University. Gila Svirsky is a peace and human rights activist and former Director of Bat Shalom, the Israeli branch of Jerusalem Link. She served on the board of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel and is co-founder of the Coalition of Women for Peace and an active member of the Women in Black movement. In 2007, Gila Svirsky was elected co-chair of B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories.

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Preface

In October 2000, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on Women, War and Peace demanding a gender-sensitive perspective on conflict and peace processes. Among other things, the resolution recognizes the importance of understanding the impact of armed conflicts on women and girls, stressing the need for effective institutional arrangements to guarantee their protection and full participation in peace processes. The implementation of this resolution is a special concern of the Austrian Ministry for European and Foreign Affairs.

Within the last two years the Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (vide) has worked on the issue of “gender & armed conflict”. In the course of this project 16 country studies examining the impact of the conflict on women were published. As a continuation of this research, a conference was held from April 17th to 18th 2008 in order to reflect on the relevance of UN-resolution 1325 for societies in long lasting conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian-Conflict by focusing on the impacts of donor politics on women’s civil society organizations.

This documentation includes all the keynotes and lectures held in the course of this conference as well as the concluding recommendations.

We would like to thank all the lectures for their participation in the conference and the fruitful discussions, knowing well that some of them had an exhausting journey to Vienna. Our special thanks go to Mag. Helmut Krieger for his important input into the concept of the conference.

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Introduction

Given the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, especially in the Gaza Strip, the title of our conference might appear to be anachronistic as perspectives beyond the circle of violence, beyond the existence of checkpoints or beyond food assistance within the framework of emergency plans are difficult to imagine. The tragic state of things is also being continuously unveiled by the nature of debates that have been carried out on solutions to the conflict since the Annapolis Conference of November 2007 and focusing on what is referred to as 'a viable Palestinian state' in the future. The question to be answered is what 'viable' implies.

As can be derived from statements by EU and US officials, such a concept seems to be tantamount to the abandonment of the old formula of a two-state solution on the basis of the frontiers of 1967. Also important are those developments that unfold their impact as the normative force of the factual, for example the continued construction of settlements in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem, the demand made by Israel according to which it was entitled to have an undivided Jerusalem as its capital etc. Thus the term 'viable' suggests a so-called pragmatic adaptation to the facts on the ground in a scientific manner and in violation of the principles of international law. This term, however, not only hints at the territorial dimensions of a Palestinian state to be established in parts of the West Bank in the future. Simultaneously, it provides insight into the present state of things in the occupied territories. This term simply implies that major parts of the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank presently have to worry about their economic survival.

Feminist research has proven and highlighted in recent years and decades that conflicts, crises and wars have gendered dimensions and entail gendered consequences. The very same truth applies to

the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well and means that it is women from marginalised social classes in the first line who are forced to absorb the impact of economic, social and political crises. The survival of whole families is often linked to the survival of those women. Thus understanding those existing conditions of life even if only in parts is a prerequisite for formulating anything that could be called 'a future perspective'. Contrary to this, elites in the EU and in the US talking about a 'viable state' seem to believe that they can simply ignore this fact. No single mention of the underlying relations between crisis, war and gender is to be found in their declarations.

In sharp contrast to this practice, gender-critical analyses of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were offered during the conference 'Perspectives Beyond War and Crisis?'. Bringing together speakers that have been doing critical research for many years and have been involved in social and political activities at the grassroots in the same manner, the conference allowed for combining those views into a bundle that are necessary to formulate gender-critical perspectives. Taking notice of the fact that the need for such perspectives is greater than ever, simultaneously acknowledging that they are more marginalised than it was the case in the 1990s, the conference succeeded in delivering an accurate analysis of the present, which allowed a glance to be thrown at a future that is not impossible yet.

The conference was opened by a keynote from Sara Roy in which she gave a very alarming picture of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories especially that of Gaza. By identifying new features, which have had damaging effects on the Palestinian society and economy, she came to the conclusion that Palestinians has been reduced to a humanitarian problem, to which the international community is expected to respond. Roy stated that the occupation has more and more become a fact and that peace and occupation are expected to be no longer incompatible by "western" elites.

The second day of the conference started with a panel on “donor policies and gender orders”, where first Sara Roy gave a critical view on donor politics, especially those of the European Union, in defining the main trends characterizing donor aid in the West Bank and Gaza Strip today. She stated that even though the EU’s politics were guided by a rights-based approach, the logic of international law was abandoned by never calling for the end of occupation by Israel in order to avoid any political conflict with Israel. The second panelist, Siham Barghouthi, reflected on the international donor policies from the perspectives of Palestinian women’s organizations and argued that it fails to address the needs of the women in many ways due to the conditions under which funds are paid. Her speech was completed by an overview on Palestinian women’s organizations and their needs and issues.

The second panel raised the question of “feminist perspectives beyond war and crises?”. Gila Svirsky formulated her feminist Israeli perspective by focusing on the issues and strategies of the Israeli women’s peace movement in the differences to the mixed-gender peace movement towards a two-state solution. Coming to the conclusion that “what we need now is women”.

Maha Abu-Dhayyeh Shamas criticized in her speech that donor aid especially after the Oslo Agreement enforced not only the imbalance between the Palestinians and the Israeli but also within the Palestinian society, where a privileged class around the leadership of Arafat appeared and the mass of the people facing harsher conditions. Therefore, the international donor community also bears joint responsibility of the Hamas election victory in 2006. With reference to international law, such as UN-Security Resolution 1325 and the Geneva Convention, she argues that the Palestinians have to be treated as protected people and the Israeli has to take there responsibility as occupiers.

In the afternoon session three workshops on the issues of the morning were held. One topic raised in most of the workshops

was the possibilities of cooperating with the Islamic Movement, in particular with Hamas. To some extent there are attempts of cooperation between the Islamic and the secular women's movement, however it seems to be difficult and limited especially when it comes to changes in the family law. But even though feminist ideas do not play a huge role in Islamic organizations, the potential for female empowerment is notable, which makes Hamas more attractive to women. The ban of Hamas by the donor community was criticized in the workshops, because this boycott has led to a cutting off of masses of people from help for purely political reasons. As Maha Abu-Dhayyeh Shamas put it "It is my battle to fight Hamas at the internal level and not that of the donors".

Another issue raised in the workshops was the cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian women in the peace movement. As an example the International Women's Commission, a women's feminist organization comprising 20 Palestinian, 20 Israeli and 20 international women was presented. Discussing the peace movement in Israel, it was stated that all these organizations are opting for a two-state solution, however, the definitions of the two states vary.

The conference was completed by the keynote of Ghada Hashem Talhami, with her overview of the Palestinian women's movement over the last 100 years and its present struggle against the occupation and for political rights of women. This was a plea to recognize the significance of women's informal political roles despite the general absence of women from the higher tiers of Palestinian politics.

Recommendations of the conference

1. Humanitarian aid must not be an instrument of political pressure to enforce the donor's agenda.
2. The European Union should follow a rights-based approach addressing the abidance with international law all without using double standards for either conflict party.
3. The EU should take a more leading and proactiverole within the roadmap-quartet; in order to develop an independent policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and not just follow the US dictate.
4. Donor politics should pay more attention to the Palestinian women's development needs according to the women's own agendas and priorities.
5. Empower the women's organizations by providing them with the logistics and financial support.
6. Support the women's coalitions on grassroots levels, and establish alliances to enhance the participation of women in the making of peace.
7. Support Israeli and Palestinian women's associations that advocate the education of peace.
8. Work towards securing an international protection to the Palestinian people and towards the execution of the Security Council resolution 1325, in relation to the protection of women and children in war times.
9. Investments must be made in the infrastructure to ensure access to education, to reproductive health services, to land

and water, to justice and protections services, to places of employment and freedom of movement.

10. The international donors should support local human rights organizations and institutions to develop strategies and plan of action for immediate intervention in times of crisis to ensure humanitarian assistance.
11. The donor community should invest in psychosocial programs in order to help the people to overcome the constant fears and insecurities they suffer with all the consequences such as male violence.
12. Investments have to be made in addressing the historical and current injustices to ensure post-conflict reconciliation by encouraging documentation programs, identifying and implementing just repatriation, reparation, and compensation programs based particularly on women's perspectives.

Magda Seewald (vide)

Helmut Krieger (University of Vienna)

Failing Peace

Sara Roy

Abstract: The keynote will examine why peace has continually failed Palestinians and Israelis and argue that the possibilities for resolving the conflict may be weaker now than at any point since the beginning of Israel's occupation in 1967. The address will focus on critical paradigmatic shifts in the way the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is conceptualized, addressed, and experienced.

In one of many reports and accounts of economic life in the Gaza Strip that I have recently read, I was struck by a description of an old man standing on the beach in Gaza throwing his oranges into the sea. The description leapt out at me because it was this very same scene I myself witnessed almost 23 years ago during my very first visit to the territory. It was the summer of 1985 and I was taken on a tour of Gaza by a friend named Alya. As we drove along Gaza's coastal road, I saw an elderly Palestinian man standing at the shoreline with some boxes of oranges next to him. I was puzzled by this and asked Alya to stop the car. One by one, the elderly Palestinian took an orange and threw it into the water. His was not an action of playfulness but of pain and regret. His movements were slow and labored, as if the weight of each orange was more than he could bear. I asked my friend why he was doing this and she explained that he was prevented from exporting his oranges to Israel and rather than watch them rot in his orchards, the old man chose to cast them into the sea. I have never forgotten this scene and the impact it had on me. Over two decades later, after peace conferences, peace agreements, economic protocols, road maps, and disengagements, Palestinians are still casting their oranges into the sea.¹

In the last seven years, the transformations in land, labor, economy,

¹ Portions of this presentation will be published in *The Palestine Yearbook of International Law*, Volume XIV, 2008. Also see Sara Roy, *The Gaza Economy*, 143 PALESTINE INFORMATION CENTER BRIEF (The Jerusalem Fund, Washington, DC), 2 October 2006; and Sara Roy, *A Dubai on the Mediterranean*, 27 LONDON REVIEW OF BOOKS (3 November 2005).

and demography in Israel and the Occupied Territories have been stunning. Palestinians have suffered losses not seen since the beginning of Israeli occupation in 1967, and arguably, since the losses of 1948. The current context has many dimensions but is defined primarily by Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian lands, perhaps most vividly expressed in the continued and widespread expansion of Israeli settlements, the construction of the separation barrier, and in the severing of the West Bank from the Gaza Strip. The current context is also defined by rapid socioeconomic decline, as Palestinians face the deterioration of their economy, a humanitarian crisis characterized by levels of unemployment and impoverishment unparalleled during Israel's 40-year occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the destruction of ordinary life.

The dramatic weakening of the Palestinian economy since the start of the second uprising has been accelerated by the international aid embargo imposed on Palestinians after the election and installation of the Hamas-led government over two years ago and intensified after Hamas's takeover of the Gaza Strip last June. However, one need only look at the Palestinian economy, especially Gaza's, on the eve of the uprising to realize that the devastation is not recent. By the time the second Intifada broke out in 2000, Israel's closure policy had been in force for seven years, leading to by then unprecedented levels of unemployment and poverty, which would, however, soon be surpassed.

Indeed, the present state of Palestinian life—be it economic, social, or political—derives fundamentally from dynamics institutionalized during and by the Oslo 'peace' process. The Oslo process did not aim to dismantle the structure of Israeli occupation but to maintain and strengthen it, albeit in a different form. The years since the Oslo agreement saw a marked economic deterioration and an accelerated de-development process that was worsened by the effects of closure, the defining economic feature of the Oslo and

post-Oslo periods. This is why, according to the UN, the Palestinian economy experienced a 36 percent decline in national income during the Oslo period. Among closure's damaging results were the physical and demographic separation and isolation of the West Bank and Gaza; the weakening of economic relations between the Palestinian and Israeli economies, which resulted in rising unemployment and poverty and dramatic income losses; and reduced access to markets both for labor and goods.

Yet closure proved so destructive only because the then 26-year process of integrating the Palestinian economy into Israel's had made the local economy deeply dependent and weak. As a result, when the border was closed first in 1991 and later more permanently in 1993, self-sustainment was no longer possible—the means were simply not there. Palestine had long before been robbed of its developmental potential. Decades of expropriation, integration and deinstitutionalization had ensured that no viable economic—and hence political—structure could emerge.

These critical features of the occupation and those introduced by and during the Oslo process have, of course, been deepened and aggravated by the conditions of the last seven years and the intensification of the conflict. This has included: a strengthened Israeli domination of Palestinian resources and deepened and acute economic dependence; the building of the separation barrier in the West Bank, depriving the territory of at least 15 percent of its agricultural land; the further expropriation, cantonization and isolation of Palestinian lands in the West Bank; continued Israeli settlement expansion; the severing of the Jordan valley from non-resident Palestinian use; the deepened separation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip; the isolation of the Gaza Strip following Israel's mis-defined 'disengagement'; and other restrictions on Palestinian economy and society resulting from the international boycott.

Furthermore, the last seven years of intifada have introduced

new features with damaging effects on Palestinian society and economy.²

These are:

1. The use of aid as a punitive weapon not only by Israel, but also by the international donor community—including its use of aid to impose a clear political agenda. The international boycott has had a devastating effect on Palestinians. Never before have economic issues been so central to the political conflict in nearly 40 years of occupation.
2. Israel's decision to completely de-link its economy from that of Palestine's—cutting off economic and commercial ties after four decades of integration and forced dependence. The loss of jobs inside Israel has been particularly devastating for the Palestinian economy, especially Gaza's, with very limited labor flows from the West Bank and virtually none from the Gaza Strip. Indeed, by 2007, 30 percent of the income earned in Israel between 1972 and 2006 was being brought into the Palestinian economy as donor aid.
3. The decline of the private sector as an engine of growth due to its inability to generate income growth under current constraints. Some 93 percent of firms in Gaza, for example, still employ four people or less and manufacturing now accounts for about 12 percent of GDP—a level it held in the 1970s. In Gaza the private sector is near collapse having lost 75,000 out of 110,000 jobs. Unemployment in the private sector has increased from 35 percent

² See Palestinian Statehood and Perspectives for Trade and Development Policy—Summary of Roundtable Discussions, from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Ramallah, West Bank, 17 May 2006.

in 2006 to near 70 percent in 2008. Some 95 percent of factories have suspended their operations due to the inability to import raw material and export finished products. In fact this is the first time in the history of the Palestinian economy that the public sector is leading the private.

4. Israel is no longer interested in controlling and dominating the Palestinian economy and shaping it to its own interests as it did, most notably, during the first two decades of occupation. Rather, Israel is now seeking to preclude the emergence of a state and a viable economic base upon which to build it by imposing increasingly damaging measures that has reduced Palestinians to a humanitarian problem—to which the international community is expected to respond.
5. The expectation and belief that the peace process is dead and that the current crisis will continue for years to come. Economic planning for most Palestinians and despite stated plans to the contrary is no longer based on a positive scenario but a negative one characterized by a moribund economy, instability, and continued conflict. Economic strategies are shifting from development to steadfastness, which characterized Palestinian economic thinking over two decades ago, prior to the first uprising in 1987.

Today, approximately 40 percent of the West Bank is inaccessible to Palestinians. Some sources place this figure as high as 59 percent. Non-resident Palestinians can no longer enter the Jordan Valley and are barred from entering those villages between the separation wall and the Green Line. Fewer than 30 percent of Palestinians living in the West Bank are eligible to apply for permits to move within their own territory and fewer than 10 percent actually receive permission, meaning that at least 90 percent of the popula-

tion are effectively confined to their territorial enclaves. Gazans are prohibited from entering or residing in the West Bank.

The intensification and institutionalization of the conditions I have just described have led to some critical paradigmatic shifts in the way the conflict is conceptualized, understood and addressed, to which I now turn.³

Prior to Oslo there was a belief among Israelis and within the international community that peace and occupation were incompatible. This has changed. In recent years, more and more Israelis are benefiting from the occupation. Their lives have been facilitated by the vast settlement road network built in the West Bank and by an improved economy resulting from a perceived containment of the conflict and of Palestinians although this illusion is slowly and tragically being shattered. Settlements are now regarded as natural outgrowth, a needed constituency providing protection and security, with important familial links to Israel proper. Thus, the integration of the settlement blocs and their infrastructure into Israel—that is, the argument that the West Bank is part of Israel—is no longer extraordinary or contentious; on the contrary, it is necessary and normal. For many Israelis—and I might add, donors—it is no longer a question of normalizing the occupation but of removing the term altogether since it no longer applies. The occupation has been transformed from a political and legal issue with international legitimacy into a simple dispute over borders where the rules of war apply, rather than those of occupation.

Separating from the Palestinians and doing what is necessary politically, militarily, and economically to insure and maintain that separation has become similarly routine. Hence, many Israelis and members of the international community no longer feel uncomfortable with the occupation at a time when the occupation has

³ See Sara Roy, *Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), pp. 328-332.

grown more repressive and perverse. This too may have produced some changes in the lexicon of the conflict that reflect the changes in political framing. There is now less talk of ‘territorial contiguity’ for Palestinians and more of ‘transportational contiguity,’ a term that first appeared in the Gaza Disengagement Plan and means that Palestinians would have contact with each other by bridges, tunnels and ‘for-Arabs-only’ roads.⁴

The need to separate from Palestinians and the legitimacy of doing so are now reflected in the formalization, institutionalization and acceptance by Israel and the international community of Palestinian territorial and demographic fragmentation and cantonization, another key paradigmatic shift. Such institutionalized fragmentation, which has divided the West Bank into at least 11 cantons and sub-cantons, is secured by a system of physical impediments. This divided reality now defines the status quo and clearly precludes territorial contiguity for Palestinians and with it, a viable Palestinian state. Indeed, according to the World Bank, the resulting restrictions on the movement of people and goods have further isolated Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza from Arab regional and world markets.

Other economic and social implications of fragmentation include: a reversion to family labor in both business and agriculture and to more traditional forms of economic behavior; a pattern of production that is increasingly oriented to local markets and domestic consumption—a dynamic that emerged during the Oslo period; and the emergence of economic activities that are a response to, and themselves illustrate, decline and breakdown such as tunnel trade, bullet trade, and people desperate to work for three shekels per day. Within such a constrained paradigm, it becomes difficult if

⁴ One example can be found in Adi Mintz, “An Atlas of Road Maps and Options for the Israeli-Arab Process” (6th Herzliya Conference, Israel, January 2006). http://www.herzliyaconference.org/Eng/_Articles/Article. Mintz writes, “We have to create a transportational contiguity that will allow the Palestinians to drive between all their places without interruption.”

not impossible to introduce structures of change.

Another example of fragmentation and the distortion it produces is the description of the West Bank town of Ramallah as a thriving economy, which is not a lie but an aberration. While it is certainly true that Ramallah is relatively successful economically, it is also true that it has become conceptually, and it seems, practically, fragmented, detached and isolated from something larger that is the Palestinian economy, which seems now to be disappearing as a conceptual framework and as a legitimate framing of reality.

In Gaza, the impact of fragmentation has created far greater distortions. For Gaza it is not a question of turning inward to the exclusion of a conceptual whole but of dispensing with the whole entirely. In Gaza we see a fundamental shift in Israeli policy from one that aims to weaken the Palestinian economy through punishing closures and other restrictions to a form of blockade that treats the economy as totally irrelevant. This shift is perverse: from engaging with the concept of an economy (whether positively or negatively) to dismissing the concept altogether. This was underlined by the Israeli Supreme Court's decision first approving fuel cuts to Gaza in October 2007, deemed permissible since they would not harm the essential humanitarian needs of the population, followed in January 2008 by electricity cuts. The court stated, "We do not accept the petitioners' argument that 'market forces' should be allowed to play their role in Gaza with regard to fuel consumption."⁵

It is no longer—and in fact has not been for some time—a question of economic growth or development, change or reform, freedom or sovereignty but of essential humanitarian needs, of reducing the needs and rights of 1.4 million people to an exercise in counting

⁵ Darryl Li, "From Prison to Zoo: Israel's "Humanitarian" Control of Gaza," Adalah's Newsletter, Volume 44, January 2008. Original source: HCJ 9132/07, Jaber al-Basyouni Ahmed v. The Prime Minister, www.adalah.org.

calories and megawatts, to paraphrase a colleague of mine. As such Israeli policy allows for and even legitimizes the destruction of Gaza's economy, institutions and infrastructure.⁶

Hence, according to the Supreme Court it is acceptable to harm Palestinians and create a humanitarian crisis for political reasons. Does that therefore mean that once these undefined "essential humanitarian needs" are met, all other deprivation is possible?⁷ How does one—and where does one—begin to rehabilitate and rebuild an economy and society so devastated?

The steady and unrelenting imposition of Israeli imperatives, which include the dismemberment of the West Bank and any possibility of a Palestinian state in order to accommodate Israel's territorial aggrandizement and the consolidation of Israeli settlements on Palestinian lands, gave rise to a shift in the way foreign governments, aid agencies, and other international organizations frame future Israeli-Palestinian relations. This shift is away from a notion of two-states and those features of state-building and political sovereignty associated with a Palestinian state in particular, toward a vision that emphasizes humanitarian over political priorities.⁸ Palestinians are reduced to a demographic presence in small and impoverished enclaves to be treated as a humanitarian issue for the international community to look after—unable to mobilize politically or economically, demoted to statelessness in their own homes.

In Gaza today, at least 80 percent of families rely on humanitarian aid compared to 63 percent in 2006. In the West Bank, 33 percent of families depend on aid to survive. In 1999, UNWRA was feed-

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. Also see, Adalah, News Update, 31 January 2008, www.adalah.org/eng/pressreleases/pr.php?file=08_01.

⁸ The Grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign, The Occupation's "Convergence Plan": Legitimizing Palestinian Bantustans, Analysis, 17 May 2006.

ing 16,174 families in Gaza; at present it feeds 182,400 families or 860,000 people.⁹ As one Palestinian economist poignantly stated, “We started with food aid and we have returned to food aid. We have come full circle.” The violence that has erupted and will continue to erupt, which reduces Palestinians to mere perpetrators, is a price the Israeli government appears willing to pay for the territorial gains it guarantees.¹⁰

Diminishing the Palestinians as a national group and sovereign people into a humanitarian problem—something that is only new with regard to its scale—is now amplified by the growing de-urbanization of the West Bank through the loss of metropolitan urban areas and the de-Arabization of Jerusalem. Palestinian urban areas generate 90 percent of national GDP, with Jerusalem contributing 40 percent alone. The loss of Jerusalem, therefore, will have a damaging economic impact that will be exacerbated by the isolating effect of the separation barrier.

Hence, the separation and isolation of Palestinians from and within Jerusalem, from Israel (and via Israel, the world) and from each other, their cities and their lands, weakens the possibility of urban development for reasons that are quite simple: people, goods and resources cannot access urban areas, separated as they are by Israeli-controlled territory. Planning is impossible, as is expansion, and the delivery of services is obstructed.

In May 2006, a New York Times editorial surprisingly captured the problem and put it this way: “[I]magine a map of Manhattan. The West Bank would be, very roughly, East Harlem and the Upper East Side. Gaza would be Battery Park City, far to the southwest.

⁹ Amnesty International, Christian Aid et al, *The Gaza Strip: A Humanitarian Implosion*.

¹⁰ Juan Cole, *The Jailer*, SALON, 12 January 2006, <http://www.salon.com/opinion/feature/2006/01/12/Sharon/print.html>.

Now imagine trying to create a fully functioning city with its own economy out of these pieces while an entirely independent, antagonistic city remained in between.”¹¹

Transforming Palestinians into perpetrators has assumed different dimensions since Hamas’s electoral victory, particularly with regard to the changing nature of physical destruction in the West Bank. The Israeli journalist Amira Hass has described to me a steady process of destroying many vestiges of Palestinian life in the West Bank as they have historically existed. Old roads long used by Palestinians traveling between major towns and surrounding villages are being eliminated as are traditional intersections, buildings, and certain commercial areas. What is happening is no less than the erasure of a Palestinian presence in the West Bank, treating Palestinians as intruders, without claim.

Another new and related feature is the increasing bureaucratization of Israel’s system of control. In addition to the political imperatives underlying checkpoints, terminals and other physical barriers, there is now a growing bureaucratic imperative that has its own interests, needs, and priorities. Bureaucratizing this structure helps to depoliticize it by making it a necessary and permanent part of everyday life. In fact, some terminals in the West Bank, I am told, are no longer manned by soldiers but are fully automated while others are operated by private Israel security firms.

Official political and economic intentions are further captured in Israel’s embrace of unilateral disengagement be it in Gaza or the West Bank. First, the notion that unilateral disengagement is now politically dead inside Israel, having been destroyed by Qassem rockets and Hezbollah missiles, assumes that this policy aimed in some measure to insure an outcome fundamentally different from the one Israel now argues it must embrace—namely retaining con-

¹¹ A Viable Palestinian State, editorial in the NEW YORK TIMES, 25 May 2006.

trol over Palestinian land and people and subduing the violence that naturally attends it. Any such distinction is simply false and misleading. For in terms of substance (as opposed to form), Prime Minister Olmert's planned withdrawal from the West Bank had as its core objectives the annexation of Palestinian lands—large areas of the West Bank and the whole of Jerusalem—into Israel; the permanence of Israeli settlement blocs on Arab land; the continued division of the West Bank into isolated areas under direct or indirect Israeli control (ruling through siege, as in Gaza); the West Bank's isolation from Gaza; further destruction of any notion of a human community among Palestinians, let alone a national or economic one; and the continued (racial) exclusion of Palestinians from any interaction with Israel. How does this differ from the reality that presently obtains? It does not.

Second and most critically, unilateral disengagement—whether it is called that or something else—illustrates the shift in Israel's intentions toward the Palestinians and their territories from one of ongoing occupation to one of annexation and imposed sovereignty—turning the West Bank into an extension of Israel. This is a critical paradigmatic change that is now accepted by the international community following Hamas's electoral victory and takeover of Gaza, and Hamas's unwillingness to formally renounce terror and recognize Israel. The days have passed when Israel feared international criticism for its actions in the Occupied Territories. The red lines, which once were there, have disappeared. Indeed, according to Israeli officials, not only will foreigners soon require a visa to enter the West Bank as they now do for Gaza, soon Palestinians themselves will need a visa to move between the West Bank's major towns.

Not only have key members of the donor community participated in the US-led boycott of the Hamas government, some are now embarking on policies effectively designed to keep Palestinians locked in their enclaves. For example, the thrust of some donor

programs is now focused on microfinance—of helping people feed themselves in their enclaves, rather than dealing with the structural distortions i.e., the occupation, that have produced those enclaves in which people are confined. Similarly, donor strategies that by design or effect, support and strengthen the fragmentation and isolation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, that divide Palestinians into two distinct entities offering exclusivity to one side—economically, politically and diplomatically—one evil and the other good, one deserving of sustenance and largesse and the other not—will have dire consequences not only for Palestinians but for all of us. As Karen Abu Zayd, the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, recently warned, “Gaza is on the threshold of becoming the first territory to be intentionally reduced to a state of abject destitution with the knowledge, acquiescence and—some would say—encouragement of the international community.”¹²

No longer is there serious talk of development or change, of capacity-building or institutional or infrastructural change. Instead, there is talk of survival and containment, subjection and subjugation. Increasingly, economic activities are evolving as a response to, and themselves illustrate, decline and breakdown and the unwillingness of the donor community to meaningfully i.e. politically, challenge the status quo.

Hence, any resistance on the part of Palestinians to Israel’s repressive occupation, including attempts at economic empowerment and social rehabilitation, are now considered illegitimate and unlawful (arguably this was the case after 9/11, when Ariel Sharon successfully argued that Israel’s fight against the Palestinians was a part of America’s global war against terrorism and any resistance to Israel was therefore illicit).

The belief that occupation is reversible, that it will one day end

¹² Saree Makdisi, “The Strangulation of Gaza,” *The Nation*, 3 February 2008.

and that it should end has also changed and this, too, represents another key paradigmatic shift. Israeli expansion is not only treated as accepted and defining of the Palestinian status quo, it is unstoppable as seen, most dramatically, in the continued expansion of Israeli settlements and their infrastructure, the wall and the virtually severing of the Jordan Valley from Palestinian use. If occupation has changed over time it is in the sheer nature of its expansion and force not in its contraction or reversibility. The imperative of expansion remains unchallenged and the longer it remains so the more difficult it will be to reverse.

The result is a surrounded and militarily controlled Palestinian entity consisting of 1) the Gaza Strip, the most violent since it resists Israeli policy in a way the West Bank political elite does not, and the most abnormal; and 2) an internally fractured and dismembered West Bank consisting of noncontiguous enclaves, where some semblance of normalcy is allowed and encouraged because it is these enclaves that Israel would eventually like to call the Palestinian state. It seems ironic that now, as during the Mandate period, the formation of Palestine is coupled—in fact, predicated—on the nullification of Palestinians.

A concluding comment

It is critical to understand that previous agreements with Israel have limited and even restricted the options for peace and development and have not expanded them. They have also led to dramatic economic, political and social declines for Palestinians. Israel's occupation of Palestine and Palestinian dependence on Israel (and external donors) did not mitigate or end with the Oslo accords—they were intensified by those accords.¹³ Any challenge to the system imposed—that is, any attempt to challenge previous agreements and what they have wrought—will be considered a threat, no mat-

¹³ See Lamis Andoni, *The Price of Israel*, AL-AHRAM WEEKLY, 31 August – 6 September 2006.

ter how many political compromises Palestinians make. Thus, even if they formed a government acceptable to Israel and the West as they did last year, and the conditions of life improved as they have for a minority, Palestinians would still find themselves—as they do—under an oppressive occupation, confined to a set of agreements that by design undermine their freedom, sovereignty, and development—as far away from statehood as they have ever been.

Within this paradigm Palestinians have been severely punished for trying to defend themselves against policies that oppress them. Rather, Palestinians and the governments elected to represent them are expected—indeed required—by Israel, the United States, the European Union and some Arab states to submit to Israeli actions—in effect, to collaborate with Israeli policy—and oppose any form of popular resistance to those actions.¹⁴ Within this paradigm Palestinians become aliens in their own land, living in submission and dependence. Nowhere is this more true than in Gaza.

These conditions led to the terrible factional violence that has long marred the Gaza Strip and West Bank and resulted in Hamas's military seizure of the Gaza Strip in June 2007. Hamas and Fatah are now stated enemies, each seeking to eliminate the other, a reality that is also new. President Abbas declared a state of emergency, dissolved the unity government and swore in a new cabinet now based in the West Bank. The result has been the creation of two authorities, reinforcing, if not legitimizing Palestine's dissection and disablement and the death of the Palestinian national movement. Israel, the U.S. and the EU agreed to transfer monies long withheld to the "new" Palestinian government in what amounts to a "West Bank First" strategy, which will fail.

The situation remains extremely volatile and dangerous. Perhaps

¹⁴ See Virginia Tilley, *A Beacon of Hope: Apartheid Israel*, COUNTERPUNCH, 5 December 2006; and Bashir Abu-Manneh, *In Palestine, a Dream Deferred*, THE NATION, 18 December 2006, www.thenation.com/doc/20061218/abumannch.

the greatest mistake being made by the Palestinian leadership and the international community is their continued embrace of a policy that seeks to demonize and isolate the Islamists. Put simply, there can be no credible political or economic process with a Palestinian government that excludes the party elected by Palestinians to govern them or that excludes, in effect, Gaza. Will the inevitable outcome—continued violence and deepened misery—be in the interest of anyone? A recent survey conducted by the Norwegian research institute, FAFO, indicated a powerful preference among Palestinians, including supporters of Hamas, for direct negotiations between Hamas and Israel and between Hamas and the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority. Although support was strongest for the release of prisoners, it was also considerable for negotiations on lifting the siege on Gaza, and for a long-term truce and peace negotiations with Israel.

And this points to another critical paradigm change that I see among Palestinians, which I would describe as a new fearlessness and demand for equality. Human beings who are deprived of their rights and humanity, who have long experienced what Martin Luther King referred to as the “numbing reality of nothingness” will tolerate it for some time and then they will not. I feel Palestinians have now reached this point. People are no longer afraid of Israel’s military strength and will not be silenced by it, a defiance that can be seen in other parts of the Arab world as well. People are prepared to die as the price of their liberation and re-humanization. Paraphrasing a Palestinian friend of mine, “Our rights are not to be given sequentially but simultaneously with Israel. They are no longer conditional. There must be a single standard of morality and it must be applied consistently and universally. The days of interim arrangements, confidence-building measures and preconditions are over. We are fully prepared to live in peace with Israel but according to a new set of rules that are based on the universality of the rule of law.”

Resolution ultimately lies in three things. First, it lies in restoring

freedom not reducing it. Second, resolution lies in reciprocity. If Palestinians are offered something equal in return for what is being demanded of them, such as Israeli compliance with international law, the end of settlement expansion, the dismantling of settlements, and an end to land expropriations, home demolitions and the policy of targeted assassinations—in short, the end, or the beginning of the end of occupation, the process would become mutual and parallel and have some hope of achieving meaningful results.¹⁵ The goal should not be to honor previous agreements but to rewrite them through a process of negotiation. Palestinian and Israeli national and economic rights must be addressed equally and simultaneously.

Third, resolution lies in the willingness of the international community to link economic action to political action. Without this linkage, little will change under current conditions. I shall address this tomorrow.

I would like to end this address with a quote from Albert Camus, which I have cited before: “The contention was that we needed justice first and that we would come to freedom later on, as if slaves could ever hope to achieve justice. And forceful intellectuals announced to the worker that bread alone interested him rather than freedom, as if the worker didn’t know that his bread depends in part on his freedom.”¹⁶

¹⁵ See Rami Khouri, *AGENCE GLOBAL*, 18 September 2006.

¹⁶ Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion and Death* (New York: Knopf, 1960), p. 91.

The role of donor aid in the West Bank and Gaza: Some reflections and recommendations

Sara Roy

Abstract: The presentation will examine the changing role of donor aid with a focus on the European Union, and the ways in which it has strengthened and diminished the Palestinian position over time. Particular attention will be given to the current period and the daunting challenges presented. I argue that without a dramatic rethinking of their strategy, objective and purpose, the donor community will cease to play any meaningful or productive role in the area and may in fact play an increasingly damaging one.

On the 9th of April the Israeli government stopped the flow of an already reduced supply of fuel to the Gaza Strip due to Palestinian attacks against the Nahal Oz fuel terminal where two Israeli workers were killed. Approximately 145 fuel stations were forced to shut down as did all suppliers of fuel and gas. Five days later on the 14th of April, Gaza's transportation sector, including public and private transportation, was operating at 15 percent capacity according to local sources.

The educational sector has been most affected by the fuel crisis. According to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, absenteeism in schools and universities fluctuated between 20 and 50 percent since last Saturday, especially in Gaza City since it houses most schools and universities. My colleagues in Jerusalem tell me that the educational sector has shut down entirely for three days because there is no fuel to run cars, taxis and school buses. The Islamic University, Al-Azhar University, Al-Aqsa University, and Al-Quds Open University registered an absenteeism rate of 30 to 55 percent. The Islamic University indicated that by last Sunday, 60 percent of its 19,000 students—over 11,000 students—and 600 faculty members were unable to reach the university because of the

absence of fuel.

Gaza's healthcare facilities similarly registered a 25 percent drop in patients due to the inability of people to reach these facilities. In addition hundreds of healthcare professionals cannot reach their places of work. The Ministry of Health (MOH) indicated that most ambulances have stopped due to lack of fuel. Furthermore, the Ministry has begun using its limited fuel reserve to operate health clinics, some ambulances and vitally needed equipment. Should this limited reserve run out before additional supplies of fuel are received, the MOH warned that Gaza's entire health sector will be paralyzed. As a result all the basic functions of civilian life have come to a virtual standstill, including drinking water delivery, sewage water disposal, and garbage collection.¹

Is it still possible to build a Palestinian economy in preparation for statehood? Is it still reasonable for Palestinians to aspire to a state of their own?

Without a political settlement of the conflict that is acceptable to both Palestinians and Israelis and that ends Israeli occupation, sustainable economic change and reform in the Gaza Strip and West Bank is impossible. Occupation and the political instability and violence that characterize it preclude development. The last 40 years of Israeli occupation clearly and unequivocally demonstrate the inextricable relationship between politics and development, one the donor community has consistently misunderstood or ignored.

Foreign aid, while essential, cannot compensate for the absence of, or deficiencies in, the political process. Economic development cannot occur until Palestinians can exercise genuine sovereignty over a state of their own. The seven-year period that was

¹ Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, "Fuel Crisis Paralyzes 85% of the Transportation Sector and 50% of Education and Health Services," Press Release, 14 April 2008, Gaza City.

the Oslo peace process, when conditions in Gaza and the West Bank, relatively speaking, were better than they are today, acutely illustrate the futility of pursuing economic change in the absence of a viable political agreement. This is not to say that aid does not have a role. Donor assistance and investment are vital for encouraging economic growth and reform. The question remains: given the constraints of the environment, which are far more formidable today than they have ever been, what role can and should donor assistance play?

The discussion has been vocal within the donor community following the Annapolis peace conference in November 2007 and the donor meeting in December 2007 at which approximately 90 donors pledged over \$7 billion in assistance to Palestinians for the Palestinian Reform Development Plan (PRDP). \$2.8 billion was earmarked for this year alone although only \$260 million had arrived by March 2008. The pledges are meant largely to reduce the government's deficit and arrears and contain spending through fiscal reforms (e.g. reducing public employment). This is what the World Bank's Managing Director, Mr. Juan-Jose Daboub, called the PA's "efforts to build fiscal discipline."² The PRDP also focuses on public investment (improving governance social service delivery, economic development and infrastructure) and on reforming the PA's security services and governance structure.

Since then donor pledges have reached \$7.7 billion, \$300 million more than the amount announced at the December meeting and \$2.1 billion more than requested by the Fayyad government. As such these monies are seen as political support for President Abbas at the expense of Hamas, which has yet to submit politically. And despite the myriad structural constraints on the ground precluding it including the absence of fuel in Gaza, there is once again talk

² World Bank, Statement by World Bank Managing Director Mr. Juan-Jose Daboub at Palestinian Donors' Conference, <http://www.reliefweb.int>.

of “envisioning the establishment of an economically sustainable Palestinian state,” to quote the World Bank,³ of prosperity, cooperation with Israel, and peace. The EU nations, collectively the single largest donor, endorsed a plan to focus aid on “sustainable, long-term economic development,” amounting to approximately \$1.47 billion over the next three years.⁴

“This is not a donor’s conference. This is a state-building conference,” said Tony Blair, now the Middle East peace Quartet’s envoy, in a speech he gave at the meeting. Although the World Bank has long warned that economic recovery is predicated on the reversal of movement restrictions on people and goods, donors failed to address this issue or the occupation itself. Rather, the World Bank Managing Director put it this way: “But we also understand that there may be challenges in implementing this ambitious reform program, especially in the absence of fundamental elements (such as security, access, movement), and that aid alone will not be able to deliver the desired outcomes.”⁵

Although the urgency of the humanitarian situation was upheld, it was not the reality of occupation that was the substantive text of the meeting but strengthening the position of the Palestinian Authority against Hamas. And while the infusion of monies may in some manner, and for some time, succeed in bolstering the Fatah-led Authority over Hamas, these monies will do nothing to strengthen the Palestinian position *vis-à-vis* Israel. If anything the lack of political will among donors to confront the reality of occupation and the damage it imposes has allowed Israel to pursue its agenda in the West Bank and Gaza without pressure from the

³ World Bank, World Bank strategy for a prosperous and viable Palestinian State, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID>.

⁴ Associated Press, “EU adjusts Palestinian aid program to target government’s goals,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 28 January 2008.

⁵ World Bank, World Bank strategy for a prosperous and viable Palestinian State.

⁶ See Lamis Andoni, “Managing the Occupation,” *Al Jazeera*, 17 December 2007.

international community to stop.⁶

The donor commitments and discussions that took place in Paris last December are painfully reminiscent of some of the analytic and structural mistakes of the Oslo period and of the period immediately preceding Israel's disengagement from Gaza, particularly with regard to the following assumptions:

- Preexisting structures of occupation—Israeli control and Palestinian dependency—will somehow be mitigated through institutional reform, perhaps even dismantled.
- The priorities of the protagonists will shift in some manner from the political issues of territory and security to economic interests; that spending in Gaza, for example, can be used to restore the authority of the Fatah-led government and thereby initiate a process of economic recovery.
- Political stability and peaceful coexistence can only take place by encouraging economic change. The tangible benefits that result will build trust, creating a template for political peace.⁷

These assumptions are false for a number of reasons. Israeli occupation—the primary feature defining political and economic relations between Palestinians and Israelis—remains in force and its structures of control more powerful and entrenched, particularly with regard to the stranglehold on Palestinian mobility and the denial of human access, which has become acute. During the Oslo peace process, many funders believed that military occupation was ending, allowing development to proceed; yet, the occupation re-

⁷ I first made this argument, which still applies, in Sara Roy, "Developing the Gaza Strip in the Event of Israel's Disengagement: Possibilities and Constraints," in Michael Keating, Anne Le More and Robert Lowe (eds.), *Aid, Diplomacy and Facts on the Ground: The Case of Palestine* (London: Chatham House, 2005), pp. 201-211.

mained structurally intact during the Oslo period. The structural relationship between occupier and occupied, and the gross asymmetries in power that attend it were not dismantled by the Oslo accords but were reinforced and strengthened. This is seen, for example, in the expansion of settlements and the near doubling of the settler population, the continued confiscation of Arab land, the fragmentation and cantonization of Palestinian lands, and the institutionalization of closure policy. Israel's undiminished occupation was the primary although not the only reason the Oslo process failed and with it the expectation of meaningful political and economic reform.⁸

During this time, donors sought economic change in the absence of a political solution believing that economic improvements would catalyze popular support of the peace process, in which donor governments were deeply invested politically and financially. They pursued what amounted to an apolitical approach, seeking technical solutions aimed at mitigating economic damage rather than political solutions that would enable structural reform. Donors failed to address policy issues and instead focused on individual projects and programs. In this regard aid was poured into the West Bank and Gaza as a substitute for the donors' lack of real diplomatic engagement. Yet the failure of the economy is not a technical problem but a political one and it requires a political solution. Economic advance is predicated on political advance and this has not changed.

Placing the economic cart before the political horse was destined to fail because the locus of control remained with the occupier and reflected the occupier's interests and objectives. Hence, donors ultimately could not respond to the developmental needs of the Palestinians but had to work within an Israeli-imposed framework that sought to preclude those needs often through the imposition

⁸ Ibid, p. 202.

of restrictive measures such as closure. As a result and despite certain positive achievements, donors were often placed in a position of having to mitigate the damaging effects of Israeli occupation policy rather than addressing the legitimate needs of the Palestinian economy and society.⁹

This begs the question of who benefits most from donor aid, the Palestinians or Israel?

Hence, after massive investments totaling close to \$10 billion over the last decade according to the World Bank, Palestinians today find themselves living under conditions that are appreciably worse, by most measures, than they were when the Oslo process began. I described some of these conditions yesterday. Today in Gaza, at least 80 percent of the population rely on humanitarian aid, 40 percent are unemployed and 25-30 percent have no running water. These conditions result in large part from the international boycott imposed on Palestinians after the election of the Hamas. Why is this acceptable?

The role of foreign aid in the West Bank and Gaza has always been the subject of controversy. Since I began my research in this part of the world nearly 23 years ago, arguments have continually been made that by supporting Palestinians under occupation, the international donor community enables and assists that occupation, facilitating Israel's political imperatives. The argument typically came down to one of costs and benefits and the ratio varied according to who was doing the calculation. Donors were certainly sensitive to the arguments made against them but could—and with considerable merit in my view—argue that their programs were necessary to sustain and empower Palestinians until a political resolution was

⁹ Sara Roy, 'The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict and Palestinian Socioeconomic Decline: A Place Denied,' *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Volume 17, No. 3 (Spring 2004), p. 396.

reached. This argument was of course challenged but it held some credibility as long as the international community was perceived to be part of the solution and not part of the problem.

But now the donor community has become part of the problem in a manner that is arguably unprecedented. For aid is not only being used politically—true everywhere and in this case to achieve political objectives that will only deepen the conflict—it is being used punitively. And, the EU commands an important position in this.

During Oslo the EU hoped for a transitional scenario that would enable the Palestinian Authority to become a legitimate institution able to govern and provide public services and negotiate the establishment of a viable Palestinian state that would live in peace with Israel. Europe was guided by a rights-based approach that saw two states as the only viable outcome that could end the conflict and introduce a functional political order. Aid was to be used to promote peace (and prevent conflict) rather than provide relief. The European agenda aimed to stimulate development by creating institutions and building infrastructure. The EU conceived of its assistance as a means of helping the newly established Palestinian Authority adjust to the multiple responsibilities of Palestinian self-rule.¹⁰ “For the EU it was crucial to increase living standards in the [occupied territories]. Tangible benefits such as higher income and improved infrastructure would entail popular satisfaction with the peace process.”¹¹ Hence, these benefits would encourage Palestinian compromise during peace negotiations.

Strengthening the Palestinian economy was a key part of the European strategy. Prosperity would lead to peace and peace would lead

¹⁰ Taken from Brigitte Herremans, *EU aid to the occupied Palestinian territories: abetting occupation?* Draft, 2007. Original citation: EC Technical Office, *Overview of EU Relations with the Palestinians*, www.delwbh.cec.eu.int/en/eu_and_palestine/overview.htm.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

to a Palestinian state. The EU encouraged the development of freer trade by trying to remove the obstacles to Palestinian exports and a lessening of the closure regime that defined economic relations between Israel and the Palestinians during the Oslo period (and since). The EU correctly understood that it would need Israel's cooperation in promoting its state-building agenda and believed that if the Palestinian entity was prosperous and well-administered, the Israeli government and its people would be less fearful of ceding control to it. Thus stability and security were based on economic improvement and strengthened social relations.

There is by now an extensive and wide ranging literature assessing the Oslo process, the reasons for its failure (and limited successes) and the role of donor politics that are beyond the scope of this presentation. While blame for Oslo's failure can be assigned to many parties including the Palestinian Authority, the principal factor lay in Israel's ongoing and deepened occupation of Palestinian lands and resources. Hence, the unwillingness of the donor community, including the EU, to challenge Israeli measures proved particularly damaging. There were certain factors informing donor actions but one was particularly important: a consensus among donors that Israel was not to be pressured in any public or even private way, thereby threatening the peace process and Israel's continued participation therein.

More specifically, it was generally accepted—and enforced by the U.S.—that Israel would not be pressured to give up any real physical control over the West Bank and Gaza. Hence, the international community never seriously considered pressuring Israel (or the PA) to adhere to the principles of international law, which minimally would have meant the return of land for peace. The Oslo agreements themselves contain no reference to occupation or to Israel as an occupying power or to its obligations as such under international law. Occupation, not law, became the default position in the event negotiations failed.

So, as conditions deteriorated economically, socially and politically, as Gaza and the West were separated from each other, as the West Bank became territorially fragmented and non-contiguous; in short as Palestinians became weaker and Israeli control over them became stronger, the donor community refused to confront these changes and the constraints they imposed because it would have led to political conflict with Israel.¹²

Thus, in the interest of keeping the peace process—or the illusion of one—alive, donor policies and politics were no longer informed by Palestinian rights or Israel's obligations under international law or even a commitment to Israel's security as defined by that law, but by an uncritical acceptance of Israeli policies and the realities created that were clearly opposed to Palestinian state building, a two-state solution and peace. The logic of international law was abandoned in the interest of maintaining a failed political process. In fact, as conditions worsened in the occupied territories because of increasing economic restrictions and a tightened closure regime, donors were forced—as early as the mid-1990s—to redirect their funding from development to emergency relief, something they were loathe to do. Again, this was done to keep the peace process alive.

Where are we now?

The occupied territories look very different than they did even five years ago let alone 10 or 15. The Palestinians have two authorities violently opposed to each other, signaling in stark terms the death of the Palestinian national movement. Gaza is cut off and isolated, its economy (virtually) collapsed. The West Bank is dissected and at least 40 percent lies outside Palestinian control. There are 132 Israeli settlements housing 282,000 people in the West Bank and 191,000 in East Jerusalem. There are now anywhere between 435 and 1,029 miles of Israeli settlement roads crisscrossing the West

¹² See Herremans, *op cit.*

Bank further truncating and isolating Palestinian land. The separation barrier is now 400 kilometers in length (248 miles) and is projected to be 721 kilometers (448 miles) at its completion. With its deep extension eastward, the barrier will sever East Jerusalem and its 250,000 residents from the West Bank, cutting the West Bank in two.

There are at least three main trends characterizing donor aid in the West Bank and Gaza at present:

First, there is very little development money available; assistance is primarily humanitarian and emergency response. Clearly, this sort of assistance is needed but it is a short-term solution that does little if anything to prepare for the future.

Second, after Annapolis there is once again a trend of directing substantial donor fund flows directly to the Palestinian Authority (PA), which means to the West Bank. Gaza is neglected except for the salaries of those civil servants who obey the Ramallah-based government. Of course, those salaries represent important remittances but contribute nothing to economic change. Furthermore, many people are paid to stay home and could be analyzed as being counterproductive in many ways. It also would be naïve to assume that the PA is using donor funds in the most transparent, effective manner possible. It is important to note that while PA officials continue to drive the latest and most luxurious cars, travel frequently and comfortably, send their children to private schools domestically and abroad, lodge their families in Amman, and build mansions, the human development indicators of the Palestinian people are plummeting.

Third, donor discomfort over the Hamas authorities in Gaza has resulted in a policy of either withholding funding from them or being so directive about how assistance can flow and to whom, that it borders on the immoral. Gaza is a room full of children

who deserve protection. Yet, donor assistance, particularly from the United States, is directed in ways that deselect whole swaths of the population.¹³ The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), for example, permits no assistance of any kind to go the Ministry of Health in Gaza although the Ministry meets the health needs of hundreds of thousands of people. This is because the Ministry is controlled by Hamas. Effectively and practically, this denies urgently needed equipment, pharmaceuticals and disposables to anyone who ends up by design or accident in an MOH hospital or clinic.

U.S. government rules in the war on terror mean that an American organization working in Gaza—even if it is a conduit for EC emergency funds—cannot contract to build, say a reservoir, in a municipality that the USG has deemed Hamas because then the US organization would be in danger of breaking OFAC (U.S. Treasury Office of Foreign Assets) rules with legal liabilities. Hence, it does not matter how much the community may need the reservoir; political imperatives supercede developmental ones. This also happens in the West Bank where, for example, an implementer may not be permitted to help with the water system in a given village because the local council is perceived as “Hamas.”¹⁴

One does not breakdown a society in order to build it up again.

At a time when European diplomatic engagement and a rights-based approach are desperately needed to address a terribly fragmented and violent context, the EU “seems satisfied with following the U.S. lead. The transatlantic relationship has trumped the relationship with Europe and its neighbors, leading to a paralysis in European policy.”¹⁵

¹³ EU programs are generally less restrictive and more flexible.

¹⁴ Interviews with international development professionals who asked not to be identified, Jerusalem, 2007 and 2008.

¹⁵ Mariano Aguirre and Mark Taylor, “Is Europe Adrift in the Middle East?” US/ME Policy Brief, The U.S./Middle East Project, November 10, 2007, pp. 1-2.

This seems particularly so in light of the rifts caused by the Iraq war. Yet, the U.S. ignores European interests in the Middle East since the most important debates take place in Washington not Brussels. “As a result, Europe is forsaking its traditional role as an actor with its own diplomacy and intent on defending certain moral values; worse, it is forsaking its basic obligation to protect its interests.”¹⁶ This is a common theme in the literature on the European role in the Middle East.

According to the US/ME Project, a progressive and well-respected think tank in the United States: “The single-minded emphasis on security in European domestic and foreign policies has proceeded on the assumption that there is no connection between violence and political grievances. This has led to further polarization, feeding regional conflicts rather than mitigating them. It has meant taking sides in Iraq, between Israel and Palestine, among Palestinians and among Lebanese; it also has meant lining up against Syria and Iran. Adopting one or two of those postures might be sustainable at any one time; taking all of them at once is not. Worse, it validates the view of many that the U.S. and Europe are determined to subjugate the region and is used as justification for resort to politically-motivated violence.”¹⁷

Why is there no longer an independent European regional diplomacy given the critical and direct linkages between European foreign policy in the Middle East and European domestic issues?

I put that question to you. The worsening Palestinian-Israeli conflict will affect Europe more directly than the US. The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is a political one and the challenge lies in finding a political solution not an economic one. Economic aid

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 2.

¹⁷ Ibid.

is of course important but insufficient. In following the American lead at present Europe is promoting political division over national reconciliation, impoverishment over empowerment. Can that be in anyone's interest including Europe's?

Gideon Levy of Haaretz similarly argues: "The stance of European leaders is particularly perplexing. We're not speaking about the U.S. with its Jewish and Christian lobbies, but rather opinionated Europe; it, too, has lost its ability to act as an honest broker, the type that wields its influence to bring an end to the conflict that endangers it, too. We need Europe, the peace needs Europe, but official Europe covers its eyes and automatically falls in line with the U.S. and its blind support for Israel and its boycott of Gaza. . . . By not speaking about the siege of Gaza, the starvation imposed on it and the killing of hundreds of its people, Europe's leaders are not meeting their political and moral obligations. Those who believe that only honest international intervention can bring an end to occupation find themselves desperate and disappointed."¹⁸

Clearly, the EU has a critical role to play in redressing the gross imbalances that characterize the conflict and many are calling for it. Historically, European diplomacy has been known for its grounding in international law and norms and its more evenhanded approach to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. What is needed is a universal application of international law, which would not only require Europe to challenge Israel on its settlement policy in the West Bank and siege of Gaza, but also require it to engage with Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah to end their rocket attacks against Israeli civilians.¹⁹

¹⁸ Gideon Levy, "With Friends Like These . . ." Ha'aretz, 23 March 2008.

¹⁹ US/ME Policy Brief, p. 3. "Europeans should explore how to return to their role as the guardians of the rule of law, international legitimacy, political morality and the international peace-making consensus that is enshrined in UN resolutions and global conventions—grandiose aims, I admit, but shouldn't someone stand up for these things if the Americans, Israelis and Arabs do not?" See Rami G. Khouri, "Europe Should Put Its Mouth Where Its Money Is," Agence Global, 19 December 2007.

One wonders what Palestine would look like today if the international community had taken a principled and rights-based approach toward Israeli measures 15 years ago when some of those measures were first introduced?

European officials have long said that they work behind the scenes to influence policy. More recently, the European Parliament passed a resolution stating that “the policy of isolation of the Gaza Strip has failed at both the political and humanitarian level.”²⁰ The resolution also called on the Abbas government to work with its counterpart in Gaza.²¹ While these initiatives are welcome they are, in effect, meaningless given the harsh realities on the ground and the continued destruction of ordinary life. Time is running out for reasons I have stated and others I have not. Europe has failed to translate its growing engagement with the Middle East into influence that could bring about constructive change. The Europeans need a policy that “enhances their strengths rather than institutionalizes their weaknesses. . . [I]t does have the moral force to say clearly what . . . a negotiated peace requires, what are the dictates of accepted law and legitimacy, and how all sides are falling short in their commitments to pursue these routes towards peace and security for Arabs and Israelis alike.”²²

²⁰ Ali Abunimah, “Shifting Attitudes Toward Hamas,” Palestine Center Information Brief 160, 11 March 2008, Washington, DC. Original citation: European Parliament, Resolution, 21 February 2008.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Rami G. Khouri, Agence Global, 19 December 2007.

As I said yesterday, economic policy must be linked to political policy and this should apply to Israel and the Palestinian Authority alike. “EU trade instruments, [for example], should be linked explicitly to EU human rights legislation.”²³ While I realize that such an independent European role remains unlikely, it is desperately needed. In the continued absence of an independent and more principled position, Europe may find itself an unwilling witness to, and victim of, its own inaction.

At what point do donor policies shift from supporting and facilitating human rights violations through acts of omission (i.e., by refusing to challenge them) to one where they become active in sustaining these violations through acts of commission? In this regard the question of the West Bank Wall raises another critical issue for the donor community. The 2004 International Court of Justice ruling affirmed the illegality of the Wall and “also held that all states are under an obligation not to recognize the illegal situation created by the barrier’s construction and ‘not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by such construction.’”²⁴

²³ US/ME Policy Brief, p. 3. Writing on donor politics during Oslo, the late UN official Rick Hooper stated: “Bosnia provides an important comparison because donors there have become increasingly interventionist vis-à-vis the conflicting parties, granting more powers to the High Representative and threatening various types of political and economic sanctions should the parties not respect the Dayton Accords. In sharp contrast, donors have been extremely reluctant even to appear to be intervening where the Israelis are concerned, let alone express sharp criticism or link aid to Israel with progress in the peace process. When it comes to the Palestinians, donor governments have only rarely expressed publicly their concern for such issues as corruption or human rights abuses.” See Rick Hooper, “The International Politics of Donor Assistance To Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, 1993-1997,” in Sara Roy (ed.), *The Economics of Middle East Peace: A Reassessment*, Research in Middle East Economics, Volume 3 (Stamford, CT: Middle East Economic Association and JAI Press, 1999), pp. 89-90.

²⁴ David Shearer and Anuschka Meyer, “The Dilemma of Aid Under Occupation,” in Michael Keating, Anne Le More and Robert Lowe (eds.), *Aid, Diplomacy and Facts on the Ground* (London: Chatham House, 2005), p. 171.

Since this decision donors have had to consider whether their projects are violating international law directly and facilitating Israeli settlement construction. The question is not only one of project feasibility but legality.²⁵

The ruling also affirmed the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention and specified that “all state parties to the Geneva Conventions are obliged to insure Israel’s respect for international humanitarian law.”²⁶ As a result, donors have been forced to more critically examine whether their own assistance and the projects it supports might violate international law, particularly the law of occupation.²⁷ More specifically, no party, including donors, are allowed to substitute for the responsibility of the occupying power especially when the problems they are addressing were created by the occupier. To date, no donor has insisted that Israel meet its obligations under international law to provide assistance to the Palestinian people.²⁸

This brings to mind something that T.B. Macaulay once wrote and with this I shall conclude: “the most frightful of all spectacles [is] the strength of civilization without its mercy.”

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 169. Shearer and Meyer further explain (pp. 169-170): “Under international law, Israel, as the occupying power, bears primary responsibility for assisting Palestinians in the current humanitarian crisis—not outside agencies or donors. The responsibilities of the occupier are laid down in the 1907 Hague Regulations and the 1949 Geneva Conventions, to which Israel is a signatory. Under Article 43 of the Hague Regulations, Israel has a broad obligation to ensure the welfare of the population in the territories. Under the Fourth Geneva Convention, it is responsible for ensuring food, medical supplies and services for the population, as well as for maintaining institutions dedicated to the care and education of children. Israel has traditionally disputed the applicability of the Geneva Conventions to the occupied Palestinian territory, but an overwhelming body of international opinion has rejected this stance. Significantly, the Israeli Supreme Court, having initially ruled for many years that only the Hague Conventions apply, has now also acknowledged that at least certain provisions of the Geneva Conventions should be observed.” With its “disengagement” from the Gaza Strip, the Israeli government argues that the territory cannot be considered occupied.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 171.

International paradigms of development and donor politics and impact on women NGOs and gender orders in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Siham Barghouthi

Abstract: This paper will give an overview on Palestinian women's organizations. Looking at international donor policies of funding those organizations, the papers points out the major shortcomings of these policies in addressing women's needs.

Introduction

Before discussing the effect of the donors' funding policies for women organizations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, it is important to mention the long lasting Palestinian women's suffering that is related to the persistence of the Israeli occupation and depriving the Palestinians of their right to freedom and national independence.

While Palestinian women support and work hard towards a just peaceful resolution that is based on international law (including relevant UN resolutions), human rights and equality, their rights are violated on a daily basis by the Israeli occupation. Palestinian women, while wary and fearing for their lives and the lives of their children and families, do dream of the day when they can enjoy a calm and fearless life.

The Palestinian families, by and large, have been divided and alienated from each other by the imprisonment of family members, besieging of the Palestinian cities and villages, and closing of the border crossings.

Palestinian women are either still locked up in Israeli jails, prevented from meeting and communicating with family members who are in

exile, been widowed as their husbands were killed during the conflict, separated from the spouses who were not granted permission to return home, or left homeless as their homes were demolished.

Many Palestinian women have been deprived of the simple right to have their morning coffee with a neighbor or a friend, as the Israeli government has been building the separation wall that has swept its way through Palestinian homes and gardens.

Stories of agonized Palestinian women have been and are told by women from all generations, and this is why nearly all of our women agree that the Palestinian Israeli conflict can only come to an end by ending the occupation and establishing the Palestinian state next to Israel. The two states solution might be transformed into a far-fetched dream, unless serious international efforts are put together to conclude a just and sustainable solution to the ongoing conflict by the end of 2008.

Palestinian women, in this regard, do value the UN Security Council resolution 1325, and read it as an important tool to enhance women's role in the negotiation process and the making of peace in the region. However, we believe that specific measurements and actions are needed to bring governments and states to comply with articles of the resolution and put them into practice- or otherwise, we fear that effect of the resolution would be limited and no serious results would be achieved.

Negotiations between the Palestinian and the Israeli sides have resumed in the past few months after Annapolis; however, things on the grounds are going in the opposite direction from the path of peace. The building of the separation wall, the expansion of Israeli settlements on Palestinian lands, and the annexation of east Jerusalem to Israel are destroying the chances for any peaceful agreement, and this leads the Palestinian women's movement to be suspicious of the Israeli government's true intentions and their

willingness to comply with the international resolutions that would lead to ending the conflict, and for this we need to reemphasize and demand a proper and efficient international protection for the Palestinian people.

In spite of all the discouraging signs from the Israeli side, Palestinian women continue to believe in and support all serious peace initiatives; this strong belief in peace was the motivation for them to react accordingly to Security Council Resolution 1325. Palestinian women proposed and initiated the formation of an international women's committee as a step towards widening women's role in the making of peace.

I would like here to use the opportunity to extend our great thanks and appreciation to all Palestinian, Israeli and International women for their sincere efforts, as the committee would not have been established without their help and support.

The Palestinian women's organizations

Some of the Palestinian women organizations emerged as a response to the crises that have been going on since the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. They were formed to provide services and support to the women that had been affected and harmed either by being forced to immigrate and live in refugee camps, or by having to cope with the Israeli occupation violations that have been ongoing since 1967 till this day.

The women's organizations take a major place on the Palestinian political map and take the lead in mobilizing the Palestinian women to enable them to defend their people's national quest for self-determination and the establishment of their independent Palestinian state.

The vision of the organizations has always focused on adopting all possible activities to expand women's participation in defending and preserving the Palestinian identity. The women's movement

has always stressed that the PLO should continue to be the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people during all the stages of our national conflict. The concerns of the movement go further to the launching of the different initiatives to empower their fellow women and enhance their role in implementation of the social and political Palestinian agendas.

The Palestinian women's movement contains several women's organizations and institutions: the General Union for Palestinian Women (GUPW), as well as most women's networks, women's legal centers, women's departments within the political parties, charitable and cooperative organizations, and the women's center in the camps and rural areas are all engaged in one or more of the following tasks:

1. Political women's organizations that concentrate on mobilization of Palestinian women in ending the Israeli occupation. Women are also motivated to defend their rights against all kinds of discrimination in their societies (GUPW and the women's committees within the political parties resemble this sector).
2. Social women's organizations that are involved in building a network of social services to cover education, health, poor families, as well as the people with special needs.
3. Economic women's organizations with special interest in empowerment of the women and involving them in the development process by expanding their position within the productive labor force; rural women societies and small lending associations are mostly active in this field.
4. Women's legal centers are actively involved in enforcement of the legislation and laws that insure equal rights

and obligations for men and women, in order to be able to reach a comprehensive set of legislation in favor of the women and can provide stability and security for the families. The centers offer legal and mental guidance for the women and conduct field studies and research on the status of women in the different localities.

5. Research and study centers specialized in deciding the criteria needed to measure the changes and development on the status of the Palestinian women; field studies and documentation of the women's stories is a major part of the work conducted by those centers.
6. The women's coalitions and networks are busy developing a social lobby in favor of the women's issues. They launch campaigns against domestic violence and early marriage, and form pressure groups to influence policy makers in order for the women to take their right position in the making of decisions; they have won the right for women to participate in the legislative and local elections within a specific quota; they are also working hard to change the stereotyped image of women in the local media.

Samples of the organizations mentioned above are cited only to give an idea of the numerous women's organizations that are active in defending women's rights and in defeating all backward ideas and norms that restrain our women and delay their development; women are given training in most needed fields, and are encouraged to take the lead and get actively involved in the national development planning.

The donor's funding policies and the women's organizations:

It was notable that the Donors interest in supporting and financing Palestinian women's associations was enhanced after the signing of Oslo accord; governmental and non governmental women's associations alike were included by the donors financial support policies. However, I will dedicate this part of my paper to the donations given to women's organizations that are part of the civil society institution and not the governmental ones.

The donors funded the Palestinian women's organization in many fields such as:

1. Women's rights as human rights; to raise the awareness of women of their rights, and give attention to the International Convention for Elimination of all Discriminations Against Women (CEDAW), the donors sponsored all local, regional, and international conferences to enhance the women's active political and developmental participation, as well as their participation in the good governance of their country.
2. Support was made available for training of the women in leadership, gender issues, awareness campaigns, and the formation of pressure groups.
3. Enhancement of the women's political involvement by encouraging women to take part in the nominating and voting process for the local and general elections; women have been trained to election campaigns as well as the media campaigns.
4. Alteration of certain laws –especially those related to the family and punishment laws; women have been mobilized to rally for the laws in their favor.

5. Support women's organization establishment by providing them with the equipment and trainings needed to increase their staff's capabilities in administration, financial analyses, strategic planning, and other related fields.
6. Raising the women's general awareness in issues of citizenship, democracy, and human rights.
7. Enhance networking and coordination between women's institutions, and the formation of coalitions and networks to elevate women's positive influence in their communities.
8. Support women's institutions that provide services to the victims of the domestic violence.

The abovementioned schemes of support have led in one way or the other to social awareness and interaction in women's issues and rights. It also formed a protective shield for the women's achievements in the quota issue and in pressuring decision makers to have to represent women in high ranking positions- although size of this representation is still limited.

Women have indeed acquired new experiences and knowledge in the local and general election process, and women succeeded and registered a surprising breakthrough during the local elections.

The question that remains to be answered is whether the international support has been able to meet the development needs of the Palestinian women. The answer might be reflected in a survey conducted in February 2008, and was prepared by the Arab World Center for Development Studies; the poll shows that women's priorities had been arranged in the following manner:

96% of the 2400 women interviewed referred to education as their top priority.

94% social security and health services

82% progressive legislation to eliminate the violence against women and to reduce forceful divorces

78% secure better opportunities for the working

women- women that are the providers for their families are the poorest.

In a special report issued on the 8th of March, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics stated that 15.7% of the Palestinian work forces over 15 years of age are women – compared to male workers that comprise 69.3% of the labor force. The report also says that 8% of the Palestinian families are fully supported by women; 65% of those families are below the poverty line.

From the above data, we can see the most visible impediments in the financing policies of the donors:

1. Women's organizations are gradually moving towards meeting the donor's criteria and conditions by executing projects not related to the basic and practical needs of the wider sector of the rural women and the women in the camps.
2. Women's institutions are forced to sign the document that denounces terrorism in order for them to be nominated for donations from the USA and some other countries; the document lacks any clear identification of terrorism.
3. The Donors decision to finance certain women's organizations is taken according to the special agendas of the donors and not according to the specific needs of the women on the ground; this is reflected in the fact that some institutes are granted donations at the expense of

many other women's institutes that provide social and life services and have direct contact with the women population.

4. Some of the aid delivered goes to institutions that have no public interactions and cannot make the needed changes on the ground; this led to the creation of a superficial women's leadership distant from the female population, and unable to win their trust and confidence.
5. The donors demand that women's organizations had to have financial and administrative standards similar to the universal standards; this led to excluding several active institutions in the villages and remote areas from benefiting from the donors money in order to elevate their services and developmental role in their districts.
6. The project proposals demanded by the donors are normally restricted to the donors' views and special schemes, and are to be submitted in English; this hinders grass root institutions that work directly with the public and the average women. One of the examples I can recall now is related to kindergartens in the rural areas as the PNA do not have the resources for this sector and local women's institutions in the villages find it hard to attract donors to support such projects.

Recommendations:

Pressure the international community for the implementation of the international resolutions on the Palestinian – Israeli conflict that would lead to a just and lasting peace for the peoples of the region.

Consult with the donors in order for them to pay more attention to

the Palestinian women's development needs according to the women's own agendas and priorities; health services for the women and children, social services and social security and poverty alleviation are on top of the Palestinian women's demands.

Empower the women's organizations by providing them with the logistics and financial support.

Support the women's coalitions at grassroots levels, and establish alliances to enhance the participation of women in the making of peace.

Support women's associations that advocate for the education of peace.

Work towards securing an international protection for the Palestinian people and towards the execution of the Security Council Resolution 1325, in relation to the protection of women and children in war times.

Feminist perspectives on ending the Israeli occupation and getting to peace with the Palestinians

Gila Svirsky

Abstract: This essay provides an analysis of the feminist peace movement in Israel and its efforts for peace with Palestine. I examine why a separate women's peace movement is necessary, how the movement differs from the mixed-gender peace movement, and what is the distinctively feminist vision of peace. I also look at the feminization of the security debate in Israel, and how this can contribute toward changing Israeli attitudes about the occupation. Finally, I look at the importance of UN SC 1325 for peace in the Middle East.

I'd like to begin by telling a story. A few years ago, two busloads of Israeli peace activists – men and women mixed – traveled to a small Palestinian village, where two homes had been demolished by the Israeli army. When we got out of the buses, soldiers blocked our access to the village and demanded that we leave. Instead, we began to walk along the main road toward another entrance, knowing full well that this would also be blocked by the soldiers. Suddenly, one of the women broke away and began to walk across the field directly toward the village. It seemed so simple, and a group of us followed her, spreading out to make it harder for the soldiers to stop us.

The soldiers came at us quickly, grabbing us to prevent our progress. I made a quick head count of them and climbed up on a mound of earth to call out, “There are many more of us than soldiers, just walk peacefully, no violence.” Soon the soldiers were running back and forth to stop more of us from going through the field. Although the soldiers were blocking us only with their bodies – twisting arms, pushing, grabbing – I guess it was the rifles slung across their backs that prevented more of the larger group from following

us. In the scuffle, 7 of us made it past the soldiers and walked the 10 minutes through the fields into the village.

Inside the village, we found the demolished homes and families living in a tent. The father took us on a tour of the ruins of his home. As he was talking, I had a call on my cell phone from someone in the group outside, who told us that, following negotiations with the army, an official delegation of the peace activists who remained behind would be allowed to join us in the village. Within a short time, we saw a group walking toward us along the road.

It was at that moment, as they approached, that we looked around at ourselves and something struck us: The 7 of us who had taken the risk, broken through the soldiers, done all the hard work, and reached the village were all women. While the “Official Delegation” coming down the road...were all men.

Does anything ring familiar to you about this story? In Israel, as is often the case in many countries, women may be doing much of the hard work for peace, but they are rarely part of the “official delegation” – they rarely represent the movement publicly. And when the voices of women are heard, it’s often the result of an exhausting struggle.

But there is more to the feminist peace movement in Israel than wanting to be heard. It is what we have to say that is also different. First, let me mention a few of the 10 women’s peace organizations in Israel to give you a more concrete idea of what we do:

There is the *Women in Black* movement, which has held a dramatic vigil every single Friday for the past 20 years in public locations in Israel – women dressed all in black and standing silently for one hour every week with a sign that carries a simple message: “End the Occupation”. You probably know that there is a sister vigil of Women in Black here in Vienna.

Another feminist peace organization in Israel is called *New Profile*. These women work to end the militarization of Israeli society. They also support and encourage women and men who refuse to do army service in the occupied territories.

A third, the *Bat Shalom* organization has worked to build a common political platform for peace with Palestinian women in a partnership called The Jerusalem Link.

Last, let me mention *Machsom-Watch*, which means Checkpoint Watch. The women of Machsom-Watch patrol and monitor checkpoints wherever Israeli soldiers block the movement of Palestinians, documenting the brutality and humiliation that take place there daily, bringing this to the attention of the Israeli public and authorities, as well as international bodies.

The 10 women's peace organizations work together in a framework called the *Coalition of Women for Peace*. You can find more details about these activities on the website www.coalitionofwomen.org.

Now the feminist peace movement is different than the mixed-gender peace movement in a number of ways. First of all, our strategies have been more varied. In addition to vigils and demonstrations, we have engaged in a wide variety of activities. We organize humanitarian aid as a political statement: helping Palestinian families with the olive harvest; providing school supplies and even medicines and infant food during crisis situations. We try to make the occupation visible to Israelis who prefer not to know what is happening by holding street theater, teach-ins, and even bus tours of the occupied territories and separation wall. In order to mobilize local and international public opinion, we run urgent-action e-mail lists, international campaigns, and websites in English, Hebrew, Arabic, and Russian. We engage in Gandhi-inspired direct action – we once “lay siege” to the Israeli Ministry of Defense, in an effort to get them to understand the cruelty of this tactic. Our

siege, of course, didn't last as long as the terrible siege now choking Gaza. We have blocked bulldozers with our bodies, chained ourselves to olive trees, and confronted soldiers in efforts to prevent further destruction of Palestinian homes and property. Much joint work has also been done with Palestinian women to prevent construction of the separation wall. Some of our actions have ended in arrests or injury. Israeli women have also participated in dialogue groups with Palestinian women, but this has not always been easy or successful, as Maha will probably discuss. If peace could be won by effort alone, the women's peace movement would have achieved it long ago. But in the world of chauvinist realpolitik, good intentions are clearly not enough.

The women's peace movement is also distinctive because it has been more progressive than the mixed-gender peace movement. We took positions that were considered radical well before the mixed groups did. Israeli women signed a peace treaty with Palestinian women long before Rabin and Arafat did it on the White House lawn, and our principles went beyond the general assertion of ending hostilities. Our treaty called for establishment of a Palestinian state side-by-side with the state of Israel, the recognition of Jerusalem as the shared capital of both states, and some sort of resolution for the Palestinian refugee problem, though we never managed to articulate a solution on which both sides agreed. But the women's movement did challenge ourselves to look at this difficult issue, and not ignore it, as most people have. We will continue to work to come up with a solution that can be acceptable to both sides.

The feminist peace movement is also distinctive because it has a broad social vision. We view the conflict as integrally related to social, economic, and gender issues. Indeed, the conflict with the Palestinians directly affects both gender inequality and oppression of the poor. Why gender inequality? Because in a society at war – where it is predominantly the men who are risking their lives

in army service and making military and political decisions – men and their views become valued and privileged over women and our views. This entrenches inequality for women, leaving us at a disadvantage in competing for jobs, political office, and social status. A man who has been an officer in the army or served in a combat role or simply given 3 years of service to the country has an advantage over a woman in applying for a job. And I don't have to point out all the retired generals who parachuted out of the army directly into senior elected office, including several prime ministers [Rabin, Barak, Sharon].

The conflict also deepens poverty, as Israel sinks vast resources into illegal settlements and the military occupation at the expense of social needs inside Israel – housing, education, health, care for the elderly, and other needs. And since women are more likely to find themselves among the poor, they become the first victims of inadequate social services. In general, socio-economic issues become marginalized in the face of the conflict. Because of this link, the feminist peace movement takes a broader perspective of war and peace, connecting them to social issues, including gender.

This has led us to a new strategy, which we call “Reframing Security”. In this campaign, we try to broaden the understanding of security in Israel so that it will include all aspects of ‘human security’ – a society that cares for its poor, reduces violence, protects its natural resources, and co-exists in peace with its neighbors. Indeed, this campaign seeks to instill the understanding that “a just peace agreement is the best way to promote security”. In the “Reframing Security” campaign, we invest our best efforts in outreach to populations that do not share our views, engaging them in ways we hope will change their minds. This new strategy also reflects our conviction that we must focus on changing attitudes inside Israel, though it is often easier and more satisfying to be talking to international audiences or Palestinian allies.

Let me mention one more important way that the feminist peace

movement is distinctive from the mixed movement: We advocate that women must be equal partners in the negotiations for peace, giving full support to UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Women must become part of the negotiations because this is only fair and just, but also because agreements must reflect the needs of all those affected by them, not just the men. Therefore the input of women is critical. Above all, we note that women are more likely to come up with a decent agreement, one that is considered a win-win situation for both sides. Indeed, it defies logic to choose military men as negotiators – men with portfolios of brutal crimes against each other, generals who have honed the art of war and who measure their success by the unconditional surrender of the other. I believe that any mother would have more experience than most generals in the art of resolving differences amicably.

I have tried here to give a sense of how the feminist peace movement has become the most vibrant and interesting part of the peace movement in Israel. And yet despite all this, the Israeli media have virtually ignored our activity. I have had more media coverage here in Vienna since my arrival than we generally get in Israel for our efforts. This has been frustrating and infuriating. We are left trying to get our message out primarily by e-mail and websites, but the Israeli public sees us very little. Some of this “ignoring of us” is surely related to how women continue to be silenced or regarded as marginal to the main business of society. It is not surprising that the only major article written about us in the Israeli newspapers was entitled, “The Pariahs”. Although many of our views have reached the mainstream of public opinion, the fact that we are strong and outspoken women do not endear us to a society in which “macho” is the revered standard.

Finally, the vision of the feminist peace movement in Israel is much broader than “separation” – the right of Palestinians to political self-definition and a state. Our movement calls for a deep-seated change of priorities. This means not just ending the Israeli

occupation, but shaping a shared future of cooperation. It means opposition to the militarism that permeates both societies, an equal role for women in negotiations for peace, and a society that cares more about education, health, art, and the poor than it does about maintaining a deadly arsenal. It means a world in which we share our resources, rather than fight about them.

The conflict between Israel and our Arab neighbors has taken a terrible toll in human life and suffering, particularly from the Palestinian people. True courage and fortitude are at the very heart of survival of the Palestinians, struggling to stay alive, to keep their families together, to hold onto their humanity in the face of adversity too terrible to imagine.

But ultimately, this occupation, like every other in history, will come to an end. The general parameters of that ending are already drawn and in agreement. What we need now is leadership committed to swiftly concluding this era awash in blood, leadership that understands the price we pay in death and destruction for every hour of delay. What we need now is leadership with expertise at reconciliation and rapprochement. What we need now is women.

Post-Oslo and (im)possibilities of cooperation in the context of occupation – a Palestinian perspective

Maha Abu-Dhayyeh Shamas

Abstract: After a short historical review this paper analyses the shortcomings of the Oslo agreement as well as the failures of donor policies in the post-Oslo period. It closes with recommendations for investments in maintaining human security and social network.

Introduction

As is well known, the Palestinian nation and its people rely heavily on international donors. Hence, donors—as a particular kind of presence and singularly—exert a great deal of influence in governmental and civil arenas of Palestinian life. Although Palestine is not a state, in any sense of the formal definition, it is a “client state,” in the sense of being subordinated and made subservient in key ways, such as not having full control of its own political workings, relations with foreign powers, economy, and, ultimately, its destiny. Palestine is often at the mercy of Israeli, US, and European mandates and interests. This is despite the will of the people and their ongoing struggles for liberation, self-determination, and statehood. It is safe to say that not many, if any, expect things to be fundamentally different in the foreseeable future. The purpose of this paper, then, is to examine the impact of this donor-client politics on the gender order.

Historical and Political Context

Palestine and the UN-based world order

After the Second World War, as a result of the devastation of two world wars in Europe, 50 countries adopted the charter of the United Nations on June 26, 1945. By adopting it, those nations “under(took) a commitment to maintain international peace and security” and to “fulfill in good faith the obligations...in accord-

ance with this newly adopted charter.”¹

Through this agreement, a new world order evolved that is state-based and that sets standards and regulates relations between states and among states and between the state and its own populations. Over the years, membership in the UN increased from 50 to the current number of 192 states, but the fundamental compact has remained unchanged.

State responsibility towards its own people

Although a chief aim of the UN is to promote international peace, they operate on the principle of non-intervention into matters of the state. Accordingly, it is a state's responsibility to protect its own people. The world's stateless people, due to war, are considered “protected people” under international law, therefore, under the protection of the “international community.”² Within this system of protection, states also are obligated to protect women and their human rights specifically under the Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, (CEDAW), adopted in 1993. In both instances, states are to hold each other accountable and international mechanisms have been created to ensure state adherence to their international obligations.

Under these laws, it is the duty of states to protect women from violence. As such, states are obligated to prevent violence against women through policy reform and legislative development, to investigate the violations, and consequently prosecute perpetrators and punish them when found guilty. Recognizing that the structural inequality between men and women is the base of all forms of violence against women, states are responsible to take temporary measures, for instance affirmative action, at all state levels to accelerate policy changes to ensure protection as well as promote women's rights to ensure access to equal opportunities for development. States have to show action on those matters through the

¹ [www.un.org/about un/charter, preamble](http://www.un.org/about_un/charter_preamble)

² www.icrc.org

submission of period reports to the CEDAW Committee. Those principles of responsibility to protect and to take necessary measures to address inequalities to ensure protection permeate throughout all systems of international law.

Creation of the State of Israel

The state of Israel was created as a result of Resolution 181, November 1947, which adopted the partition plan to create the Jewish homeland. Resolution 273, May 1949, admitted Israel as a member state of the UN.

The creation of the Israeli state resulted in a massive expulsion of Palestinian people from historical Palestine. Since its establishment of Israel, the UN has issued 73 resolutions related to the Palestine/Israel conflict that assert the right of Palestinians for justice and restitution. For example, despite UN Resolution 194 that compels Israel to allow the refugees the right to return, it has continuously refused. Moreover, there have been numerous denunciations of Israeli violations of international laws in their dealings with Palestinians and their neighbours particularly Lebanon.³ The absence of any international enforcement and the deep sense of injustice led to the Palestinian people exercising their own agency by massive mobilisation and organisation to liberate the homeland and secure restitution, according to UN resolutions, for the expelled and became refugees.

Creation of the PLO

There is a global recognition of the right of Palestinians to self-determination, statehood, and restitution, also based on international law. Supported by the Arab League, the Palestine Liberation Organization, (PLO), was created in May 1964 to lead the struggle for the liberation of Palestine. In 1974 the PLO, recognized as a national liberation movement and as a sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, received a standing ovation at the

³ www.jatonyc.org

General Assembly to participate as an observer in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly and to maintain permanent observer mission at the UN ⁴.

The 1967 War

The inability to settle the Israel/Palestine conflict has resulted in many regional wars that have cost hundreds of thousands of lives to date. The 1967 War, so-called “Arab/Israeli” or “Six-Day,” was a milestone in Israeli/Palestinian relations, as it brought under direct Israeli control the Palestinian population with the exception of those refugees residing in the neighbouring Arab countries and disbursed in the rest of the world. In spite of a clear international stand on the need to end the occupation and the recognition of Palestinian rights for self determination, Israel pursued its denial for this right and continued its repressive policies towards the people, and systematic strategies to take control of land and resources. This repression led to a popular uprising in late 1987 known as the “First Intifada.”

First Intifada

As a result of the “First Intifada” against the occupation and the brutal Israeli response, international public opinion shifted and Israel felt the pressure. Israeli leadership recognized the need for Israel to adjust its relationship to the Palestinian people, that is, to recognize the need for Palestinian self-determination and the creation of a Palestinian state. At the time, some perceived this shift as an Israeli need to off-load their responsibility for the care of the Palestinian people to a Palestinian entity, as much as a Palestinian need for statehood.

Sponsored by the United States, and with the blessing of the world community, the Washington negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians under the umbrella of the Arab states started. ⁵ This led to no final outcomes. While the official negotiations were hap-

⁴ www.un.org/members/nonmembers

pening, backdoor negotiations between the PLO and Israeli representatives were taking place under the sponsorship of Norway. It was this that eventually resulted in the Oslo Agreement. For all the criticisms about the Oslo Agreement, its importance was that Palestinian and Israeli representatives negotiated directly, however asymmetrical the power relations, without intermediaries. This meant that they were forced to find ways to live together in historical Palestine.⁶

Palestinian Authority: Non-State Entity with State Obligations

The famous Rabin-Arafat handshake on the White House lawn on September 13, 1993 publicly sealed the political agreement long awaited by the international community and was eagerly welcomed by the world community. It hailed the creation of the Palestinian Authority (PA), the governing body separate from the PLO, to assume control and responsibility of internal Palestinian affairs. This body was created as a result of the Oslo Accords (officially called the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements) on August 20, 1993. The Oslo Accords set the framework for relationship between the PA and the State of Israel for an interim period, anticipated to last only five years, during which a permanent agreement between the PA and Israel would be negotiated (beginning no later than May 1996). Permanent-status issues, such as jurisdiction over Jerusalem, status of refugees, Israeli settlements, security and borders, environment and water resources, were deliberately left to be decided at a later stage.

Internal obligation to respect human rights

Under the agreement, the PA was given the responsibility for the administration of the territory under its control. The PA demonstrated its commitment to human rights, democratic freedoms, international law, and the principles of the Charter of the United

⁵ en.wikipedia.org

⁶ www.passia.org/seminars97/diplomacy

Nations, in the decision taken on Sept. 30, 1993, to establish a supreme Palestinian National Authority for Human Rights, called the Palestinian Independent Commission for Human Rights.

Jurisdictional divisions and lack of authority

The agreement resulted in political-geographic division of jurisdiction that fundamentally constrained and restricted the authority of the PA. Referred to as “Phased Redeployment of the West Bank and Gaza Strip,” the Occupied Palestinian Territory was divided into three jurisdictions, called Areas A, B, and C. A consists of places under full Palestinian control, B comprises PA administration of Arab areas and Israeli control of security, and C is all Jewish communities including settlements, Israeli bases, all the main roads between Jewish communities and between the Arab towns in Areas A and B.

Matters related to “security” and foreign relations remained under the control of the Israeli authorities. However, in accordance with international law, the Geneva Conventions remained applicable; therefore, neither party could undertake any actions that would undermine the permanent status issues mentioned above. However, because of the division of jurisdiction as described above, the PA could not exercise its rule consistently or effectively over all the people, thereby resulting in the gradual development of the phenomenon of lawlessness.

Inability to protect its own people:

The PA could not protect its own people. Immediately after Oslo, Israel instituted a policy of systematically closing Jerusalem, restricting the movement of people to prevent them from reaching work places, and embarked on an even more aggressive settlement-building in the West Bank, further dividing the Palestinian Territory. All these have resulted in even more hardships for the average Palestinian. The Israeli military poses grave threat to Palestinian security as it continues to raid towns, demolish houses, and arrest, imprison, and torture people who they identify as a threat to their

own security. One out of three Palestinian men have spent time in Israeli jails or prisons.⁷

Total dependency on international political will and economic support

The international support of the Oslo Accords translated immediately into economic support from the various states to the PA through “development cooperation” to cover all aspects of Palestinian life, including state-building and infrastructural and economic development. The EU, along with individual member states, became, and continues to be, the major financial contributors to the PA. The money was given with the political motive of encouraging the “peace negotiations” presumed to lead to genuine and sustainable peace with Israel. It was a unique donor-recipient relationship insofar as the PA, a non-state, was treated as a state. As such, the PA was expected to meet all its external and internal responsibilities and obligations according to international state-based standards, especially to its own people, without having the necessary power and jurisdictional authority.

The PA also was faced with the double standard imposed by donors and other members of the international community. Donors used their financial contribution to hold the PA accountable for fulfilling the various Israeli/Palestinian agreements; however, they did not hold Israel equally accountable for any of the violations of the same agreements and even human rights against the Palestinian people, who under international law, are still considered protected people. Moreover, the donors, as UN members and signatories to various laws, conventions, and so on, failed to uphold their own legal responsibility by failing to make violators of these accountable. The unequal relationship between the PA and Israel and the donor-states and the absence of steady support and intervention by independent third parties to ensure movement on the peace process resulted in the undermining of the PA to govern effectively and to deliver expected fruits of a much anticipated “peace agreement.”

⁷ www.ppsmo.org (Arabic only) Palestinian Prisoner's Society Club

This led to such a severe loss of credibility with its own people that eventually the Palestinian people resorted to taking matters into their own hands, thus fomented another uprising, the Second Intifada. This resulted in the escalation of military hostilities, whereby the civilian population, both Israeli and Palestinian, became the target, with the intention of pressuring governments and leadership on both sides change existing policies.

Intra-Palestinian Politics: Promoting Class Stratification and Every-day Corruption

A troubling internal development related directly to features of the Oslo Accord began to manifest early on. A class of privileged and affluent people started to appear. Through the flow of donor money, the introduction of highly paid development aid staff, along with the VIP permits system that determined more or less free movement according to certain criteria, Palestinian society became more stratified than ever before, with a few having better standard of living and easier mobility, and the rest facing harsher conditions.

This privileged class exploited the existing power imbalance, in terms of political favouritism relative to the Israelis, to benefit themselves by manipulating the weak Palestinian systems. The legal system, already weakened as a result of years of occupation, became corrupted through cronyism, nepotism, and pressure from the new powerful elite. Thus, in addition to Israeli human rights violations with impunity, there was neither proper investigation nor prosecution of crimes committed against the more vulnerable members of the society. Women are at the bottom of power hierarchy!

Due Diligence, International Development Cooperation/Responsibility for Accountability

Since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994, millions of dollars of donor money have been invested in the Palestinian Territory. The assumption that guided these investments was that occupation has ended and Palestine is in the state-building

stage. Donors did not pay attention to the common-sense fact that the transitional period, after which the permanent status issues were supposed to be addressed, would be politically volatile and violent. No measures were taken to deal with those difficulties on the ground. The international community should have noted the danger signs after the assassination of Itzak Rabin, because it marked the beginning of the rise of the Israeli Right. The Palestinian Authority, even under the strong leadership of Arafat, was dependent on the political will and strength of the pro-peace Israeli leadership. The international community, with all its good will, failed to exercise the principle of due diligence in the handling of the peace negotiations and the transitional period, and did not step forward to assume its role as a proactive third-party to offset the power imbalance between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Since the time of the signing of the Oslo Agreement, the situation has deteriorated steadily. Systematically and rapidly increasing the construction of illegal settlements, building the Isolation Wall thereby placing the Palestinian people into isolated ghettos, developing a Jewish-only road network in the Occupied Territory, increasing the militarization of the Palestinian resistance to occupation, and using Israeli military strategies against the Palestinian civilian population, all have dashed the hopes for a political settlement based on a two-state solution. Because the international donor community has played a significant role in the development of the current situation, however unintended, it is important to examine donor experience in the post Oslo period to learn from the shortcoming in order to develop more proactive policies that are consistent with international law to ameliorate the current situation and, it is hoped, place the peace negotiations on the right track.

Donor Policies in Palestine: Unwitting Abettor to Prolonging the Occupation and Humanitarian Crisis?

The international community, under the UN system, must take at least moral, if not political, responsibility for the protracted nature of Palestine-Israel conflict. Since the Oslo Agreements, by not act-

ing proactively to apply the principles of rule of law and respect of agreements, donors have contributed practically to the prolongation of occupation. From the ground, it is clear that donors have unintentionally contributed to the breakdown of internal Palestinian social and political systems and networks and exacerbated the suffering of the people. Although this list is not exhaustive, I will highlight what I think are the key failures of donor practices that have contributed most acutely to undermining the rights and material conditions of Palestinian people, particularly women.

The Palestinian Authority: Between Palestinian aspirations, Israeli vision and International agreements

When the Palestinian leadership decided to sign the Oslo Agreement, to their mind, it was a first step towards liberation of the people and the creation of the Palestinian state alongside Israel, according to 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital. The Israelis wanted a Palestinian Authority to assume the burden of responsibility for the civilian population and manage the daily affairs, while Israel controlled the borders, land and resources, with priority for Jewish-only development. International community, eager to find a resolution to the conflict, fully supported the agreement through their generous financial contributions. However, these financial contributions were not backed by the political will to ensure respect and implementation of agreements, and hold the violating parties accountable.

Political expedience at the expense of values and principles

States must develop their policies and invest their resources locally and internationally according to their obligations within the UN system and aligned with international laws and principles to protect human rights and human dignity and to promote global peace. In the case of Israel-Palestine, the clear violations of these principles were overlooked for political expediency, making life even more difficult for the women's movement and progressive forces within the community.

Post-conflict and state-building development aid in a conflict situation: contradictions in principle and strategy

In the absence of proactive third parties and of accountability, agreements between unequal parties will not be met, with the powerful party having the advantage. Without addressing the root causes of the conflict and holding violators of the agreement accountable, investments are wasted, if not damaging in some cases. Additionally, in Palestine there are conflicting aims of donor support. On the one hand, there was keen interest in supporting the Palestinian rehabilitation and reform. On the other hand, there was more emphasis on supporting the Israeli version of “security,” which is militarized, not human-based, and is Israel-centered. The average Palestinian’s sense of security—overall wellbeing and justice—was further undermined.

Supporting constitutional development while simultaneously encouraging multiplicity of jurisdictions especially security tribunals:

Donors heavily supported politically and invested financially in the development of the Palestinian Constitution movement for legislative reform. At the same time, they supported the establishment of a separate security court system for political opponents, which was not accountable to the civil justice system. In a state where the ruling elites do not want to be held accountable, this further undermined the already weakened justice system. Moreover, while discussing the constitution, the society was pushed into a debate about the boundaries of Palestine, the sources of legislation, Palestinian identity, citizenship, right of return, and issue of the social contract and individual freedoms. These complex and extremely controversial issues were debated even though there was not a political solution in place.

The forced debates served mainly to anger all parties, deepen the existing rifts, create new fissures such as between the women’s movement and the progressive parties, and generally undermine the women’s movement and other progressive forces, and embold-

ened the Right.

Supporting Human Rights and Democratic reform while supporting increased militarization and development of the prison system

Development aid to the PA was contingent on it fulfilling its obligations to promote and respect human rights through legislative reform, training, and the development of mechanisms to monitor violations such as the Palestine Commission for Human Rights. However, to ensure it met its obligations on security matters according to the Oslo Agreement, a large proportion of the Palestinian budget went into training security personnel and the building huge prison complexes and security systems in Gaza and the West Bank. While the PA did not investigate and prosecute internal corruption, they arrested, imprisoned and tortured opponents of the Oslo Agreement. In the eyes of the average Palestinian, the PA came to be seen as the long arm of Israeli occupation.⁸

Investing least in formal justice system allowing paramilitary the role to mete their own style of justice

Donors invested in health, education, security, and so on. In examining the PA budget allocation for civilian infrastructure, the least amount was invested in the justice system and most in the security system. This was due to leaders' intention to impose a political solution to the conflict, thus a strong justice system, which would mean demands for and institutionalized mechanisms of accountability, was not politically expedient. In addition, because of closures, checkpoints, and other obstacles to mobility, the judges were unable to move freely and quickly to do their jobs. This meant constant postponement of cases, inability to adjudicate cases, and lack of power to enforce court orders. These problems are further exacerbated because of division of jurisprudence between PA and

⁸ 2008 Palestinian budget, 32.76% goes to ministry of Interior, which has the security branch. This is separate from the president's budget for the president's security. 10% goes to health, and 30% goes to various social services with the donor recognition of increased poverty.

Israel over areas A, B and C and because of the breakdown of the traditional disciplining forces of the tribal system and the extended family.⁹ As a result, the militia-based justice system was empowered, to the detriment of women.

Empowering the president's office but not holding it accountable

Recognizing the political power of Arafat to bring forth a political solution, the donor community did not hold his office accountable to the abuse of funds. Donor aid was shifted to buying his power base. When human rights organizations raised the issue of corruption and or abuse of funds (myself being one of them) in European foreign ministries, the answer was that every political leader needs money to ensure his power base. Whereas the system in Europe will hold politicians accountable when they abuse public funds, this principle was not respected when European public money is spent abroad. Women need the development of transparent and accountable systems of government because only through such systems they can negotiate for their spaces.

Weakening of Palestinian Legislative Council:

The sole focus of late president Arafat was to survive as a leader and fulfill his obligations according to the Oslo agreement in order to bring about the Palestinian state in his lifetime. For that purpose he allowed many pockets of power and used them against each other, and allowed corruption to grow, so he could use it against the person. When the legislative council investigated the first corruption cases amongst the Palestinian leadership, he exercised power manipulation with the strong Fatah party to influence the vote which over a couple of issues weakened the legislative council and it lost its credibility in the eyes of people. Legislative debate

⁹ Under the Oslo agreement areas were dividing into A, B and C. Area A was under jurisdiction of PA, area B required coordination between Israeli and Palestinian security which rarely happened on civilian matters and area C was under the total jurisdiction of the Israelis.

was immediately curtailed, and in the eyes of the people it became just a body benefiting socially and financially from the situation. Legislative and policy reform is the essence of the protection of less powerful groups and women here were further marginalized.

Curtailling freedom of expression

Any opposition to the Oslo agreement was violently stifled. The books of late professor Edward Said were prevented from circulation. Leaders from the left, right or those who criticized PA violations of human rights were arrested and tortured. ¹⁰

The Sum of the Parts

All that are described above constitute the context for the Hamas landslide victory in the 2006 national election. They presented themselves, and were accepted by the voters, as the party that could do what the ruling party had not been able to since their ascendancy as the official representatives of the Palestinian people:

- Recapture territory and natural resources
- Stop Israeli settlement expansion and development of Jewish-only road and highway system
- Protect Palestinian people from state and settler violence, housing demolitions and other forms of physical destruction like uprooting trees, humiliating security inspections at checkpoints and borders, imprisonment of Palestinians, and humiliating security checks, and delays in and curtailment of mobility
- Improve economic conditions and secure tax revenues due to PA
- Ensure human rights and justice for Palestinian people
- Move the peace process forward

In short, Hamas and others on the Right highlighted the ineffectualness of the ruling Fatah party as well as the heavy corruption

¹⁰ www.meforum.org

within it. Their strategy was reinforced by the increased polarization within Palestinian society due to widening social, ideological, and political gaps and the visibly empowered armed militias because of lack of jurisdiction of PA police over all Palestinian areas, erosion of the respect for rule of law more generally.

Amongst Palestinian circles, it is commonly noted that, by letting Israel renege on their legal responsibility for caring for Palestinian people and not holding it accountable for systematic violations of international law, donors have helped prolong the occupation and the current humanitarian crisis, consequently the extreme suffering of the Palestinians.

Donor Policies and Palestinian Women in a Prolonged Conflict

Prolonged conflict means ongoing militarized violence, from low-intensity to heightened onslaught over a period of many years, or threats of violence. In addition to exacting a high death toll amongst the civilians, the violence, the threats, and unpredictability undermine the society's collective sense of security by forcing people to be hyper-vigilant and respond quickly, which systematically undermine existing coping mechanisms. For Palestinians, external pressures caused by 60 years since the Nakba—catastrophe—whereby more than half the Palestinians were forced into exile and 40 years of occupation have caused a breakdown in a sense of the collective, or Palestinian people-hood, rise of individualism through assertion of power to ensure individual survival. During prolonged conflict, therefore, it is essential to undertake programmes and activities that ensure the maintenance of the collective. Women are an essential element of the collective; they are the glue.

Development aid and humanitarian assistance informed by and based on all the human rights, humanitarian law, and Security Council resolutions relevant to women.

This means UN SCR 1325, the Geneva Conventions addressing the issue of protected people, and CEDAW with all its optional proto-

cols. There must be a comprehensive, integrated approach to development aid and humanitarian assistance that utilizes protective legal frameworks such as those named above, as well as political will, to support Palestinian women consistently and appropriately. Women are highly dependent on the proper functioning of the state for the protection of their rights, thus mobilizing the institutions of the state is the core of their struggle. Because Israel persists in denying their responsibility for Palestinian population and the PA is unable to offer protection effectively since it is not a functioning state, Palestinian women are living in a situation where neither the occupier nor the government takes responsibility. Moreover, the absence of international will and donor lack of due diligence, Palestinian women have even a tougher situation in looking for frameworks through which they can secure their human rights and protection.¹¹

Human Security focus in development aid and humanitarian assistance

Although women are often victimized, because of their role as primary caretaker of the family and community, there are elements of strength and resistance, which must be tapped.¹²

Donor investment, therefore, must focus on systems that maintain social networks within the local communities and mitigate power imbalances and structural inequalities focusing on the most threatened members. Abuse of power and not addressing power imbalance at the individual and the collective levels harm both sides, and eventually lead to a downward negative spiral and eventually violence. Women and children would be the first victims, but also the local community and eventually the neighbouring communities will be affected.

This investment in maintaining human security and social network

¹¹ CEDAW committee 2005

¹² "Women in Situations of Organized Violence. A Case of Double Jeopardy: The Palestinians", by Maha Abu-Dayyeh Shamas, www.cfd-ch.org/pdf/friden/womanoeuvres/maha_eng.pdf.

must be made on three fronts: building the infrastructure, strengthening the political decision-making, and addressing the injustices including those at the heart of the conflict to ensure post-conflict reconciliation, which will lead to sustainable peace. The overarching principle is to ensure women's dignity and promote self-confidence and self-determination.

1. Investing in the infrastructure

- *Ensure access to education.*
Women need to believe that their children will be safe when they go to school rather than be harassed by the Israeli army or settlers. That level of anxiety for the safety of their children eats away at women's capacity to cope. This requires investments in schools close to the communities so children will not have to travel far.
- *Ensure easy access to reproductive health services.*
Palestinian population is a youthful one, with 46% under 15.¹³ In the coming years, there will be an even more serious need for reproductive rights and services. Most women over the age of 17 are married, thus actively reproducing. They need to feel secure in their reproductive life and not have to worry about lack of access to birth control or being forced to give birth at the checkpoint. This requires investments in community-based health services, and a good and safe referral infrastructure for specialized services.
- *Ensure access to places of employment and freedom of movement*
Ensure that men are gainfully employed and have access to their places of employment as well as

¹³ Population Reference Bureau, retrieved from <http://www.prb.org/Articles/2006/AFirstGlimpseatthe2004PalestinianDemographicandHealthSurvey.aspx>

creating employment opportunities for women who want to or must work. This means removing restrictions on the movement of men under the age of 45, establish micro-enterprise loans so men and women can become financially independent. There is a danger of focusing on employment of women only when the men are not able to find work because this often perpetuates frustration that could lead to domestic violence.

- *Maintain connection to the land and provide access to water*
 Palestinian families must have continued access to the land that they and their ancestors have toiled for centuries to maintain connection to the land itself and maintain harmony within themselves and the environment. Women, who are responsible for gathering water, need to have access to clean water and not have to beg from settlers. Reclaiming the land and water, building and maintaining terracing of the mountains for agricultural purposes, and supporting local food-production businesses along with establishing systems for marketing products are essential investments.
- *Access to justice and protection services*
 Women need to feel there is a fair and objective body that will look into grievances when there is abuse of power. As it is now, even the traditional tribal justice system is being undermined because of the lack of connectivity and inability of PA police to have easy access to Palestinian communities in areas B and C, and the empowerment of the local armed militias. Easy access to justice has to be facilitated, and network of protection and social services must be maintained to ensure support of women and their children who fall into abusive situations. This requires investment in the justice system as well as community based policing services

for the purpose of serving the community and not be a tool to serve the security of Israel.

- *Support the establishment of local community centres and meeting places:*

Traditionally, women within the extended families and female neighbours supported each other. They would sit together and chat while helping each other in seasonal food preparation, or on their way to fields and markets. The restriction of movement had isolated households thus women have been denied this kind of support. Women need to have a safe communal space, which can be neighbourhood meeting rooms, where they can meet and provide each other support. Such communal spaces are one of the essential life-supports for communities living in a prolonged conflict. Although these kinds of spaces are necessary for all, the men avail themselves of the local coffee shops, designated by custom as usually a men-only setting. By contrast, the women and the youth do not have those public places. Such Centres can also be utilized by the community as a whole to address community-related issues, for community-wide activities, and for cultural events, all of which would help strengthen community ties, therefore, sense of the collective.

- *Humanitarian assistance during heightened Israeli military violence*
Donors have systems and policies that guide investment during heightened conflict situations, and post conflict situations. In a heightened conflict situation short-term humanitarian assistance of all forms is brought in to the communities in the form of relief aid food aid and medical supplies depending on the form of the disaster. There do exist international organizations that have de-

veloped expertise in assisting during all forms of disasters, natural or man made. In Palestine, this is essential and is needed when there is escalation in military activities against the civilian communities. Post conflict aid focuses on state building mechanism and also there is a lot of literature and policies in place that can guide these investments. However in the Israel Palestine context neither one of these approaches alone is suitable. Aid must join a strategic development component and immediate humanitarian component. Whether it is humanitarian assistance during a crisis or assistance for infrastructure-development local women are an essential component in the planning and implementation work. Here the power of women as actors must be fully utilized. It is recognized that women have a good sense of crisis management, and they can promptly take leadership roles to fill the gaps and address the immediate needs. This had been experienced many times by Palestinian society during crisis times.¹⁴ Moreover, women would have easier access to private spaces of affected families.¹⁵ In relation to infrastructure development, women would have better sense of priorities for basic community needs.

- *Strategies and plans of action for immediate intervention in times of crisis.*
Israeli occupation army and settler violence have developed,

¹⁴ During the first Intifada when most men were arrested or were in hiding, it was the women who developed the neighbourhood committees to address the needs of the communities during prolonged curfews.

¹⁵ WCLAC social workers along with social workers from the Jerusalem coalition entered Jenin camp when Israel attacked the camp in April 2002 and before the shooting stopped. They helped coordinate the effort in the gathering of the families and stayed with the children while the mothers were dealing with their shock and went searching through the rubble for their houses to salvage whatever they could of their belongings. A homemade video was made "Jenin Aftermath".

over the years, predictable forms depending on the specific communities targeted, which always are those in areas coveted for Jewish settlement development. Using various forms of violence, trained settler militias, along with others, terrorize Palestinian communities routinely and systematically. During these times, women, elderly people, people disabled in one way or another, and children bear the brunt because most attacks happen when the men are absent.¹⁶ The local human rights development institutions must develop strategies of coping and documenting and plans of action on how to ensure support to the local communities when there is heightened violence and document it.¹⁷ People will come out with all sorts of creative ideas that would address the specific needs as expressed by the local community. If such strategies are already in place, donors then only need to support their implementation when the crisis happens. This will reinforce the positive coping mechanism of the local communities and specifically women and girls.¹⁸

- *Support psychosocial programmes*
Communities living in constant fear and insecurity need to have ongoing psychosocial support. These programmes must have an integrated approach with ongoing social and cultural activities with youth, men and women. In times of conflict women need to be able to cope with their fears as well as continue providing the basic needs of their families. Whether homes and

¹⁶ <http://www.yesh-din.org/Report/ASemblanceofLaw-Eng.pdf>

¹⁷ See <http://www.btselem.org/english/Settlerviolence/Index.asp> and <http://www.btselem.org/english/video/ShootingBackBackground.asp>

¹⁸ Young teenage girls took some of the most effective footage documenting settler violence through the B'Tselem video documenting project.

kitchens are destroyed, or the communities are subjected to prolonged curfews, women are the ones who still must feed their families, in addition to soothing the fears and controlling the crying of their terrified children. These situations tax to the limit women's emotional and physical capacities, and many break down. Thus women require the most psychological support. However, in threatened communities, the fears and needs of men and youth must also be addressed. Given the masculinist nature of armed conflict and military occupation and the expectations of a patriarchal culture and familial organization, men experience a profound threat to their masculinity. Their sense of impotence due to their inability to protect their families and to play a significant role in ending the occupation can turn into negative behavior towards themselves as well as their loved ones. Investment should be made, therefore, in developing the psychosocial skills of both female and male members of local communities. Women can be the best care providers in psychosocial programmes to other women but men should also be encouraged and trained to address the needs of other men. Culturally relevant and transformative coping and resistance strategies can be developed using local leadership and only technical assistance from outsiders.

2. Investment in political decision-making

If according to international law nations have the responsibility to protect human rights, then donors must apply due diligence to ensure respect, promotion and protection. If donor due diligence is to apply, then donors must review their own policies and develop their own capacities to ensure respect as well as promotion and fulfillment of international human rights and humanitarian law principles. They have to apply their own rules during their international

engagement, as well as achieve the objectives, which their own taxpayer money had been invested in. The international principles of human rights must be the framework that guides all support. Donors have to recognize the interconnectivity of their own financial contributions at the international level and their own local politics and their diplomatic engagement. They have to hold accountable any violators of these principles, and citizens of contributing countries should hold accountable their own governments for not ensuring the sustainability in the investment of their own taxes and not having coherence with international principles and standards in their development aid, humanitarian assistance programmes, and policies guiding international relations.

- *Donor's own implementation of UNSCR 1325*

When it comes to women's empowerment in a situation of conflict, donors have to show their own respect of UN resolutions and international law. They have to set an example by applying the rules themselves. They have to develop their own plan of action to implement UNSCR 1325 and translate that into their foreign policy, development aid and humanitarian assistance programmes. They also have to show that they report to the CEDAW committee and implement programmes to eliminate the gender gap and fight violence against woman in their own societies. Women's groups and activists should insist that their own governments apply all women-related conventions and resolutions centrally within development aid, humanitarian aid, and peace work programmes and hold them accountable to the prescribed standard.

- *Genuinely empower local groups*

Donors need to review their humanitarian assistance and development aid programmes. They have to put coherence into these programmes, support them with political action and apply them with respect to the human rights and

dignity of the local communities. Some donors have a policy of transferring funds through their local NGOs. This can be very effective in terms of transferring skills and cross-national networking, or it can be very disempowering. Donors have to take every precaution that their own development aid assistance maintains the human dignity and provide resources to empower affected communities to help them regain control of their lives and destinies and not contribute to the further disempowerment local communities and particularly women. Local skills must be promoted and empowered. Internationals should be there to support and facilitate but not do the work themselves. Part of helping people to cope positively with their difficult situation is by letting them do the work themselves and not have others do it on their behalf ¹⁹. The Palestinian society in particular has the human resources that can plan and implement local programmes and projects. Their handicap is the restriction on movement, and inability to access resources.

- *Involve women as decision-makers and not only as recipients*

Donors have to ensure women's participation, especially those closest to the ground, at every decision-making level, whether locally or internationally. Although women typically are seen only as victims, they are actors and resisters. Due to their gender and social roles, women are able to identify general community needs and those specific to women that tend to be overlooked when negotiating development aid or humanitarian assistance and interventions. Women are the ones who maintain the

¹⁹ Women networking Across Borders: Cooperation, Diaspora and Migration Between Italy and the middle East, Maha Abu-Dayyeh, Rome, Italy Dec. 4,5, 2006.

social fabric, and are most effective in rethreading the social realities after a military intervention. Consequently, women can be very effective social mobilizers. To shift the direction already being taken, donors first must recognize their responsibility, then reinforce their financial contribution with the political will to ensure the respect of principles, agreements, and enforcement of the rule of law. Donors must take a zero-tolerance approach: closely monitor violations, hold violators accountable, and exercise political influence, impose economic sanctions, or both, to sanction the violators. They also can use bilateral relations to promote political action based on the principles of respect for human rights and humanitarian law. As members of the international community, donors are obligated to protect, investigate, and hold accountable all violators of international human rights laws and international humanitarian law. It is a responsibility they had signed on; it is a responsibility they must undertake and hold each other accountable to.

3. Investing in addressing the historical and current injustices to ensure post-conflict reconciliation

In a prolonged conflict there is a strong sense of injustice at the collective as well as at the individual levels, which is transmitted from one generation to the next. This reality should not be underestimated and must be addressed in ways that would enable people to resist in transformative ways and utilize the established coping mechanism while addressing the injustice.

- *Encourage documentation programmes:*

One way of dealing with trauma is to encourage victims to document events and experiences of the communities past and present and to preserve their individual and collective memories. This will have a multilayered benefit. Documenting people's stories of victimization helps in the coping and healing process and sets a

historical record through the eyes of victims, which will be essential for post-conflict reconstruction, compensation, and reconciliation programmes. The documentation can also serve to formulate strategies for change and the documentation process can be part of the strategy to engage people positively as recorders of history and memory for future generations and as way to secure justice. It will help the communities to cope and will strengthen them to move on. It is also important to note that it takes several generations to regain the economic, social and cultural connections and repair the damage caused by systematic destruction to these networks because of the prolonged conflict. This requires intensive rehabilitation programmes at all levels and throughout, the creation of new networks and the establishments of an alternative economic base to sustain the new social and cultural networks that have to evolve.

- *Accurately assess complex contemporary impacts of historical injustices*
 Doing so will enable equitable and just reparations or other mechanisms for righting historical wrongs. Documenting women's stories in particular will help in a better assessment of the damage incurred at the deeper level of the social, economical and cultural fabric of any community.
- *Identify and implement just repatriation, reparation, and compensation programmes based particularly on women's perspectives.*
 When women's, and other victims', pain, suffering, and loss are duly acknowledged—in a variety of tangible and intangible ways—they are better able to move on and even consider the possibility of reconciliation. Too often, formal truth-and-reconciliation and other post-conflict projects have served to re-traumatise rather

than heal, especially in the case of women whose traumas often are beyond the imaginable. This must be prevented at all costs and the primacy of women's lives and wellbeing reinforced at every opportunity. The critical issues of repatriation, reparation, and compensation have been side-lined by protracted nature of the Israel-Palestine conflict, the massive Israeli media power that consistently has demonized Palestinian people, and the seemingly general indifference in the international community. These must be incorporated into humanitarian relief agendas.

Conclusion

Every significant conflict in modern history has taken many expected and unexpected turns and twists, and the nature and particulars of those vary depending on the regional and global economic interests and interested parties in any particular period. The interested parties often exploit and enflame local conflicts to serve the best interests of the most powerful parties.

The inevitability of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could have been foreseen as far back at the late-19th century, early in the Zionist movement, when Palestine was being considered as the site for the establishment of the homeland for world Jewry. After the First World Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, the Viennese rabbi sent an exploratory pair to assess the suitability of Palestine as the future state of Israel. The two sent word back with this metaphorical observation: "The bride is beautiful, but she is married to another man."²⁰ In other words, Palestine was not a barren, unsettled, undeveloped landmass in the Arabian Peninsula. From this to two World Wars to other vagaries of geopolitics and economic interests of the main cast of characters—Israel, Great Britain, France, US, Arab states of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine, who in some ways became the most minor among

²⁰ Ghada Karmi, *Married to Another Man: Israel's Dilemma in Palestine*.

them—have resulted in the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with ebbs and flows of high-intensity and low-intensity armed struggle. These political dynamics, and related economic history, and the internal corruption, essentially doomed Palestine to its current donor-dependent status.

One of the unforeseen twists in the story of Israeli-Palestinian conflict is “9/11” and its aftermath, the so-called “War on Terror.” This battle cry targets the “terrorists,” the conflated Arab/Muslim people, usually men, and is the ideological apparatus of US state/military (along with the “Coalition of the Willing”) incursions in the Middle East. At the same time, Israel and the US work hand-in-hand for “Israeli security” and to protect US interests: oil and strategic military objectives to claim it for themselves. Regardless of who is occupying and being occupied, prolonged armed conflict, militarism, militarization, violence by both state and non-state actors against the local people, and political and economic domination by a small elite, will gradually erode the most essential and vibrant features of both societies: respect for rule of law and loss of hope, imagination, and creativity.

Until Palestinians are consistently able to exercise self-determination and live on their own land freely and in dignity and Israelis removes the shackles imposed by the rule of the military and interest groups, the conflict will continue. Women, within both Israeli and Palestinian societies, will have to constantly navigate their own systems to achieve internal peace and ensure the well being of their societies. Palestinian women are showing exceptional resilience and playing a major role in maintaining the social fabric of the society in spite of all systematic attempts at dispossession and disconnection.

Donors—as extremely influential third parties—must mobilise their resources with an eye on history. When the last weapon has been fired, the last segment of The Wall demolished, and both sides seated in their rightful places, the generation that does not

know or understand the history of Israeli-Palestinian conflict will raise difficult questions: Who led us into this terrible situation? Who supported the warring and the occupation? Who stood by and said very little, or nothing at all? Donors will belong to the third group—essentially bystanders due to the lack of political will—unless they quickly change their course. They must become a proactive third party, allied closely to grassroots movements and ordinary people, that promotes the values and principles embedded in human rights and women's rights, which they claim to uphold and actively promote.

Supporting women's action and agency is very political; it is not just a project. Donors must be aware that doing so is influencing social fabrics; this has to be done very sensitively to local culture and local political dynamics, and in cooperation with local women groups. Not doing that will compromise the very same groups they are trying to empower.

Occupation, war, and feminist perspectives The struggle of Palestinian women

Ghada Hashem Talhami

Abstract: The case of the Palestinian feminist movement proves the difficulty of divorcing the women's question from the national question, not only in the Palestinian case but also for all Third World feminist movements. Non-Western women appear to be more concerned with the survival of their family and community than with individual liberation. Their struggle is not against the patriarchy since the family is the most indigenous unit in society. Therefore, we find the identity of Palestinian women forged in the crucible of war and revolution. Palestinian women have been mobilized and politicized as a result of British Mandate policies which opened the door to Jewish immigration to Palestine and massive land purchases and acquisitions by the Zionist movement. After the loss of the historic Palestinian lands in 1948, Palestinian women regrouped in the diaspora to form social welfare organizations and assist the victims of the 1948 Arab-Jewish War. Eventually, women were accorded official status as a cadre of the PLO and members of the Palestine National Council, or Parliament in exile. After the 1967 War, Palestinian women organized under occupation in order to relieve working women of the West Bank from the pressures of proletarian existence as unskilled workers in the Israeli economic sector. Women continue to be the greatest victims of conditions created by the Israeli occupation, with their conditions deteriorating badly as a result of two Palestinian intifadas. Contrary to the accepted Western view, we find that Palestinian women have assumed positions of national leadership within the PLO and its constituent factions. Predictably, Palestinian women will rise in the political system as long as war and occupation continue to mobilize their ranks.

In the age of globalization, Western social theories, particularly those articulating the concept of feminism, seem to have taken over the world. Today, the women's movement everywhere is being explained and theorized in terms of gender conflict targeting the patriarchy, irrespective of differences of time and place. Women in advanced industrial societies are said to be facing the same obstacles as women in areas struggling against imperialism, economic disparity, war-time conditions, and alien cultural invasions. Even the UN-sponsored Decade for Women conferences were premised on the commonality of forces impeding women's liberation and progress. American, European, African and Asian women were expected to focus on issues of gender discrimination in the work-place, in education, and in the economy despite the specific conditions afflicting women in societies suffering from foreign occupation and war. In other words, the woman's question was to be divorced from the national question in favor of a liberation paradigm which ignored the consequences of international inequality, military occupation, racism and war.

Theoretical Differences

Some experts on the condition of Third World feminine struggles reject the "feminist" label altogether. Recognizing this label to be the product of over-emphasis on an individualist, Western, liberal approach to the female question, several African-American writers in particular, like Alice Walker, have created the term "womanist" as a more accurate description of a movement dedicated to the survival of an entire people, in its female and male sectors.¹ Elizabeth W. Fernea, an American writer, took this idea a step further by defining what really distinguishes the women's movement in the Middle East from that of Western feminists. She wrote:

"If one tries to pinpoint the most striking contrast between Middle Eastern women writing here (in her edited work: *Women and*

¹ Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York: Harcourt, 1992), *passim*.

the Family in the Middle East) and much similar material from the pens of Western women, it seems to be that Middle Eastern women do not see the existing problems as exclusive to themselves. Over and over again, they say in different ways that the 'feminine condition' cannot be separated from that of men, the family and the wider society. Self-identity is becoming important, but identity is still contextualized."²

Indeed, the Qur'an refers to women as "the sisters of men." In the view of Cheryl Johnson-Odim, Third World women see a relationship between racism, imperialism, and gender discrimination. These women, therefore, reject Western feminism as being too narrowly defined as a war against gender-based discrimination, whereas it should address issues of concern to their own national experience. Within their own societies, women, men and children are victimized by racist regimes and world forces of economic exploitation and control. Johnson-Odim, thus, concludes that Third World women achieve their liberation through political struggles in a manner not dissimilar to the battles fought by Western women during the early part of the twentieth century. Non-Western women appear to be more concerned with the survival of their family and community than with individual liberation. Third World women's heightened awareness of the need to achieve auto-liberation is itself a by-product of their political engagement and the conditions of their own lands.³ Bell Hooks (a.k.a. Gloria Jean Watkins), on the other hand, asserts that Western feminism is undisputedly a white, middle-class ideology which focuses primarily on male oppression of women. According to this perception, Western women should view all males as the enemies of women. This ideology,

² Elizabeth W. Fernea, ed., *Women and the Family in the Middle East: New Voices of Change* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1985), 2.

³ Cheryl Johnson-Odim, "Common Themes, Different Contexts: Third World Women and Feminism," *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), 314-5.

furthermore, views the institution of the family as the instrument of women's oppression. But to Third World women, the family unit is an indigenous institution which is absolutely essential to the survival of men and women.⁴ Yet another Third World writer, Vandana Shiva, confirms that Third World women have declined to focus on gender as the most pertinent definer of women's oppression. Instead, these women continue to emphasize such factors as race and class in their domestic and international contexts.⁵

This dichotomy of views led to an open confrontation between Palestinian women and members of the US delegation to the UN Nairobi Conference on Women in 1985, when the former group insisted on placing the subject of Palestinian women on the program's agenda. The subject was finally listed in response to a General Assembly recommendation calling on the conference's planners to take note of the condition of Palestinian women living under 'racist or colonial rule' in the Occupied Territories. This was a follow-up to an earlier emphasis on the subject of Palestinian women under occupation made at the earlier Copenhagen UN Conference on Women.⁶ Much of the debate during the Nairobi Conference, as a result, turned into a heated argument between the Palestinian and South African women on one hand, and Western women on the other, over the relevance of pursuing a feminist agenda focused primarily on individual liberation.

⁴ bell hooks (Gloria Jean Watkins), *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston, MASS: South End Press, 1984), 33.

⁵ See: Vandana Shiva, *Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity and Biotechnology* (London: Zed Books, 1993).

⁶ See: "Perspectives on Palestinian Women," The Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights, New York, 1985, p. 11, for a pro-Israel American perspective on Palestinian efforts at international for a.

Forging an Identity

Few would question the fact that the identity of Palestinian women was forged in the crucible of war and revolution. Unstable and volatile political conditions in post World War II Palestine led to the involvement of women in the nation's political struggles. Not surprisingly, the earliest women to be so mobilized were upper-class and elite women whose male relatives were often heavily involved in acts of resistance. But as conditions in Palestine deteriorated and the loss of life and property mounted, involuntary political mobilization deepened, reaching eventually to peasant women who were the least informed or formally educated segment of the population. There were massive women's demonstrations on the occasion of every major national crisis, such as the Wailing Wall Riots of 1929, resulting from Jewish efforts to widen their use of areas facing the Wailing Wall. The women's movement at the time was encouraged and promoted by the Arab Executive, one of the earliest Palestinian national organizations during the British Mandate system of government. From that point on, Palestinian women were regarded as a valuable reservoir of mass protesters, which soon led to the emergence of the Arab Women's Executive Committee (AWE). The participation of women in the activities of the Arab Executive, even as a separate group, was seen as a reflection of the modern outlook of the male leadership group. One of the AWE's first duties was to communicate the nationalist version of the Palestinian narrative to its affiliated female groups. It should also be noted that the early female leadership group of this organization and several of its branches was made up of Muslims and Christians, mirroring the secular nature of the Palestinian national movement itself until the recent Fateh/HAMAS divisions. Rather than being viewed as simply a branch of the male organization, these early female formations should be seen as training grounds for future leadership roles. The AWE should be credited also with performing a modernizing role by reaching out to village women and teaching them how to improve the conditions of their chil-

dren and families while at the same time inducting them into new nationalist roles. Eventually, several branches of AWE emerged in various Palestinian cities, including Haifa, where an affiliate under the name of the Arab Women's Union was led by the very radical Sadiyah Nassar who served time in British jails. The unlady-like behavior of this unit, whose members engaged in violent activities like the smashing of store windows in order to force compliance with strike days, eventually caused a split from the main organization. Women in these coastal towns not only challenged views of the male national leadership, they also devoted great efforts to the assistance of political prisoners and their families.

As the Arab Revolt of 1936 loomed on the horizon, women of the Jerusalem-based AWE devised novel ways of instructing the general population in the merits of national unity. Thus, during demonstrations protesting the 1931 visit of General Edmund Allenby, who drove Ottoman troops out of Palestine in World War I, a Christian female leader, Matheil Moghanam, was designated to give a public talk at the Mosque of Omar, while a Muslim leader, Tarab Abd al-Hadi (wife of a prominent statesman, Awni Abd al-Hadi), was asked to address a crowd at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Also, by this time, female demonstrations surrounded by protective male demonstrators were becoming common.⁷ What is even more noteworthy was the spontaneous participation of peasant women in the 1936 Arab Revolt. Not only did these women bear the double burden of tending to their farms in the absence of men, they also directly contributed to the revolt. Many were involved in feeding fighting men in the field of combat, while some hid fugitives in their own homes. Some women contributed to the war effort by fighting alongside the men. Palestinians give a place of honor to the first female martyr to fall in the line of duty, a woman by the name of Fatemah Ghazal

⁷ Ellen Fleischmann, "The Emergence of the Palestinian Women's Movement, 1929-1939," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Spring, 2000), 17-31.

who fell during the battle of Azoun, near Lyddah, on June 26, 1936.⁸

The Years of Service and Regrouping

After the Nakba (the Palestinian term marking the destruction of their homeland in 1948), Palestinian women attempted to regroup and create new organizations in the new Palestinian diaspora. A Jaffa-based leader, Salwa Abu-Khadra, who fled during the hostilities to Damascus, founded the Women's Union in her new place of refuge. Eventually, she was to emerge as one of the earliest cadres of Fateh. A Jerusalem-based leader who found herself in Cairo, Samira Abu-Ghazaleh, created the Palestinian Women's League in her new place of residence. And so it went, women founded new organizations wherever Palestinians were to be found. But the thrust of these organizations was primarily charitable, as women struggled to cope with the massive Palestinian refugee problem resulting from the creation of Israel in 1948.⁹ Until the emergence of the second PLO under Yasser Arafat's leadership in 1969, the experience of the refugee camps strengthened traditional customs and norms.¹⁰ Unlike the Palestinian environment where women were free to engage in national activities, being guests in other Arab countries and having to live in reconstituted village settings reinforced, rather than weakened, traditional male controls of the past. In a way, this was not any different from the experience of Afghani women in the refugee camps of Pakistan during the 1980s.

Following the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, few of the branches of the AWE survived, but those which did so became fully devoted to

⁸ Simona Sharoni, *Gender and the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 59; From the Palestinian Women's Struggle, pamphlet by GUPW, Beirut, n.d., pp. 5-6.

⁹ Amal Kawar, *Daughters of Palestine: Leading Women of the Palestine National Movement* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 6.

¹⁰ Soraya Antonious, "Fighting on Two Fronts: Conversations with Palestinian Women," in Miranda Davies, ed., *Third World-Second Sex* (London: Zed Books, 1983), 72.

sustaining the Palestinian refugees inside the West Bank and Gaza. As the Palestinian refugee population proliferated inside and outside of historic Palestine, the needs of the Palestinians emerged as charitable, not political. But what motivated women to continue with these efforts was the previous nationalist ideology which stressed the need to aid “the common national struggle.” It was the ideology of the 1917-1939 women’s organizations which pushed them to seek greater training and education in order to deal with the needs of the dismembered national community.¹¹

Women’s organizations took on a national character again with the creation of the first PLO in 1964. A creature of the Arab League of States, particularly Nasser of Egypt, the first PLO was neither radical nor overwhelmingly populist. Women participated in the meetings of the first Palestine National Council in Jerusalem in 1964, with a delegation of forty-five out of a total male body of 422. These included luminaries of the old generation of leadership such as Zuleikha Shihabi and Wadi’a Khartabeel, and future leaders like Issam Abd al-Hadi and Samiha Khalil (a.k.a. Um Khalil). By 1965, women responded to a call by the new PLO to form a supra organization by creating the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) as an official cadre of the first PLO. This organization also included representatives from various women’s groups in Gaza and the West Bank. This cadre, second only to the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) enjoyed a long affiliation with the first and the second PLO.¹² For many who were able to make the transition from the female activism of the British Mandate period to that of the PLO years, the new affiliation was not any different with their relationship with the Arab Executive.¹³ At first, strongly

¹¹ Polina Sakalian, “Women in the Palestinian Liberation Movement: Greater Women’s Rights Achieved through Nationalism,” unpublished thesis, Lake Forest College, 2006, 50-1.

¹² Sharoni, 29-31.

¹³ Sakalian, 59.

anchored in Gaza which emerged as the stronghold of the rump of the old Palestinian national movement, GUPW saw the enrollment of many future leaders, such as the twenty-three year old Intisar al-Wazir (a.k.a. Um Jihad). GUPW's leader was someone who participated in the pre-1948 and post-1948 nationalist phases, namely Issam Abd al-Hadi. After the Israeli occupation cast its shadow over the Palestinian territories following the defeat of 1967, the Israeli authorities were quick to imprison and later to expel Abd al-Hadi and Shihabi. Abd al-Hadi became a totally political activist, being elected to the Central Council of the Palestine National Council in exile. The GUPW became the official representative of Palestinian women under the auspices of the second PLO, following the passing of national leadership from Ahmad Shuqeiry to Arafat. Advocating for Palestinian political rights became GUPW's main activity as the women sought to visit and establish relations with women's groups in Cuba, Iraq, the Soviet Union, and East Germany, among others. This was a necessary outreach as the PLO sought to gain recognition in international quarters during the 1970s.¹⁴

Women under Occupation: Transformation or Modernization ?

When the Israelis won control over the West Bank and Gaza in June of 1967, the lives of activist Palestinian women changed forever. For women who lost a male provider, the occupation sucked them into the vortex of the ranks of the unskilled proletariat. They also came to experience Israeli jail sentences for the first time in their lives. Palestinian society under Israeli occupation was radically transformed, although Israel's defenders insist on describing this as the process of modernization. Apparently, Israel's apologists never tire of making the unsubstantiated claim that the Israeli occupation, unlike any other experience of this kind, should be regarded as a benign system of rule.¹⁵ In reality, the occupation has drasti-

¹⁴ Kawar, 31-3, 60.

¹⁵ "Perspectives on Palestinian Women," 4.

cally altered the lives of Palestinian women in such a way as to make the outbreak of the first intifada in 1987 almost inevitable. Women were made to feel the impact of massive family impoverishment due to the confiscation of land and the general destruction of the Palestinian economy. Within a matter of years following the 1967 June War, women lost their traditional role as workers on their families' agricultural lands due to the incessant building of Israeli settlements on confiscated land. In addition to this sector, 50% of the West Bank population is made up of refugees who were pushed out of their original towns and villages in 1948. In Gaza, the number of registered refugees who receive UN rations on a regular basis is as high as 85% of the total population. The combined effect of harsh economic conditions and political repression which at first targeted males, forced this category within the 30 to 64 age group to emigrate in large numbers. This same trend later affected men in the 14 to 25 age group. Israel's tax policies which had increasingly burdened the Palestinian occupied population was in violation of the terms of the Fourth Geneva Convention. All of these factors combined to weaken the economy of the Palestinian family. Thus, new responsibilities fell on the shoulders of the female population, evidenced by a dramatic increase in the number of female-headed households. The women soon became a proletariat, which unlike the male population, had no previous experience suitable for the realities of the marketplace. They had no bargaining experience and were unlikely to strike due to the availability of a large pool of unemployed workers. Until recently, many of these women became migrant workers within Israel proper. According to 1990 estimates, 45% of the total labor force engaged in agriculture in the West Bank are women. Other women pursue domestic occupations such as sewing, embroidery or other crafts. Gaza's statistics portray a harsher reality. Due to the limited availability of land in that area, only 8% of women are self-employed on family farms. Smaller numbers worked until recently as migrant agricultural workers within Israel, but these have dwindled due to Israel's frequent closure policy and reluctance to bring Arab

laborers into its territory. Until the establishment of the Palestine National Authority, West Bank women used to depend on finishing work for the Israeli garment industry. This was done at home and wages were at least 50% lower than what the average Israeli worker earned for similar work. In addition, women rarely enjoyed any job security, being retained on short-term working permits which expired on Jewish holidays, during the winter off-season, or whenever an emergency arose. Due to their exclusion from the Israeli national labor union, the Histadrut, both Palestinian men and women lacked any benefits such as unemployment insurance, normally associated with organized labor contracts.¹⁶

Palestinian women usually worked in small shops employing ten workers or less. The average per capita income of a West Bank and a Gaza worker were estimated as one-third and one-sixth that of an Israeli worker, respectively. Most workers required up to four hours daily to commute to work since Israeli law prohibited overnight stay within Israel. Women's forced employment must be viewed in the context of the general destruction of the economy of the West Bank and Gaza, both of which served as a captive market for Israeli products and a source of cheap labor. Women took on employment within Israel too, suffering long travel hours and the prospect of leaving their children unattended behind. Neither did the Palestinian home possess labor-saving devices to shorten a woman's domestic duties.¹⁷

When some women sought to unionize, the whole weight of the Israeli security apparatus fell on them. Consider the case of Amal Wahdan, who worked in the 1980s as an accountant for an Arab company, the Jerusalem Cigarette Company. The factory employed

¹⁶ Ghada Talhami, "Women under Occupation: The Great Transformation," in Suha Sabbagh and Ghada Talhami, eds., *Palestinian Women under Occupation and in the Diaspora* (Washington, D.C: Institute for Arab Women's Studies, Inc., 1990), 16-8.

¹⁷ Shani Taylor, "Palestinian Women Workers Face Discrimination on Two Fronts," *Al-Fajr* (May 20, 1983), 8.

120 workers, of whom twenty were women mostly employed in secretarial and unskilled work. In December of 1983, she was placed under house arrest while pregnant due to her organizing efforts. Her husband who was also a union activist was imprisoned at the time. Although she was later released from house arrest, she had to endure long sentences of town arrest.¹⁸ Wahdan's suffering at the hands of the Israeli military authorities was also due to her role in the creation of the Women's Work Committees. These were founded in the West Bank and Gaza in order to address the needs of Palestinian working women. The committees have always recognized that Palestinian women were victims of Israeli discrimination directed at all Palestinians, including class oppression as low-level workers, and gender discrimination as women workers. The work committees emerged as a woman's movement dedicated to the understanding that the liberation of Palestinian women is an important component of national liberation. The committees faced several obstacles, not the least of which were harassment, arrest, and imprisonment. The Israeli authorities habitually delayed the granting of organizational permits, arguing that under Israeli Military Order No. 10, any political meeting of ten or more requires a permit. Any individual who was seen as engaging in adverse propaganda was subject to a ten-year prison sentence or a fine of \$1,500, both of which were not subject to appeal since the Israeli military governor was legally immune from such procedures.¹⁹

The Women's Work Committees

Although the work committees developed as affiliates of various Palestinian political factions outside of the Occupied Territories, they are mainly credited to the social awareness of the leadership of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). First appearing as The Association of Labor Committees in 1978,

¹⁸ "Palestinian Woman Unionist Finds Organizing Tough Going," *Al-Fajr* (March 3, 1986), 13; "Three Unionists Town-Arrested," *Al-Fajr* (August 14, 1986), 4.

¹⁹ "Women's Work Committees in the Occupied Territories," an unpublished report by PHRC, n.d.

this new approach to women's issues was led by Zahira Kamal, a school teacher. A second work committee followed, organized by the Palestinian Communist Party, taking the title of The Association of the Working Palestinian Woman. Fateh, the main faction within the PLO, organized The Woman's Association for Social Works in 1988. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, another military faction, formed the Association of Palestinian Women, which emerged in 1981, in Nablus. By that time, Yusra Barbari had already created a PLO-affiliated group in Gaza in 1964, known as the Palestinian Women's Association. But due to the minimal enrollment of Gazan women in work outside the home, the focus of this group was not on working rights. Later, a HAMAS-affiliated organization emerged under the leadership of Amal Zamili who insisted that women's rightful place was in the home. The women, thus, became all too political and factionalized, leading the Algiers Palestinian National Council (PNC) meeting of 1988, to call for their unification under a supreme women's council. This did not materialize, although the work committees forged ahead with programs dedicated to aiding the working woman. Zamili, however, continued to stress that women should not get involved in politics and should devote their efforts to educating the younger generation and maintaining Islamic traditions in the home.²⁰ But for the West Bank work committees, the need was to assist working women survive the hazards of the occupation and their unfamiliar work environment. Recognizing that the rate of illiteracy among peasant women was almost 60%, the committees began to operate literacy centers which also served as meeting grounds for women who were socially and nationally isolated. But, the committees' greatest contribution was their establishment of nursery schools, kindergartens, and summer camps for children in the refugee camps while teaching mothers better means of child care. These projects were a great boon to women who travelled

²⁰ Alex Fishman, "The Palestinian Woman and the Intifada," *New Outlook* (June-July, 1989), 9-10.

long distances to work and left their children behind them. There were also programs to provide academic instruction to students suffering from frequent school closures by the Israeli military. Sit-home women were offered vocational training programs in order to preserve native crafts associated with the Palestinian cultural heritage which was threatened with extinction. Women were also taught collective bargaining methods and how to demand better rights in the workplace. Additionally, the committees created special groups to defend the rights of prisoners and to support their families, particularly since more and more of the prisoners were women.²¹

Thus, life conditions under military rule not only led to the inevitable politicization of poorer women, they also stiffened the backs of the more modernized women. This was evident in the manner in which these women responded to seemingly friendly gestures by the Israeli military authorities. When the Israelis decided to co-opt the Palestinian national current in the Occupied Territories by calling for municipal elections in 1976, they also adopted a law enfranchising Palestinian women. Instead of expressing gratitude, particularly when no such favor was extended by the Jordanian regime, the Arab Women's Union called on all Palestinian women to boycott the elections. One official of this organization, Raymonda Tawil (Arafat's future mother-in-law) commented: "The Union felt that Israel did not have the legal right to change Jordanian law. It was also feared that this step would give Israel a precedent for changing other laws."²² Tawil was referring to the illegal practice of the Israeli military government over the West Bank and Gaza which often passed new laws, contrary to the stipulations of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1947, prohibiting such practices

²² Ghada Talhami, "Palestine Women: The Case for Political Liberation," Arab Perspectives (January, 1984), 10. Tawil's statement was quoted in *The Jerusalem Post Weekly*, May 4, 1976. Work Committees."

²¹ "Women's Work Committees."

in occupied areas. Once again, women were to place the national interest above their gender agenda. For working class women, unlettered peasant females, or women of the elite, living under the occupation regime was a harsh experience. The proletarianization of Palestinian women, as one Israeli writer put it in 1989, was not a pleasant or progressive experience: “Figures supplied by the Palestinians themselves demonstrate that the contribution of women to the economy of the occupied territories is the result of economic distress, not of economic development.”²³

The Prison Experience

Before the establishment of the Palestine National Authority (PNA) on parts of the Palestinian Occupied Territories following the signing of the Oslo Accords, a large number of women experienced imprisonment and torture at the hands of the Israeli military authorities. There are still prisoners in Israeli jails today, some serving long-term sentences. Today, the favored Israeli method of retribution when the military invade Palestinian towns and villages at will revolves around the demolition of homes and assassinations, euphemistically referred to as “targeted killing.”

Neither did the Israelis ever spare women who are merely engaged in non-military acts of protest. Leaders such as Samiha Khalil, Issam Abd al-Hadi, Zahira Kamal, Raymonda Tawil, and many others suffered imprisonment, expulsion, and long terms of house detention. The rampant use of torture in Israeli military jails has been documented in many reports by international humanitarian agencies, as well as by a landmark study published by the London Sunday Times in 1977. Many reports documented the use of sexual torture and harassment against women prisoners, including a 1986 study by the Palestine Human Rights Campaign (PHRC).²⁴

One of these studies which relied on reports appearing in major

²³ Fishman, 11.

²⁴ Talhami, “Palestinian Women under Occupation,” 20-3.

Israeli newspapers and publications was made in 1989 by the London-based *The Israeli Mirror*. This study detailed the harshness of treatment reserved for women activists during the first intifada (uprising), 1987-1996. The traditional inclination to avoid unduly harsh punishment of women in similar situations has been totally forsaken here. Some women, like Miriam Ismail, an activist with the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees, (the apex organization of the women's committees), was detained without trial for a long period of time and subjected to psychological and physical torture such as being locked in the "cupboard" for as long as a week. Neither was age any protection against such methods, as girls as young as fourteen years of age were often imprisoned. Some of the accounts describing the sexual harassment of female prisoners during the first intifada made its way to such Israeli dailies as *Ha-dashot*, *Ha'aretz*, *Yediot Aharonot* and *Davar*.²⁵ The mistreatment of prisoners was usually the result of Israeli Administrative Detention Laws, which were inherited from the emergency regulations of the British Mandate system. These laws allowed the authorities to hold suspects for a long time before bringing them to trial, to allow for obtaining confessions. It was during this initial period of incarceration that torture and undue use of pressure were used in order to facilitate trials. According to the Center for Palestinian Statistics, the number of women prisoners who passed through Israeli jails since 1967 totals 10,000. Of these, 500 were incarcerated during the second intifada (2000-present). Currently, the number of female prisoners is over 500, in addition to 120 females under detention. About 4,000 children were also held since the second intifada, of whom 330 remain imprisoned today. Some who are 18 years old or more have been held years ago when still children.²⁶ Three West Bank female prisoners have delivered their children while serving

²⁵ Cath Senker, ed., *Defiance: Palestinian Women in the Uprising*. Booklet published by *The Israeli Mirror*, London, 1989, pp. 3-37.

²⁶ "9,400 Palestinian Detainees in Israeli Prisons and 650 Thousand Detainees since the Occupation," (Arabic), *Fasl al-Maqal* (April 21, 2006).

jail time. Of all these practices, nothing is more objectionable than the detention of children, then bringing them to trial according to illegal laws issued by the occupation authorities. While most of these under-age prisoners are eventually released, their families are usually charged with the payment of large fines. Dalia Itsik, Israeli Speaker of the Knesset, has demanded an investigation of the use of experimental drugs on Palestinian prisoners.²⁷ According to Amnesty International, when women are arrested, threatened, and subjected to ill treatment, it is usually to place their husbands or male relatives under pressure or to have the prisoners sign false confessions. By adopting these practices, Israel is violating several international conventions, including the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In addition, the Fourth Geneva Convention on the Rights of Occupied People, prohibits under Article 3 (1) (c): “. . . outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment.”²⁸

Worsening Conditions under the Second Intifada

Despite the devolution of authority to the PNA in some parts of the West Bank and Gaza, the outbreak of the second intifada has led to a severe deterioration of living conditions, especially for women. First and foremost is the impact of military checkpoints, blockades, and curfews on women's health and well-being. The damage to the fabric of Palestinian society in general has deeply affected women's lives who are now victimized both by the Israeli military and by their own society. However, much of the blame should still be directed at the Israeli military since it is their continued control over the Occupied Territories and their frequent incursions into

²⁷ “The Day of the Palestinian Prisoner: Suffering and Steadfastness,” (Arabic), Al-Hourriyah (April 21, 2007), 7.

²⁸ “Israel and the Occupied Territories: Conflict, Occupation and Patriarchy,” Amnesty International Report, London (March 2005), 18.

Palestinian towns and villages that led to the destruction of 4,000 Palestinian homes, sizeable agricultural areas and extensive commercial businesses. Added to this is the deliberate sabotaging of the water, electrical, and sewage infrastructure. The checkpoints and other restrictions on the movement of people have made access to places of employment, education or health centers near impossible for the 3,500,000 people inhabiting the West Bank and Gaza (2 million in the West Bank and 1.5 million in Gaza).²⁹ In his "Statistics about the Fifth Year of the intifada," Dr. Mustafa Barghuti, head of Non-Governmental Organizations in the West Bank and Gaza, has estimated the number of military checkpoints to be 703. One example of the effect of these checkpoints on travel time is that a trip from Ramallah to Hebron which used to take one hour to complete, now can last as long as 12 hours. At least 86 Palestinians, including 30 children, have met their death at the checkpoints. By 2004, at least 55 women have delivered their babies at the checkpoints, with 20 of these suffering the death of their newborns as a result.³⁰ Checkpoints and blockades have effectively isolated and surrounded many towns and villages, forcing Palestinians to go for long distances in order to circumvent the by-pass roads of Israeli settlers. The Separation Wall, which completed around 600 kilometers by 2000, is complicating the lives of Palestinians further. In addition to cutting off entire communities and educational and health facilities, the Wall has consumed large tracts of Palestinian lands since 80% of it is built outside of Israel within the Green Line (Israel's 1967 border).³¹

Israel does not recognize that restricting a civilian population's freedom of movement constitutes a severe infringement on that population's human rights, especially in the areas of health, educa-

²⁹ Ibid., 4.

³⁰ [http://www.palestinemonitor.org/new web/September update archive. htm](http://www.palestinemonitor.org/new_web/September_update_archive.htm). Sep. 27, 2004.

³¹ "Israel and the Occupied Territories," 7.

tion, and work. The fundamental rights of an occupied population are protected under international humanitarian law, particularly as those affected are considered subjects of belligerent occupation which should be transitional by nature. Israel ignores these conventions, as well as, the implications of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (the Women's Convention). Other ignored international instruments include the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICEFRD). According to Amnesty International, Israel has refused to abide by UN human rights treaties and has rejected altogether the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the Occupied Territories. Israel claims that since it did not deprive the Occupied Territories of their sovereignty, it is under no obligation to apply this convention to these areas. Thus, Israel does not recognize the applicability of Article 38 (2) of the same convention which calls on the occupying power to ensure equal access to medical and health facilities to the Palestinians which the Israelis enjoy. Neither does Israel observe Article 38 (5) and 16 which specifically charge the occupying power with providing health treatment to pregnant women and children on the same level as what is available to Israelis.³²

The checkpoints have also resulted in poverty and unemployment since they prevent people from reaching their lands or places of work on time. Land is routinely seized by the military, especially after severe delays which prevent the farming population from reaching their fields. But the worst impact of closures remains on the sick and injured. Not only did the health infrastructure in the Occupied Territories deteriorate as the result of the security situation, much of the ill population are unable to travel for treatment outside of the country. The stark contrast between the high level of health care available to Israeli women and to Palestinian women

³² Ibid. 6-8.

has recently been noted by an Israeli section of Physicians for Human Rights. This organization found out that, to take one example, the survival rate of breast cancer patients within Israel is 70-75%, but for women in the Gaza Strip, it is 30-40%. Patients seeking to travel to Egypt or other countries for better health treatment are prevented from doing so due to frequent and prolonged border closings in that area.³³

Women's Work Opportunities and Domestic Violence:

Although women's participation in paid employment outside of the home has been low, before the second intifada women's participation has increased to 15.8% among women in the 25-year age-group or older. After the intifada, women's participation fell to 10.5%. Some of this decline is the result of restrictions imposed on Palestinian agricultural lands by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), such as restricted access to sources of water, land seizure by Israeli settlers, and the destruction of olive groves and fruit orchards due to building the Wall. Under these conditions, including the increasing absence of males, subsistence agriculture becomes absolutely necessary. But even that is becoming difficult as women struggle to play the role of main bread-winner for the family. Male unemployment, which is experiencing a dramatic increase, has placed additional pressures on women and children to seek employment. Women are now pressured to find employment outside of the home and the family's fields. The only available work to the majority remains of an unskilled nature in the unregulated sector of the economy. More importantly, women are not only facing abusive and exploitative treatment at the hands of their employers, they are also mistreated by unemployed male family members. Human rights organizations and social workers have concluded that the rise in domestic violence against women is the result of worsening economic and security conditions. Even when the first intifada provided opportunities for women's participation in civil societies,

³³ Ibid. 12.

the level of domestic violence targeting women increased due to the rise of violence against the Palestinian male. With the development of a more militarized intifada in 2000, women's opportunities for participating in decision-making were drastically reduced, and so was their ability to affect their own future. Restrictions and confinements forced upon the Palestinian male population deepened the level of poverty throughout society. This caused feelings of humiliation and frustration, leading to angry and violent response to any act of domestic provocation. Anger and abuse became the natural reaction to the males' inability to fulfill their traditional roles as family providers. Additionally, women have been reluctant to end abusive marriages due to the lack of employment opportunities outside the home.³⁴

Educational Opportunities

In the shadow of the second intifada and its increased violence, educational opportunities for women and girls were perceptibly reduced. This is the result of travel delays at the checkpoints and frequent blockades, rendering daily access to educational facilities, particularly for young women, extremely problematic. Students travelling from nearby towns and villages have to incur increased travel costs as the daily journey becomes longer. They also have to contend with reduced security and the possibility of spending nights outside the family home. When more families are impoverished as a result of the general deterioration of economic conditions, they are hardly able to absorb the 400% or 500% increase in transportation costs due to long travel delays. As is typical in these conditions, educating sons is given priority over the education of daughters. The risks to the female student of daily commuting has also given rise to the phenomenon of early marriages.³⁵

³⁴ Ibid. 13-4,20-1.

³⁵ Ibid. 14-7.

Women's National Leadership Roles

The rich historical experience of Palestinian women should have catapulted them by now to positions of national leadership. Any casual glance at the history and development of the Palestinian national movement will adequately demonstrate the pivotal role which women played in sustaining the national struggle. However, what emerges from the women's narrative is a specific pattern of formal acknowledgement of their efforts but limited opportunities for participation in formal politics. It is also clear that Palestinian women have been greatly mobilized by the intensification of the national struggle and by society's need for a human infrastructure engaged in acts of social production. Although the women became an important cadre of the PLO, and despite their acknowledged and immense service to the nation, when the latest intifada arose it was directed mainly by a male leadership. But a closer look at Palestinian history reveals an accumulation of female experience by those who created and staffed such organizations like the work committees of the 1980s, which successfully focused the nation's attention on such "feminist" issues as work, equity, and gender. It should be remembered that their greatest service to the community in the pre-intifada period was the creation of more than 80 nursery schools and an extensive literacy program for women, efforts which also created opportunities for the acquisition of organizing skills and networking across class lines. When the first intifada broke out, therefore, women's organizing abilities were not dissipated. Instead, the women's work committees merged into the Neighborhood Committees which served as the grassroots of the uprising. Thus, the first intifada emerged as an opportunity for empowerment and mobilization in defense of the Palestinian people. The work committees quickly heeded the call of the intifada's United National Leadership. The women were enrolled in all of the sub-committees of the Neighborhood Committees, in charge of agriculture, education, health, food storage, and guarding duties. Clearly, without the experience of the work committees, women

would not have been able to contribute to the national effort during the uprising. Women also understood that total immersion in the duties of the intifada, meant shelving the feminist agenda. Yet, it is undeniable that the conditions of the first intifada made the transition to a national role seem so natural and expected.³⁶

The Indigenous Feminism of Samiha Khalil

Although no more than five or six women were ever elected to the first and second Palestine Legislative Council in 1996 and 2006 which had a total membership of 132, women did actually fulfill the demands of national leadership roles. Yet, official and formal recognition of women's contribution to the national struggle remained low. Only two women were named to the PNA cabinet in 2005, and only 13% of the staff of the PNA's institutions were women. A mere 10% of all lawyers were women and only 9% of all judges were women.³⁷ Despite all this, the contention of some writers that "There are no women in the national leadership," cannot be fully substantiated.³⁸ Indeed, women did reach the highest layers of power during some phases of Palestinian national history. The following list briefly illustrates this point:

1. Issam Abd al-Hadi, the first GUPW's head in the 1960s, became a member of the Central Council of the PNC in the 1970s.
2. Intisar al-Wazir became the Treasurer of Fateh and later, the head of the Martyrs' Department.
3. Samiha Khalil became a member of the National Guidance Committee of the Occupied Territories in 1978. She also ran for the office of President during the

³⁶ Rita Giacaman, "Palestinian Women in the Uprising: From Followers to Leaders?", unpublished paper, September 1988, pp. 3-10.

³⁷ Tanmiya, The Welfare Society of Geneva, Summer Report of 2005.

³⁸ Fishman, 11.

elections of 1996.

4. Majidah al-Masri, currently serves as member of the Central Committee of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), a constituent group within the PLO.
5. Leila Khaled is currently a member of the Central Committee of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a constituent group within the PLO.

When viewing the national careers of these female leaders, it is difficult to separate their nationalist from their feminist agendas. All of them cared deeply about women, and all of them cared deeply about the nation. Each one of them rose to prominence nationally due to their service to women, which gives credence to Alice Walker's innovative adjective of "womanist". No life-story illustrates the convergence of the "womanist" ideology with the philosophy of national liberation than that of Samiha Khalil.

The woman who ran against Arafat for the presidency of the Palestinian territories in 1996, was best known for her social service institution, In'ash al-Usra, or Society for the Rehabilitation of the Family. This was an organization which was founded in 1965 with a budget of \$500, only to grow by 1986 to a budget of \$42,000. Founded single-handedly by this former school-teacher, In'ash al-Usra ran an orphanage for children of the martyrs, a nursery school, a bakery, a beautician training program, a dental clinic, a library, a folklore museum, and a textile shop. The society offered literacy classes, a university scholarship program for 300 female students, and employed 4,800 women as producers of traditional Palestinian embroidery working from their own homes. The society also employed 152 full-time employees, registered 200 women in its various vocational training programs, offered a financial sponsorship program for 1,500 families, and ran a program to assist political prisoners and their families.³⁹ Based in al-Bireh (near Ramallah),

³⁹ Orayb Najjar, "Palestinian Self-Reliance on Trial," *The Christian Century* (November 23, 1988), 1070-1.

the society was dedicated to helping women and the family by offering self-help programs. Much of its budget came from marketing its own products. Um Khalil also published a journal described by one Israeli journalist as the equivalent of *Shdemot*, the kibbutz movement's publication. When the first intifada broke out, she devoted her efforts to assisting its victims and their families.⁴⁰

Um Khalil was not one to accept charity or donations that did not meet her patriotic standards. Offers of aid from American organizations who received money from Congress were rejected, since it was the same Congress which, in her view, funds the building of illegal Israeli settlements on Arab land. When the Israelis closed her Society in an effort to calm the atmosphere during the intifada, her defenders claimed that the Society was engaged in social, rather than political activities. She herself, however, continued to assert the political nature of her activities. She explained at one time that "... teaching women self-reliance is political: making products that compete with Israeli goods, even on a small scale, is political. Self-help is political. It means that we are people seeking and deserving selfdetermination instead of occupation."⁴¹

Um Khalil was arrested six times by the Israelis. Her Society was closed for the longest stretch of time in June, 1988, but some of her projects continued and even picked up steam with the passage of time. The Israeli charge against her in Ramallah's Military Court accused her of "Influence on public opinion in a manner threatening the public welfare and public order." Other charges included publishing a leaflet on International Children's Day which was bordered with the colors of the Palestinian flag. She was also accused of advocating women's participation in the activities of the intifada. One of her most moving literary effort, however, was publishing "A Letter from a Palestinian Mother," in the Israeli pa-

⁴⁰ Gideon Levy, "Samiha Khalil: First Lady," *New Outlook* (June-July, 1989), 38.

⁴¹ Najjar, 1072.

pers of Davar and Al Hamishmar. In this statement, addressed to Israeli mothers, she asked if they knew about the violence and atrocities being committed in the West Bank in their names.⁴² But she continued to pay for her activities until her death in 1999. The Israeli authorities barred her from any outside travel, including from attendance at the UN Nairobi Conference on Women. She was also prevented from visiting her children in Jordan, as well as proceeding to another town while under house arrest in order to retrieve her deceased husband's body in a timely manner. Her true awakening to the tragic dimensions of the Palestinian tragedy was when she witnessed a long line of refugees waiting to receive food rations from the offices of UN Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) during the early 1950s. She resented turning the Palestinians into a charity case, accusing the UN of failing to find a political solution for the loss of their homeland.⁴³

Conclusion

The case of Palestinian women is significant on several levels. First and foremost, it is an inseparable part of the Palestinian national narrative, enriching it with the multiple experiences and social and political ideas of the female segment of the nation. Secondly, this is a human rights story which cries out for justice and understanding. No one who reads about Palestinian women will fail to be impressed by their steadfastness and faith in the face of tremendous odds lined up against them. Thirdly, the Palestinian case is an instructive lesson in how to survive and even thrive under the patriarchy. Experts on Western feminism should familiarize themselves with this story in order to better understand the meaning of the struggles of non-Western women. What they will learn is not only differences in the manner in which women's energies are harnessed to the national liberation struggle, but also how to work towards the survival of families, women, men and children alike.

⁴² Levy, 38-9.

⁴³ Najjar, 1971.

Keynotes and lectures of the conference “Perspectives beyond war and crises? Donor politics and gender orders in the Israeli-Palestinian-Conflict” which was held from April 17th to 18th 2008 in Vienna.

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