



The Role and Status of Palestinian Women in the Struggle for National Liberation: Static or Dynamic?

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THE ROLE AND STATUS OF PALESTINIAN WOMEN IN THE STRUGGLE FOR
NATIONAL LIBERATION: STATIC OR DYNAMIC?

by

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DEDICATION

For my parents, without whose constant love and encouragement this project would not have been possible.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that the elite and urban women leaders of the Palestinian women's movement neglected to engage rural women and women living in refugee camps as their equals in a women's movement. Further, despite women's active presence in the public sphere, the sphere remained defined in masculine terms. As a result, Palestinian women, as "guests" in the domain of men, were easily pushed out after they had served their purpose in the nationalist crisis. What is remarkable is that even after Palestinian men reclaimed the public sphere, Palestinian women remained politically active in the private sphere. In order to understand how this was possible, we must look more closely at the terms "public sphere" and "private sphere".

INTRODUCTION

The Palestinian rebellion from 1936-39 represented one of the first Palestinian national uprisings. The rebellion began as a response to the increasing Zionist immigration into Palestine, as well as to the policies of the British Mandate. What is significant about the rebellion was not who it was fought against; rather, that it was the earliest struggle for a unified, national Palestine. This was not to be Palestine's only nationalist uprising, however. The first Palestinian Intifada began late in 1987 and lasted until the Oslo Accords of 1993. Most recently was the second Palestinian Intifada, which began in 2000, and may or may not be ongoing. There are currently calls for a third Intifada, which is a largely electronic movement, calling for diaspora Palestinians to collectively storm the borders of Israel on May 15, 2011 (which will be the 63rd anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba). During the Palestinian national movement in the late 1930s, like national movements elsewhere, Palestinian women became involved in the nationalist movement in a manner, which allowed women to be both publicly and politically active.¹ Indeed, "it cannot be denied that, historically, [nationalism] has provided an impetus for women to defy social and cultural norms and become involved in realms of activity from which they had previously been excluded."² The visibility of Palestinian women's contribution to the nationalist movement during the 1930s set a precedent through which Palestinian women continued to be publicly and politically

¹ Ellen Fleischmann, *The Nation and its "New" Women: The Palestinian Women's Movement, 1920-1948*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 6-7.

² *Ibid.*, 10.

visible during nationalist crises in the future, including during the first Palestinian Intifada.

Perhaps the most popular depiction of the first Intifada in the West is of young Palestinian boys and teens throwing rocks at IDF soldiers and burning tires. Another well-known image is that of the political, active, and vocal Palestinian woman, decrying the Israeli Occupation and the treatment of her sons, brothers, father, and husband. To the Western imagination, Palestinian women finally broke the patriarchal chains that had defined their lives for millennia.³ This thesis will explore women's roles leading up to-- and during the early years of --the Intifada. Using the public/private dichotomy and the tensions between nationalism and feminism as a guide, it will seek to answer why Palestinian women, who appeared to command a strong presence during the early years of the Intifada, were eventually pushed out of the public sphere. This thesis posits that because of the relationship between nationalism and gender, Palestinian women were allowed into the public sphere in the face of a national emergency brought forth by the Intifada. But why, after only two years, was there a sudden drop in women's public participation?⁴ Answering this question has been the subject of much debate in academic circles. These debates are discussed below.

³ Simona Sharoni, *Gender and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: The Politics of Women's Resistance*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 57 and Joost R. Hiltermann, "The Women's Movement during the Uprising," in *Palestinian Women of Gaza and the West Bank* ed. Suha Sabbagh (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 41.

⁴ The drop in women's public participation is noted in: Islah Jad, "Patterns of Relations within the Palestinian Family during the Intifada," trans. Magida Abu Hassabo in *Palestinian Women of Gaza and the West Bank* ed. Suha Sabbagh (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Penny Johnson and Eileen

This thesis argues that the elite and urban women leaders of the Palestinian women's movement neglected to engage rural women and women living in refugee camps as their equals in a women's movement. Further, despite women's active presence in the public sphere, the sphere remained defined in masculine terms. As a result, Palestinian rural women, as "guests" in the domain of men, were easily pushed out after they had served their purpose in the nationalist crisis. What is remarkable is that even after Palestinian men reclaimed the public sphere, rural Palestinian women remained politically active in the private sphere. In order to understand how this was possible, we must look more closely at the terms "public sphere" and "private sphere".

In his seminal work on the public sphere Jürgen Habermas argues that the rise of a bourgeois class in Western Europe led to a societal divide known as the public sphere and the private sphere. Habermas defines the public sphere as a place where private individuals and "government" meet and where private individuals discuss issues of public concern.⁵ In this space, rational-critical debates about public issues can take place. Habermas also describes the public sphere as "constitutional establishment...in the

Kuttab, "Where Have All the Women (and Men) Gone? Reflections on Gender and the Second Palestinian Intifada," in *Feminist Review* Winter no. 69 (2001): 21-43, accessed 03/05/2009, www.jstor.org; Rana Salibi, "Women's Activities in Popular Committees during the Intifada," in *Palestinian Women: Identity and Experience* ed. Ebba Augustin, (New Jersey: Zed Books, 1993); Simona Sharoni, *Gender and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: The Politics of Women's Resistance*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995).

⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), 102-03.

political realm.”⁶ As Habermas defined it, the public sphere is intrinsic to the political sphere.

To demonstrate why the simplistic public/political versus private/domestic dichotomy does not work in Palestinian history, consider the following example from the Ottoman Empire (which included historic Palestine). In late Ottoman society, cloistering women in harems was a cultural norm practiced by those who could afford to. Thus, it was a class marker, a way of proving that women of a particular family did not need to toil in fields or mix with men in the marketplace. Even with the institution of the harem, upper-class Ottoman women were involved in public and political life from within the harem. One way they were able to do this was through charity work. “From the great mosque complexes founded by the sultans’ mothers to modest neighborhood endowments created by ordinary individuals, Ottoman women left their mark on the cities, towns, and villages of the empire.”⁷ Many of the endowments arranged by the upper class Ottoman women were designed to help women of unfortunate circumstances, including orphans and prostitutes. In this way, even from the harem, Ottoman women affected change in the public sphere. This example provides a way in which a specific class of women maintained their place within the private sphere, but also acted in the public sphere.

In her critique of Habermas, Nancy Fraser provides a nuanced understanding of the public sphere that accounts for different forms of political participation. When

⁶ Ibid., 84.

⁷ Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 8.

bourgeois men claim to be *the* public, others (such as poor, ethnically or religiously “othered”, or women) create their own discursive space, through what Fraser called a “subaltern counterpublic.”⁸ Even when the subaltern counterpublic is not given equal access to the public sphere, they find ways to change public dynamics. Methods of doing this include distributing literature, opening publishing houses, making films, giving lectures, opening research centers, having conferences, or creating academic programs which will broadcast a message from one subaltern counterpublic to the bourgeois male dominated public sphere, as well as to other subaltern counterpublics. The end result of this process can be a newly defined public space. As Fraser argues: “The point is that there are no naturally given, a priori boundaries here [in the public sphere]. What will count as a matter of common concern will be decided precisely through discursive contestation.”⁹ Hence, the public, and therefore the political, are constantly changing in a society. They are, “cultural classifications and rhetorical labels....that are frequently deployed to delegitimize some interests, views, and topics, and to valorize others.”¹⁰

Like the upper-class Ottoman women, Palestinian women also used private space and participated in a subaltern counterpublic to bring changes to the public and political space during the first Intifada. Boycott was among the forms of civil disobedience

⁸ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Social Text*, No. 25/26, 1990, pp. 56-80, Accessed Jstor.org: <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=01642472%281990%290%3A25%2F26%3C56%3ARTPSAC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-N>

67.

⁹ Ibid., 71.

¹⁰ Ibid., 73.

Palestinians engaged in during the first Intifada. Since 1967, when the Gaza Strip and West Bank fell under Israeli occupation, all goods bought and sold in the Palestinian Territories were imported from the Israeli government and thus subject to Israeli taxation. The Intifada leadership called for Palestinians to boycott imported goods, “especially those for which local substitutes exist...”¹¹ Women’s co-operatives addressed the issue of boycott through local production of foodstuffs. By engaging in traditionally domestic tasks such as cooking or making preserves, Palestinian women enabled public boycotts of Israeli goods, served the political objectives of the Intifada leadership, and responded to demands that women keep their physical bodies out of the public sphere while still exerting agency in the public sphere. This phenomenon is discussed further in chapter three, but is previewed here to show how the dichotomous, Western understanding of public and political versus private and domestic is unsatisfactory in the Palestinian context, as well as to demonstrate the need for a new understanding of the relationship between gender and public and political spheres, as Fraser did.

Other scholars writing about Palestinian women and the first Intifada proffered different analyses with respect to the relationship between Palestinian women and the public sphere. The dominant school of thought is that Palestinian women became less publicly, and therefore less politically, active after the first two years of the Intifada. A discussion of these sources is in the following section.

¹¹ United National Command of the Uprising, “Leaflet No. 10”, March 11, 1988, in Shaul Mishal and Reuben Aharoni, *Speaking Stones: Communiqués from the Intifada Underground*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 70.

Scholarship on Women and the First Intifada. Writing on Palestinian women focuses on two major historical periods in Palestinian history: the British Mandate (1920-1948) and the First Intifada (1987-1993). Finding secondary literature on women outside of these time periods is at best difficult. Explaining the dearth of literature outside of these time frames is difficult, if speculative, but historical developments among women during the two time periods suggest why scholars have taken an interest in them. Specifically, both time periods saw national struggles that led to great, if temporary changes in Palestinian women's relationship with the nation.

Fleischmann investigated women during the Mandate era, with specific attention to the women's movement from 1929 (the year of the Wailing Wall Riots, discussed in Chapter I) to 1939 (the end of the Great Revolt). According to Fleischmann, the women's movement, whose membership was the elite and upper-middle class of Palestine, was unable to define "woman," with reference to balancing "Eastern" and "Western" understandings of gender, particularly with regards to veiling discourse. The movement was not feminist in the Western liberal sense of absolute gender parity, but it exhibited what Fleischmann called an "indigenous kind of feminism, whereby [women] manipulated and exploited gender norms in order to subvert and challenge power structures."¹² Fleischmann paid great attention to the differences between Christian and Muslim women throughout her argument, and suggested that there was sectarian "tension" in the women's movement, although her discussion of both Christian and Muslim women

¹² Fleischmann, 174.

“playing the religion card”¹³ suggested the leading women of the movement were comfortable enough with their religious identities to play them against the British.

In his monograph *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past*, Ted Swedenburg wrote specifically about the Great Revolt (1936-1939) during the British Mandate. In contrast to Fleischmann’s emphasis on the elite during the Mandate, Swedenburg sought to give voice to another voiceless group in Palestinian history, the peasants. Although women were not the sole focus of his work, Swedenburg discusses ways in which both peasant and elite women were involved in the Revolt and noted the condescending attitudes of the elite women toward the peasant women. Swedenburg also argues that religion did not play a role in the revolt. He argues, providing anecdotes from his interviews, that the religion of the Revolt was neither Islam nor Christianity, but rather, Palestinian.¹⁴

Far more scholarly attention has been given to the period of the first Intifada. Within this period, scholars are particularly interested in women’s participation. Explaining Palestinian women’s sudden disappearance from the public sphere was a contested subject of inquiry. Until today, there is not a scholarly consensus on answering “why?” although many have attempted.

Islah Jad faulted the Intifada leadership (the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising, discussed in Chapter III), arguing that if the UNLU would have recognized

¹³ Ibid., 169-170.

¹⁴ Swedenburg, 90, 122.

women's issues and the women's agenda, the women's movement would not have fractured across party lines, and women perhaps would be in a stronger position today.¹⁵

Jad, Najah Manasra, and Joost R. Hiltermann each pointed to the rise of Islamism as a leading factor in why women left the public sphere.¹⁶ Souad Dajani echoed a similar argument, but added that the combination of the Israeli ban on popular committees, including the women's committees, in conjunction with the Islamist movement, "left fewer opportunities for women to enter public life".¹⁷

Dajani also argued that the development of women's committees in the decade immediately before the first Intifada allowed Palestinian women from different political parties to maintain nationalist identities even across class lines.¹⁸ Although upper-class women founded the committees, they were designed to provide services to rural and camp women, and were thus not classist. Dajani is correct in pointing to the class-inclusive nature of the committees, but she assumes that because elite, urban women were trying to create a women's movement by including rural women, that there was, in fact a Palestinian women's movement. She does not discuss perspectives of rural women

¹⁵ Islah Jad, "Patterns of Relations within the Palestinian Family during the Intifada," trans. Magida Abu Hassabo in *Palestinian Women of Gaza and the West Bank* ed. Suha Sabbagh (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

¹⁶ Najah Manasra, "Palestinian Women: Between Tradition and Revolution," in *Palestinian Women: Identity and Experience* ed. Ebba Augustin, (New Jersey: Zed Books, 1993), 19; Hiltermann, "The Women's Movement during the Uprising."

¹⁷ Souad Dajani, "Between National and Social Liberation: The Palestinian Women's Movement in the Israeli Occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip," in *Women and the Israeli Occupation: The Politics of Change*, ed. Tamar Mayer, (London: Routledge, 1994), 45.

¹⁸ See Dajani, "Between National and Social Liberation: The Palestinian Women's Movement in the Israeli Occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip."

who were involved in the committees and whether or not they saw themselves as part of a Palestinian women's movement, particularly after the first Intifada began.

In her book *Daughters of Palestine*, Amal Kavar traces the development of Palestinian women in politics, noting generational differences that occurred. Specifically, she argues that in each national crisis, with a new generation of women leaders, Palestinian women redefined what is political. Her use of interviews with top-ranking PLO and Fatah women make Kavar's work an important source for understanding the development of this spectrum of the women's movement. As a study of the PLO women's leadership, Kavar's book presents a vivid study, but as an addition to the field of Palestinian women's literature, its scope is narrow. It lacks a discussion of everyday women's issues, as well as of various classes of Palestinian women. It also ignores the Islamist movement entirely, leaving the reader with the impression the Palestinian women only identify with the secularist movement.

Dajani and Kavar demonstrated the primary concerns regarding the history of Palestinian camp and rural women. As Dajani's chapter suggests, when Palestinian rural women are acknowledged in literature, it is without agency. Dajani concludes that the Palestinian women's movement matured because the urban women engaged with their rural sisters. Where are the voices of the rural women? Did they see themselves as part of a women's movement, or were they involved in committee work for other reasons? Why is it considered a women's movement when the rural women were summoned to fulfill

the objectives and visions of an elite minority? Alternatively, works like Kavar ignore the existence of rural women altogether.

Each of these arguments focuses on the roles of the elite and upper class women during the first Intifada, and as such, does not provide satisfactory arguments. Cheryl Rubenberg's study of women's involvement in the first Intifada also provides an illustrative example of how Palestinian history has been misrepresented through a scholarly emphasis on the urban elite, indeed, largely written *by* the urban elite, of Palestine. Considering that 60 percent of Palestinians live in villages and refugee camps, she notes the overwhelming emphasis on the contributions of the urban elite during the Intifada, while little or no attention is paid to if and how rural women participated.¹⁹ My contribution to the field will be showing, through critical engagement with the secondary literature, that in addition to the underrepresentation of rural women, when they have been the focus of academic inquiries, they are understood as the pawns of urban agents.

By evaluating the role of rural Palestinian women, it will be evident that in ignoring the voices and contributions of rural women, such as their involvement in women's committees, much of the secondary scholarship about women and the first Intifada ignores significant contributions and equally valid perspectives on the nature of women in nationalist movements. We will also come to understand the reasons for which women were knocked out of the public sphere shortly after the beginning of the first Intifada. These reasons are: Elite women did not have real power/authority- they were

¹⁹ Cheryl A. Rubenberg, *Palestinian Women: Patriarchy and Resistance in the West Bank*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 1-2.

just pushing orders which came from men in power; the women were not united across class or party lines; the public sphere remained defined in masculine terms. Assessing the public-private dichotomy will also allow for critical engagement of Palestinian women's actions, contesting the assumptions that Palestinian women were rooted in the public sphere during the late 1980s and that it was the Islamist movement that disenfranchised women. Evaluating the relationship between gender, feminism, and nationalism elucidates the process through which women were allowed into the public-political sphere. Further, it provides a framework to understand the feminist-nationalism ideology some Palestinian women embraced to justify their place in the public-political sphere.

Layers of Identity. This thesis is a discussion of Palestinian women, but as this introduction has already alluded, to discuss Palestinian women as a monolith or as a cohesive, singular identity, ignores the multi-layered fabric of Palestinian identity. Different combinations of the various threads of Palestinian identity overlap to create historically unique experiences among Palestinian women, and indeed affected the ways in which women participated, or chose not to participate, in nationalist struggles. Thus, a nuanced discussion of the facets of Palestinian identity is a necessary component to any discussion of Palestinian history. The following identity markers are of particular relevance to this thesis: locale of upbringing- urban, rural, or refugee camp; class status- elite, middle class, or peasant/lower class; level of education- college, high school, only Islamic education, no education; religion- Christian, Muslim, or no affiliation; and level of religiosity- conservative, moderate, liberal. Of course, as this thesis is historical in

nature, the time period in which a woman lived was also significant in shaping the way in which she participated in national struggles.

Inherent in the different sub-identities are cultural norms that dictated what kind of access to public or political sphere activity women had, whether they wanted access to it, and what they did in the public sphere. To illustrate this, look at the influence of locale on family structure and levels of independent decision making. In a village or camp, family structure tended to be clan-based. This means the patrilineal, extended family exerted control and decision-making authority over the younger members of the family. Family structure in cities, on the other hand, tended to be defined in terms of the nuclear family or, a mother, father, and their children. In nuclear families, the children tended to have more freedom to make their own decisions in life.²⁰ A glimpse into education during the British Mandate will also show they way the different identities shaped lives.

The policies of the British Mandate "construct[ed] a kind of de facto policy that simultaneously neglected, disciplined, and repressed women."²¹ Although British educational reforms sought to expand girl's education, it was used as a tool of social control. Rural girls were especially victimized by this policy, because they, more so than their urban counterparts, were regarded as having little need for schoolwork. The emphasis of their education lay in hygienic issues and other ideals of domesticity, which reinforced the ideals of the private sphere. Further, the girls' curriculum was designed with the needs of the Palestinian male population in mind. The British believed that since

²⁰ Manasra, 6.

²¹ Fleischmann, 25.

Palestinian boys were receiving a modern Western education, Palestinian girls needed to complement that by learning how to run homes, with an emphasis on sanitation and childrearing.²² These historical examples provide further illustration of the ways in which sub-identities influenced and shaped the identity of different sectors of the population of Palestinian women.

These examples illustrate the way in which one identity marker affected the life of Palestinian women, but what happens when the different identity markers converge? How is women's access to public life determined then?

Consider, for example that an urban, elite, college-educated, Christian woman historically had the most access to public space in Palestine while a rural, peasant, uneducated, Muslim woman had the least access to the same space at the same time. Palestinian identity did not and does not function on this binary, however, and any combination of the various sub-identities listed is a possible description of a Palestinian woman. When this happens, it becomes more difficult to make generalizations. If there was an urban, middle class, high school educated Muslim woman, and a rural, peasant, college educated Christian woman, which woman had more access to public space?

Answering this question may prove to be an exercise in futility, as arguments can be made supporting answers for both women. What is more useful is an analysis of both women based on the threads of their sub-identities in a given historical context. In doing so, we can address broad historical questions about Palestinian women, such as education

²² Ibid., 38.

reforms during the Mandate era, or, for the purposes of this thesis, the role of women in national uprisings. By noting the different facets of Palestinian identity, then, one is forced to look critically at Palestinian women's history, and challenge claims, as this thesis does, that the first Intifada disenfranchised Palestinian women.

Defining Patriarchy. Whereas some have argued that the decline of women's visible public participation bears a correlation to rise of the Islamist movement,²³ this thesis contends that patriarchal norms (associated with both the secularist and Islamist movements) are what led women to create their own subaltern counterpublics by embracing and politicizing their traditional, domestic roles.

“Patriarchy” is a charged term and can carry different meanings in different contexts. For the purpose of this thesis, I borrow two definitions of patriarchy, as well as an explanation of how the definition applies to the Palestinian context.

Rubenberg argues that patriarchy is “a type of power relation [that] originates in the domestic realm.”²⁴ In the Palestinian context:

It is a system for monopolizing resources, maintaining kinship status, reproducing the patriline, controlling women's sexuality and bodies, legitimizing violence, regulating education to reproduce the roles and relations socialized in the family focusing healthcare exclusively on maternity and procreation, and limiting women's access to the labor market as well as defining the types of work in which women may engage.²⁵

²³ See Islah Jad, “Patterns of Relations within the Palestinian Family during the Intifada”; Loren D. Lybarger, *Identity and Religion in Palestine: The Struggle between Islamism and Secularism in the Occupied Territories*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); or Tamar Mayar, “Women and the Israeli Occupation: The Context,” in *Women and the Israeli Occupation: The Politics of Change*, ed. Tamar Mayar, (New York: Routledge, 1994).

²⁴ Rubenburg 12.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

Lybarger agrees with this definition in his own definition of patriarchy. "By 'patriarchal,' I mean a structure of social authority within which men, usually older men, monopolize public prestige and power, and women's social honor and life opportunities derive from child rearing and maintenance of the domestic sphere."²⁶

Gender and Nationalism. Nationalism, whether the primordial progression of an ethnic group, or an *imagined community* of state-sponsored infrastructure, posits, "that identification with the nation and loyalty to its claims overrides all other commitments on the part of the individual."²⁷ Competing "commitments" include, but are not limited to, class, regional, and religious connections. Implicit in the idea of nationalism is that when members of the nation hold the nation above all else, all members are equal. But as feminist scholars note, the nation is built upon gender differences that subvert the place of women. What, then, is the relationship between feminism and nationalism?

Frantz Fanon argues that the struggle for national liberation generates women's awareness. Through women's participation in the national struggle, women are allowed the space to challenge traditional gender barriers and they grow more aware of their gender-specific oppression under patriarchy. As their participation brings them into the public-political sphere, and women begin to challenge colonization, they also start to question the traditions that have banned them from this sphere. A heightened feminist

²⁶ Lybarger, 134, n9.

²⁷ Graham Day and Andrew Thompson, *Theorizing Nationalism*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 109.

consciousness stems from this, and women are faced with both a feminist and a nationalist battle.²⁸

The problem that surfaces in the dynamics between nationalism and feminism is the notion that national interests supersede the interests of women. Further, women should not seek to fragment the interests of the nation by agitating for women's rights, particularly in the struggle for national sovereignty. Rather, women should fight alongside men (sometimes literally, other times within their proper gendered role) and seek national independence. Only once this is achieved should they agitate for women's rights within the new nation. As Algeria has proven, however, in the struggle for national liberation and nationalist movements women face the risk of losing.²⁹ When feminist movements arise, women are faced with the difficult choice of privileging their own interests as women over the interests of the nation, or trying to find some way of reconciling the seemingly competing ideologies. Out of this reconciliation a sort of feminist-nationalism is founded. It is this approach that elite Palestinian women turned to during the Intifada, with the yet to be consummated dream of attaining both national and gender liberation.

²⁸ Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 35-64 quoted in Sabbagh, "Introduction," *Palestinian Women of Gaza and the West Bank*, ed. Suha Sabbagh, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 22.

²⁹ Nahla Abdo, "Nationalism and Feminism: Palestinian Women, and the *Intifada*—No Going Back?" in *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*, edited by Valentine Moghadam (London and Atlantic Highlands, N.J.:Zed Press, 1994), 148; Sherna Berger Gluck, "Palestinian Women: Gender Politics and Nationalism," in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, no. 3 (Spring 1995), 5-15, 5; Suha Sabbagh, "Introduction," 26-27.

According to Joseph Massad, Palestinian nationalist discourse has identified the Palestinian hero as young, strong, masculine, and bourgeois. This conception of the Palestinian hero has been memorialized by the media through images of young boys, "playing men", masked in their kuffiyahs, throwing stones and holding a Palestinian flag.³⁰ This image marginalizes the public role Palestinian women have had during national struggles, yet Palestinian women engaged in nationalist work as early as the British Mandate.

As alluded to above, nationalism and feminism are not necessarily diametrically opposed. Peteet explains, "[i]f nationalism and feminism are juxtaposed as competing spheres of interest, identity, and locality, one runs the risk of a binary construction that is not borne out in everyday experience."³¹ Because it is artificial to look at adherents of feminism and nationalism as in an either/or dichotomy, it is important to examine their points of intersection. The Palestinian women's movement began not as a feminist movement with a feminist agenda (with feminist defined as women's awareness of women's subordinate position in a gender hierarchy), but rather it, "was built on inherent and objective contradictions and limitations." While women did work to promote the place of woman in Palestinian society, it was done within a

³⁰ Joseph Massad, "Conceiving the Masculine: Gender and Palestinian Nationalism," in *Middle East Journal*. Vol. 49, No. 3, 1995 (summer). 467-483, 470.

³¹ Julie Peteet, "Nationalism and Sexuality in Palestine," in *Social Constructions of Nationalism in the Middle East*, ed. Fatma Müge Göcek, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 159.

nationalist framework, and toward a nationalist end.³² During the 1970s, as the PLO began to call on all members of Palestinian society to take part in the national struggle, women realized the extent of the limitations under which they were to operate. The patriarchal norms of their society would not allow them to leave their homes, which hampered their attempts at organizing committees (elite women's primary form of public-sphere participation during the late 1970s). In a very literal way, women could not contribute to nation building efforts, without first confronting the issue of "woman." Palestinian women consciously attempted to link their struggle as women with the nationalist struggle, first during the struggles against the British during the 1920s and 1930s, and again vis-à-vis the first Intifada. This led to a new space for women's political participation where, "Palestinian women [could] challenge the dominant conception of Palestinian nationalist agency."³³ The space has been created by the "mass nationalist movements [and] the widespread rejection of existing political institutions and culture,"³⁴ through the development of women's committees that sought to provide rural and camp women with the means for economic liberation from their husbands and fathers.

To elucidate the historical processes that led to the first Palestinian Intifada and the women's movement within the Intifada, this thesis is organized into three chronological chapters. The first chapter begins with a discussion of the 1936 Arab

³² Kathy Glavanis-Grantham, "The Women's Movement, Feminism, and the National Struggle in Palestine: Unresolved Contradictions," in *Women and Politics in the Third World*, ed. Haleh Afshar, (New York: Routledge, 1996), 173.

³³ Massad, 481.

³⁴ Sharoni, "Gendering Conflict and Peace," 183.

Revolt and its women's movement, which provides a beneficial point of analysis with which to assess the Intifada and its women's movement. The chapter also addresses the immediate consequences of 1948, the rise of Palestinian political parties (especially Fatah), as well as the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Chapter II looks at the rise of Islamism in Palestine, as well as the rise of the women's movement from 1967 leading up to the Intifada. Of particular interest is the change in the discourse of the women's committees, from self-designed men's auxiliary committees, to liberated women's committees with a stated goal of gender liberation. The final chapter looks at the rise of Hamas and the influence of its policies on women in particular. After providing examples of the ways in which women participated in the Intifada during the first two years, the chapter addresses why women's participation in the Intifada changed from one which included women's physical presence in the public sphere to one in which they created subaltern counterpublics and participated from the domestic sphere. Finally, the conclusion looks at the similarities and differences between the Arab rebellion of 1936-39 and the first Intifada and suggests that the issues that Palestinian women faced during the first Intifada were not unique to the Intifada, but are rather symptoms of the potency of patriarchy in Palestinian society.

CHAPTER I: IDENTITY REDEFINED: THE MARGINALIZATION OR
LIBERALIZATION OF WOMAN AND THE NATION?

Revolutionary Beginnings. From 1917-1948, historic Palestine was ruled by the British who promised, by way of the Balfour Declaration, to both establish “a national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine and simultaneously protect the “civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.”³⁵ Whatever the British meant behind these murky promises, the Mandatory government “maintained certain religious or tribal structures in order to facilitate administration, mediate conflict, and impose control, retaining those ‘customs’ or practices that benefited their objectives in certain ways while creating or developing others that suited their purposes.”³⁶ Palestine became another jewel in the British imperial crown. Palestinians were already faced with the pressures of rapidly increasing Zionist immigration, which began in the late 19th century, and subjection to occupied rule only intensified sensitivities. Small bouts of violence were not unheard of, as settlers or colonizers attacked indigenous people, or vice versa. One such incident occurred on April 13, 1936 when Palestinian insurgents killed two Jews. This incident set off a wave of events, including violence, counter-violence, and strikes, known as the Great Revolt of 1936-39. The Revolt is remarkable for its place as the first Palestinian national movement (as opposed to other uprisings that were

³⁵ Arthur James Balfour, “Balfour Declaration,” 11-02-1917, accessed BBC News http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/middle_east/israel_and_the_palestinians/key_documents/1682961.stm, 05-08-11.

³⁶ Fleischmann, 31-2.

localized), as well as its magnitude as an act of “anticolonial insurgency in the Arab East” between the World Wars.³⁷

The Great Revolt of 1936-1939 is a relevant launching point for a discussion of the first Palestinian Intifada for a number of reasons, not least of which is their shared purpose of “shaking off” the unwanted occupier. Peasant perspectives of the elite during the Revolt, as well as parallels of women’s work in the Revolt and the first Intifada, are of particular interest to this thesis.

According to the peasant memories of the Revolt nearly fifty years after the fact, peasants were the primary actors in the Revolt. It is documented that they were active as guerillas, and according to some memories, it was peasants only “who behaved as honorable and militant nationalists.”³⁸ The urban leadership, according to these sources, was remembered as “corrupt and timid” or as “insufficiently active.”³⁹ Rural men interviewed between 1984-5 even went so far as to blame the failure of the Revolt *and* the loss of 1948 on the elite class, citing reasons such as failing to contribute monetarily to the Revolt and cooperating with the British. In other cases, rural men accused the leaders of the Revolt of corruption. As the accusations went, these men took donations that were earmarked for weaponry and supplies for the fighters and pocketed the money.⁴⁰ What is significant about these remarks is not whether or not they were

³⁷ Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past*, (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2003), *xix*.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, *xxvii*.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

accurate, but the specific, identifiable class difference in the way participation in the Revolt was remembered.

Women's participation during the Revolt can be best described as auxiliary work. Rural women threw stones at the British, and ran water and supplies to the men who were fighting. Urban women took a much different approach. The Arab Women's Committee, founded in the wake of violence in 1929, coordinated with the Higher Arab Committee during the Revolt to organize public demonstrations, raised money for the resistance, and provided aid for the families of the victims.⁴¹ What is most striking about women's role during the Revolt, however, is how the concepts of honor and the private sphere were altered to meet the demands of a nation in crisis.

One of the ways in which the private sphere was recoded during the Revolt was through hiding rebel fighters in the homes of villagers. Sometimes the rebels would be trapped in a village surrounded by British troops. The villagers would take the fighters in, give them clothes to make them look local, and hide them in their homes together with the women of their family. In her memory of the Revolt, one woman complained that at times there were between forty and fifty men sleeping on the floor of her house.⁴² Although this happened in rural villages, where gender seclusion was not practiced to the extent that urban and upper class families practiced it (see introduction), this was still a society that valued the private sphere as the domain of the women, and a place where unrelated men would seldom, if ever, be invited into. In the face of the Revolt, and the

⁴¹ Ibid., 176.

⁴² Ibid., 130.

crisis of the nation, however, women and men allowed a reinterpretation of the cultural norm to benefit the nation, and the needs of the nation were made supreme. This is not the only time this happened in Palestinian history. As the third chapter discusses, women during the first Intifada were active in many of the same ways, and there was a similar redefinition of honor and of the private sphere to accommodate the needs of a nation in crisis.

Eventually the British crushed the Revolt, and Palestinians, men and women, returned to the status quo. Gender relations and the private sphere normalized, and it was not until the 1948 war that gender roles and Palestinian identity changed as rapidly and as quickly.

Defining “Palestinian.” The creation of Israel caused, at the very least, a crisis in nationalism for the Palestinian people. A small strip of Western Palestine, the Gaza Strip, was now under the military control of the Egyptian government, and the West Bank of the Jordan River was annexed by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Perhaps as many as 750,000 more Palestinians became refugees,⁴³ some within the borders of the new Jewish State, some within the confines of the Gaza Strip or the West Bank, and still others in the neighboring countries of Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. In addition to the subjection to rule by foreign powers, be they Arab or otherwise, the loss of land damaged the Palestinian understanding of self.

⁴³ UNRWA 1950 statistic in: Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993*, (Washington, D. C.: Clarendon Press, 1997), 4.

To illustrate the complexity of the Israeli domination of Palestinian life, it is necessary to understand honor codes in traditional Palestinian society. As several scholars note, the construction of Palestinian male identity was based upon two ideals. Prior to the 1950s, the "Palestinian Arab patriarch, whether peasant or poet, was supposed to defend...his land and his women's sexual integrity."⁴⁴ In another analysis of pre-Nakba identity, a different scholar agrees that "honor" was inextricably linked to land ownership and the maintenance of chaste women within the family. With the loss of land in 1948, she adds, redefining honor became part of the national crisis.⁴⁵

Recalling the identity markers discussed in the introduction, it is important to note here that the altered understanding of honor did not have a direct bearing on all Palestinian men or women. Although simplistic, it bears noting that land dispossession only affected those who owned land. As such, it stands to reason that urban dwellers derived concepts of honor from land less than rural Palestinians who worked their land and lived off of it directly. As such, the new honor code applied more stringently to rural women than it did to urban women. This was symbolically visible in the decades immediately following the Nakba, where urban women were outwardly the most liberal and Western, and rural and camp women suffered the backlashes theorized above. Before analyzing the differences between urban and rural women, it is important to understand

⁴⁴ Shiela Katz, "Adam and Adama, 'Ird and Ard: En-gendering Political Conflict and Identity in Early Jewish and Palestinian Nationalisms," in *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 85-105, 87.

⁴⁵ Hasso, Frances S. "Modernity and Gender in Arab Accounts of the 1948 and 1967 Defeats," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 4, Nov., 2000. Accessed jstor.org, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/stable/259422?seq=3> 2/07/11, 495.

key changes that occurred in Palestinian leadership, as well as other political trends that struck the Arab states during the 1950s.

Prior to 1948, leadership within Palestine, whether as a province of the Ottoman Empire, or as a Mandate of the British Empire, is best described as a patriarchal leadership of male notables, where village elders and ruling families took charge of local affairs. One of the consequences of the 1948 war was a change in Palestinian leadership. Young male leaders, who were “ideologically radical” and most of whom were influenced by Marxist ideologies, replaced the traditional leaders.⁴⁶ These Marxist ideologies were paired with another ideological undertaking: pan-Arabism. Pan-Arabism swept the Arab world during the 1950s and dictated the idea that all Arabic-speaking people should unite under one flag as a secular state, and purge their lands of the imperialists. The champion of this rhetoric was Gamal Abd Al-Nasser, the president of Egypt from 1954-1970, who came to power through a military coup in 1952. As part of this ideology, through Arab unity, Palestine would be liberated from its Zionist occupiers. “Palestinians were swept up by the tide of pan-Arab nationalism in the 1950s and thus became politically active despite the lack of independent Palestinian organizations.”⁴⁷

Not all of the young new leaders were pleased with pan-Arabism as the means to Palestinian liberation, however. In 1951, a Palestinian student studying in Cairo, Yasser Arafat, challenged this notion by establishing the Palestinian Students’ Union on the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 494.

⁴⁷ Samih K. Farsoun, with Christina E. Zacharia, *Palestine and the Palestinians*, (Westview Press, Boulder, CO: 1997), 174.

basis that Palestine needed to be liberated first, and then they could unify with the pan-Arab movement. Although it did not become a viable political party until 1958, this pre-Fatah organization is an example of the change from the traditional Palestinian leadership discussed above to the young new leaders, most of whom were willing to die for national liberation.⁴⁸ Despite the change in political structure, the new leadership was still male-dominated-- the inner circle of Fatah did not host any women leaders. During its years as an underground operation, Fatah recruited young, new members, fundraised, and distributed leaflets to achieve its political goals. Yasser Arafat sowed the seeds that would grow into the dominant Palestinian political party until the outbreak of the Intifada. In 1957, Arafat and the other Students' Union co-founders began to leave Cairo. While others left for Gaza and Qatar, Arafat found himself in Kuwait. The Persian Gulf countries proved to be a politically beneficial move because there was a heavier flow of people in and out of the region connecting them with other parts of the Palestinian diaspora, there were more opportunities to build up operational funds for what would become the Fatah party, and there was more freedom to assemble. (Syria, Jordan, and especially Nasserist Egypt watched Palestinian nationalist activities with a careful eye, for fear that they would stir unrest in their respective governments).

In its prototypal stage, Fatah defied the cries for pan-Arabism, but stayed true to other political -isms sweeping the Arab world at that time, Marxism, and its concurrent secularism. Turning to the Algerian war of independence as an example, Fatah leaders

⁴⁸ Kavar, 15.

believed that armed struggle was the means through which the masses would be united, and then organized into revolutionary battalions. Drawing on this theory, no military act was deemed too small, and something as simple as attacking a bridge was seen as a vehicle for attracting youth to the movement.⁴⁹ Fatah, too, called for armed struggle as the means to Palestinian national liberation, and wanted to achieve a secular, democratic Palestine.

While Fatah and the PFLP sprang from grassroots students' movements, another national Palestinian organization, "aboveground, elitist, [and] toeing the line of the Arab states..."⁵⁰ saw its inception prior to the 1967 war. This organization was born not of the direct will of the Palestinian people, but out of necessity by other Arab leaders, specifically Nasser of Egypt. Recognizing the need for an official Palestinian representative body, Nasser called a meeting of the Arab League in Cairo in 1964, and it was at this meeting that the PLO, Palestine Liberation Organization, was created "[a]s a sop to [Palestinian] discontent rather than out of any real desire to see them independent..."⁵¹ Despite the "elitist" nature of the PLO, it was not unpopular among the Palestinian people. Like its contemporaries, the PLO was also committed to the Marxist notion of a revolutionary armed struggle to liberate Palestine. As such, PLO bases were established throughout refugee areas in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. In addition to

⁴⁹ Sayigh, 120.

⁵⁰ Farsoun and Zacharia, 181.

⁵¹ Kitty Warnock, *Land Before Honour: Palestinian Women in the Occupied Territories*, (Houndmill, England: MacMillan Education LTD, 1990), 8.

military training, these bases provided facilities for education, industrial workshops, and the development of trade unions and women's organizations.⁵²

During the PLO's early years, Fatah leaders regarded the organization as a "means to freeze the revolutionary potential of the people"⁵³ While it adhered to Marxist notions of armed struggle and gender equality through "compulsory military training on all Palestinian men and women able to bear arms,"⁵⁴ it was still caught up in class politics. The PLO's parliamentary body, the Palestinian National Council (PNC), drew its delegates from, "traditional social leaders and scions of the established families of the pre-1948 Palestine and ...the propertied and professional elements of the middle class...Few, if any, were from the refugee camps or of peasant and working-class background..." and women comprised less than 27 of the total 422 seats in the original Parliament.⁵⁵ For all of Fatah's criticisms of the PLO, it did not recognize the same flaws within itself.

The pan-Arabist calls of Nasser and its proponents did not last forever. The 1956 Suez Crisis, in which Israel, in an alliance with Britain and France, attacked Egypt in response to Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal, launched the beginning of the end of Palestinian support for Nasser and pan-Arabism, according to Yezid Sayigh. In the aftermath of the 1956 war, Palestinians were still largely supportive of pan-Arabism, but a "debate among the future founders of Fatah crystallized in the wake of the war, as it

⁵² Warnock, 9.

⁵³ Wazir, *Fatah: Genesis*, 99, quoted in Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 121-2.

⁵⁴ Sayigh, 98.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

became apparent that the real challenge lay...in responding to the absence of autonomous Palestinian organizations.”⁵⁶ The proximity of the Suez War to the Nakba led to an “early stimulus for the reemergence of independent Palestinian political-military activism”⁵⁷ Although the 1956 war only cast doubt in the minds of a few Palestinians, it would not be until the 1967 war that Palestinians collectively started to doubt the utility of pan-Arabism as the road to national liberation.

During these years of great political and social change, the politics of Palestinian male notables gave way to a new, young, and revolutionary class of male leadership. These were years of great change for Palestinian women as well, and although women may not have been part of the inner revolutionary circles, they were active agents in the societal changes brought forth by the war of 1948.

Palestinian Women before the Intifada. Because of the belief that Palestinian women did not previously engage in politics, outsiders often note Palestinian women’s involvement in the first Intifada as a remarkable break from tradition. Contrary to this belief, the public-sphere involvement of Palestinian women has a rich history. Although Palestinian women staked their claim in the public sphere decades before the Intifada, there were limits to this participation. This section discusses Palestinian women’s involvement until 1967 foremost as divided along class lines, but also as reactionary to national emergencies, or as limited to charitable work. Beginning as early as the 1880s,

⁵⁶ Ibid., 83.

⁵⁷ Farsoun and Zacharia, 175.

when Zionist immigration into Palestine began, women in rural Palestine fought along men to resist the earliest Zionist settlements,⁵⁸ an example of women's participation in response to a national emergency. When the 1917 Balfour Declaration was issued, there are records of women protesting alongside men. During the 1920s, Palestinian women founded numerous welfare and charity organizations all aimed at "one goal...to be of benefit to the nation."⁵⁹ The charities culminated in the first Palestinian women's conference in 1929.

The creation of the Arab Women's Congress, which first convened on October 26, 1929, in response to the 1929 Wailing Wall riots⁶⁰ was another way in which Palestinian women became politically involved. The uprising threw new political responsibilities onto the shoulders of Palestinian women as they watched their men go off to fight, die, or be imprisoned by the British.⁶¹ At the Congress, where over 200 women gathered, four resolutions were passed.⁶² They protested the Balfour Declaration and deemed it "a deliberate violation of all the pledges given to the Arabs.... and...it contains two contradictory and irreconcilable parts..." Further, the resolution calls any Arab who will not work to fight against the Declaration a "traitor to his country and nation."⁶³ The

⁵⁸ Souad Dajani, "Between National and Social Liberation: The Palestinian Women's Movement in the Israeli Occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip," in *Women and the Israeli Occupation: The Politics of Change*, ed. Tamar Mayer, (London: Routledge, 1994), 36.

⁵⁹ Asma Tubi, *'Abir wa majd* (Beirut: matba'atqalalat, 1966), 155, quoted in Fleischmann, 109.

⁶⁰ The riots began over disputed control of the Wailing Wall, and quickly spread throughout Palestine. They resulted in many deaths, both Arab and Jewish, and also revived the Palestinian male nationalists leadership.

⁶¹ Mogannam, 70.

⁶² Fleischmann, 116.

⁶³ Mogannam, 71.

resolution also called for all members of the Congress to work to secure a National Government based on proportional representation and demanded a boycott of Jewish goods. “The Congress urges every Arab to buy nothing from the Jews but land, and to sell them everything but land.” The final resolution was that the previous three be shared with the British government.⁶⁴

The significance of this conference is that it set a precedent through which other women’s organizations could be established. The Congress also exemplified the way in which the elite women conducted themselves in politics. While the Congress was touted as a spontaneous, nationalist gathering, there was in fact an executive committee meeting prior to the “spontaneous” Congress, where a group of women drafted the resolutions, as well as appointed themselves the executive committee of the Congress, without any regard for the other Congress participants, and certainly without considering the collective Palestinian woman. “Thus the ratification of the resolutions at the congress was primarily a rubber stamp for decisions that had already been made by the core group...”⁶⁵ of women. While the Congress and its resolutions remain a watershed moment in Palestinian women’s public political involvement, it also highlights that even within the politics of the elite, elite women superimpose their objectives without regard for lower class women. This is a continuity that was seen in other phases of Palestinian women’s involvement.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 72.

⁶⁵ Fleischmann, 118-9.

Women took active roles in the 1936-39 revolt where they participated in the boycotts, ran food and water supply lines to guerillas, and transported weapons. There was also the double burden of having to make up for the men's work on the home front and in the fields. Each of these examples of women's public sphere participation was accepted as part of women's role in the revolt, and hence as participation in a national emergency. These examples of political involvement, which were triggered by significant political events, illustrate one way in which Palestinian women were politically active historically. More commonly, however, elite Palestinian women were involved through charitable associations which served a variety of societal needs, and many of which were established in the early 20th century.

The establishment of charitable societies in Palestine is described as, "...part of a global phenomenon...when *educated* women throughout the world started to become involved in a multitude of reform, social, and ultimately, political movements..."⁶⁶ The impetus for this movement in Palestine may have stemmed from colonial encounters, where more Palestinian women were becoming educated, creating a middle- and upper-class of women who were aware of the needs of their society. Both Islam and Christianity have a "doctrine of obligatory charity" and as such, this elite class of women, fusing their education and religious duties created, "a tradition of noblesse oblige toward their more indigent coreligionists."⁶⁷ In Palestine, this typically meant urban, Christian women seeking to urbanize their rural counterparts through what they deemed a proper

⁶⁶ Ibid., 95-6. (Emphasis added).

⁶⁷ Ibid., 96.

education.⁶⁸ While the charitable societies were serving the needs of the community, they did at times coordinate their efforts to serve nationalist duties during the British Mandate.

However empowering the women's charitable societies may have been, they were still gendered, and subject to limitations imposed by men. Third world nationalism, Massad argues, is still linked to European nationalism because nationalism is a European concept rooted in European philosophies. With regards to gender, the Third World sought to create women who are educated and employable, but still in a subordinate position. The third world tries to integrate European customs, and create new gender norms which "are modern inventions dressed up in traditional garb to satisfy nationalism's claim of a national culture for which it stands. These new ideals are not so much *traditional* as they are *traditionalized*."⁶⁹ Even as Palestinian women integrated new charitable foundations into the traditional charitable works of their culture, they were still bound to gender roles, and tied to these roles even as the women's committees of the 1970s (discussed in Chapter II) grew in popularity.

Julie Peteet highlights the importance of the period 1921-1939 because, for the first time, women's organizations changed in that their work allowed them to leave their homes and work for the nation.⁷⁰ It should be noted that this applied to only a very small, elite class of women. Fleischmann also notes the importance of this early period of women's political involvement in her argument that Palestinian women's "politicization

⁶⁸ Islah Jad, "The Demobilization of Women's Movements: The Case of Palestine," 3.

⁶⁹ Massad, 468.

⁷⁰ Julie Peteet, *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 57.

and nationalism arose *from* their charitable and social work" as they became increasingly aware of the economic and social limitations imposed on them under the Ottomans and then the British.⁷¹ Although Palestinian women challenged their place in the nation, it was done to advance national liberation in tandem with women's liberation, not just women's liberation alone. The loss of the 1948 war changed the nature of the women's committees.

The elite women, who had the time and resources to commit to charitable societies prior to 1948 found themselves after the war in a situation in which they were no longer available to carry out national work, according to some scholars. Because of the overwhelming loss of Palestinian land, Palestinians in the new diaspora needed to find alternative means of survival. In many cases, women were forced to work outside of the home to help support the family. What little time existed for national work for before the war, was now gone.⁷² There are, however, accounts of women refugees holding demonstrations in camps during the 1950s making demands for better aid from the United Nations branch that was their beneficiary, and of sit-ins at the Red Cross demanding intervention for the treatment of male prisoners. Nuha, born in Jerusalem sometime around 1948 recalls, perhaps from her own family history, "... in the years around 1948...lots of women were finding roles for themselves in social work—in first aid units, or helping refugees and war orphans..."⁷³ This suggests that women were still

⁷¹ Fleischmann, 109-10. (Italics in original)

⁷² Ibid., 95.

⁷³ Warnock, 37.

active in charitable work even after 1948, but these acts, “rather more ritualistic than hopeful” pale in comparison to the sophisticated charitable societies known before the 1948 war.⁷⁴ One possible explanation for this is that the new host countries of Jordan, Syria, and Egypt quickly shut down those women’s groups that tried to carry on in the diaspora, because, as noted above, the governments were wary of allowing a competing nationalisms to exist among their new populations.⁷⁵ The fact that the neighboring governments saw the women’s societies as a nationalist challenge to their own subjects is testament to the nature of the Palestinian women’s societies, and their significance in affecting change in Palestinian civil society prior to 1948.

The influence of Nasser and his pan-Arabist ideologies stirred the hearts of Palestinian women as well as men. In 1965 the women’s auxiliary of the PLO, the General Union of Palestinian Women was founded. In some ways, because of the charitable work Palestinian women were familiar with, the GUPW was not a great change for them. While they had not been able to organize their societies in recent years, there was, of course, a strong tradition of women doing this kind of work. In other ways, however, the GUPW was a break from the charitable traditions of Palestinian women.

Prior to the GUPW, Palestinian women would not have considered their charitable societies overtly political. At times, like the 1929 women’s conference, politics was the focus, but generally speaking, their work was social relief work and “...was traditionally perceived as a non-political enterprise. Posing no threat to the social and

⁷⁴ Ibid., 144.

⁷⁵ Sharoni, 60-1.

political power structures, it was safe for women in the middle class.”⁷⁶ The organizations were deemed safe because they "were built around women's nurturing role,"⁷⁷ and focused primarily on private sphere activity. Kawar argues that it was the first generation, after 1948, that broke out of the mold of charitable work, and created “new models for how Palestinian women could participate in nationalist politics.”⁷⁸ This was visible, nearly two decades later, with the GUPW. “It was a historic move because it opened up opportunities for women to participate in the struggle for national liberation, side by side with men.”⁷⁹

Hijab Discourse, 1930-1967. The Islamic women’s dress is, in its simplest definition, an expression of modesty. In the modern age, however, the hijab has become the object of debate among feminists, Westerners, universities, and government policy makers. Even among women who wear hijab, its “various forms...signif[y] class, regional background, religion or age. These forms and meanings are fluid...”⁸⁰ Thus, hijab is not universal in its representation, even among those who support it. Whereas secularists have decried the presence of hijab citing it as a tool of women’s oppression, Islamists have decried the lack of hijab, citing it as an indicator of a morally defunct society. Women’s dress has often been co-opted as part of national struggles in Muslim societies. In Marxist Algeria, for example, women were discouraged from wearing hijab,

⁷⁶ Kawar, 5.

⁷⁷ Sabbagh, "Introduction," 7.

⁷⁸ Kawar, 5.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁸⁰ Hammami, “Women, the Hijab and the Intifada,” 25.

based on the Marxist principle that as a modern nation, women and men are equal and do not need such a blatant gender-based marker in their dress. Inversely, the Palestinian Islamist party, Hamas, called for women to wear hijab as a sign of their commitment to the national struggle in the early years of the Intifada (see Chapter III). With the politicization of women's dress, and the use of the hijab as a nationalist symbol during the first Intifada, it is important to discuss hijab in Palestinian society during the years 1930-1967.

Perhaps the most significant point to address regarding hijab in Palestine, as the quotation in the paragraph directly above indicates, is its fluidity. This means there was not a universal way of covering, both in terms of what was covered, and what was used to do the covering. The way Muslim women chose to cover, and the fabrics and styles they used to do so was indicative of many aspects of her identity, not the least of which was her urban or rural upbringing.

For urban Muslim women, veiling was often a requirement if they left their homes, and was a "signifier of urban women's elevated class status and respectability."⁸¹ To maintain this respectability, urban women often wore plain black veils, covered their arms and necks, and as a photograph from the Mandate shows, the veils sometimes partially or completely covered the faces of the women wearing them.⁸² Rural women did cover their hair, but not completely, as urban women did. Rather, they tied their hair back with a kerchief (Arabic: *mandil*), which left their necks open, and often showed the

⁸¹ Swedenburg, 178.

⁸² Fleischmann, cover.

front of their hairline. The scarves were worn with baggy, long sleeved, ankle length dresses that were hand-embroidered with colorful patterns that were indicative of which village the woman came from. It was not unusual for rural women to bare their forearms either, because of their role in manual labor in the fields.⁸³ The purpose in drawing out these differences is to set the stage for what happened during the Intifada. As Hamas grew in popularity, it began to demand a very specific, if uniform, dress code for women. This will be discussed in greater detail in the third chapter.

There does not appear to be empirical evidence regarding the numbers of women in Palestine wearing hijab during this time period, (perhaps indicative of the points detailed below), but there are interviews from women about this time period that lend some ideas to the relative importance of hijab during this time. During the late 1950s, class transformations led to a societal change, where many Palestinian women either took off their hijabs, or simply never started wearing one.⁸⁴ An interview with one Jerusalem woman echoes this observation. She begins by talking about her grandmother. She “...belonged to the last generation of women who never went out unveiled. I think an important factor in the decline of veiling must have been the involvement of the bourgeois women in social work after 1948...none of my aunts was veiled when I was a child.”⁸⁵ Although her explanation of women being unveiled revolves around 1948, Nuha

⁸³ For more on the variations in women’s rural dress prior to 1987, see Shelagh Weir, *Palestinian Costume*, Interlink Books: Massachusetts, 2009. The book features hundreds of photographs of different women’s dress, and highlights some of the differences I have just described.

⁸⁴ Hammami, “Women, the Hijab and the Intifada,” 25.

⁸⁵ Warnock, 37.

also describes a picture of her mother from her mother and father's honeymoon in 1945, where she describes her mother "wearing a skirt that doesn't come past her knees."⁸⁶

Although there is disagreement over when unveiling became prevalent among Palestinian Muslim women- secondary sources, as noted above, point to the late 1950s and the interview just cited indicates the late 1940s- what the sources agree on is the influence of class in this social phenomenon. As a new middle class of women emerged, women no doubt influenced by the leftist and secularist politics sweeping the Arab world, there also appeared to be pressure from within (circles of women) to unveil. In addition to class-based changes in hijab customs, the grassroots nature of this movement should be noted. Wearing or not wearing hijab was not on the agenda of any of the burgeoning political parties.

In another interview, which foreshadows the hijab debate during the Intifada,

Layla, a Gazan woman, reflects on her childhood in the 1960s:

They were starting to dress more freely before the occupation, but when Israeli soldiers come into the camps, walk on the roofs...we have no privacy. Men insist that we protect ourselves from being exposed to the soldiers' gaze all the time by putting on long dresses and covering our heads. Now most women in Jabalya wear long black skirts...and scarves over their heads. Before the occupation it was only in the very south of the Gaza Strip that women were so traditional. I never saw any of my relatives dressed like that when I was a child, but now they all are.⁸⁷

Layla's memory of veiling in Gaza confirms what Nuha experienced in Jerusalem, and shows that the lack of emphasis on hijab existed in many parts of Palestine, prior to the

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 53.

1967 occupation of Gaza. It was not until the Israeli occupation of Gaza that women in Layla's village began veiling. When women began veiling after 1967, classist politics were replaced by patriarchal-nationalist demands.

What is even more significant about Layla's observations is their connection with the new ideals of Palestinian masculinity that the 1948 war brought about, and the further loss of land in 1967 surely reinforced. As their land was under siege and subject to occupation once again, Palestinian men needed to reassess how they would define their masculinity. Displaced men needed to retain their honor, and turned toward their women, and the dress of their women to retain family honor, and defend their "Palestinianness" against the Israeli occupiers.

Conclusion: If Palestinian society and politics can be described as "patriarchal" or male-dominated before 1948, they should be continue to be understood within this framework even after the changes brought by the war of 1948. Although Palestinians suffered a great social upheaval in the face of 1948, because of the nationalization of masculinity, they were unable to break away from the traditions of patriarchy.

Though the work of Palestinian women during between 1948 and 1967 was remarkable, and proved the value of women's participation in the public sphere, they were still boxed-in by the limitations of third world nationalism discussed by Massad. As the next chapter elucidates, the women's committees of the late 1970s sought to break away from this mold, but because of the patriarchal nature of the political system of the time, namely Fatah and the PLO, as well as disagreements among the women's

committees, Palestinian women were still unable to liberate themselves on the women's front.

CHAPTER II: TIDES OF CHANGE: THE WANING OF SCULARISM AND THE WAXING OF ISLAMISM

Introduction: The time period 1967-1987 saw a number of great changes in the history of Palestine. The defining events of this period are the 1967 Arab Israeli war, which rendered the West Bank and Gaza Strip militarily occupied territories of Israel, and the aftermath of this war, including a turn from popular Arab support for Nasser's pan-Arabism. The Palestinian National Movement replaced pan-Arabism as the dominant political ideology in Palestine.

During this time the Palestinian Women's movement also saw great changes. For the first time ever, the benevolent societies and other women's organizations came together with an expressed, deliberate, political agenda. On International Women's Day in 1978, a meeting of activist women established the Women's Work Committee, which sought to mobilize all Palestinian women with the end goal of women's liberation.

The Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups also grew during this time period. The development and spread of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas' precursor, is covered in detail to set the context for Chapter III.

PLO and Fatah 1967-87. During the early years in this period, the secular parties of Palestine saw a rise in popularity. The 1967 war showed the vulnerabilities of Nasser's pan-Arab dream and led to a Palestinian national discourse that demanded the liberation

of Palestine before any plans for Arab unity were enacted.⁸⁸ With this new strategy for liberation, Palestinians turned their attention inward to the PLO. The defeat of 1967 boosted the popularity of the PLO so much so that by the early 1970s most Palestinians viewed it as their legitimate representative body, a great change from the politics of notables discussed in Chapter I.⁸⁹

The PLO faced a number of challenges after 1967. One of Israel's first moves after the war was to exile the PLO. The PLO set up its headquarters first in Amman, but after a clash with the Jordanian military in 1970 it was forced to relocate in Lebanon, where it operated until the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, at which point the PLO turned toward Tunisia for asylum. While the initial ouster from Palestine created many obstacles within the PLO, it also created a leadership vacuum in Palestine, which, as will be shown below, was an opportunity Hamas seized.⁹⁰

During the late 1960s and early 1970s Fatah, along with other Palestinian parties, began preparing for and carrying out attacks against Israel. One of the most noteworthy armed conflicts was the Battle of Karameh in 1968. From Karameh, a small village in Jordan, Palestinian guerillas had launched a number of attacks against Israel. Israeli military entered Karameh, intending to shut down the guerilla cell operating there, but the Palestinian fighters successfully warded off the Israeli soldiers, resulting in a small military victory, and a significant morale victory.

⁸⁸ Sherifa Zuhur, *Hamas and Israel: Conflicting Strategies of Group-Based Politics*. Strategic Strategies Institute: Carlisle, PA, 2008, 22.

⁸⁹ Warnock, 8.

⁹⁰ Zuhur, 21.

Women's Roles. The preparations for armed struggle reveal one of the many ways Palestinian men and women were grappling with the issue of the place of woman, both within the struggle for independence, and within Palestinian society in general. In the late 1960s, as different political factions began opening military training camps, the PFLP camp set a precedent not only by training both men and women, but by training them in the same camps. Many enthusiastic Fatah women wanted to take part in the armed struggle as well, but the party did not have the infrastructure to train them. Um Jihad, one of the leading women in Fatah raised the issue of women's training camps at Fatah's first General Congress, and after lobbying in private meetings with Arafat and other Fatah leaders, the male leadership finally gave way and opened some light artillery training camps for women.⁹¹ As Fatah women began to demand a place in the military struggle, Fatah reluctantly opened separate women's camps, but not until 1970, nearly two years after the PFLP began training women side by side with men.⁹² This dialogue set a precedent for how Fatah would deal with other women's issues in the coming years. Fatah leaders were slow to enact any pro-woman policies, unless pressured by women from within the party, and even then, as this example with Um Jihad illustrates, change was slow to come by.

Feminist scholarship often notes the double-burden of women in nationalist struggles. Not only are women concerned with the national liberation of their people, but they must also fight to guarantee that women will have rights after liberation is won.

⁹¹ Kawar, 36.

⁹² Ibid.

When the struggle for liberation endures for decades, as in the Palestinian case, women are faced with the question of to which front should they allocate their resources? Do they seek national liberation first, women's liberation, or, do they try to find a joint solution?

As noted in the first chapter, Palestinian women have a rich tradition of charitable work, which primarily provided social services, but also served as the basis for political mobilization in national struggles, as seen in the examples of the 1929 women's conference and women's work during the Palestinian Revolt in 1936-39. The period 1967-1987 saw a change in the volume and function of women's committees. As more women engaged in charitable work, each of the major Palestinian political parties adopted a women's arm.⁹³

Two types of involvement in the women's committees emerged during the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the face of so many changes in life under occupation, women's groups, such as the GUPW, emerged. Dajani notes the burgeoning of feminist thought during the 1970's. Women were finally, "questioning of traditional assumptions about women's roles" and challenging what was deemed "acceptable women's behavior." She continues, "Women themselves, newly confident, and radicalized by their growing

⁹³ Fatah, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Communist Party each hosted an auxiliary women's committee, splitting women's involvement across party lines.

involvement and activism in the public sphere, began taking charge and fashioning their own responses –both to their situation as women and to the Occupation itself.”⁹⁴

One of the ways the newly “radicalized” women began to change the place of Palestinian women was by establishing new committees, committees with a clear, political agenda that reached beyond the niceties of charity work. “Perhaps the most significant change involved the gradual shift from a movement that appealed primarily to upper-middle-class women to a movement that was becoming more class-conscious and grassroots-based.”⁹⁵ Their motivation was the belief that if women’s role in the national struggle were strengthened, “they would be able to realize women’s full potential in society.”⁹⁶ As such, by improving the day-to-day standards of women’s lives, especially rural women, eventually women would be able to reach their dual liberation.

Women’s committees slowly began to branch out into rural areas and camps, where they were met with stiff opposition based on conservative cultural values that were strongly opposed to women’s involvement in the public sphere. The women in the committees worked hard to prove, especially to rural and camp men, that the activities they planned were “acceptable” for women, and that the practical skills they would receive, would augment the meager incomes that so many rural families earned. Projects designed by the committee women included sewing, typing, literacy courses, health

⁹⁴ Dajani, 39.

⁹⁵ Sharoni, 68.

⁹⁶ Dajani, 39.

education (which was typically sexual education), and the establishment of nurseries and kindergartens.

As the vocational centers focused on women in camps, they attracted mainly poor, rural women. One way in which women were mobilized was through participation in newly established vocational centers. The centers, most of which were opened in camps in Jordan, focused on teaching women practical skills so they could compete in the job market. For example, typing classes were a common skill taught, and after women completed their courses they could be employed by the PLO offices and serve the revolution by providing administrative aid. Another common skill that was taught was sewing. Women who learned this trade were able to stay home and work, providing them with a meaningful way to be active, without having to go to the front lines with men.⁹⁷ It becomes apparent through these examples that while women were encouraged to participate in the national struggle, it was still within a gender appropriate sphere. Women were provided with domestic skills, so they could serve the national cause, without upsetting cultural norms about what women should and should not do, and where they should and should not be.

The process of different parties and factions adopting women's committees was a prevalent theme from 1967-71, so by the time the PLO was exiled from Jordan, the women's leadership had been almost entirely co-opted by the different factions,

⁹⁷ Kawar, 44.

especially Fatah.⁹⁸ They were united in 1978 under the banner of the Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees (PFWAC).⁹⁹ Although still committed to providing social services, new women's committees were founded with a markedly different political agenda, as Palestinian women became ready and interested in serving the nation.

Some Palestinian men were interested in giving women more political power to serve the national cause. Women in the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), for example, were given leadership positions because the leading men of the DFLP believed that having women with positions of political power was a sign of modernity, an image they believed they needed to advance the cause of Palestinian nationhood in the international arena.¹⁰⁰ The fact that the DFLP pushed so hard to include women in its leadership should not be misunderstood as women's equality. While they did promote women to the ranks of its leadership, the majority of the women involved in the DFLP and other political parties were members of women-only auxiliaries, where it was socially acceptable for women to participate. The DFLP may also have been effective in recruiting women because of its approach to the feminism versus nationalism question. The DFLP believed that Palestine needed the help of all Palestinians to liberate Palestine, and adopted the belief that women must be liberated from the bonds of

⁹⁸ Kavar, 28.

⁹⁹ Islah Jad. "The Demobilization of Women's Movements: The Case of Palestine." Women's UN Report Network. 1-14-09. Accessed www.comminit.cm/en/node/284711, 4-17-09, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Frances S. Hasso, "The 'Women's Front': Nationalism, Feminism, and Modernity in Palestine." In *Gender & Society*. Vol. 12 No. 4 August 1998 441-465. Accessed JStor, 03/2010, www.JStor.org, 442.

patriarchy before they could wage a struggle against the occupation.¹⁰¹ Regardless, the DFLP was exceptional, “among Palestinian nationalist parties and unusual even compared to other 20th century nationalist, class based, and revolutionary movements” because of its large proportion of women in membership and leadership positions.¹⁰²

While the scope of the national work was still confined in terms of gender relations, this period marks an important transition from the charitable work of Palestinian women in the early twentieth century to the roles they took during the Intifada. The national work during the turn of the decade was little more than the traditional women’s work in charitable societies, but by the early 1970s, it was done with a clear and open nationalist message. “The women’s leadership was comprised of operatives who faithfully carried out tasks given to them by the top male leadership.”¹⁰³ As noted above, there were women during this time who wanted to participate directly in armed confrontations, but even those women who were not prepared to go to the front lines supported armed struggle in the early 1970s.¹⁰⁴ Even with the change in motivation for maintaining their charitable works, women were still working under the ranks of men. This would soon change.

The late 1970s marked an important turning point in the women's movement. For the first time, a sector of Palestinian women became concerned with women's rights over

¹⁰¹ Hasso, “The Women’s Front”, 445.

¹⁰² Ibid., 452.

¹⁰³ Kavar, 45.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 99.

national rights.¹⁰⁵ This is not to say to say all Palestinian women became aware of a shared women's agenda. An example of this is the establishment of the Women's Work Committee. This committee was part of the growing national movement and was founded by young students who sought to mobilize different groups within Palestinian society. They believed Israel would not soon renounce its claims on the Occupied Territories, and that existing Palestinian infrastructure was not prepared to handle the realities of the ongoing occupation.¹⁰⁶

In March 1978 there was a meeting of urban, middle class women from Jerusalem and Ramallah who met to discuss how women were going to handle the occupation. This meeting, which was the founding of the Women's Committees Movement, made a groundbreaking change in the women's movement under the occupation. The national movement, under the leadership of men, was firmly committed to armed struggle, and until the 1978 meeting, women, in their service to the nation, had supported this commitment under the men's leadership. At this meeting, however, women threw out this commitment, and instead focused on how they would survive under the occupation.¹⁰⁷ This change in policy is significant because the women at this meeting no longer saw the road to national liberation as strictly following the orders of the male dominated leadership. Rather, women began looking into their own interests (which were not served

¹⁰⁵ Orayb Aref Najjar, "Between Nationalism and Feminism: The Palestinian Answer," in *Women Transforming Politics: Worldwide Strategies for Empowerment*, ed. Jill M. Bystydzienski, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 145.

¹⁰⁶ Hiltermann, 42.

¹⁰⁷ Kawar, 99.

by fighting) and created their own agenda for how they would commit to the national struggle while also committing to serving the interests of women. Additionally, “[n]ationalism is more empowering for women when its focus is on grassroots rather than military mobilization.”¹⁰⁸

This meeting sparked the beginning of a change of women’s discourse in the national struggle. Gender norms became a part of the national agenda during the late 1970s, when leftist-nationalist women began to challenge the status quo.¹⁰⁹

During the 1970s and 1980s, there does not appear to be a strong discourse about the way women dressed. According to one study, in 1984 only 11% of women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip wore hijab.¹¹⁰ In fact, as one scholar notes, “[s]hort skirts and bare heads and arms” were becoming acceptable forms of dress.¹¹¹ Not only were women dressing freely, but also there were not any overt political processes encouraging women to dress more Islamically or more Western. Within the religious community in Gaza, however, the Muslim Brotherhood was active in encouraging women to follow an Islamic dress code. During the late 1970s the Muslim Brotherhood’s outreach committees began to reestablish the importance of hijab in Gazan society, and imbued hijab with new sense of piety and political affiliations, foreshadowing the political platform of Hamas that was yet to come.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Hasso, “The Women’s Front”, 459.

¹⁰⁹ Haaso, “Modernity and Gender”, 503.

¹¹⁰ Hammer, 302.

¹¹¹ Warnock, 65.

¹¹² Rema Hammami, “Women, the Hijab and the Intifada,” 25.

The power of secularist parties began to wane in the 1980s. Challenges brought forth by the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, coupled with the weakening of the PLO, created a vacuum through which then marginal Islamist groups began to change the national discourse by offering a new perspective on Palestinian national goals and new means of achieving these goals.¹¹³ Islamist groups and ideology were not new to Palestine, however. They had a long-standing presence in Palestinian society, as the section below illustrates.

The Rise of Islamism in Palestine. Hamas' arrival into the Palestinian political arena at the outbreak of the Intifada may have appeared spontaneous, but its roots were planted before 1948, with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's expansion into Jerusalem. Since that time, the Brotherhood sought to create a more Islamic Palestine. With decades of social work steeped in Islamic rhetoric, and ultimately a general, societal disenfranchisement with the secular powers at the time (the PLO and Fatah), Hamas was able to break into the political scene, with a Palestine already familiar with Hamas' Islamist ideals.

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928 by an Egyptian named Hassan al-Banna. The movement, which sought to reinforce the Islamic values in Egyptian society, soon spread to other parts of the Islamic world. During the Arab Revolt of 1936-39 the Brotherhood demonstrated its commitment to the Palestinian cause, and eventually the Brotherhood would take hold in Palestine. The first branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in

¹¹³ Mishal Saul and Sela Avraham, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence, and Coexistence*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 14.

Palestine opened in Gaza at the end of World War Two, and shortly after a Jerusalem branch was also established.¹¹⁴ It grew quickly, and by 1947 there were nearly 40 branches and 10,000 registered members. From 1945 to 1948 the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine was largely concerned with social and cultural activities, but after the West Bank fell under Jordanian rule in 1948, they became more involved in political activity, especially with their opposition to the Hashemite throne. This political stance won them seats in the Jordanian Parliament, and this led to the development of a strong social infrastructure in the West Bank.¹¹⁵

The Brotherhood did not fare so well under Egyptian control in the Gaza Strip. This is largely due to the overtly political nature of the Brotherhood in Egypt, which led the Egyptian government to ban and repeal bans on the Brotherhood in Egypt, and by default, the Gaza Strip. When the Brotherhood was banned in 1949, the leaders in Gaza reorganized as a religious educational center, keeping some of the Brotherhood infrastructure viable so that when the ban was lifted from 1952-54, the Brotherhood flourished, attracting a wide range of members, including students and refugees. In 1954, a failed plot to assassinate Egyptian President Gamal Abd al-Nasser resulted in a brutal repression of the Brotherhood, and years of underground Brotherhood activity in the Gaza Strip. While the Brotherhood in the West Bank was able to develop a moderate tone

¹¹⁴ Hroub, Khaled. *Hamas: Political Thought and Practice*. Washington, D. C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2000, 15.

¹¹⁵ Mishal and Sela, 17.

due to its place in open and democratic aspects of the Jordanian governance, the Brotherhood in the Gaza strip developed a militant, underground flavor.¹¹⁶

After the 1967 defeat, the West Bank and Gaza Strip became subject to Israeli occupation, where they remain until today. Immediately after the war, Israel allowed Islamic activities to take place in the newly occupied territories, perhaps as a remedy to the fervent secular nationalist movements taking place among Palestinians. There was also an open border policy between the West Bank and Jordan, which allowed for freedom of movement and ideas, and in the case of the Muslim Brotherhood, propagation of ideologies. Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, the founder and spiritual leader of Hamas, took advantage of the open borders and traveled from his home in Gaza to lead Friday prayers in the West Bank, Gaza, and in Muslim communities within Israel, including Galilee and the Negev, thus reaching Palestinians in all corners of historic Palestine.¹¹⁷

Sheikh Yasin's itinerant preaching was just one part of the Muslim Brotherhood's outreach activities under Israeli rule. At the center of the outreach program in Gaza was building mosques. Mosque building served many functions of the Brotherhood agenda. They were safe from Israeli interference, if not encouraged by Israel as an antidote to the nationalist rhetoric and activities of Fatah and the PLO, and they provided a theatre through which the Brotherhood could propagate their message and mobilize public

¹¹⁶ Mishal and Sela, 18.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

support. From 1967-86 the number of mosques in Gaza doubled from 77-150, and an additional 50 mosques were built from 1986-89.¹¹⁸

The Muslim Brotherhood began pressuring women to wear hijab and jilbab (a loose-fitting, ankle length overcoat they invented as “Islamic dress”) during the 1980s at the Islamic University in Gaza and while they were at work.¹¹⁹ It would not be until the outbreak of the Intifada in 1987 that Gazan women at large would be pressured and harassed into dressing according to the Brotherhood’s standards.

In 1977 Anwar Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem sparked a flow of ideologically motivated students from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank. The visit led to tensions between Egyptians and Palestinians, resulting in a decree which barred Palestinian students from admission into Egyptian universities. As result, there was an influx of students from the Gaza Strip attending universities in the West Bank. Many of the students from the Gaza Strip were self-identified Islamists, and their political views diffused among West Bank students, many of whom, since the defeat of 1967, were already dissatisfied with the inability of the secular-leftist discourse in liberating them.¹²⁰ In this way, there was a grassroots transfer of Gaza’s more socially conservative Islamist ideologies to the comparatively liberal West Bank.

The Islamization of Palestinian society stemmed from the work of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine. This religious revival was only one of the precursor’s that

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 21.

¹¹⁹ Hammami, 25.

¹²⁰ Mishal and Sela, 23-4.

paved the way for Hamas' entrance into Palestinian politics. A change in the tone of Palestinian nationalist discourse, beginning with the defeat of 1967 also created opportunities through which the prototypal Hamas would develop and spread throughout Palestine.

Tracing the development of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West Bank and Gaza Strip reveals the way in which Islamist ideology developed in Palestine beginning in the late 1940s, and how it continued to expand and take hold of Palestinians until the 1980s. As Islamism spread, particularly under the banner of the Muslim Brotherhood, internal debates created divisions, which would ultimately result in the founding of Hamas.

The inner circle of the Brotherhood agreed on one thing: Islam was the vehicle through which Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular, would liberate themselves from the West. The methodology through which this theory would be applied remained in question. There appears to be two schools of thought, in terms of how Islamism would liberate the Palestinians. The first argued that revolutionary Islam was the way to deliverance. This school argued that official power needed to be seized from the government, legally or through the use of violence, and society would be Islamized from the top down. (The 1979 Iranian Revolution is an example of this). The other school, reformist Islam, called for a less violent approach. Through long term institutional planning, especially with regards to education and social action, society would be Islamized from the bottom up. The Muslim Brotherhood founder, Hasan al-Banna embraced reformist Islam (as is evident through much of the Brotherhood's activity in

Gaza, Sheikh Yasin's preaching, and the mosque-building campaigns), but particularly after the Iranian Revolution, which was viewed as a success for revolutionary Islam, the Brotherhood in Palestine began a debate about which strategy would best serve their purpose.¹²¹

The movement for revolutionary Islam eventually won the heart of Sheikh Yasin, although he was certainly a minority among his peers in adopting this strategy. In 1983 he gave secret orders to members of the Muslim Brotherhood to gather firearms, notably from the Israeli black market.¹²² As Hroub notes, this marked the beginning of a period marked by a radical shift in the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology, one in which it developed a confrontational perspective.¹²³ Other evidence of the adoption of revolutionary Islam is seen in the years 1986-87, through the establishment of several paramilitary organizations, including Hamas, and the other leading Islamist party, Islamic Jihad. Another militant Islamist group, Movement for Islamic Jihad, particularly swayed many young Palestinians when it staged an attack on the Israeli military in 1986. The youth, who were feeling "both territorially and generationally neglected by the PLO leadership", admired the Movement for Islamic Jihad's use of militancy.¹²⁴

A broader, regional change in politics also occurred in the late 1970s. As leftist and Marxists movements were failing in the region, the Arab people began looking for new ideologies. With the success of the Iranian revolution in 1979, Islam was the path

¹²¹ Mishal and Sela, 29-30.

¹²² Zuhur, 22.

¹²³ Hroub, 34.

¹²⁴ Zuhur, 26.

many saw as the way to their own national liberation, and Islamist groups began to grow in popularity.¹²⁵

Chapter Conclusion. This chapter discussed the growth of secularism in Palestine, noting its change from pro-Nasserist politics to a Palestine-first orientation. The women's committee movement also grew during the 1970s, demonstrating the growth of secular ideals among the elite, politically active women who founded and ran the committees. At the same time that leftist women brought their ideals to rural Palestine, the Muslim Brotherhood took hold in Palestinian society. This was the beginning of the Islamist movement in Palestine, and paved the way for Hamas' arrival at the beginning of the first Intifada.

¹²⁵ Hroub, 32

CHAPTER III: “THE POLITICIZATION OF DOMESTICITY”¹²⁶ AND REDEFINITION OF SPACE, 1987-1993

Introduction. As the years of Israeli rule wore on, and the brutalities of life under occupation set in, day-to-day activities in the Occupied Territories became tense. Life was so tense that when a car accident involving an Israeli driver and Palestinian victims occurred in December of 1987, a five-year struggle for Palestinian independence began. The first Palestinian Intifada (1987-1993) was marked by economic strikes, armed struggles, and a burst of women’s activism, particularly through women’s work committees discussed in Chapter II.

Within the first days of the Intifada Hamas also emerged, unwilling to let the secular Fatah-led PLO co-opt the Intifada. The arrival of the Islamist Hamas not only changed the nature of the Intifada and Palestinian national politics, but also the place of Palestinian women in society. As this chapter will show, the role of women in Hamas’ vision of an ideal Islamic society countered the image that the urban elite women had for their countrywomen. This chapter also asks whether Hamas ruined this vision, or if it was changed by other factors, contending that Hamas policies, particularly regarding compulsory veiling, were not the end of women’s physical-public participation. Rather, it was the inability of urban women to truly unite with rural women, paired with the failure of men to recognize the public sphere as a woman-appropriate space, that pushed women

¹²⁶ Fleischmann, 10.

out of political participation. When this happened, Palestinian women, within their subaltern counterspheres, developed alternative strategies for reaching the public sphere.

Hamas. In a 1990 publication, Hamas said of the beginning of the Intifada, the Palestinian leadership, “exploited the gains of the *Intifada* by making concessions to American and Zionist claims...Instead of taking their people by the hand and guiding them on the right path, those leaders pulled them onto the perilous ground of international alliances.”¹²⁷ Hamas went on to declare itself a blessing to the Palestinian people, a party that would represent the true aspirations of the Palestinian people.¹²⁸

Although Hamas’ self-history credits itself with orchestrating the Intifada as an Islamist movement by claiming its own secret existence since before December 15th, 1987, it is evident that Hamas did not really exist until the following January.¹²⁹ When the Intifada did break out on December 8th, it became clear to the Muslim Brotherhood that the PLO wanted to co-opt the uprising to restore its popularity among the Palestinian people.¹³⁰

In the early days of the Intifada, the Muslim Brotherhood adopted a policy of jihad against the Israelis, which in turn gave way to internal disagreements. The primary disagreement was a question the Brotherhood had grappled with before, should they turn to revolutionary Islam, or reformist Islam, as an Intifada strategy? The solution was a

¹²⁷ Quoted in Andrea Nüsse, *Muslim Palestine: The Ideology of Hamas*, (Harwood Academic Publishers: Amsterdam, 1998), 63.

¹²⁸ Nüsse, 63.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹³⁰ Mishal and Sela, 35.

compromise, which gave way to the birth of Hamas- the revolutionary arm of the Brotherhood. Hamas would be responsible for keeping the Muslim Brotherhood safe during the Intifada, while the Brotherhood would continue its communal and educational activities.¹³¹

When Hamas came into the political scene, tensions between it and the PLO were nearly immediate. Until the arrival of Hamas, the PLO enjoyed a near-monopoly on Palestinian politics, and was defensive as “Hamas began to compete with the United National Command (the PLO-based Intifada leadership) over the day-to-day agenda of the uprising...”¹³²

One of the most visible ways in which Hamas targeted women was through their dress. The previous chapters have included discussion on the changing dress of Palestinian women throughout the relevant time periods, as well as motivations for the change. During the Intifada women’s dress, specifically wearing a headscarf and *jilbab* (an ankle length overcoat), became highly politicized. Hamas encouraged women to dress in this way to show their political commitment to the national struggle, to stand against Israeli and Western influence, to show respect for the martyrs, and to protect women from Israeli soldiers.¹³³ Their campaign was hugely successful in the Gaza Strip, where, after one year of the Intifada, Gazan women noted that it was “almost impossible” to be

¹³¹ Mishal and Sela, 35.

¹³² Ibid., 36.

¹³³ Hammer, 303.

in public without a headscarf.¹³⁴ But while the Islamists asserted the traditional, private sphere roles of women and Islamic dress, they simultaneously targeted women as political followers and engaged them in public sphere activities.¹³⁵

Birth of the UNLU/ Fatah relations. When the Intifada broke out, the PLO leadership, then stationed in Tunis, knew they needed to get involved. They commissioned the United National Leadership of the Uprising, or UNLU, to be a representative body on the ground that would take charge of the Intifada by organizing boycotts or other aspects of the Intifada.

In the years directly before the Intifada, Palestinians felt a general disconnect with the PLO leadership. The leaders had lived in exile since 1967, and they were well educated and wealthy. This disparity, paired with the worsening conditions inside of the territories created a socio-economic and ideological gap, which was shown above, Hamas was ready to fill.¹³⁶

Gender Discourse. Many Palestinians, men and women, religious and secular, met Hamas' hijab campaign with disdain, but few were willing to fight this issue in the face of the uprising. What is most surprising, however, is the response of rival Fatah, whose secular and somewhat leftist orientation made it a prime vehicle to decry attempts at compulsory veiling. In keeping with their status-quo approach to gender issues, Fatah and the PLO did not comment on the hijab movement until 1989, nearly two years after

¹³⁴ Rema Hammami, "Women, the Hijab and the Intifada," in *Middle East Report*. No. 164/5, May-Aug. 1990. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/stable/3012687> accessed 2-07-11, 25.

¹³⁵ Hammer, 300.

¹³⁶ Nüsse, 95.

the hijab campaign started, and even then, it was indirectly through the UNLU. In the declaration, the 43rd Communiqué, the UNLU stated that women's dress was only a minor issue amidst the greater struggle of the Intifada.¹³⁷ In this belated proclamation, the UNLU subverted the feminist struggle to the national one, by telling Hamas and women alike that worrying about women's dress is insignificant compared to the greater national struggle. Although the Communiqué threatened young men who harass women for not wearing headscarves, it did so in a way that reinforces this subversion. The men were told that it is "unpatriotic" to treat women in this way, and they should not do it on the grounds that it is "unpatriotic," not because of egalitarian rhetoric. Additionally, the same Communiqué appeals to Palestinian women, telling them that the Intifada is not a time for vanity in dress, which extends to using cosmetics. Why did it take the UNLU two years to issue a statement on this issue? As one analyst notes, "It is likely that their own patriarchal and traditional values prevented the leaders from interfering in this issue..."¹³⁸ In the absence of a position on the hijab campaign, and no commitment to action against it, it is difficult to read the UNLU's 43rd Communiqué as anything more than placating words.

Veiling Norms, 1987-1993. As illustrated in Chapters I and II, veiling prior to the Intifada was not a rigid system. Rather, it was a way in which women expressed class, age, or, political affiliations. During the Intifada, Hamas and other Islamist influences were particularly influential in their ability not only to get more women to veil, but also

¹³⁷ Hammer, 304.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

in the way in which women veiled. Take the example of Mujahida and her mother. Her mother, a peasant whose family was dispossessed in 1948, still wears the traditional *mendil* and peasant dress described in chapter I. Whereas this style of dress was passed down from generation to generation, Mujahida decided on an alternative form of Islamic dress- the *jilbab*, an ankle-length coat and invention of the Islamists and a face veil, which left only her eyes visible.¹³⁹

Women's Contributions Part 1: Committees. As established above, at the outbreak of the Intifada the political mobilization of women was seen not as a threat to the gendered social order, but instead as a vital component of the national struggle. Women's involvement in the Intifada manifested itself in many ways. Women took to streets in demonstrations and protests, confronted Israeli soldiers, took over leadership positions in local committees, and transported ammunition. Women were also instrumental in smuggling food and information during curfews, described by Sharoni as "major contribution[s]" to the proliferation of the uprising.¹⁴⁰ Most of these activities are reminiscent of Palestinian women's involvement in the early national emergencies as discussed in Chapter I, particularly the 1936-39 Revolt. It is clear that Palestinian women took part in the Intifada in many possible ways. The different branches of the Women's Work Committees orchestrated many of these efforts.

Although each committee of the WWC was autonomous, during the Intifada they often collaborated for major strikes and demonstrations. They helped organize and lead

¹³⁹ Lybarger, 86.

¹⁴⁰ Sharoni, "Gendering Conflict and Peace," 179.

emerging popular committees in villages and camps. The women's groups and popular committees worked together to provide emergency relief after Israeli raids, visit the families of martyrs, provide material aid where needed, work for prisoners, and to arrange prison visits. Women distributed leaflets and, "discussed politics openly for the first time, and urged people who remained unconvinced to participate in the uprising."¹⁴¹ The Committees also provided services for women participating in the resistance. For example, there were day cares, support networks, literacy campaigns, and community health education.

Suha Hindiyeh, co-founder of the Palestinian Women's Resource Center (now known as the Women's Research and Training Society) explained the importance of these services in a 1989 interview. As Hindiyeh and others sought recruits for the women's movement, the overwhelming response was, "If you want us to be recruited into committees, we have to find somewhere to put our children." Hindiyeh also observed "[t]he other need was that a large number of our women are illiterate, so literacy classes started to open."¹⁴² These services should be understood within the feminist-nationalist framework because Hindiyeh encouraged the public-political participation of women to promulgate the agenda for national liberation, and these "nurturing" and private-sphere services were provided to that end.

¹⁴¹ Hiltermann, 44.

¹⁴² Penny Rosenwasser, *Voices from a 'Promised Land': Palestinian and Israeli Peace Activists Speak their Hearts*, (Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1992), 50-1.

Women's Contributions Part 2: Co-operatives. Another focus of the Committees was to help Palestinians, especially women, achieve economic independence, in certain cases from the occupiers and in others from Palestinian men. To facilitate this process, the Committees created co-operatives for women to participate in. The co-operatives generally included preparing or processing food and manufacturing clothing, or, in rare cases industry such as carving copper.¹⁴³ The co-operatives provide a lucid example of feminist-nationalism in their joint objectives of emancipating Palestinian women from economic reliance on Palestinian men, and in fostering a Palestinian economy independent of Israel.

One well-known co-operative is the Abasan Biscuit Factory. Although this co-operative was actually located in the Gaza Strip, it is representative of other models that took root in the West Bank. Women in Abasan Village used to make biscuits for children at a near by kindergarten, and they decided to expand their production and start marketing their biscuits. The Women's Research and Training Society (the organization Suha Hindiyeh ran) gave the women start up funds. According to Hindiyeh, the women "went on their own to the market to buy a large oven, which is, for the Abasan women, a big step..." Over time, the women turned a profit and paid themselves salaries, in addition to providing foodstuffs made independent of Israel.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Nahla Abdo, "Nationalism and Feminism: Palestinian women and the *Intifada*--No Going Back?" in *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*, ed. Valentine M. Moghadam (London: Zed Books, LTD, 1994), 159.

¹⁴⁴ Rosenwasser, 52.

Scholars remain uncertain as to how successful the co-operatives were in the Palestinian women's struggle. One issue is that the projects did not guarantee greater women's participation in the public sphere.¹⁴⁵ Another concern, Abdo argues, is that it remains to be seen whose interests were better served through this project-- the nation's or women's? Abdo's skepticism is not unfounded. Her interviews revealed widespread apprehension about putting women's issues before the nation. One interviewee stated, "It is very important for us to preserve our culture..." with the implication that putting women above the nation would challenge what defines "Palestinian."¹⁴⁶

Some critics argue that the public/private division does not work with Intifada era activities, largely because of the work of co-operatives. For example, how should the work of Palestinian women, who engaged in communal cooking in times of crisis, be classified? Najjar argues that even though women were engaging in a private sphere activity, they were doing it for public purposes. Other evidence of blurring the boundaries between public and private lies in the use of sewing and embroidery. Although these are typically activities of the private sphere, and are considered to be a form of art, Palestinian women have used these skills to promulgate political agendas, such as embroidery which was used in protest of Camp David.¹⁴⁷

Others have argued that the boundaries were not blurred in co-operatives, because the end result brought women into the public sphere. Hindiyeh contends:

¹⁴⁵ Hiltermann, 46.

¹⁴⁶ Visit to Copper Carving project, June 1990, quoted in Abdo, 161.

¹⁴⁷ Najjar, 147.

Somebody might argue that food-processing projects are also domestic, women's work. But actually when women undertake a food-processing project on premises of their own, in a small factory, it won't be considered a traditional role--because they have to come in contact with merchants to sell the product...and to go into the market to buy the raw materials. They are getting involved with the society as a whole.¹⁴⁸

The co-operatives, in their implicit goal of bringing women's independence from men, should be understood as public sphere activity. The work of committees and the co-operatives were but two examples of Palestinian women's public participation. Although other aspects of the women's movement could be substituted, the purpose of these case studies is to point to the extent that women participated in the public sphere. Recalling Fraser's theory of the subaltern counterpublic, women's work was still affecting public sphere and politic change, and as such should be understood at public sphere participation.

Following the traditional model of charitable societies, urban, upper- or middle-class women founded and established the women's committees and co-operatives, which targeted, as the Abasan Biscuit Factory demonstrates, rural women. In one ethnographer's account of rural Palestine, she notes, "not more than a handful of the 175 women I worked with in the camps and villages had ever heard of the urban women's organizations...and fewer still had made use of their services."¹⁴⁹ So while rural women were collectively involved in the struggle, it appears as though there was a great disparity

¹⁴⁸ Rosenwasser, 51.

¹⁴⁹ Rubenburg, 21.

as to which rural women were actually engaged. Were women gathered from villages close to urban centers for convenience's sake? If more rural women were engaged, would the outcome of the women's movement be different? The following section explores this question, attempting to explain the process through which women left the public sphere during the early years of the Intifada.

"Where have all the women gone?" As the Intifada became institutionalized, women's participation appeared to wane, beginning in the third year of the struggle. Answering, "why?" has been a difficult task. Some have blamed it on the UNLU, while others have suggested that going to the streets to protest did not necessarily mobilize women.¹⁵⁰ Still others blame Hamas, or the Islamist movement more generally.¹⁵¹ Others, such as Leila Hudson, argue that women's participation did not wane, rather, it morphed. Participating in the Intifada, was, according to Hudson, a means through which gender roles were constructed. In this regard, Hudson defined women's participation as "extraordinary" and ambiguous, and most importantly, as a way to, "reassert traditional feminine identity in the end."¹⁵² Because Palestinian women's identity was traditionally defined through work in the domestic sphere, and the Intifada, as Hudson argues, was an opportunity to reinforce the traditional sources of identity, Palestinian women used the patriarchal pressure to create new modes of public and political communication through

¹⁵⁰ Sabbagh, "Introduction," 3.

¹⁵¹ Swedenburg, 193.

¹⁵² Leila Hudson, "Coming of Age in Occupied Palestine: Engendering the Intifada," in *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East: Tradition, Identity, and Power*, eds Fatma Müge Göcek and Shiva Balaghi, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 125.

committee work and their subaltern counterspheres. Thus, although women were participating in the the private sphere, they were still participating in the Intifada and affecting change in the public sphere.

As noted in the introduction, explaining why women's public participation declined during the first Intifada has been a subject of scholarly debate. Sabbagh suggests three trends that have led to the decline of women's participation. First, both the Intifada and US peace talks failed to bring any tangible results or resolutions. A second reason is the rise of fundamentalism with its concomitant forced veiling and mobility restrictions placed on women. Finally, economic stresses, stemming partly from the Gulf War, forced women and families to rely on extended family networks, where patriarchal norms are allowed to flourish.¹⁵³ This thesis suggests two additional trends that contributed to women's declined public participation in the Intifada. The inability of elite and urban women to unite themselves and engage village and camp women in a united women's front, and the refusal of the men in politics to truly acknowledge their women colleagues as equals and enforce policy, which resulted in the failure to redefine the public-political sphere in gender inclusive terms.

The reactions of camp and village women to the urban women is telling of the multiple battles urban women leaders faced just in attempting to bring the women's movement together. Several camp and village women note how urban women would compete amongst themselves, vis-à-vis the factions they were involved with. Janeen

¹⁵³ Sabbagh, 15-6.

recalled, “The women who came from Ramallah were more interested in their factions and getting more members to join, than in the issues. For example, we used to go to the...demonstrations...and these women would shout ‘I brought ten,’ ‘I brought twelve,’” Janeen continued, “Many women in my village were very active during the beginning of the intifada but they didn’t want to be labeled with a faction. The more they saw of the factions, the more they dropped out of political activity altogether...”¹⁵⁴ Another woman, Um Abed, recalls of the factions, “They’ve become very politicized. For example, the Fateh women’s committee will only take care of, support, or deal with Fateh women.”¹⁵⁵ Um Abed also recalled this observation as the primary reason for dropping out of the women’s movement. Her second concern is discussed below.

Many village women often felt that they were the pawns of the urban women. They were expected to do the heavy and dangerous work, while the urban women sat quietly by and coordinated. “Some of the elite women went to the demonstrations but they were never in the front lines.”¹⁵⁶ Or, as Nabela recalled:

The CP [Communist Party] and its women’s union...are just as elitist as every other faction...I couldn’t stand the attitudes and the elitism of the union’s [female] leaders, the hierarchy in the union, the petty in-fighting...During the intifada the[y] tried really hard to recruit me but I refused...because I knew the minute I’m inside, I’ll just be a silent worker cadre who has to keep my mouth shut.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Rubenberg, 225.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 222.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 225.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 226.

Janeen went so far as to accuse urban women of fraud. "...I know for a fact that there was a budget to cover the cost of transportation for village women traveling to demonstrate...But when I traveled, I always paid for my transportation myself. No one ever offered to pay...I know that some of the urban women...simply put the money in their pockets..."¹⁵⁸ Whether or not the insight of these women was fact or fiction, the significance lies in the existence of these perceptions, which undoubtedly erected barriers to getting and keeping rural women involved on the national level.

Issues within the women's movement were only part of the problem Palestinian women faced. The second issue lay in how men defined the public sphere. Their inability to recognize it as an appropriate space for women, (excepting their utilitarian presence in national emergencies) created a backlash for which both the Palestinian women's movement and the Palestinian national movement continue to suffer.

Activist and novelist Sahar Khalifeh conducted interviews with ten Palestinian women participants in the Intifada. She observed a generational divide, where the older women boasted about their contributions to the struggle during the meeting, and the younger women kept quiet. When twenty-something Siham Abdullah, whose mother was present at the meeting, and who shared many stories about her bold actions, was asked about this she responded:

I want to work, and I want to contribute but the situation does not allow for it...I took to the streets during a large demonstration along with many young women, and we all heard one of the boys from our neighborhood saying, "Look at the

¹⁵⁸ Rubenberg, 225.

sluts. They are joining the demonstration in order to show themselves off and to meet men." If our young men were as politically mature as our young women, the intifada would have been much stronger.¹⁵⁹

While it was incumbent upon women to take part in the national struggle for liberation in the Intifada, the response of the young neighborhood boy shows the contradiction women faced. What is also interesting to note, is that in the context this story was shared, there was no distinction made as to whether the verbal insults were used against veiled or unveiled woman, and the boys responsible for the comments were not directly linked to a political affiliation. The women were to understand that they had served their purpose in this national emergency, and as this young boy's comments demonstrate, their participation was taking place in the masculine-dominated political sphere. In other words, women did not belong there anymore.

Further evidence of Palestinian men's refusal to redefine political space is seen in the contradictions that faced the urban activist women. "...regardless of their secular dress, university degrees, and professional employment, within their homes and in relation to the males of authority therein, many [women] are also constrained by the same basic practices, institutions, and discourses that confront the village and camp women."¹⁶⁰ This sentiment, which is from a researcher in Palestine, is confirmed by Palestinian village women, too. "I see the situation of women in this society as quite good...I think

¹⁵⁹ Sahar Khalifeh, "Comments by Five Women Activists: Siham Abdullah, Amal Kharisha Barghouti, Rita Giacaman, May Mistakmel Nassar, Amal Wahdan," in *Palestinian Women of Gaza and the West Bank*, ed. Suha Sabbagh, trans. Nagla El-Bassiouni, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 193.

¹⁶⁰ Rubenberg, 21.

the only problem Palestinian women face is their families.”¹⁶¹ Thus, even the women promoting a vision of women’s participation in the public sphere, are still bound to gendered notions of private and public within their own families and communities.

Um Abed, quoted above, also weighed in on the pressure on women to stay out of the public sphere in her village. In her discussion of why she was no longer active in the women’s committees she observed, “the village has become more conservative and women who leave their homes for any reason are watched very closely.”¹⁶²

During Khalifeh's interview with Siham, two other women joined the conversation. The topic at hand was a double standard that was emphasized by the Intifada. Women typically married men who were politically active, but men did not want to marry women who were politically active because such women were believed to have questionable morals. One of the women, Azza, asserted that the Intifada was not enough to change women's place in Palestinian society. For this change to take place, she argues, there must first be a change in values.¹⁶³ The change in values, Azza suggests, also applies to redefining the public sphere. Indeed, the public sphere is "valued" as the domain of men, and Palestinian men reaffirm this value by punishing women who do not also share it through name-calling and refusal to marry women who violate this standard.

The other woman in the conversation, Khawla, also chronicled the contradictory messages female participants face:

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 37.

¹⁶² Rubenberg, 222.

¹⁶³ Khalifeh, 194.

In the media, on television, women's praises are sung, but in the street and neighborhood the situation is different. Here women's political activities are not respected...[R]oughly 30 to 40 percent of the general population is politically mature. The remainder, including the young generation of men currently in universities, have not changed their values.¹⁶⁴

Khawla's observations also point to the need to revalue and redefine the public sphere to encourage and allow women's continued engagement in the Intifada. Each of the observations from these young Palestinian women illustrates why young women have turned away from political activism. The attitudes of young men, protecting "their" sphere have forced Palestinian women out of the public-political sphere and have forced them to find alternative methods of expressing their political voices. Of course, these examples could also be interpreted as men not wanting women to be politically active, whether in the public or private sphere. One more example from Siham will demonstrate that this is not the case.

One day, as Siham was bathing, her mother rushed into the bathroom and commanded Siham to cover herself with a towel. Israeli soldiers were outside looking for some men that Siham's mother was hiding. Siham pretended to bathe as the soldiers searched the entire house, except the bathroom, where she "protected" the Palestinian men from the Israeli soldiers. When Khalifeh asked Siham if she thought this was more daring than joining in the demonstrations, Siham replied, "No this is a more acceptable form of political activity because it took place in the house and not the public sphere

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 195.

where women are not easily accepted...if I am seen at night in the street returning from a political meeting, people might question my reputation."¹⁶⁵

This last example from Siham articulates a strong, if optimistic message. Like the women of the Revolt, Palestinian had politicized the traditionally feminine, domestic sphere, and embraced their traditional roles as protectors and mothers, to serve the nationalist cause. Even if men did not let the women into the public sphere physically, women would still leave their mark in the sphere.

Conclusion. This chapter has outlined the rise of Hamas in conjunction with the outbreak of the Intifada, with a particular emphasis on women's activity during the Intifada. The nature of women's involvement at the beginning of the Intifada was explained, and the demise of public sphere activity of this nature was noted, thus presenting the question, what happened to Palestinian women and the Palestinian women's movement during the Intifada? Through an analysis of interviews with and ethnographies of Palestinian women, this chapter suggested two new explanations for the failure of the Palestinian women's movement. First, the urban-based Palestinian women's movement failed to rally and unite with rural and camp women, and second, Palestinian men refused to redefine the public sphere as a gender inclusive space. Thus, women's participation in the Intifada was a situation where Palestinian women were only allowed into the public sphere in the face of a national emergency, but were pushed back out after

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 195-6.

men decided that the women served their purpose. Women responded to this by reclaiming the private sphere and politicizing their domestic space.

CONCLUSION

Chapter I discussed charitable societies as the basis of the modern Palestinian women's movement. Through these societies, elite Palestinian women were able to work outside of the home and provide services, typically to poor, rural Palestinian women. The other public sphere involvement of Palestinian women was confined to national emergencies, where women were not only "allowed" but encouraged to participate in the public sphere. This trend continued throughout the twentieth century, as demonstrated in chapters II and III.

Chapter II discussed the rise of Islamism in Palestinian society as well as the rise of the women's movement particularly through women's committees. Paradoxically, at a time when Palestinian women were noted for having the most freedom in the public sphere, the Islamist movement, which ultimately sought to restrict women's public sphere activities, gained the most popularity. Although the women's participation in the public sphere was no longer restricted to the charity work of the upper echelon, it was still classist in that middle- and upper-class women dominated the decision making infrastructure of the women's movement.

The final chapter surveyed the rise of Hamas, but emphasized women's contributions to the Intifada in the early years and posited explanations for why women were ultimately ousted from the public sphere. As the Intifada waged on and the women's leadership fragmented, large masses of rural women, who already faced limited

mobility because of the conservative nature of rural Palestine, realized that the urban women leaders would not be able to lead them to victory in either of their struggles-feminist or nationalist.

May Nassar said, "Because our society is a male-dominated society, one can't expect women to go down into the streets in the same numbers as men. When this society becomes less patriarchal, we will see more women in the streets."¹⁶⁶ Despite Palestinian women's persistence, strength, and organized efforts, the public sphere, opened to them for a brief moment, was once again shut. The development of the public and private sphere dichotomy was not new to Palestinian society. Fleischmann showed that during this same time, Palestinian women were gaining greater autonomy from Palestinian men, that is, until the arrival of the British in 1920. British educational policies encouraged the return of Palestinian women to the private sphere.

This essay also explored the relationship between gender and nationalism, demonstrating that the national emergency in the form of the Intifada necessitated that women's awareness of women's issues would take place. Further, it recalled the feminist criticism of nationalism by showing that Palestinian nationalism is constructed in masculine terms.

By highlighting the rich past of Palestinian women's political involvement, it is little surprise that Palestinian women became so vocal and active in the uprising. The Intifada changed women's perceptions of themselves, and men's perceptions of women.

¹⁶⁶ Khalifeh, 210.

Women saw themselves as capable and as equal participants, and men often welcomed their presence in the public sphere. As the Intifada progressed, however, men's perceptions of women changed again. This time, men created resistance for women to get involved publicly. As a result, women also began to question their place in the public sphere.

While women were active in the public sphere, they engaged in a variety of activities. This thesis focused on the contributions of women's committees and co-operatives. Both case-studies exemplified the extent to which women were politically involved, and the motivation and spirit with which they were involved. The committees and co-operatives also typified the ways in which Palestinian women actualized feminist-nationalism, by serving both women's liberation and national liberation simultaneously.

In the final section, this thesis showed that women's activism itself was not the issue that many Palestinian men opposed. Rather, it was women's strong presence in the public sphere. Had women worked to redefine the space as gender neutral, in addition to redefining their roles as women, I contend that women would not have been pushed out of the public sphere.

However, the elasticity of public and private sphere definitions provides a glimmer of hope for Palestinian women. Their ability to act politically and publicly from within the domestic sphere showed they will not be quiet. But many questions remain unanswered.

Are Palestinian women's lives today better or worse as a result of the Intifada? Are Palestinian women still fighting for women's liberation? Based on a 2000 women's conference in Ramallah, it is clear that at least some Palestinian women are still looking for the balance between feminist and national liberation.¹⁶⁷ But, if the second Intifada revealed anything about women, it is that they are still fighting for recognition in the public sphere. In direct contrast to women's participation in the first Intifada, the second Intifada saw little public participation from women. Some have argued that this is tied to the absence of any civil society activity during the second Intifada, noting that there is a direct correlation between occurrences of civil society in the public sphere, and the participation of women in the public sphere.¹⁶⁸

The rise of NGO's in the West Bank offers more insight into the role of women today. The "NGO-ization" of the West Bank has co-opted the women's movement, taking issues of "collective concern" and transforming them "into projects in isolation from the general context in which they arise, without consideration of the economic, social and political factors affecting them." Further, the process has changed causes for social change into "'project[s]' with a plan, timetable, and a limited budget, which is 'owned' and used by a small professional elite for the purpose of accountability vis-à-vis

¹⁶⁷ Penny Johnson and Eileen Kuttab, "Where have all the Women (and Men) Gone? Reflections on Gender and the Second Palestinian Intifada," in *Feminist Review*, Winter 2001, no. 69, 21-43. Accessed www.jstor.org 03/05/09, 39. The title of the conference was "The Women's Movement and the Current Situation: Towards Integrating Nationalism and Feminist Agendas."

¹⁶⁸ Johnson and Kuttab, 24.

foreign donors.”¹⁶⁹ In other words, foreign donors, who may or may not be concerned with the best interests of Palestinian women, dictate change for Palestinian women.

The future of the Palestinian women’s movement is uncertain at this time, but this thesis has shown that until women can first and foremost unite themselves, in particular with regards to the urban-rural divide, they will not be able to liberate themselves from the chains of patriarchy, or the Israeli occupation. In addition to uniting themselves, women in Palestine also face the challenge of redefining political space so they may be welcome in the political sphere at all times.

¹⁶⁹ Islah Jad, “The Demobilization of Women’s Movements: The Case of Palestine.” Women’s UN Report Network, 1-14-09. Accessed ww.comminit.cn/en/node284711 4-17-09.

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