Beyond Secularism and Islamism
Perspectives for the Arab World
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This volume is part of the project
Dialoguing Across the Religious/Secular Divide

VIDC – Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (Ed.)
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Introduction

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This publication is one outcome of the project “Dialoging Across the Religious/Secular Divide”. Started in 2010, this project was a cooperation between VIDC and the Institute for Women’s Studies at Birzeit University in Palestine. Some of the included papers were presented at the conference “Beyond Secularism and Islamism – Perspectives for the Arab World”, which took place in Vienna on January 27, 2014. In addition to this publication, in 2013, a special issue of the review of Women’s Studies that included the paper Prof. Wael Hallaq presented at the conference was published in English and Arabic with the title “Beyond the Divide: Discussing Secularism and Religion”.

During VIDC’s previous conferences on Palestine, participants highlighted the necessity of initiating a public and more objective debate on the different perspectives on the role of religion, secularism and pluralism within the Palestinian society. Sharing this opinion, the Institute for Women’s Studies at Birzeit University developed a proposal for a three year project.

The project started with an internal seminar series during which participants read and discussed of different texts – from authors such as Emanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Ernst Renan, Talal Asad, Sayyid Qutb, Edward Said, Wael Hallaq – just to mention a few.

As an outcome of these seminars a faculty forum was established which organized monthly open seminars. During these seminars different issues related to the topic of secularism and religion were presented and discussed.

In the course of the project the debate spread outwards with public lectures; for instance with Prof. Hallaq. Additionally, the annual Birzeit Debate Forum in December 2012 took as its topic: Debating the Motion: “There is no contradiction between applying Islamic law and the civil state”, which was covered by Palestinian media and shown on Palestinian TV.

As one have seen in the last years the religious/secular divide is not only an issue in Palestine, but in all Arab countries where uprisings took or are taking place, this divide is one of the main areas of conflict. Be it in Egypt where the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood government was dismissed by a military coup or in the war in Syria, secular and Islamic ideas are used as an important weapon in these confrontations. Thinking beyond this divide, it is crucial to have critical analysis of existing ideas and of what is meant by ‘secular’ or ‘Islamic’.
The present volume comprises the one of the keynote speeches of the conference as well as a selection of papers presented by students in course of the project as well as during the conference.

In her keynote Islah Jad argues that the brand of Islamic movement contesting the power of the Palestinian national movement is, to a great extent, a product of the failure of the secular national movement to fulfill the promises for national independence or state building. She shows in her article how the Islamists incorporated women into politics in order to create the image of the Islamist women.

Under the section of the student papers Rawhiyya Qasem explores the western discourse on political Islam. Sawsaan Kanaan analyses the relationship between religion and state in Egypt and looks for an answer to the question; is Egypt considered a secular or religious state? Starting from Adel Daher’s concept of secularism, Maram ‘Ayesh questions whether or not the demand to adopt the Western concept of secularism in the Palestinian context underlies a colonial logic. Finally Hanan Kaoud elaborates in her paper why liberal/secular approaches in combating violence against Palestinian women have failed.

At VIDC it is our hope that this publication will contribute to the overall goal of the project: to initiate a public and more objective debate on the different perspectives on the role of religion, secularism and pluralism within the Palestinian society and beyond.

Our thanks go to the Institute for Women’s Studies at Birzeit University for its cooperation, to our consultant Helmut Krieger for his contribution to the project and to the Austrian Development Cooperation for its financial support.
Introduction

Arab nationalism has from its origins invoked Islam as a basis for legitimacy. Neither Islam nor nationalism is a fixed idiom and here I argue that the brand of Islamic movement contesting the power of the Palestinian national movement is, to a great extent, a product of the failure of the secular national movement to deliver on its promises for national independence or state building. I argue that one of the elements that eased the shift to a ‘fusion’ between Islam and Palestinian nationalism was the defeat of the Palestinian national movement and the ability of the Islamic movement (Hamas) to identify itself with the struggle to gain Palestinian national rights.

Arab nationalism, whether in its Baathist, Nasserist or other forms, incorporated Islam as part and parcel of its claims of difference and was a unifying ideology in the quest for building what Salame calls a ‘state of legitimation’ – a move that derives fortification from enduring social elements, rather than insisting more fundamentally upon a vision for change and innovation (Salame 2001:20; Hourani 1983; Davis 1987; Lawrence 1987; Tibi 1987; Al-Azemeh 1996). Al-Azem goes further to accuse the ‘secular’ nationalist elites of obstructing a rational understanding for the Islamic cultural heritage to become the subject of independent scientific methodologies and inquiries pertaining to social sciences. They instead used Islamic cultural heritage as an ideological tool in the service of their regional, national or party politics. Thus, when the nationalist waves faded away, an uncritical approach to Islam and Islamic heritage remained and was easily presented as untouchable core of Arab and Muslim identity (Al-Azem 2004).

In some of the above views, the assertion that Islam was fused with Arab nationalism was seen as a hindrance to true secularism and true modernity. Many scholars referred to the fusion between religion and nationalisms in the modern construction of the latter. The fusion of religion and nationalism as a brand of ‘secularism’ wielded amongst the post-colonial national elites was a clear marker of identity for these post-colonial nation-states in the Arab World. For example, ‘Abd El-Baki Hermassi, writing on Islamism and secularism, summarizes the differences in the important distinction between de facto and de jure secularism.

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1 Islah Jad is a lecturer on gender issues and politics at the Women's Studies Institute and Cultural Studies Department of Birzeit University in the West Bank. She joined Birzeit in 1983, and is a founding member of its women’s studies program. She has written books and papers on the role of women in politics, Palestinian women and the relationships among them, Islam, and NGOs. Dr. Jad is also a consultant on gender issues to the United Nations Development Programme and is co-author of the UN’s Arab Development Report on Women’s Empowerment.
Whereas in the West *de jure* secularism called for the formal separation of church and state, the Arab state recognized Islam as the religion of society and, in this way, demobilized its political use. Although the state was not formally secular, in practice, these states marginalized the role of the mosque in politics and practised *de facto* secularism (Hermassi 1993 cited in Hatem 1994:664-5).

Further conflicts may be noted between Islam as religion and as nationalism. In contemporary political Islamic movements, and contrary to the meaning of Islam at its inception, the ‘new’ meaning of Islam is inclusive of Muslims and exclusive of all non-Muslims, unlike nationalism. But like nationalism, Islam is interpreted as a political system and used for political ends, which is a threat to secularism. However, according to Asad, both Arab nationalism and Islamism share a concern with the modernising state because Islamism takes for granted and seeks to work through the nation-state, which is central to the predicament of all Muslims. It is this statist project, he argues, and not the fusion of religious and political ideas that gives Islamism a ‘nationalist’ cast (Asad 2003:199). Asad urges us not to focus on the ‘real motives’ of Islamists, but rather to look for what circumstances oblige ‘Islamism’ to emerge publicly as a political discourse, and how it challenges the deep structures of secularism (ibid:199).

The arrival to power of the Islamic Movement Hamas after the legislative election of 2006 triggered a fierce conflict over the control of the Palestinian Authority (PA). In this conflict, the discourse of ‘secularist versus religious’ was deployed, mainly by the PA, to undermine Hamas and to show political and moral supremacy over the Islamic Movement. Women’s rights and gender ideology were one of the tools used by PA and its followers to undermine its political rival. Thus, a theoretical and ideological layer focusing on Islam and secularism was added to the political grievances. In secular discourse, women were perceived as victims of the expansion of the Islamic gender ideology of Hamas that would push women backward. In contrast, Islamists of Hamas see feminists and secularist women as manipulated by a universal discourse and PA politics that ignore Palestinian national rights and work to divert women’s attention to their own ‘individual and egoistic rights’. While this portrayal forges a wide gap between women on both sides, I argue that nationalist feminist ideology influenced the direction of the debate on gender and women’s rights in the Islamic movement and that many of the positions and views of the latter were formed in reaction to the nationalist feminist movements. I have found it difficult to categorize any form of Islamist ‘feminism’ without scrutinizing the rejoinders it offers to modern political principles. Thus, the idea of a fixed ‘inner logic’ of Islam, explains the position of the Islamic movements less accurately than an examination of how Islamist women engage with their nationalist counterparts whose positions actively inform Islam discourse. I shall focus on Islamist women, the discourse they employ to promote their vision and their daily practices and their positioning within the Islamic movement, particularly their active participation in politics since 2006.
While there is a considerable volume of writing on contemporary Islamic movements, there have only been sketchy references to their gender ideology. Very little attention has been paid to women militants themselves, which would provide a voice for those who are not considered by many feminists to be part of the Palestinian women’s movements. I argue that this is an important omission particularly in view of their growing activism for civil society and the changes that occurred after the Hamas victory in the legislative election of January 2006. The ability of Hamas to shift its position into a nationalist stance since gaining control of the Gaza Strip in 2007 was crucial to reach wider constituencies and to gain more popular support and legitimacy.

My aim is to contextualize and explore the changing discourse, structure and gender ideology of the Islamic movement in the West Bank and Gaza and to examine Islamist women’s activism within Hamas. The Islamists’ changing policy on women’s participation in the public sphere resounded within the movement, resulting in transformation from near apathy and inactivity to more inclusion and mobilization.

Islamic movements entail a variety of forms of organization from declared political parties to underground organizations. I use the phrase Islamic movement to refer to a socio-political movement, founded on an Islam defined as much in terms of political ideology as in terms of a religion.

The growing influence of Islamic movements in the Middle East is usually examined in the context of the states’ withdrawal from providing vital social and economic services to its citizens. This frame does not fit in the case of Palestine where a sovereign nation-state never existed. However, the socio-economic and political transformations produced by the Israeli Occupation were important in promoting the Palestinian Islamists directly or indirectly. Hamas thus shifted from an exclusionary religious movement, into a powerful rival and alternative to the Palestinian national movement represented by the PLO or the PA (Palestinian Authority). The Islamic movement’s ability to shift to a nationalist position and broaden itself to a nation-wide movement was crucial for Hamas to reach wider constituencies, gain legitimacy, and expand its popular support. Hamas used the conflation between Islam and nationalism deliberately. Islam was ‘nationalized’ and confined to the territorial context of Palestine; and Palestinian nationalism was ‘Islamized’.

By emulating the ‘secular’ and leftist political groups -and by competing with them- the Islamists learned how to ‘adjust’ their appeal to attract a wider constituency. With the collusion of the Israeli Occupation and the Jordanian regime, the Islamists in Palestine managed to build an impressive infrastructure of cultural, social, economic and political institutions that proved crucial in sustaining the Islamic movement.

The move from accommodating Occupation to fully fledged resistance through spectacular military actions was a turning point in the history of the Islamists in Palestine. Once established as a broad, popular national movement, the Islamic movement altered its
structure to act as a legal, political party. The National Islamic Salvation Party (*khalas*) was an important medium for the Islamists to seek a more sustained and organized constituency and to move towards the eventuality of power-sharing through democratic means such as elections. This shift was crucial in compelling the Islamists to pay more systematic attention to recruiting and organizing women. In competition with the secularists and as a reaction to their stand on recruiting and integrating women in their organizations, the Islamists focused on educating women and integrating them into their party structure at all levels.

The link between religious fundamentalist movements and gender ideology is inseparable in their quest to build a moral society based on the moral family. I examine what I term the ‘gendered’ structure of Hamas and the evolving nature of Hamas gender ideology. The rigid, formal division of labor confining women to the domestic sphere as the reproducers of a ‘moral’ nation gave way to more open-ended interpretations of texts enabling women to forge a wider space in the public arena. This shift was not haphazard; it was the outcome of the work of Islamist women within the movement against the background of past achievements which were irreversible by the Islamists. It was also the outcome of the pressure exercised by ‘secular’ feminist who critiqued the Islamists ‘fixing’ the gender order by instituting the immutable rules of shari’a law.

Many studies have shown that the “resurgence” of Islam – which refers to an Islamic lifestyle and growing religiosity – can be seen in virtually all Muslim societies, affecting culture, social relations, economic affairs, and political life. This phenomenon cannot be understood with reference to traditional systems of thought and action but represent an effort to generate and legitimate new forms of political and social action in radically changing societies. Thus, it is a novel and modern phenomenon.

However, the Palestinian Islamic ‘revival’ cannot be conflated with a broader ‘revival’ in the rest of the Middle East. In Palestine, not only has there never been a state but also there is a further complication; Israel, as an occupying force, has been extremely interested in the elimination of the ‘secular’, nationalist PLO. As capitalist democracies supported Islamists who fought communism during the Cold War, so the Israelis had an interest in nourishing the influence of the Islamists in order to weaken the PLO and ultimately break up the national movement. Alongside these influences, Hamas has largely managed, to mutate from being a religious, political movement into a broad-based national movement in which Islam becomes the core of Palestinian national identity.

With the failure of the peace process and the spread of corruption within the PA, Hamas’ popularity soared. Its popular standing also related to a growing trend of religiosity amongst Palestinians.

It is against these economic, national and political backgrounds that one can examine the fluctuating power and influence of the Islamic movement in the West Bank and, in particular, in Gaza, where it originated. The different types of social organizations that
the Islamists established became important economic and social venues for young women looking for work and mobility.

The young were taught about self-sacrifice, pride in the simple life, obedience and discipline. This took place during a phase of economic decline in the Palestinian economy, when the Israeli labor market was getting rid of thousands of Palestinian casual workers. Material services received an increased focus and appreciation. The Islamists instituted support programs such as funds for poor students in Gaza or abroad, aid to those suffering from housing demolitions by Israeli occupation army, and support for families whose breadwinners were imprisoned. The Islamists established many health clinics, provided occasional free medicine and a blood bank. The mojam’a (the Islamic center in Gaza, a branch of the Muslim Brothers, later transformed into the Islamic resistance movement Hamas) copied many activities that used to be provided by nationalist and leftist groups, such as voluntary work campaigns, summer camps, sports training and competitions. Most of these activities were for men. The establishment of the Islamic University in Gaza in 1978/79 was another important step in the spread of the Muslim Brothers’ influence.

This kind of competition with other groups also drew the Islamists’ attention to what Ahmed Atawneh calls “the importance of women’s vote and how crucial the recruitment of female students is to the support of the Islamic blocs,” especially in universities such as Birzeit to which “conservative families don’t send their girls” because the student body includes a lower percentage of “Muslim religious girls” (Atawneh, Interview 2002).

The Islamists could neither hinder nor ignore the valuable lesson after the 1948 Nakba (creation of the state of Israel): that education is the only guarantee against unpredictable change. For although Hamas’s advocacy of education for women could lead to their gaining a new space in public life, it also enforced patriarchal norms through sex segregation. Yet the separation between the sexes also led to new careers for women outside the realm of traditional professions (teaching, nursing, and so on), such as photographer or waitress at weddings, or other events of only female gatherings.

The decline of the PLO and the ability of the Islamists to re-invent themselves as a nationalist movement were crucial factors in their growing popularity. While the PLO was effectively being transformed into a vehicle for the pursuit of diplomatic activity, Islamists wasted no time and embarked on formulating a new ideology in which nationalism would be brought to the fore.

Thus, the transformation of Hamas into a militant national resistance movement brought the old national ethos, which fused struggle, sacrifice and suffering invested with sacredness and inviolability back into the very core of Palestinian national identity; within this formation, any act detracting from the struggle is considered sacrilege, if not treason. This reconstruction of Palestinian national identity goes against the PA’s attempts to establish a political identity around narrow interpretations of loyalty to the Party (Fateh) and gains
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(for its members) (Fateh is the largest faction of PLO that was founded and began its military action in 1965). Through struggle, women’s purity once again becomes a keystone of the ethos of suffering, sacrifice, and struggle: women’s immodesty dishonors the memory of the martyrs - women’s preoccupation with trivia and fashion at a time of sacrifice and struggle is an insult to the fighters for liberation - and women, by their immodest dress and conduct, are unwittingly aiding the enemy in their designs to corrupt the nation (Hammami 1991). Islamists also rail against the ethos spread by the work of feminist women’s NGOs, which are accompanied by extravagant advertisements, conferences, high salaries and donor funds (considered by the Islamists as profits) instead of by sacrifice and suffering while the Occupation rages on unabated. In what follows, I will present an account of the conflict that erupted between a newly formulated nationalism that presented Islam as its essence and an old ‘secular’ nationalism, in order to explore the impact of this conflict on women and the roles women played within it.

In order to function as a political movement, Hamas separated its military wing from its political organization and established the Islamic National Salvation Party as its political arm. However, once Hamas won the election and took control of Gaza in June 15 2007, the party was dissolved.

An overview of the Women’s Action Department of the Salvation Party is important to explain the ways in which Islamists incorporate women into politics in order to create the image of the ‘new Islamic woman’ (White 2002). Islamist women are presented with the need to meet two paradoxical expectations: They must be not only model mothers and obedient wives but also model political activists. It is the same dilemma that nationalist and secularist women are still struggling to solve.

Hamas’ contradictory gender ideology, like that of the nationalists, stressed the accepted role of women in reproducing the nation. While the movement was keen to present the ‘new Islamic woman,’ it is apparent that this image potentially contradicts the usual conception of the Palestinian woman as the fertile ‘womb’.

The Party and its women’s department opened its doors to the ‘new Islamic woman’ who is educated, outspoken, moltazemah (veiled) and modern. Modernity is reflected in the fact that these women are educated, professional and politically active. The veil is seen as a signifier of modernity since it is different from ‘traditional dress’. The ‘new Islamic dress’ (long robe of plain color and a white or black head scarf) is seen as a uniform of conviction.

“It is different from the thub (traditional peasant woman’s dress) which is used by our mothers and grandmothers. It is different in its meanings; it is a unifying symbol to our followers and members, if I see a woman wearing it, I will immediately realize that she is ukhot (a sister). It indicates that we are educated and not like our mothers who are mostly illiterate. It gives us heiba (respect) as the dress of our ulama (religious leaders). It is economic, simple and modest” (Amira, Interview 2000)
Implicit in the Islamist veiling style is participation in a national social movement that lends the wearer a heightened sense of status, both moral (vis-a-vis secularists) and social (vis-a-vis women who merely cover, but do not veil). However, despite its political cachet, behind the social force of veiling “one can discern the familiar principle of *himaya*, (guidance and protection) by (and from) men” (White 2002).

Unlike some other Islamic countries -- Turkey for example, in which Islamist women, once married, lose their ‘voice’ when they retreat to the security and seclusion of the patriarchal family- the Salvation Party and its women’s department provided an important venue for educated Palestinians who have limited access to a restricted, male dominated labor market. In this sense, it is important to trace the identity the party provides for women by allowing them to manage their dual roles as activist in the public sphere and as mother and care-giver.

The new participants brought into the Islamic movements by the Party include university graduates, and professional women, thus consolidating a new category that changed Hamas from a military, underground, male-dominated organization into a more popular political movement. The move to create an Islamic women’s movement with the support of the top leadership is a significant marker in the history of the Palestinian women’s movement. For the first time, women became a strategic concern for the Palestinian national movement, this time under the banner of Islam.

**The Gender Ideology of Hamas**

While Hamas’ gender ideology rests on religious idioms, it is, nonetheless, possible to demonstrate that it is contradictory and in continuous flux. This is due to ‘ordinary’ socio-economic factors and, as I proposed, a reaction to the challenge presented by the discourse of feminist nationalist and secular women, as well as Islamist women’s activism within the movement. The universalist discourse used by women in NGOs is alien not because it is ‘Western’ but because it was not founded on a thorough knowledge of the women’s situation whose interests these organizations claimed to be representing. This discourse was also reproduced and diffused in the absence of a power structure that could support it, either through the women’s movement or the national political movement in the aftermath of the Oslo Agreement signed in 1993.

The national secular movement of the 1970s /80s, which led to massive participation of women in the first Intifada, was weakened as the result of the economic deterioration, massive unemployment, and failure to find a viable political solution. Starting in the mid-1970s, many Palestinian universities were established that attracted young girls from rural and poor backgrounds. The activism of the nationalist students was crucial in involving them in
secular nationalist movement. However, by the 1990s many of the same women had been attracted to the Islamist movement and had adopted the veil.

The influence of Islamists can be explained with reference to a series of interrelated factors: the decline of the Palestinian national movement accompanied by the withdrawal of the grass roots organizations from service provision; the ‘NGOization’ of women’s organizations which ruptured their organic links with the grass roots; the ‘nationalization’ of Islam and the ‘Islamization’ of the Palestinian national identity by the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine.

Central to this latter process was the Islamization of gender. Hammami has noted that the 1987 intifada was the first time “that an issue, specifically veiling, once relegated to the arena of religious behavior had been mobilized as a nationalist issue” (Hammami 1997: 194). Hammami, rightly, points out this campaign showed the ability of Hamas to conflate its social ideology with Palestinian nationalism, wielding the threat and use of violence against women to impose the veil. Women gained little support from the national leadership of the intifada which failed to stop this campaign in time (ibid: 194).

From this, it may seem that Hamas’s gender ideology was a ‘fixed’ entity stemming from a conservative and misogynistic religious platform. According to this view, women, were perceived as the victims on whom something unwanted was imposed. While this might be true for some women in the leftist organizations, it is still important to understand why it was difficult to reverse the course of events. This was true after the establishment of the PA, and even after the national leadership of the intifada issued many leaflets, with the consent of Hamas, de-legitimizing the attacks on women to impose veil on them by some nationalist activists. In other words, why do we witness an increase in the number of veiled women and girls if veiling is a symbolic form of - if not a signifier of – adherence to the textual tradition of Islam advocated by Hamas? (I argue in order to understand the gender agenda of Hamas, factors that link gender and nationalism must be explored. Hamas’s gender ideology cannot be separated from the colonial use of gender, its rivalry with the ‘other’ nationalist groups and, to a lesser extent, scriptural texts. However, other factors, such as the conservative elements of Palestinian nationalism in its secular form, as explained above, could be invoked to elucidate the slide into Hamas’ gender ideology (Jad 1990; Massad 1995; Hammami 1997; Budeiri 1995).

The orthodoxy displayed by Hamas in the first intifada cannot be explained as misrecognition of indigenous culture as it arose in the context of a reaction to the increasing intimidation against women aggravated by the Israeli Occupation. Hamas, contrary to Fateh,
spelled out its gender agenda at an early stage. This is a common feature of religious movements which place a great deal of emphasis on the family unit. The Israeli writer Amnon Cohen in his well-known work entitled “The Moslem [sic] Brothers” wrote the movement had “fixed repressive ideas about women and how they were expected to conduct themselves. Women were not permitted to use makeup or to over-adorn themselves, they were to veil their faces, and were not to appear in public ‘half naked’. This, the Brothers maintained, was clearly laid down by Islam” (Cohen 1982). Contrary to claims made by authors such as Cohen, the intimidation against women is a kind of artefact of the occupation rather than a “fixed” conservative culture which oppresses women.

Chandra Mohanty warns against the analytical leap of seeing the widespread practice of veiling as indicative of women’s sexual oppression and control. Rather, she urges us to understand it analytically by questioning its meaning and function in various cultural and ideological contexts (Mohanty 1991:66-7). Hamammi showed that the spread of veiling in the course of the first intifada was linked to a national meaning, that in the face of the calamity, death and destruction inflicted by the Israeli Occupation, women had to show respect to the martyrs (Hammami 1997).

Hamas’ focus on military activism should be highlighted to better understand its position vis-a-vis women’s piety and veiling at any particular moment. Secondly, the veil has different meanings for different women according to their self-perception, class and ideology. Finally, a more nuanced approach to understanding the meaning of veiling is important in the elaboration of an oppositional political strategy.

During the first intifada a new formulation of the issue of women’s piety and modesty was deemed essential in order to ‘protect’ the nation. The insistence on veiling as a moral code for women can be explained as a tool in the Islamists’ rivalry with secularists. Veiling is a unifying cultural marker for the movement and a signifier of its growing strength among Hamas followers, or, as Nikki Keddie suggests, it may be a way of asserting communal identity, rather than being such a strong religious marker (Keddie 1998). Veiling can also become an important political symbol employed to forge new social ‘modern’ identity and a concrete tool in opening new possibilities for women within and outside the movement. The different meanings of the veil should not be seen as the only marker of Hamas’ gender ideology. Rather, their ideology changes as the power of the Islamist women alters within their movement.

In 1988, Hamas published its mythaq (Charter) in which its ‘formal’ position on gender was spelled out in articles 17 and 18. Article 17 states that “Muslim women have a role in the liberation struggle that is no less important than the role of men: the woman is the maker of men, and her role in guiding and educating the generations is a major” (Hamas Charter 1988). In the same article, women were presented as passive targets for the “Masons’, ‘Rotary Clubs’, and intelligence networks - all centers of destruction and saboteurs”
And the Islamists should play their role in confronting the schemes of those saboteurs i.e. protecting them” (Hamas Charter, article 17).

In article 18, it was stressed again that “the woman in the house of the Mujahid and the striving family, be she a mother or a sister, has the most important role in caring for the home and raising the children with the ethical character and understanding that comes from Islam” (Hamas Charter, article 18). The woman was advised to be economical, avoid carefree spending and “keep in mind that money is blood that must flow only in the veins to sustain the life of children and parents equally”. Women were thus advised to ‘give’ to their family and nation instead of ‘taking’, a notion Hamas stresses to differentiate Islamist women from the secular activists. In this vision, women are portrayed as dependent on men, confined to their homes and segregated from public space. However, this was not what Islamist women and female students were actively ‘doing’ in the students’ blocs of Hamas or in Islamist associations. The tension between Hamas’ gender vision and what Islamist women actually do will be presented in the following sections. Through their own involvement in the movement, these women were able to change this vision to make a space for themselves.

The Ever Evolving Gender Vision: ‘The Text Does not Prohibit’

The observation ‘the text does not prohibit’ was a recurrent theme in my interviews with Amira, Maysoon, Samira and many other women militants. They meant religious texts are open-ended, making it possible to forge a wider legitimate space for women in the public arena. The daily reality of life for women eager for work, education and political participation shaped a gradual and growing critique inside the movement. Islamist women, while fully complicit in disseminating the movement’s gender ideology, are also the first to push its boundaries to increase their participation in public space.

These developments accompanied a change in Hamas’s strategy after the ‘peace process” began when it transformed from a military underground organization into a political party. In evaluating the impact of this transformation on women’s activism within Hamas, I analyze papers presented by women activists at many conferences organized by Islamist women activists in Gaza.

The Salvation Party started to widen its popular base more systematically by recruiting women. As it began to emphasize the legal political struggle, like other national and secular organizations, it could not ignore the conditions in which women lived or prevent them from joining political life. Yet the movement dismissed claims for women’s rights by other nationalist and secularist women’s organizations. Internal factors pressured Hamas to deal with women’s issues, while external pressures, from feminists’ demands and the equal rights discourse, offered a serious challenge to Islamist discourse.
What, then, are women’s rights from an Islamic perspective? Here the answer will not come from the male leadership of the party or in Hamas’s old Charter, but rather from its women. I draw on the contributions of a workshop and three conferences as the main forum on women’s rights that clearly illustrate the shift in these positions, as well as in Islamist women’s experience within the party and their daily practices.

The first conference concentrated on women’s groups that were delegitimizing secularists in order to present themselves as the ‘true’ and ‘authentic’ voice for women’s interests. The second conference focused on reinterpretation of the religious texts to allow a new reading that would incorporate women’s achievements in society due to modernization processes. It is interesting to note that in the process of formulating a new reading for religious texts, a parallel process of ‘de-Islamizing’ the discourse on women’s rights took place. As will be explained, the Islamists adopted new terms (such as ‘sustainable development’), predominantly used by donors and feminist activists. Then the third conference scrutinized the concept of sustainable development and questioned its relevance, to Palestinian society. Also, for the first time, a ‘modern’ and ‘feminist’ critique of the liberal rights approach was used. These conferences were landmarks for Hamas gender ideology in the passage from utter rejection of feminism to borrowing and selectively incorporating positions advocated by feminists. This resulted in their recuperation by the Islamists (that is, the women were Islamized) even as their Islamic discourse was de-Islamized and considered within the present framework.

From Rejection to Engagement

The Women’s Department (daerat al-’amal al-nissaei) of the Islamic Salvation Party proved to be energetic and active in pushing the boundaries of the Islamist women’s space within the party structure and in society at large. On 24 April 1997, it published a booklet presenting the findings of a workshop called “Palestinian Woman … Where Next?” The booklet, for the first time in the Muslim Brothers’ history in Palestine, fills the gaps of their gender agenda and inverts some of its previous positions. The introduction to the booklet clearly states that the raison d’etre of the whole discussion was that it “became a preoccupying issue for those many who are keen to see women occupying a distinguished position in the society side by side with men” (Women’s Department “Introduction” 1997:1).

Many prominent male and female Hamas leaders in the workshop criticized secular women’s groups linking their NGOs to the West, depicting them as a ploy of the West to weaken the nation and betray it by ‘smothering’ Israel’s existence in the heart of the umma. (Islamic community of believers) It rejected the call for the gender agenda as unfit when the national agenda was still unresolved. Nehad Khalil, a prominent journalist from al-Rissa-la (The Message, a weekly Islamist journal), questioned the motives of ‘the foreign funding’
of the different NGOs advocating rights in the Palestinian society as the West’s desire to create a political environment acceptable to Israel; and the need of some Palestinian party cadres for jobs and money, or personal "enrichment, through funding, and fame" (Nehad Khalil 1997:3, 4). He claimed the motive behind the activism of these organizations was to divert attention from criticizing human rights violations by the Israelis towards women’s issues which “don’t fit with the existing social and economic structures” and rejected the call for a gender agenda as inappropriate in the face of the struggle against the Occupation.

In my interviews, many Islamists women expressed the same skepticism vis-a-vis universal rights for women. Maysoon, for example, states:

*Isn’t it weird to hear the same discourse all over the Arab world and the Islamic world by many women’s organizations? How come that all women’s needs and aspirations are all the same all over a spectrum of different societies with different contexts and needs? Where is the specificity of each society, where are the variations between them and among women themselves? This is a standard blueprint strategy pushed not by women but by foreign donors.* (Maysoon, Interview).

However, the April 1997 workshop could not reject outright the prevailing discourse on women’s rights. Some feminists (mainly those from Gaza) called for the prohibition of polygamy and the right to divorce within shari’a law; and others called for restrictions on polygamy without outright prohibition. There was an appeal not only to establish a study center but also direct more attention to laws, visions, and studies proposed by secularist women.

*A paper presented by Khitam Abu Musa, an Islamist woman, inverted the gender vision of the Hamas Charter of 1988. Abu Musa interprets Islam as the religion that gives the woman all her rights: education, free choice of a husband, inheritance (widely denied by custom), mobility (to participate in the call for the rule of God and jihad), proselytizing, and social or professional work (Khitam Abu Musa 1997:17-21).*

In interpreting religion and *shari’a* in this manner, she invokes the authority of the religious text to stress that “the urge of women to develop intilaq (to flourish) and participate in social life with all that entails, including meeting men, is an approach decided by the Islamic *shari’a* and prophet’s *sunna* (deeds)” (29)(ibid:17-21). She also uses the concept of ‘public good’ emphasizing that “Islam mandates [stress added] women to go out and participate in social life as good Muslims.”

This vision is not shared by all Islamist women in the party; it seems more pertinent to the needs of educated women who want to abolish the sex segregation code to benefit from more opportunities in the labor market. Less educated women say, rather: ‘in the party they are irritated when we insist on being separate. The party says that as a
developmental party there is no harm in mixing, but this is against our traditions’ (Fatmeh, Interview). Some party cadres and educated women are more open to changes than some of their grass-roots constituencies.

In these conferences meticulous attention was paid to the demands and visions of Palestinian feminists concerning issues related to legislation, work, education, political participation, and women in the media and communication, all areas in which the Islamic vision is formulated in response to other platforms. The concluding vision was crystallized around refuting the idea that religion is the cause of women’s subjugation and dismissing civic legislation as recourse for women. It was stated that Islam is the path to ‘fairness and justice’ (Samira, Interview).

Nevertheless many ideas were formulated to present a more progressive gender vision stemming from al-shari’a. While the starting point is the ‘text’, the call for new interpretations is always linked to the needs of society and the ‘spirit of the age (roh al-’assr). In this way, the discussion moved gradually away from religious discourse toward a more ‘modern’ and temporal discussion. The usual empty, repetitive religious discourse about other women’s groups was criticized in favor of more engagement.

The conclusions of these conferences can be encapsulated in two main points. First, they argued Islamists should change, anticipate reform, and take the lead in uplifting (nahda) women- otherwise others will lead. Second, it should be stressed that “the mission to liberate women and activate their role falls primarily on women. Women have to claim their rights and struggle for them in the light of the proper understanding of the tolerant shari’a”.

Organized by the Women’s Action Department, the third conference was dedicated to outlining more specifically the differences that exist between shari’a and international conventions. It provided a more thoughtful critique of women’s rights discourse as presented in international conventions. Using critical feminist thought, the papers presented at this conference questioned, for the first time, the viability not of women’s rights discourse, but rather of its liberal, individualistic, and Western aspects (Phillips 1993).

Thus, feminist discourse based on the notion of active citizenship contested the discourse of the women’s NGOs, based on liberal agendas. Citizenship is conceived of individuals or groups who assert their rights, and fulfill their social responsibilities. Whereas in political terms, it is reduced to the limited practice of voting, which reflects an impoverished view of social membership. Instead there is a need for a more substantive version based on participation and social responsibility, known as social citizenship (Molyneux 1996:6). Haroun argues that “in our Islamic vision, the individual is seen in relation to the collective. That is why the notion of individual rights, in Islam, is formed in the context of duties that help to awaken in the individual the incentive to ‘give’ and not only to ‘take’ (Amira Haroun, Introduction: 5).

The stress in Islamic discourse on social service and give and take approach is linked to the ‘specific’ situation of the Palestinian people which is not cultural but rather national and
quite complex -- a dimension that is very much missing in the feminist NGOs’ discourse. The stress on ‘giving to the nation’ should be seen in the context of the now absent national agenda. The women’s movements in Palestine should also be seen in a context in which the audible voice became a feminist voice claiming rights but overshadowed by the needs of the nation under the continuing Occupation.

Thus, in the absence of a clear national agenda, the Islamists link woman’s rights to the national struggle by expecting her to be both a ‘sacrificing mother’ who reproduces her nation by providing more male fighters and also a ‘revolutionary militant’ who should join the struggle along with her brothers to liberate the nation.

In conclusion, I have argued in this paper that it is not the religious text but the political context that determines the Islamist discourse. The ‘modified’, ever-evolving version of shari’a displayed by Hamas raises two issues. On the one hand, it challenges the feminist NGOs discourse based on a liberal, individualistic notion of rights that ignores the nation’s plight under Occupation. By putting Islam at the center of a modified notion of Palestinian nationalism, the Islamists managed to delegitimize the feminist women’s discourse which they portrayed as non-national and alien. On the other hand, it also challenges the rather ambivalent Palestinian secularism that used Islam as a source of its legitimacy. By ‘Islamizing’ Palestine and ‘nationalizing’ Islam, the Islamist proved successful in forging a brand of nationalism in which Islam was integral and mobilized the masses.

In such a context, the secularists, while pressuring and challenging the Islamists, are nonetheless losing ground by advocating the discourse of rights in isolation from the national agenda and in the absence of a mobilizing organization. NGO activism, based on short-lived projects, does not have the potential to constitute an alternative. By becoming an opposition movement against all forms of violations of civic and human rights, the Islamists have developed a political organization. In contrast women in NGOs have no organized constituency and the support they have, is derived from a decaying, discredited authority.

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Student Papers

The Western Discourse on Political Islam

Rawhiyya Qasem

Introduction

For the West, the confluence of religion with politics is a sensitive subject that has left a painful, historical wound, due to the traumatic conflict between church and state on the one hand and the conflict between politics and the church on the other. This has caused a negative perception of not only Christianity, but of all other religions, including Islam. Due to the historical experience of prolonged and bitter conflict, the West insists that the convergence of religion with politics can only lead to chaos. For the West, religion is thus best seen as a formation of values, principles and ethics that regulate private life between a person and his/her God. The sphere of religion is private, while politics is the public life system based on worldly interests that may be in conflict with religious restrictions. Hence, the sphere of politics is the public, as asserted by John Locke in the eighteenth century.

This view has been generalized to other monotheistic religions and is not limited to Christianity, nor especially Islam. Rather, since Islam is the religion that has had the most conflict with Christianity over the course of history, the confluence of politics with Islam has been more sensitive and negative (Esposito 1992).

Most indicative of this is the West’s invention of the term ‘political Islam’, the term commonly used in its discourse about Islam and politics that indicates the phenomenon of politicization of Islam or the adding of an ideological, political dimension to Islam to achieve the political goals and interests of those they term ‘Islamists’. However, Muslims reject the term ‘political Islam’ while the West insists on using it, and as a result, a new political, academic and intellectual conflict has erupted between the two sides, which seems never-ending and enduring like the other conflicts that brought Islam and the West into confrontation throughout history.

The problematic of the research

It is important to analyze the discourse regarding what the West termed ‘political Islam’ and to discern what the West seeks to broadcast to the world. Perhaps this research paper will shed some light on this intellectual conflict within the framework of the relationship
between the West and Islam. It is worth mentioning here that this paper does not view discourse about political Islam as right or wrong, but attempts to discover what lies within it in terms of messages and concepts that are produced and disseminated.

Theoretical Framework for Analysis of the Discourse of the West about Political Islam

The West believes that, from the outset, Islam has been a problem as well as an intellectual challenge for European Christians (Silvestri 2007). This can be attributed to the prolonged political and ideological conflict between Muslims and Christians over the course of history, which the West deems to be instigated by Muslims. This conflict has intensified and become ongoing due to the religious and political dimensions behind it. The ideological differences and the political conflicts of interest between the two parties have laid a strong foundation for the continuation of this conflict across generations and eras. In the eyes of the West, Islam became an immortal enemy, and religious political incidents linked them together throughout history—starting with the Islamic conquests, then the Crusades, Ottoman domination, the Arab-Israeli crisis, the Iranian Islamic revolution, and directly to the emergence of resistance factions and movements in recent years, which they have termed terrorist movements and organizations. This makes Islam a perpetual problem for the West and Christianity (Abu Awad 2011).

The Western position regarding Muslims does not pay them much respect; rather, it is a stance that is characterized by fear and mistrust at the same time. One can say that the relationship between the Western and the Islamic worlds is a relationship punctuated by tension, fear and uncertainty (Halliday 2000). As for Islam being an intellectual challenge, most importantly it means that the West believes that they must do everything they can in terms of intellectual capabilities to confront Muslims. They believe that the effective method to oppose Islam is no longer only through security and military means, but also through intellectual and diplomatic approaches. Even though Western policy towards Islam might have resorted to security and military operations the last decades, their main policy is diplomatic and intellectual. One can say that security and military operations were only used to support to what could be termed an ‘intellectual process’ that the West has launched against Islam and Muslims. Perhaps the most important thing the West is doing to meet this intellectual challenge against Islam is what can be termed ‘the discourse policy.’ This means the dissemination of ideas against Islam and Muslims and its propaganda through academic studies and research, the media, and diplomacy, especially Orientalist discourse as an epistemic method.
Orientalism has served the expansionist political goals of Western nations, and Orientalists had accompanied occupations, for they were, as Mahmoud Shaker, RIP, called them “the bearers of the concerns of the Christian North”, and they presented extensive and detailed information about the countries that Western countries desired to colonize and from which they would obtain wealth and riches (Shaker 1987). What recurs in the Orientalist discourse is binary of ‘I’ and the ‘other’, since consciousness itself is not externalized except in clashing with the West, i.e., in colonialism, as if the relationship were between opposite cultures and not between colonialism and resistance, for the identity of the Arab does not manifest except through the other.

Robson started from this Orientalist epistemological perspective and, giving himself the authority to interpret the term ‘Islam’, he dealt with it from the lexical meaning. The intended meaning was what Orientalists imputed, i.e., Islam is defined by submission and surrender and there is no plurality in the divine self in Islam, which makes it a repressive religion that believes in one ruler. Hence it cannot be liberal, and Islam speaks for itself, for it is restricted to a specific epoch and people. (Robson 1954)

Renan laid the foundation for such [Orientalist] statements, due to interest in Semitic languages and his infamous position on the Semitic mind, namely that it was not fit to study science. Anton followed by stating that the problem was in monotheistic religions, for Arabs could not produce anything else. Arabs were pagans, whose race was impure, and Semites only produced oppressive religions; religion was a historical stage that can be bypassed, as evidenced by the progress of people with the decline of religion and the emergence of the state, which became an incubator for everyone’s ambitions. These thinkers considered what Hegel had stated as a historical law; the evolution of the human form for Hegel begins with the state and then civil society, so the problem of producing a free, liberal individual lies with the state or with the society and then with family history. Based on this Hegelian gradation, Islam was out of date. What has been defined as knowledge about religion in the West represented the absolute truth (Renan, Secularism and Religion).

Muslims, too, can fall into the Orientalist trap and go along with Renan concerning the necessity for Arabs to achieve what Europe had achieved, which can only be done via science and philosophy, since [human] evolution is essential (Al-Afghani). Secularism sees itself as a starting point where ‘religion’ is defined in its relationship to it. According to anthropologist Talal Asad, “The ‘secularist’ represents himself in the discourse of modernity as the foundation from which the theological discourse had risen …” Asad distinguishes between secularism as a political project, or rather a number of overlapping projects with various contradictions, and as an epistemological foundation in the construction of social sciences.
The problem in this characterization is that secularism, so that it supports its non-religious identity, must deny its mutual dependence on a religious ‘other’. The secular approach needs to be purified constantly, and must reformulate the ‘dissimilarity’ continuously between the secular ‘self’ and the religious ‘other’ through the definition of the existence of the latter as a mere danger that must be marginalized (Asad 2003).

One could conclude that the contemporary definition of secularism deals necessarily with religion, in the sense that it desires to control and set limits to it. Asad attempts in his definition to set the boundaries between secularism and religion as he links them with each other, since one cannot understand each without the other and secularism in its contemporary form cannot be defined without what is being defined as Islam: “Perhaps that is why the liberal state finds itself having to try and impose on its citizens the disciplines and limitations that it calls secularism.”

The ambiguity in defining secularism, which creates ambiguity between the political and the religious, is necessarily in favor of force. Egypt, for example, has incomplete secularity, since it allowed the Muslim Brotherhood a margin of activity. It is not separation between religion and politics that best characterizes secularism, but continual deepening of power politics and religion for the purpose of protecting liberalism, which constitutes the organizational capabilities of the modern state; this raises the important question of the processes taking place below secularism (Agrama).

In an interview conducted by Saba Mahmood (1996), Asad was asked about [the view of] Islamic movements as an expression of tradition that impede the progress of modernity from the Western perspective: “do you think the religio-political movements (such as Islamism) force us to rethink our conceptions of modernity? If so, how?” Asad replied:

“Well, I think they should force us to rethink many things. There has been a certain amount of response from people in Western universities who are interested in analyzing these movements. But many of them still make assumptions that prevent them from questioning aspects of Western modernity. For example, they call these movements ‘reactionary’ or ‘invented’, making the assumption that Western modernity is not only the standard by which all contemporary developments must be judged, but also the only authentic trajectory for every tradition… The development of politico-religious movements ought to force people to rethink the uniquely Western model of secular modernity. One may want to challenge aspects of these movements, but this ought to be done on specific grounds. It won’t do to measure everything by grand conceptions of authentic modernity.” (http://web.stanford.edu/group/SHR/5-1/text/asad.html)
Secularism can rely on technological tools for power, and become an imperialistic project intended to shape fundamentalists and traditionalists. Mahmood’s understanding of the women’s movement in mosques in Egypt is different from the understanding of liberal secularism, since she believes that the ethical is linked to the political, and that the private appears in the public. This is in contrast with Western analysis in which secularism defines the scope of the ‘secular’ and links this to public power, sound reasoning, rational dialogue, justice, tolerance, and public interest, while it characterizes the ‘religious’ as the contrary and links its scope to a personal God and beliefs regarding that God (Connolly 1999). In an Orientalist secular context, the discourse of the West regarding Islam and politics emerged through what is termed ‘political Islam’. Through this discourse, the West disseminated ideas that primarily centered around Islam as a religious doctrine and form of worship that has nothing to do with politics. The preoccupation of Muslims with politics is viewed as a deviation from its nature and a politicization of Islam, and political Islam is a threat and a problem for both the West and Christianity. It is assumed that it has failed and will not find its way to success in the modern world.

I shall discuss these ideas and reveal the notions that the West desires to popularize and disseminate, and the discourse and policies that accompany their dissemination in the international community.

The Discourse of the West on Political Islam

The following sections deal with issues relating to the discourse of the West regarding political Islam, namely: the concept of political Islam, Islamists, and political Islam and the West.

The Concept of Political Islam

The liberalization of Islam necessarily invented a new Islam, for the term ‘political Islam’ dates back to the previous decades. Attia Al-Wishi (2001:210) wrote in *The Dialogue of Civilizations*: “The first person to use this term was Hitler, when he met Sheikh Amin al-Husseini, Mufti of Palestine at the time, and told him: ‘I am not afraid of the Jews or of communism, but I’m afraid of political Islam!’” In *Political Islam and Political Pluralism from an Islamic Perspective*, Mohammad Imareh (2003:5-6) says:

“I am not too comfortable with the term ‘political Islam’, despite its prevalence, and the publication of much literature on this subject and under this title. As I recall, in the limits
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of my readings, the first person to use the term “political Islam” is Sheikh Mohammad Rasheed Ridha, yet he used the term to describe Muslim governments, which he called ‘political Islam,’ while he meant those who administered the nation within the framework of the Islamic nation. But the term, ‘political Islam’ is now used, and since the last three decades and the rise of the Islamist tide and phenomenon, to mean: the Islamist movements that are occupied in politics. And in this term, ‘political Islam,’ lies the dubiousness of reduction of Islam to politics, since there is no Islam without politics.”

This term has been invented and produced in the West since the previous century in the context of its discourse about Islam and its relationship to politics, and is used in particular to refer to ‘political parties based on Islamic principles’ (Abuza 2007).

Guilian Denoeux (quoted in Bradley 2007) describes the [Islamic] political world: “It is a form of exploitation of Islam by persons, associations, and organizations, for political objectives, with an imagining of the future on the basis of reconciliation and fabrication of ideas taken from the Islamic tradition”.


“Political scientist Guilian Denoeux defines political Islam as a form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups and organizations that pursue political objectives. It provides political responses to today’s societal challenges by imagining a future, the foundations for which rest on reappropriated, reinvented concepts borrowed from the Islamic tradition.”

Denouex attributes this view to Islamists (rather than Muslims, attributing an ideological dimension to Islam) and thus considers that Islam has nothing to do with politics, as it is a religion whose principles are based on the relationship between a person and his God, and therefore is remote from the political dimension. This also implies that the Muslim preoccupation with politics and the attribution of their political activities to Islam is merely an invented idea that has no basis in Islamic teachings and traditions, and those groups that do so divert from its nature as a religion. This is an attempt to achieve the political objectives of those for whom Islam is a political affiliation. In light of this concept, the term ‘political Islam’ signifies its distinction from religious Islam, or the distinction between a deviant, political Islam from authentic, religious Islam.

The first problem is that the term ‘political Islam’ is Orientalist and its objective is to isolate resistance, in a strategic military fashion, from within the Muslim community (Abu ‘Awad 2011). The process of definition of political Islam and other related terms, such as fundamentalism, Islamic awakening, Islamic extremism, terrorism, Islamic terrorism, and
Islamophobias involve another problematic aspect, as the concept of political Islam is presumed to overlap with these concepts. Despite the broad parallels in all the definitions, there are disagreements between researchers and academics in approaching them. The debate does not stop at this point: Which Islam do we mean, and which Islamists? Is it the Islam of the nation or the Islam of individuals? Is it popular Islam or official Islam? Is it the Islam of governments or political Islamist movements? And if it is the Islam of governments, is it the Islam of Saudi Arabia, Iran, or the Taliban? If it is the Islam of political movements, is it the Islam of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hizb Al-Tahrir, the Islamic Group, or Islamic Jihad? And if it is the Islam of the educated elite, is it the Islam of Sayyid Qutub, Abu Al-‘Alaa’ Al-Mawdudi, Hasan Al-Hudaibi, or Al-Qaradawi? (Al-Barghouthi 1998).

The West ascribes political Islam to those termed ‘Islamists’ and those who intend to add an ideological dimension to Islam to achieve their political objectives (Lahoud 2005). Or it is ascribed to those who believe that it is not enough for society to be a Muslim community, but that it must also be Islamic. This will only be achieved through political efforts and movements. They considered the thought of Islamists to extends to Salafis, but as not driven by clerics (Roy 1996). As to the Islamists’ motives and objectives, they are the dissemination of culture in secular European societies and the application of Shari’a (Islamic jurisprudence) when possible (Tibi 2008). This means that their main motivation is not a political and cultural motivation against the hegemony of the West, but is a religious motivation that propels them to establish an Islamic society in all parts of the world. These are fiery messages that disclose relationships of infinite strength and dominance, which overturn designations and replace them as they please, with Islamists’ instead of ‘Muslims’ and ‘political Islam’ instead of ‘politics in Islam’.

Since politics is not what Islam brought, Islamist politicians are therefore not Muslims. They assume that true Muslims who are well-versed in their religion would not be politicians. They deduce this from the phenomenon that the movements of Islamists are not driven by those who are knowledgeable in Islam, but by ‘young civilians’ who claim that they are ‘religious thinkers’. Once again, the scenario is repeated in the recent Arab revolutions in Egypt and other countries, which cannot be viewed as instigated by anybody but enlightened youth who studied in the West. With this, the West wants to emphasize, again, that Islam does not have a political dimension and that its link to politics is a result of political attempts by those who do not understand the true nature of Islam. As to the motives of Islamists and their objectives, they are deemed to be the preaching and application of religion, in an attempt to divert attention from the economic, political, social and colonial hegemony of the West, since they feign innocence, as if many of those movements were not reactions to Western policy (Ayubi 1993).
Political Islam and the West

The most important assertion of the West in its discourse about Islam and politics is that Islam in its political and ideological cloak constitutes a threat to Christians and the West. They consider the phenomenon of political Islam and Islamists as the most important manifestation of this threat; hence it must be confronted and challenged intellectually. For example: “The Muslims were a threat to Western Christendom long before they became a problem” (Rodinson 1974:9, cited in Esposito 1992:37). According to Oliver Roy: “Many in the West seem to view the end of our century [1900s] as the era of the ‘Islamic Threat’” (Roy 1994:1). Satloff concludes from the analysis of various speeches and statements that there was no U.S. policy toward political Islam, but toward states, institutions and interests. However, he believes that Islamic movements as a whole constitute a threat to Western interests; since Islamists, even if they disagree on means and ends, agree on the goal of the inception of the Islamic state (Satloff 2000).

The West believes that political Islam and Islamists pose two threats simultaneously, for two reasons: first: the Islamists hate the West for its hegemony that has extended to the Islamic world. Second: political Islam has a special system and principles that Islamists would like to apply to reorder the world (Tibi 2008).Although these two threats are different in terms of formulation, since the first can be described as a direct threat while the second is the opposite, yet they both share one point, which is resistance to Western hegemony. This means that these two threats represent two form of resistance and this is what is happening in actuality, since the West dominates the Islamic world not only through political and military means, but also, and in a stronger fashion, through political and economic concepts and the cultural system (Bin Sayeed 1995).

The West has assumed two different positions vis-à-vis these threats; in return for the hatred declared by the Islamists against the West, the latter took the position of defending its political and economic interests in the Arab world through cooperation with the ruling regimes and the local state authorities where Islamist resistance against Western interests appeared. To do so, it resorted to diplomatic processes and sometimes military operations.

As to confronting the policy of the Islamists who seek to reorder the world through the application of the Muslim social system, the West has resorted to a policy of discourse. In this way, the West disseminated its discourse by all possible means, bearing messages that centered on responding to the Islamic political system and emphasizing its contradictions with the political system in the contemporary world. It is in this regard that the West emphasized that Islam is a religion that does not include a political system and that any attempt to add a political and ideological dimension to Islam is only a process of politicization.
of religion for political purposes. They also emphasized that political Islam will not achieve its objectives as to what Islamists aspire to; the establishment of an Islamic state or Islamic society is a fiction and cannot be implemented in actuality. Roy (1994:12) writes:

“One need only skim the literature of ulamas or the Islamist, or listen to the sermons in the mosques, to admit that there is an Islamic political imagination dominated by a single paradigm: that of the first community of believers at the time of the Prophet and of the first four caliphs … this model offers the militants of political Islam an ideal for Muslim society.”

The most important connotation of the term ‘Islamic fiction’, in regards to the impossible Islamic state, is that what the Islamists are seeking in terms of establishment of an Islamic society modeled on what was established in the era of the Prophet and the Rightly Guided /the Righteous Caliphs (al-Khulafā’u r-Rāshidūn) is a fantasy that will not be achieved. This is because the authentic model of the Islamic society was not based on a clear political system since the boundaries between the authorities and the religious, political, economic and social functions was not clear. This community also was not bound by logical limits as known in the modern system. Taking such a society as a model in this era of modern politics is a distant fantasy. In this, the West deduced that the idea of a ‘state’ originated in and is specific to the West, and was not a familiar idea in the Islamic tradition. Hence, there are insufficiencies in Islamic political concepts, in terms of the body politic, the governor, and the government (Ayubi 1993).

Conclusion

In conclusion; one can say that there are three major stereotypes formulated by Western Christian imagination about Islam in the median era, namely, an association with: idolatry, violence, and lustfulness, with all the attached connotations of faithlessness, brutality, and moral decay. With these stereotypes, the process of constructing a Christian discourse about Islam took place, in which imagination and ‘fantastical’ aspects occupy a prominent place, and where that discourse became hostage to a spoken and symbolic lexicon simultaneously (Al-Jabiri 2009).

The discourse of the West regarding political Islam pivots upon the following points:

1. The popular opinion in the West is that religious texts are limited to the time frames and locations in which they appeared, and that the culture of the present era should not be
understood as it is, but must be construed as an interpretation that makes it appropriate for the culture of the era.

2. Islam is viewed as having an inferior position in relation to the West, having a barbaric and irrational tendency, and being primitive. The discourse of Orientalism emerged since its early beginnings loaded with relations of power and hegemony between the West and the East.

3. Hostility toward Islam is used to justify any discriminatory practices towards Muslims, their exclusion from society, and their isolation or marginalization.

4. Islam is viewed as a religion with a non-political doctrine, and does not introduce a clear political system that can be implemented, and the Muslim society, which Islamists seek to achieve, is fictional, will not materialize, and is an impractical plan. It is an ‘impossible’ society.

5. Political Islam does not represent Islamic traditions, but is a politicization of Islam for political and military purposes, while Islamist movements are only the embodiment of this objective.

6. Islamists do not represent Muslims, and their ideas do not represent a sound way through which Muslims can understand their religion, hence all Islamic resistance movements and factions are terrorists and cannot be viewed otherwise.

7. Islam in its political and ideological cloak is a threat to the West and Christianity, and “if it is not with us it is against us.” Islamophobia is a manifestation of Western megalomania.

8. This rejection of Islamic political thought and its applications belongs to the secular perspective. It includes the tendency of secularists to view Islam from a bilateral perspective and to link it to violent and anti-democratic trends.

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The Problematic Relation between Religion and the State in Contemporary Egypt

Sawsan Kanaan

The question of religion and state was raised in the Arab countries at the stage of independence and modernization, specifically the relation between Islam and the new political structures that emerged after independence. In other words, the new political power in its modern concept that replaced traditional authority needed secularism as an entrance to the modern state that is linked to the west.

Since new state nationalism is a recent phenomenon that emerged in the age of capitalism, we accordingly cannot understand secularism in isolation from the modern state and its social classes. Hence, secularism was introduced as an alternative to the religious state to be the solution for states who wanted to tread on the path of modernization and progress.

Advocates for secularism looked at religion from two aspects: creed and civilization functions. The function of civilization can be viewed in the slogan “religion is for god and the state is for all” whereas the ideological (creed) function is related to the relationship between the believer and god. Those advocates stressed the issue of minorities and took it very seriously, and the failure of theocratic state to prove their ideas. But if we look at secularism from a Marxist point of view, we can conclude that political liberation comes from human liberation that can be achieved by not converting mundane matters into theology.

The importance of Egypt case

Egypt is an example of reorganizing the relation between religion and the state, and the exploitation of religion by the competing political elite. Hence, the dilemma in Egypt lies in the exploitation of religion for extending state authority.

The relation between religion and state in the Arab countries and in Egypt in particular is between the European model of separating religion from the state that came after French revolution and the religious Islamic models. This paper aims at answering the following questions: is Egypt considered as a secular or religious state? What is the form of the relationship between religion and state in Egypt? And what are the problematic aspects of this relationship and its consequences?

The process of updating the state in Egypt started particularly in the era of Mohammad Ali Bashan, who has significant reforms in political, social, economic, cultural areas of life. He started the transformation from feudalism to capitalism, and put down the foundations of the civil state. After him appeared some enlightened religious intellectuals like Jamal Al Afghani and Mohammad Abdu who tried to stress and prove the idea that liberation is a
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tool for modernization and link it to Islam, as well as other secular intellectuals like Farah Anton who stressed the idea of separating religious authority from the religious one in order to achieve tolerance between religions and modernity. Then came the book of Ali Abdul-Raziq (1925) (Islam and Governance) which debated the caliphate and concluded that Qura'n and Sunnah didn’t legitimate the caliphate and that it is not a religious position. These debates shaped the dialectic relation between modernist and secular, and contributed to the formation of ideas on how should be the relation between religion and politics in Egypt, and the relationship between political power, judiciary, and Fatwa Institutions (Al Azhar).

The emergence and renewal of Islamic political thought in Egypt

Political Islam, or ‘Islamic movement’ began to emerge in Egypt at the beginning of the 20th century while the Ottoman empire was breaking down, represented by ‘Muslim Brothers’ group (1928) that introduced the notion of (the inclusion of Islam) and was calling for applying Islamic Shari’a laws through state institutions. Then came the ‘Islamic Jihadi’ group (1973), who believe that the only legislation is Quran and Sunnah and any other legislation is infidel. They also called for establishing an Islamic state.

With the emergence of these Islamic groups and the use of violence by them to reach their goals in changing the society, some self criticism started internally in an attempt to review Islamic political thought. For the ‘Muslim brothers’ their critique was the idea that they could not find their way to the state and the whole society, and they could not make their thought up to date, despite the fact that they had succeed in spreading their thought, growing their number of members, and strengthening the group. For the ‘Islamic Jihadi’ group, their critique regarded the use of violence and the need to reconcile with the state authority.

Religion institutions within the modern state

At the beginning of the 20th century, Egypt started the process of modernization gradually, which caused major changes in the relationship between law and religion. As Islamic courts were the only form of law in Egypt during the Ottoman rule, then began the structuring of the legal system of the religious authority, and the insulation between political power, judiciary, and ‘fatwa ’ institutions. During Jamal Abdul Naser era, the state was pursuing modernization in the areas of industry and agriculture under the state control over the public sector while the religious group was banned. Then the state went back to capitalism in the era of Anwar Sadat and Husni Mubarak, during which the relation between religion and the state became unclear.
The modern state (especially at the era of Husni Mubarak) tried to impose a democratic style, both in political and social arenas. (However, its concept of democracy has no clear features and weak credibility at this point.) And in order to differentiate between religion and politics, the modern state recognized the legitimacy of religion and its values, while maintaining the concept of modern state and the minimum required democracy. Also, the modern state tried to create a neutral religious sphere that would not disturb the public order, which made the common arena between private and public a subject for dispute and rationing for political power. Meanwhile, the religious personal space was separated which meant that people were given the freedom to apply or not apply religious rituals as long as this did not affect the public order. At the same time, the state was marginalizing religion from the political and public spheres and limiting the role of religion clergy.

In its attempts to spread modernization, the Egyptian state started to spread its control over religious, cultural, educational, and social institutions and worked on including them under the state regulations and supervision, for example:

- The supervision of religious affairs (Al Awqaf) ministry on all the mosques, by licensing the preachers and coordinating with them regarding what to address during the Friday ceremonies.
- Recognizing Al Azhar (a state subsidiary) as the regulator in the religious affairs, although most of the decisions on religious issues were taken by the state courts.

**Hisba legislation**

An important example of the state control over religious institutions, and the politicization of some religious laws is the use the ‘Hisba’ Islamic legislation that emerged from an Islamic principle called ‘the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice’ in legislative law, under the supervision of the state and the Attorney General. This decision can also be an example of the integration of politics and religion, while it contradicts with the notions of democracy and secularism. This legislation was used in the judgment of apostasy on the professor Naser Hamed Abu Zied and the invalidation of his marriage, as he’s no longer considered a Muslim. This judgment was a result of his rational writings related to Islamic law. This judgment represented the contradiction of the state policy, as it was trying to win Muslims’ public opinion while maintaining domination on the religious institutions.

**The revolution against Mubarak and its results on the relation between religion and the state**

The revolution started on the 25th of January 2011 against Husni Mubarak rule, represented by all categories of people, especially youth. The revolution succeeded in taking
down Mubarak, but as it continues, it manifests three political powers: the first is the Egyptian state army that took an important part in the revolution beside the Egyptian people. The second is ‘Muslim Brothers’ group with its strongest and most organized civil-political activism in terms of numbers, organizational discipline, and consistency of cultural mainstreaming among its ranks. The third is the liberal force, which is made up of party organizations and independent political figures. However, the Muslim brothers’ presidential candidate (Mohammad Mursi) won the election and became the president, which caused a shock for liberals, youth revolutionaries, and religious minorities. Continuous protesting and rebellious acts started to emerge as a rejection of Mursi, especially after his declaration that he is the only source of executive and legislative powers, limiting the independence and of judiciary system, and gave himself the protection from any legal accountability, which even Mubarak did not dare to do. As a result, millions of the Egyptian people protested and called for taking off Mursi, which happened with the intervention of the Egyptian armed forces. The chief commander of the armed forces and minister of defence (Abdul Fattah Sisi) became the First Deputy Prime Minister, while remaining Minister of Defence. His new position allowed him to make constitutional amendments, and the new amendments included an article that prevents the establishment of any religious political party while declaring that the principles of Islamic law are the main source of legislation.

**Conclusion**

State policy in Egypt is characterized by the lack of clarity in its relationship with religion, due to the fact that politics and religion are integrated in a way that resulted in constant struggle between them, which makes the inspiration of secularism unstable.

Basically, secular politics caused misunderstanding between religion and politics, as it was foreseen to be used by the state as a tool to represent the western modernity. At the same time, the state maintained its religious image in fear of losing the large religious category of the society; it possessed religious institutions under its control and supervision. The state efforts extended to dominate the social, cultural, religious, and political arenas of the Egyptian lives, without posing this provocation directly to any of the relationship parties.

The state was in reality separating religion and politics, while at the same time trying to make them appear inseparable and non-contradictory.

This ambiguous relationship between religion and the state is putting the community at the center of the conflict between religious culture, which religious institutions and groups are trying to promote, and the liberal cultural image that the state is trying to maintain and imprint in society through all of its other institutions in its attempts to remain part of the global system of the Western civilization.
The Dialectic of Secularism and Religion: The Palestinian-Israeli Condition as a Model

Maram 'Ayesh

Introduction

This paper addresses the problem of the dialectic between and duality of secularism and religion. The reader should not expect a conclusive solution that would remove its dialectical actuality. There have been many scientific studies and ideological arguments that have addressed this dialectic without being able to end the controversy over this ‘conflict’.

To start with, this paper engages with the concept of secularism from the perspective of Adel Daher in his book *The Philosophical Foundations of Secularism*. The choice of this framework is to consider the author’s attempt to remove the concept of secularism from the system of power, to lay a foundation for secularism by using intellectual reason, and to promote it as a knowledge formation, regardless of it being a tool used by hegemonic powers for exploitation and control over their colonies. Daher attempts to answer the question as to whether it is possible to deal with such a problem, epistemologically, outside of the balance of dominant powers, or whether we have to necessarily deal with ideologies that exist behind the concepts that the capitalist, colonial powers disseminate in their alleged ‘modernity’. Daher reaches the conclusion that secularism is a logical necessity to enable humankind to manage its worldly affairs. Yet when using the expression ‘logical necessity’, we negate the logic of the other or opposite option, thus breaking with the past, and with religion, as a ‘logical necessity’ for a better life.

The question that is the focus of this paper, drawing on Daher’s framework is: Does our adoption of Western secularism, in a ‘colonized Arab society’, constitute a logical condition for our venturing into the era, surviving in the colonial situation, and being branded as modern? In answering this question, after an overview of Daher’s argument, below, it may seem to the reader somewhat of a leap to address the Israeli colonial condition as a model. However, the choice of this historical experience in particular has a specificity that may serve to answer the question, since tangible experiences that exist historically represent material realities. The question of Zionism was evoked to illustrate the experience of creating an entity out of nothingness, its success in turning an idea into an existence. The emergence of the Zionist movement will be addressed, as well as its transformation from a stream of Judaism to a dominant colonial power, and its colonial role in the creation of dualistic national identities in the Israeli-Palestinian context. Ultimately, the path of
transformation in the experience of Zionism invalidates the ‘logical necessity’ of secularism advocated by Daher in his book, for reasons that will be elucidated later.

**Secularism for Adel Daher, and its relationship to religion and to Islam**

In his analysis of the concept of secularism, Daher begins where Islamist intellectuals, like Mohammed Arkoun, Mohamed Amara and others, had left off. These intellectuals had demonstrated that secularism is a Western European product, which was necessary historically in the Western context, because of the dual religious/civil authority at the time, and cannot be applied to the Arab world (where Islam is the dominant religion), because Islam had not suffered historically from a duality in power. So briefly, there is no logical need for the solution used by the West against the ‘religious state’, i.e., secularism.

Yet in Daher’s historical account of the emergence of secularism, and its conceptual evolution due to historical circumstances, he insists on the importance of ‘importing’ it and removing it from the ideological mill, in order to reach the crucial content of the concept of secularism. He continuously links secularism to Islam, with a semi-explicit suggestion that Islam is the only religion that ‘links itself’, or that ‘its adherents link’, to the state and politics, and that this is the ideology always defended by Islamists against calls for secularization. In the process of identification of concepts, one must analyze two aspects; the first pertains to the link between the concepts to specific conditions, in light of certain historical or cultural contexts; even if these conditions help produce the concept in those particular circumstances, this does not mean that they are essential or necessary. The second is that searching for the apparent characteristics of the concept (i.e. secularism) means searching for the purpose for which the concept is employed. Thus, the Islamist understanding of secularism, that it is specific to the West where the church controlled religious affairs, is in conflict with the analysis of the concept, since different historical circumstances (the domination of the church in the West) do not constitute a fundamental condition for the concept of secularism. Daher believes that the pervasive principle of secularism is getting rid of the control of religious institutions, no matter what they are.

Daher attempts to disprove and analyze the argument that humans cannot manage the affairs of their world without divine guidance, in isolation from the ‘Islamic’ argument, as he calls it, in an attempt to prove his secular argument in a manner that does not show any bias. Yet he later devotes chapters of his book to Islam and secularism, to discuss the Islamists argument, which, as he believes, requires viewing Islam necessarily as a negation of secularism.
In his interpretation of the Islamists’ argument, Daher believes that the basis of it is that Islam inherently imposes a stance that rejects secularism for Muslims. Hassan Al-Banna’s argument that “Islam is a religion and a state” does not describe the various historical relationships between Islam and politics, but establishes the existence of a crucial relationship between them. The centrality of this relationship suggests that the state is part of Islam. Yet some Al-Azhar scholars believe that Al-Banna’s statement constitutes an insufficient proposition due to the use of the word ‘and’. Al-Banna’s statement later became a slogan for most ‘Islamic awakening’ movements, until the relationship between Islam and politics became established for them as a logical, conceptual relationship. Here Daher says clearly that Muslims cannot adopt Al-Banna’s statement, because of discrepancies in logic that would necessarily lead him to reconsider the relationship as one that cannot exceed being a historic or objective relationship.

The First Assumption

In his deconstruction of the Islamists’ argument, Daher resorts to assumptions to prove validity or invalidity. For example, the assumption that the relationship of Islam to politics is a historic relationship, which means that the historical circumstances under which Islam grew, required the establishment of a state to ingrain religion. Consequently the material or objective circumstances that Islam lived through necessitated its move towards politics, and not specifically the nature of Islam’s religious doctrine. Thus Daher believes that if not for those circumstances, Islam would have not been different from Christianity in relation to politics. This assumption implies that if these objective conditions were what linked Islam to politics, then the lapse of those conditions would negate its relationship with politics, since that is not part of the nature of Islam as a religion.

The Second Assumption

As for the relationship of Islam to politics being a conceptual relationship, this suggests that this relationship is included in the core of religious teachings in Islam. This signifies that the Muslims’ belief in the teachings of Islam necessarily compels them, regardless of historical or objective circumstances under which they live, to establish their Islamic state to fulfill their doctrine, as that would be a religious obligation. Daher views the problem here in considering the establishment of the Islamic state at the heart of the doctrine of Muslims.

The question posed by Daher here is: Could God, whose nature is assigned by Islam, be a being who can order people to establish their state on certain bases, and not others,
regardless of their temporal and spatial conditions? To address this question, the author analyzes the idea that the relationship between Islam and politics is a conceptual and not a historical relationship. He says that the theorists of the Islamic awakening, who propose such an idea, must not only prove that it does not contradict the doctrinal essence of Islam, but also that this essence logically requires this relationship to politics.

Daher uses analytic methods of logic that resemble mathematical formulae, aiming to achieve a result he calls logical. Despite the accuracy of his analysis, or success in using the logical method of persuasion apart from any historical circumstances, or any hidden ideological balances, he implies that separation of state from religion is a logical necessity. He also suggests that the link with the past and with religious and cultural heritage does not imply success at all, and that salvation, progress and advancement is ‘logically’ achieved by adopting Western secularism which redeemed the West from the curse of church authority.

This may lead us to wonder whether secularism represents the way of salvation. And even if it had, at a particular historical moment and in a particular context, brought salvation to a particular group, will it necessarily be the sole salvation today? Will history prove that success is the destiny of secular regimes? And if they were sometimes successful, will success be theirs alone? In this regard, the paper touches on the Zionist experience—this movement that has managed unjustly to create a state out of nothingness despite the blatant contradiction in its essence between secularism and religion. Conversely, the path of transformation in the Palestinian context, despite a political lack of adherence to religion, has seen the actual existence and right to exist transformed via an opposite vector to an idea.

**Zionism between Secularism and Religion**

The emergence of the Zionist movement was a reaction to the conflict related to the integration of European Jews into a social contract, namely, the claim of Judaism to a nation for Jews only, in an attempt to overcome anti-Semitism and not to confront it. Hence Zionism’s goal was not to change anti-Semites, but to change the Jews by converting them from a religious denomination to a nationality, and from a sacred group to a modern nation. While Zionism negates the state of religious sectarianism, it finds itself negating the secularism of Jewish individuals who are led by secularism towards integration. Zionism, then, is a negation of both secularism and religiosity. And since it negates the two poles of this dialectic, its abstract idea bears in itself a contradiction, for when it negates secularism it becomes a religion, and when it negates religiosity, it becomes secular. Those who consider the Zionist movement as an abstract ideology find that it was a current within
Judaism, which calls for the reformulation of Judaism, and when Zionism won, Judaism become a current in Zionism.

To transform Judaism to a nation, the idea needed a state, yet in European thought, and also Zionism, the idea of the nation was associated ultimately with the idea of sovereignty of the state. The intellectual proponents of Zionism did not busy themselves in searching for theoretical proofs to support the nationalism of Jews, but they started to build the Jewish nation in practice, and presented their plan for the state. At the time, Orthodox Judaism was the antithesis to Zionism, which was also a minority movement within Jewish groups and its opposite was the contemporary reaction towards the brutality of early capitalism, as exemplified by the critiques offered by European socialism and communism. The first conflict took place in Judaism with the Jewish religious establishment, whose minority religious world was threatened by Zionism as a whole. In addition, there was a challenge to its cultural hegemony as a sacred denomination that did not see salvation in history, but in a miraculous event that exists outside of history, where divinity intervenes via the arrival of the Messiah. The second conflict also took place between two different ideas of salvation, yet both approaches searched for salvation in history and not outside of it.

Intellectually, the Jewish state as conceived of by the Zionism of Herzl is devoid of religious symbols and myths. Herzl believed that the Zionist project was linked to a European colonial project, but the state is not an abstract settler state, and the activity to establish it is not an ordinary colonial activity. Those implementing it proceeded by invoking an understanding of their project as a process of liberation and not colonization. Azmi Bishara refers to “The historical right, the re-formulation of Jewish history as a national history since the era of the First Temple, the establishment of a Jewish state as a re-building of the Jewish state, and the return of the Diaspora” (Bishara 1999). Ilan Pappe states of the transformation that unfolded: “The Zionist movement is the most successful nationalist movement in history, because it was made to exist to create one people, yet it created two peoples.”

Since identity is formed through the definition of the ‘self’ in relation to the often antithetical ‘other’, one cannot understand the evolution of the formulation of identity without engaging in understanding its relationship with the other. Colonialism contributes to the formation of national identity through both military and legal institutions, which constitute the general framework of nationalism, in which nascent [national] identity is nurtured. The production of culture and national identity in a colonial context has become a representation of the historical and cultural resources of the nation and its people. This pattern in generating and imagining national identities has been prevalent in countries that were colonized in Asia and Africa. The colonial institutions that were established for the
administration of these countries maintained their original forms ‘post-colonially’ after the departure of the colonial administration and its replacement by a ‘national’ administration. (Massad 2001:18).

The condition of Palestine is unique, since its historical experience is distinct, thus making it always singular. Darraj’s arguments emerged in the late 1980s to establish the origins of a Palestinian national identity via a cultural discourse that presented Palestinian cultural accomplishments, as illustrated by intellectual and literary documents, as well as historical evidence of Palestinian awareness of themselves as a national group, even before the materialization of the Zionist project on the land of Palestine (Al-Sheikh 2005). This suggests that the colonial condition does not create identity. The Palestinian narrative is the creation of the Palestinian national movement, in light of the regulation and formation of modern nationalisms.

This narrative of nationalism has been influenced by the genesis of nationalities in Europe, and accompanying European attitudes in the nineteenth century toward non-Europeans, especially Jews and Arabs. Given that nationalism often entails the transformation of the oral narrative to a written historical narrative, the formation of Palestinian national identity has followed this pattern through a secular narrative resting on three major components (the land, the people, and the historical narrative). The establishment of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was founded on this narrative.

Darraj says that the culture of the Palestinian victim is derived from the Zionist culture of the executioner (Darraj 2002:36), since the Palestinian narrative is linked politically, not existentially, to the formation of an antithetical identity, i.e., the Israeli identity, which was realized by the Zionist movement, which Pappe dubbed “the most successful nationalist movement in history”. Pappe argues that the Palestinians, who were defeated, emulated the victor. Many criticized this Palestinian sin when of impersonation that caused the ‘defeated’ to imitate the victor. Yet Darraj views this as an issue greater than and different from sin, as he views the impersonation by the defeated of the victor’s role as an act of creation, as it transforms the victor into a supernatural creator. Darraj says: “Zionism, as it has imposed uprooting, warfare, death, and hope, seems like a second god to the Palestinian person. It limits his/her movement, and calls him/her by many names. If creation is the appellation, and the creator gives the created its name, then the Zionist created the Palestinian more than once: It created him/her once when it gave him/her the designation of a refugee and an ‘Israeli Arab’, and created him/her once again when calling him/her a saboteur, a terrorist and the enemy of peace”.

There is no doubt that the general logic of nationalism, which applied to the Palestinian condition, applies as well to the Israeli condition, despite the critical difference between
the formation of the Zionist movement, as a national settler movement linked to a dominant European colonial project, and the Palestinian national movement, as an indigenous national liberation movement that opposed it. The notion of transforming the ‘idea’ of a nation to ‘existence’ lies in the affirmation of identity, or even the ability to create it. The Zionist movement succeeded in transforming its idea of nationhood into an actual existence via the establishment of the state and an end to exile, while the Palestinian national movement failed to transform the existence of the Palestinian people (and end to its Shataat [Diaspora]) into an idea, i.e., to a historical entity capable of entering into the global historical record as developed by European modernity. The Zionist project managed to transform in itself existence, yet Palestinian existence could not establish its own idea, which allowed the ‘Zionist idea’ to overcome ‘Palestinian existence’. Ultimately, Zionism became an authority of state, and Zionist gangs transformed themselves into a ‘defense army’. While, on the other hand, the Palestinian case was manifested in the transformation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization institutions to the Palestinian National Authority, and the Palestinian Liberation Army was dissolved!

In his book, *The Invention of the Jewish People*, Shlomo Sand presents the idea that there is no such thing as a pure Jewish nation, or a single Jewish people that can trace its ethnic and biological origins to a single root, as alleged by Zionist thought. There is the Jewish religion, with followers belonging to diverse and disparate nationalities, ethnicities, and geographies, and linked to one another through their affiliation with this religion, as is the case of Christians, Muslims, or others in history. The seed of the Zionist project germinated in the nineteenth century, and was influenced by German nationalism and the emergence and rooting of the nationalist era in Europe. Zionism arose via its reproduction of the European experience by creating and inventing a Jewish nationality that did not exist from a historical and scientific perspective.

The above-mentioned facts constitute conclusive evidence that power is what is employs either the religious or secular perspective to establish the roots of its own hegemony. The Western colonial project has consistently been producing concepts, imposing them as facts, and excluding all that conflict with achieving its colonial objectives, whether this is called a true religion or an advanced secularism. Although the Zionist project represents an apparent colonial policy, and has sought to devour homelands and confiscate rights, yet Islam remains the ‘horrifying’ obsession which the hegemonic powers seek to remove from history and the world, to obliterate it and extract any measures of power it may have. The topic of dealing with Islam constitutes the opposite doorway to the Israeli condition as represented by the Zionist project, as the Palestinian condition assumes the antithetical and opposite position to Zionism.
What appears between the lines here is that the concept that needs to be sought and reinforced in this wheel of power that turns nonstop is ‘resistance’. For as the concept of secularism necessarily conjures up religion, also colonialism necessarily invokes resistance. One cannot deal with concepts imposed by the West merely to fit them into place (like a jigsaw puzzle) by colonized peoples; why would peoples languishing under occupation seek a place for the term ‘democracy’, or desert their religious and cultural heritage, and consequently their historical and intellectual traditions, to chase after a ‘liberal modernist secularism’ in order to demonstrate their ascension from backwardness, while they are simultaneously and continuously being usurped in whatever is tempting to colonial powers? Here one could say that the ‘logical necessity’ for such a context is to look inwards, i.e., to adherence to character, identity and selfhood, since the separation advocated by Western secularism is separation from one’s self, and an affirmation of cultural schizophrenia and consequently the schizophrenia of identity, which necessarily furthers the dissolution of the colonized in the shackles of Western and Israeli colonizers.

Conclusion

The Palestinian context represents a reality that is not easy to analyze in terms of considering where religion and secularism lie, yet the problem manifests itself in dealing with religion via the modern system, in the idea of the separation of religion from politics or state. Such an idea stems from the allegation by the West that Islam is a mechanism for resistance, and thus the logical necessity that Daher demands is a Western demand that accomplishes a colonial objective. It is an Orientalist entryway that advocates a modern liberalism that it is trying to root itself in an Arab-Islamic tradition, and it is presented as part of a framework that does not outwardly attempt to transgress the essence of religion, by arguing that the logical conclusion is one that the creator desires, since it acknowledges that humans have intellectual capacities that would necessarily lead him/her to such a result.

Yet this argument contains a trap or dilemma that only exacerbates a resignation that has no remedy under the yoke of colonialism, because the attempt to portray the path to salvation as a logical necessity, as catching up with Western secularism, insists on absolute severance with religion and the past. The mere idea of severance with religion is extremely unjust, as it would be a retraction from religion as an epistemological foundation, so to speak, and not necessarily imply the adoption of the ideologies of Islamist groups and the Muslim Brotherhood. It also does not mean the adoption of the political agendas of movements that exploited religion, but a return to the Arab-Islamic cultural heritage and to many thinkers such as Ibn Rushd [Averroes] and Talal Asad. Those who allege that democracy can only be derived from secularism call for undermining the Islamic religious discourse
in particular, and are manifested in corrupt regimes allied with the colonial powers, and clothed in secular cloaks. They only aim for the persistence of the colonial condition and the dogmatic dependence on the West and Israel. While claiming to have the propensity for democracy, they repress any Islamist movement that has activity in a public democratic space, since that would necessarily lead to the commencement of ‘resistance’ to end the colonial condition.

References


Mainstreaming Liberal/Secular Approaches in Combating Violence against Palestinian Women. Why these have failed?

Hanan Kaoud

Introduction

Different organizations work to combat violence against women including through engaging directly with the judicial and security systems; the legal formal bodies that are responsible for providing protection to women under the doctrine of state protection. However, many factors contribute to the poor enforcement of the legal rights of Palestinian women. These include: the weak Palestinian culture of rights; the dominant tribal system; the lack of efficient and effective human rights organizations and enabling law institutes and the impact of the occupation on disabling the Palestinian security system.

Practices of the Israeli occupation are not limited to imprisonment and torturing of Palestinians but extend to result in the confined conditions of the Palestinian lives and future given the deteriorated economic situation, especially in the post-Oslo period due to the increased numbers of checkpoints at the borders of the Palestinian villages, restrictions on movements and mobility, occupation of more lands, demolition of houses and agricultural lands, humiliation at checkpoints, and much more. According to Kuttab and Johnson: “the sacrifice and struggle of Palestinian young men and children in demonstrations at Israeli checkpoints placed at borders of Palestinian towns and areas cannot be reduced to a simple crisis of masculine identity – crises in national, class and ethnic identity are deeply entwined” (Kuttab and Johnson 2001:8)

In light of all these features, there is a particularly strong need for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to engage and work to ensure more effective state protection of women. This paper argues that organizations engaged in providing protection to women are failing due to many factors including, among others: The lack of strong oversight over the judicial and security systems with limited influence due to the certain aspects of dynamic power relations, specifically with the existence of the Israeli occupation, thus creating a culture that places the blame on the victim rather than on the perpetrator. This oversight is important because in order for people to be able to ‘buy in’ to the work of the security system and accept the rule of law, they have to feel part of the law making process and confident that the law is applied to everybody irrespective of their political position, religion, gender and race.
**Violence against women: Facts**

Despite the immense efforts exerted by a wide range of organizations that act beyond boundaries in providing protection to Palestinian women, national statistics still show violence against women in the Palestinian society at very high rates. According to information provided by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, rates of violence against women have reached 36.1% in 2011 (valid for four years) compared to around 25% in the year 2005 (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2011) while killings of women in the name of so-called ‘honor-killing’ has reached 29 cases in 2013, in addition to 2 cases reported in January 2014 (Women Center for Legal Aid and Counseling: www.wclac.org). And, despite the Palestinian Authority’s ratification of article 11 of *The Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW), efforts and attempts to combat violence against women remain at risk. In addition, the Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325 provided a hope for the ongoing Palestinian struggle. Although Palestinian women always had an eye on UN mechanisms and processes that deal with women peace and security, using it as a forum of activism, there are still serious gaps on how effective is the work of Palestinian women and women organizations on this issue. The problem arises because Palestinian civil society and human rights organizations neglect the importance of applying Women, Peace and Security tools especially for policy advocacy and acquiring societal solidarity.

**Civil Society Organizations: A brief history**

In highlighting the evolution of the Palestinian civil society, it becomes important to point out that third world countries have been witnessing a remarkable increase in the number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This might reflect a constraint due to the fact that while these institutions operate under the themes of empowerment, development and human rights, certain doubts may arise pertaining to their work and agendas (Jad 2007, Hammami 2000). Meaning, it is true that non-governmental organizations serve by enabling the institutionalization and developing the third world countries, however, they more tend to serve the so called ‘novelty’ of liberal thoughts of western states by means of controlling the wealth and resources of the developing countries.

The Palestinian civil society has a rich history, dating back to the 1900s with the formation of national labor unions, youth clubs and women’s organizations. Since the British mandate and Jewish colonization of Palestine, the Palestinian women’s classical concerns has been more embraced in the struggle for self-determination and independence, consequently linking women’s emancipation to the national liberation movement (Jad 1999; Fleischmann 2000). Following the beginning of the first *Intifada*, in 1987, human rights organizations demanding the implementation of Palestinian human rights flourished.
This work has continued with the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in 1995. One of the negative effects of the Oslo Agreement was the demolishing of the Palestinian Women’s Movement (Jad 2007) which had previously risen as a social movement aimed at collectively resisting the occupation and providing support and services to marginalized groups in the society during and prior to the first Palestinian Intifada in 1987. The loss of constituencies in political parties and in women’s movement and the inability to come up with a unified agenda for tackling women’s issues, have isolated the women’s movements from Palestinian women grassroots, as well as weakened their voice in reflecting a women’s agenda up to the present. Consequently, gender-based violence in Palestine becomes the product of violence that is perpetuated by the Israeli occupation and the violence of a society that is suffering from lack of weak societal oversight to enforce and institutionalize laws that are protective to women’s rights.

**Violence against women in Palestine: Situation analysis**

Arab countries developed in different historical and cultural contexts compared to the West. It is historically recognized that the Arab Feminist Movement which had already started prior to national independence movement, was largely de-colonial and national liberationist in ideology. Women came to be recognized by their societies as national partners; they were encouraged to take part in the process of nation building, their mobilization was contextually framed as an integral part of the renaissance Nahda (Joseph 2000; Abdo 2010; Kandiyoti 1996; Jad 2009; Mohanty 1991); the right to land and self-governance was called for clearly by both men and women. Yet this nationalist call set back their rights as gendered citizens emerging from traditional societies where different genders had different roles.

Since the Israeli occupation on the Palestinian lands in 1948 until present, Palestinians have been suffering from political and conflict violence. Violence continues to structure the daily lives of the Palestinians (Johnson 2010) and is reported as dramatically increasing after the UN General Assembly’s declaration of occupied Palestine as a non-member observer state on November 29, 2012; especially with the Israeli’s announcement of plans to expand settlement developments on the Palestinian lands. Israel’s violation of international laws deprives families of their homes, and often results in disruption to livelihoods and a reduced standard of living for the Palestinians; an act that has increased violence in the Palestinian society through forming a culture of impunity.

This has placed women’s issues at a low priority (Ameri 1999:52-53; Holt 2003:235), where it became difficult for battered Palestinian women to file complaints against perpetrators of violence whether they were from their families or relatives. This has a lot to do with disagreement between those who believe that the national liberation struggle must
take precedence and those women’s organizations who believe that national liberation should go hand in hand with women’s liberation (Holt 2003). Women constitute the core victims of such divergence. This dilemma has been correctly expressed by Islah Jad where the “rise of NGOs and the process of NGOisation can be seen to have resulted in a shift in power relations: from ‘power to’ women at the grass roots to ‘power over’ them by the new elite” (Jad 2004 in Jad 2007:624). The approaches that are followed by the national NGOs reflect upon liberal thoughts through direct funding and support from International organizations.

**Legal Contexts – A brief**

While the Palestinian Civil Police (PCP), which is the formal body that is responsible for providing protection for citizens including women, is a civilian police force, the Palestinian National Authority has yet to enact legislation governing the PCP. Rather, they are still treated, under legislation and according to practice, as a military force whose violations are prosecuted under military courts and not civilian courts. Scholars observed a deliberate lack of clarity in the functions and roles of the Civil Police so that many citizens have questioned the identity of their police (Milton-Edwards 1998), similarly for Palestinian women who suffer from violence assaults. Such impassiveness is also observed in that “the weakness of the police and courts under the Palestinian Authority means that many Palestinians do not seek recourse there” (Johnson 2007:99). Women are underrepresented across the board, however especially in the PCP where women comprise only 3.3% of the force and in the military justice system where women only represent 2.0% of the staff.

Several bodies exist within the Palestinian Basic Law to oversee the work of the Palestinian Security Forces, including the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) as decriminalized in Article 47 of the Basic Law which clearly states that “the Legislative Council Shall assume its legislative and oversight duties as prescribed in its Standing Orders” (Article 47 Palestinian Basic Law), and which also provides that the executive branch of the government is accountable to the PLC through a variety of tools including inquiries, hearings and fact-finding committees. The PLC also has, at its disposal a complaints mechanism through which inquiries from the private and public arenas can be made. Two aspects have affected the functionality of the PLC: The first one being Israeli’s efforts to suppress the Palestinian sovereignty and self-determination on their own lands through the process of arresting political leaders including members of the PLC after the 2006 elections, where statistics revealed

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2 www.ps.undp.org/content/dam/papp/docs/Publications/UNDP-papp-research-PCBSjusticeenglish.pdf
3 www.palestinianbasiclaw.org/basic-law/2003-amended-basic-law; accessed on 10 May 2013
by Palestinian Human Rights Organizations indicate that by November 2012 around 14 PLC members were detained. The second factor that has affected the functionality of the PLC is related to the internal political split between HAMAS in Gaza and the Palestinian National Authority in the West Bank represented by FATAH. Since the 2006 elections and HAMAS winning, the PLC has been at a standstill. Accordingly, the PLC, the official body that exists within the Palestinian Basic Law to ensure democratic practices that employs a participatory approach in policy making, has been at a standstill since the 2006 elections, and has led to the mistrust in the vital role of this body and its reflection on democratic practices.

It is important for CSOs and women NGOs to engage with the government and political parties; their role becomes vital in giving voice of marginalized women through opening up policy making processes and affecting upon decision makers towards the betterment of women through a realistic political and social change. In the absence of a functional PLC (since 2007), it becomes crucial that CSOs perform oversight to achieve democracy. It is worth mentioning that during the first Palestinian Intifada (1987), CSOs emerged as instruments for political mobilization and service providers. However, the post-Oslo period (1994 onwards) has witnessed a ‘de-politicization’ of the role of the CSOs (Jad 2009), shifting their focus from politics-based to service delivery. Despite this process, the Palestinian National Authority saw in civil society a threat to its policy of centralizing power and controlling all aspects of public (Abdel Shafi 2004:5). This vision has unfolded different aspects of power relations between the current occupied Palestinian State and the CSOs. In cases of gender-based violence, experiences of varying power relations have limited the capacities of CSOs in dealing publicly with the dilemma of gender-based violence.

The power embraced by the PCP is derived from the fact that the PCP gains authority from the state itself. This results in CSO reluctance to mobilize victims to disseminate their stories in public as living examples of violence and thus socially exterminate such experiences; to use their stories as tools that can be used to raise the awareness of the communities on cases of gender-based violence. In essence, one way of eliminating gender-based violence in the Palestinian society is to propagate cases and living experiences in public. In some countries, the media is considered as part of the civil society because of the role they play in conveying the interests and demands of civil society groups to policymakers, to other parts of civil society, and to international audiences (Caparini 2004:8).

Therefore, media organizations can play an important role in overseeing the work of the PCP through guaranteeing that the police remain truthful to the policing mandate, do not abuse its authority and become more effective in their actions towards gender-based violence. To efficiently address gender-based violence in the Palestinian society, the media and CSOs need to actively monitor the work of the police; women NGOs need to systematically

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and regularly monitor the media for information relevant to cases of violence against Palestinian women while at the complementary level CSOs need to engage actively with media through interviews and giving information for media reports. However, interviews with CSOs expressed certain concerns in relation to the sensitivity of the work of the media in the Palestinian context in general, in connection to the Palestinian national cause and the prioritized focus on violence and practices exercised by the Israeli occupation against the Palestinian population. CSOs also bear in mind that media organizations are reluctant to reveal information on the work of the police believing that they will later suffer recrimination, consequently revealing another challenge of unequal power relations that govern the work of the media in connection with the work of the police.

The weakness of the Palestinian Civil Police in protecting the rights of Palestinian women, especially women with domestic violence assaults, and the non-functionality of the PLC urges amalgamating the efforts of the civil society and women organizations and groups to combat violence in Palestinian society and a move from isolated and ad hoc mechanisms towards a more systematic institutional response that seeks to reach a zero tolerance for violence. Such interaction might entail oversight exertion.

Laws and Legislations

The existing laws in Palestine are broad and are subject to varying degrees of interpretation by legal institutions, especially with the Palestinian Authorities backing of proposed amendments of the Penal Law that are considered by women movements as measures to extend access to the rule of law. For example, the Palestinian Basic Law largely adheres to human rights standards, however the rights it establishes are not being litigated nor do they appear to form more than a negligible component of day-to-day legal practice. The outdated ‘British/Jordanian’ Criminal Law also fail to conform to international standards, i.e. perpetrators of the so-called ‘honor killing’ can be exempted from judicial sanction. The gendered impacts of the Israeli occupation on the Palestinian legislative reform process cannot be overstated as these obstruct Palestinian efforts to put in place a legislative and judicial framework which is capable of protecting the rights of women. The obstruction of a legal system which hinders the provision of legal protection for women, especially in Areas B and C in the West Bank and East Jerusalem where the Palestinian Civil Police has no authority to implement laws without prior coordination from the Israeli occupation.

From Formal to Informal Justice

An element that has played a major role in aggravating violence against Palestinian women is the informal justice (tribal) system, whose operation legitimates norms and practices by the society. Informal justice has been strengthened and grown as has the cultural identity of the Palestinian communities throughout history. More specifically, the absence of state authority during the British mandate on Palestine in 1920 followed by the Israeli occupation has compelled greater self-reliance in relation to justice.

One should not neglect the deeply-rooted masculine concept that is entrenched in the patriarchal structure of the Palestinian society. The judicial system is in itself patriarchal in its formation. This has a lot to do with the masculine judicial cultural attitudes and how judges (even policemen) believe and behave. Dependent on individual beliefs, consensus is reached between female civil police and civil society organizations for a need to change certain aspects of cultural attitudes related to gender-based violence. Unsurprisingly, policewomen acknowledge the imbalance between the existing Penal Law and cultural approach and call for a cultural revolution for a change in beliefs even among police officers themselves on ways of investigating and handling cases of violence against women. It is observed by interviewees from CSOs and PCP that Palestinian society considers battered women reporting violence behaviors as disloyal by badly situating their husbands or family members in the society.

As such, this setting has a negative effect on women especially in cases of violence. A case might be closed for considering a woman’s position as weak, alongside the case might be referred to alashira (tribe) through rijal el sulh (Arabic words used to mean: Men towards reconciliation). The decision on the future status of the family, mainly women, becomes dependent on the eldest of both families. The will of the assaulted woman per se becomes marginalized with the possibility of concluding with subsequent circle(s) of violence. This representation reflects formal justice that formalizes informal justice and essentially places the rule of law in the hands of alashira and rijal el sulh.

Women and Shari‘a

Arab women’s activism, feminist thinking and practice in general are not new to the Arab world. Academic literature discussing women’s activism in the Arab world is abundant and can best be addressed systematically by focalizing state and religion as enterprises granting rights and delivering moral justice (Joseph 2000). One should not neglect the role of the Palestinian Status Law in placing women as inferior to men. This remains a central recurring theme in Arab women’s activism that is directed towards gendering citizenship through reforming Shari‘a laws enforced by states, granting male guardianship
over women via family or personal status laws. The Palestinian Personal Status Law is considered by many Palestinians as well as feminists and scholars as gender-biased (Kevorkian 2002:578), thus constitutes one of the reasons behind the lack of citizenship rights for women besides their marginalized roles in political and economic practices notwithstanding the political instability and the effect of the imposed colonization policies on the Palestinians as a whole that results majorly in the lack of Palestinians access to natural resources and restricted mobility.

As such, Shari'a laws should not explain the problems of domestic violence, but rather explanations must be sought by analyzing the relationship between religious law and state power in permitting or prohibiting violence within the family (Hajjar 2004:4), where it depends on the state to enable and reinforce laws to promote and ensure gender equality in its society including prohibiting violence perpetrated against women.

Hajjar also highlights the influence of religion on women’s rights in all and not only in Islamic societies and emphasizes that the fact that countries where Muslims constitute a majority and Islam is recognized as the official religion, the state nationalizes religion by incorporating Shari'a principles into the national legal regime (Hajjar 2004) such as that of the Palestinian Authority, especially given the sensitivity of Palestine with its lack of sovereignty on its own land given the continuous existence of the Israeli Occupation since 1948 until present.

**Conclusion**

Unfortunately, it seems that protection mechanisms tend to be ineffective, not out of lack of will, but simply because of the political situation that the Palestinians are facing, the weak Palestinian culture of rights, the lack of efficient, effective and sustainable human rights organizations and enabling law institutes notwithstanding the practices of the Israeli occupation in the Palestinian lands.

A long term approach towards eliminating gender-based violence requires digging in deep in the root causes of violence against women and not dealing with cases based on theory. There is a need to study well the Palestinian context from within and to combine national efforts to strategize for long term approach that aims at enhancing and institutionalizing the rule of law to eliminate all sorts of gender discrimination, enhancing an equal-based cultural dimension, addressing informal justice, strengthening oversight mechanisms, and building the trust of civil society, specifically through establishing a gender equality based ground in dealing with cases of violence to encourage women as well as men, to buy in to the work of the judicial system and security in addition to raising the awareness of women about their rights as equal citizens in the Palestinian state.
What is important is to establish measures to extend the access to justice to cover issues of critical importance to women. It is important for the law to reach the private domain, within the family, to address gender-based violence that has been placed beyond the scope of the law; that is not to assume that gender equality has been achieved in the public sphere. The low representation of women in the security and judicial sectors requires innovative policy interventions to bring social equitable justice for Palestinians, especially in light of the limited new recruitment opportunities in the context of the Palestinian Authority’s continuing financial crisis.

Outreach of the rule of law and the availability of laws do not necessitate that the law is being implemented to serve the interest of Palestinian women as has been referred to in the context of this paper due to the several societal and political factors. This is evident by the weakness of the national institutes that follow liberal approaches to influence upon the state powers to endorse the proposed amended laws that are extracted from Sharia’ as a provision for women’s protection. The role of CSOs becomes important in overseeing the work of the law enforcing institute, such as that of the police, in policy influence through advocacy platforms to enforce the implementation of existing laws and requesting the endorsement of the amended penal code that serves achieving gender equality including equal treatment, protection, access to justice and rule of law in the Palestinian society as a whole.

The last but not least important aspect is promoting women’s political inclusiveness and participation in addition to mobilizing local communities to address the different kinds of violence and harassments that are exercised against women in the public and that contribute to transforming abused women to silent victims in the society. Addressing violence must mobilize all existing resources, including the avenues of legal and policing reform with a special focus on promoting women’s political participation and representation especially in political parties and decision making positions along with “developing internal discourse that can complement rights-based-approach” (Johnson 2007: 103), and devoting more attention to the important role of women in advancing the society and the attitudes of the government and the community towards women’s rights, but also emphasizing mobilizing the moral and social resources of Palestinian communities to bring issues of violence to public discussion, awareness and action (Johnson 2010) supported by a unified conceptual framework with the engagement of local communities and civil society.

Civil society organizations and the National Coalition for Implementing UNSCR 1325 will still need to institutionalize UNSCR 1325 in ongoing strategic framework and advocacy strategies and yet provide platform of activism at the national and international levels through alliances and building networking to support Palestinian women’s protection in the occupied Palestinian territory.
References


