

PALESTINIAN WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES AND FEMINIST ACTIVISM: MOBILIZING UNDER
NEOLIBERAL, NEOPATRIARCHAL, AND COLONIAL REALITIES

by

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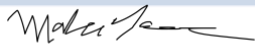
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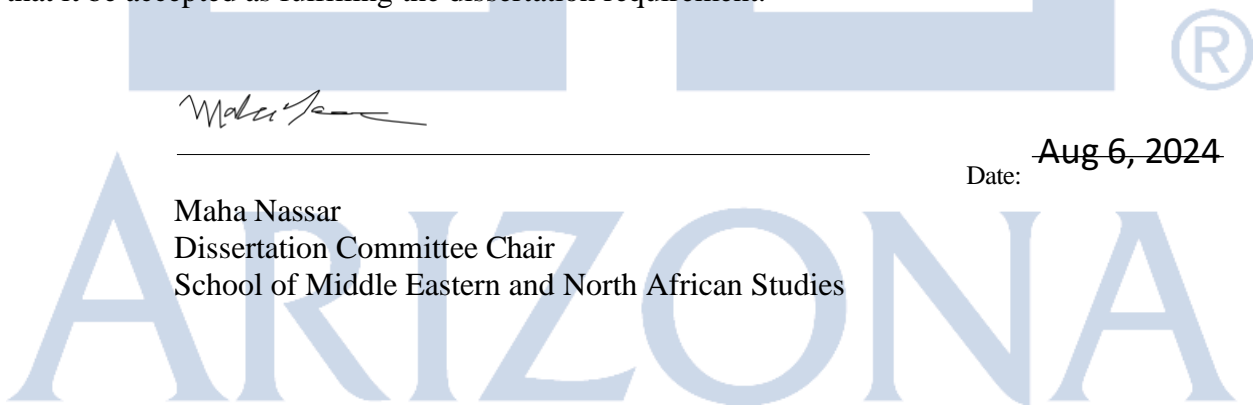
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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We respectfully acknowledge the University of Arizona is on the land and territories of Indigenous peoples. Today, Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized tribes, with Tucson being home to the O'odham and the Yaqui. Committed to diversity and inclusion, the University strives to build sustainable relationships with sovereign Native Nations and Indigenous communities through education offerings, partnerships, and community service.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines current Palestinian women's personal and collective social and legal experiences as women living under Israel's military occupation and a system of settler colonialism. The Israeli occupation of the Palestinians impacts women disproportionately through its policies and restrictions on Palestinian ways of life, culture, and tradition, as well as through its enhancement of patriarchal tendencies in an already conservative and traditional society. Using qualitative interview data and primary and scholarly sources, this study provides two other important analyses. First, it examines the limits of Palestinian women's and feminist activism due to their inability to reconcile various feminist perspectives and overcome their structural weaknesses as a result of the international donor-funded NGO model. Second, it sheds light on the specific ways that the occupation enhances patriarchal tendencies in Palestinian society, as evidenced through the behavior of the PA, Hizb ut Tahrir, clerics and tribal leaders, and lawyers in defaming, threatening and preventing women from attaining greater social and legal progress. I argue that while Palestinian feminists and women's activists in the West Bank and East Jerusalem face extremely difficult socio-political barriers in their fight to advance women's legal and social rights, part of their struggle can be traced back to weaknesses in the movement itself. I consider Ṭāl'āt's model of radical, independent and feminist activism as a possible alternative to current methods of mobilization. I also recognize that the almost impossible social and political conditions that Palestinian activists work in are further exacerbated by the colonial oppression that Palestinians face and the neoliberal, capitalist system (Mohanty, 2013). Lastly, within the context of the occupation and settler colonialism (Ihmoud, 2022), the Palestinian Authority is not committed to the social or political emancipation of women and has failed to advance women's social and legal status in Palestine.

INTRODUCTION

My interest in conducting this study partially stems from my own life and experiences as a researcher, woman, and mother. I lived in Jerusalem and the West Bank for twelve years, first between 2007 and 2017 and again between 2021-2022 and 2023-2024. I speak fluent Palestinian Arabic, am married to a Palestinian, and have Palestinian in-laws. I am in a unique position as someone who is not exactly an insider, but who is not completely an outsider either. During my time in Palestine, I struggled with how to balance my Western-informed views of gender roles and behavior with what is socially and culturally expected from women and mothers in Palestine. Through a process of reflection—both self-reflection and reflection of what I observed living in Palestine, I not only learned how to respect different understandings of gender roles, but I also came to realize that Palestinian women were also changing their expectations and visions of what their roles should be. I am aware of my positionality as a white American researcher. In some ways, my background and position could make it harder to conduct this research. However, because I spent so many years living, studying, and working in Jerusalem and the West Bank, and because I have been involved in daily and community life, I have observed multiple facets of their experiences, including social, political, and religious restrictions and multiple levels of oppression.

Being both an insider and outsider has also helped me in the sense that Palestinian women are more likely to speak to me about certain realities they face because I am not Palestinian. Some women feel that they can be more honest with me because I am not from the society that they worry would judge them. Several of my interlocutors told me that the feelings, ideas, and details they shared with me were not things they would share with their fellow Palestinian friends because it was not socially appropriate to discuss or “complain” about

women's responsibilities as homemakers, workers, and mothers, domestic violence, or relationship problems with their husband. Many Palestinian women told me that if they discussed problems with their husbands with other women, they would be judged by those women and would be blamed for their problems. This is changing to some extent, with younger people more willing to discuss these problems openly and to be in a relationship with shared responsibilities. Nonetheless, it is still common for women to hold the wife solely responsible for the success or failure of a marriage, the family's well-being, as well as children's life and academic success. Because of these social expectations, it can be difficult for women to open up about real issues that impact their well-being. I strove to build trust with the women I spoke with and made a huge effort to listen, observe, and learn from them. Meanwhile, women who were feminists and/or worked in a women's rights or social NGO were not hesitant at all to depict the sometimes very harsh reality that Palestinian women face in society, and especially from the Israeli occupation.

Through this research, I have made a concerted effort to tell their stories and illustrate their beliefs and attitudes about women, gender, and the Israeli occupation. In doing so, I have attempted to faithfully represent the opinions, desires, and wishes of the women who participated in this study. When possible, I followed up with some of my interlocutors to clarify and confirm or disconfirm some of my findings and conclusions in a process called "member checking" (Birt, 2016; Candela, 2019).

Why This Study

This study draws from theories in global south feminisms (GSF) (Mohanty, 2003), Middle Eastern feminisms (Hyndman-Rizk, 2020; Khamis, 2019; Skalli, 2014), anticolonialism and de-colonialism (Elia, 2017; Ihmoud, 2022) to both consider women's everyday social,

political, economic, and personal lived experiences as women under occupation and examine and interpret new and current challenges and collective strategies the women's movement is engaging in to meet women's social needs and oppose patriarchy and occupation under the umbrella of neoliberalism. The goal of the study is to understand the social, political, and economic barriers facing women, but also the complex and intertwined factors that limit the women's movement from advancing its goals of great gender equality, modification of legislation relating to women and family matters, greater women's representation in all spheres of society, a change in attitudes about gender and family violence, and the end to the occupation.

While the data in this study focuses on the women's movement work in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, it also includes data about the online feminist movement *Tāl'āt* which was established in 2019 by Palestinian women living in the 1948 borders (more commonly known as Israel), though its protests reached cities in the West Bank and Europe as well. By examining various in-person and online Palestinian feminist strategies and women's lived experiences, this dissertation interrogates the limits and possibilities of women's social advancement, political participation and national liberation under occupation and subject to and part of the neoliberal environment.

For this study, the phrase 'women's movement' is defined broadly as any institutional, political, social, independent, and/or collective organizing around the social, economic, and legal challenges and limits women face under a system of patriarchy enhanced by the Israel occupation and its impacts. This includes women's social and legal NGOs, as well as coalitions that were established to address important gender-related issues, laws, and policies. For the privacy and safety of my interlocutors, pseudonyms are used for individuals and the names of women's NGOs are not used.

While other studies have specifically looked at isolated components of the Palestinian women's movement such as the NGO-ization and professionalization (Kutab, 2012; Jad, 2008) of the women's movement after Oslo, specific feminist movements such as Ṭāl'āt (Saba, 2023; Stagni, 2024), analysis of the marginalization of Palestinian women's political participation (Hawari, 2019; Aboudi, Ayaseh, and Abu Ilrob, 2021), and Hizb ut Tahrir's war on social and legal advancement for women (Hattab & Abualrob, 2023), no studies to date provide a larger picture of the neoliberal environment that the Palestinian women's movement is working under to draw a broader analysis of how these neoliberal policies have created nearly impossible conditions for women to gain stable and permanent social and legal advancement. Through global capitalism and a desire to monopolize power, neoliberalism focuses on the marketization of individuals and services and favors financial gain over human rights and justice (Johnson, 2019). Neoliberal logic relies on and creates "...an autonomous, utilitarian, self-maximizing subject who acts as the individual agent that participates in markets, drives them forward, and ensures, on a collective level, their auto-regulation (Haddad, 2012)." This economic mentality impacts how people act, view success, and treat one another and promotes an individualistic and personal gain philosophy on life. In a historically collective society like Palestinian society, this overarching economic system has changed the very fabric of Palestinian society and created a situation where people are more focused on surviving financially or becoming wealthy than they are in continuing collective grassroots efforts to gain national liberation and freedom from a paralyzing military occupation and colonialism.

This study sheds light on how both state and non-state actors work within the capitalist neoliberal sphere to dominate, control, oppress, and commodify Palestinian livelihoods to gain and/or remain in power. Specifically, in this capitalist neoliberal environment, the PA has

become more authoritarian in its behavior by silencing and surveilling Palestinians, and working with Israel to subordinate Palestinians who oppose it or the occupation. Israel, to keep its supporters' and investors' pockets full, works hard to portray Palestinians as barbarians and terrorists and Israel as a beacon of democracy and an economic powerhouse in the Middle East. This emboldens the narrative that Israel's security and very existence is in the utmost danger and must be protected. By creating a security need and stakeholders in various military and security technologies, Israel gains economic support and power because everyone except the Palestinian benefit from the economic proceeds of the utilized military and security technology. Israel relies on private companies to restrict, surveil, imprison, control, and engage in violence against Palestinians to separate itself from the burden and responsibility and prove Israeli dominance and Palestinian inferiority (Johnson, 2019). Lastly, the impotency of the PA to achieve a sovereign Palestinian state, its corrupt behavior, and its coordination with Israel to surveil and control the Palestinian people, have allowed for alternative ideologies to enter the scene and gain the support of the Palestinian public. This can be seen in Hamas's grassroots and social activist mobilization and in Hizb ut-Tahrir's active engagement in political, social, and gender issues impacting women and other marginalized groups. The PA's corruption has allowed Islamists, Salafist, and other groups to gain popular support, but these alternatives to the PA do not help the women's movement.

Even though this study attempts to paint a broad picture of the state of the women's movement in terms of structure, ideology, and mobilization, it draws on the micro-level data by examining women's personal and lived experiences as women, as activists, and as Palestinians to inform the larger macro understandings of the wider struggles Palestinian women face as they collectively fight for national and social liberation. Within this framework, this study provides

two other important analyses. First, it examines the limits of their feminist activism due to their inability to reconcile various feminist perspectives, work together against patriarchy, and overcome their structural weaknesses as a result of the international donor-funded NGO model. Second, it sheds light on the specific ways that Israel's occupation serves as a tool of neoliberalism that enhances patriarchal tendencies within Palestinian society. This is evidenced by the behavior of the PA, Hizb ut-Tahrir, conservative critics, and lawyers who abuse, threaten, and prevent women from achieving greater social and legal progress. I argue that Palestinian feminists and women's activists in the West Bank and East Jerusalem face almost impossible conditions in their fight to advance women's legal and social rights. This is due not only to the current neoliberal environment that enhances systems of oppression but also to weaknesses in the movement itself given its international funding and NGO focus. Ultimately, the weaknesses in the women's movement and its failure to achieve women's social and legal rights can be linked to colonial and neoliberal economic approaches and realities. While the online feminist movement *Tāl'āt*'s model of mobilization has not caught on in the West Bank at this time, it could provide a possible alternative model or alternative characteristics of feminist activism and mobilization. Lastly, this dissertation argues that within the context of the occupation, settler colonialism (Ihmoud, 2022), and neoliberalism (Haddad, 2012), the PA, despite being the governing body of the Palestinian people with the responsibility for the well-being and rights of its citizens, is not committed to the social or political emancipation of women and has failed to advance women's social and legal status in Palestine by engaging in oppressive, discriminatory, and patriarchal practices.

With the increased political marginalization of Palestinian women and youth and the continued political stagnation following the 1993 Oslo Accords, independent social movements

and citizen journalists have emerged on the social media scene to voice their opinions and highlight the socio-political challenges that Palestinians are confronting. One of these youth-led movements, Ṭāl'āt, is a decolonial online radical feminist movement that was most active between 2019 and 2022. According to its social media posts, it attempts to align the issues of women's rights and safety with the Palestinian national liberation struggle (Stagni, 2024). While this study does not focus on Ṭāl'āt specifically, the group's insistence that "Palestine as a feminist issue" serves as an example of one feminist strategy that relies on, but also expands, the historical Palestinian women's movement's agenda to prioritize women's issues and safety while simultaneously criticizing colonization and occupation and working towards national liberation (Saba, 2023; Stagni, 2024). Therefore, the first part of my study highlights individual women and feminist activists' experiences as women under occupation, the current struggles of women's activism in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and the criticisms of women's mobilization from other Palestinian women. Moreover, in acknowledging the critiques of the women's movement from various actors, it considers how Ṭāl'āt's calls for independent, grassroots organizing around a politically independent agenda that prioritizes feminist values and the end of colonization may be the answer to the critiques of the current NGO-ization (Jad, 2003) and depoliticization (Stagni, 2024) of the women's organizing. At the same time, it interrogates why Tala'at has not taken hold in a stronger, more tangible way in the West Bank. In doing so, it highlights disagreements between Palestinian women about feminist priorities and ways of mobilization.

Another aspect of this study focuses on how patriarchal forces such as the PA and Hizb ut-Tahrir actively attack and limit feminist activists and women's organizations. It draws attention to the challenges that Palestinian women and collective movements have faced in their efforts to modify legislation relating to personal status and family protection, change attitudes

about violence against women, and increase women's representation in decision-making positions in the social, political, and economic spheres. In digging deeper into the experiences of Palestinian feminist activists, this study offers a more nuanced perspective suggesting that, in addition to internal differences among Palestinian women about how to reach their feminist goals, patriarchal forces enhanced by the occupation have contributed to a period of regression in the women's movement. These forces include increased attacks on women's organizing by the ultra-conservative Hizb al-Tahrir group, the failure of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to protect women's organizations from such attacks, and the PA's refusal to work with women's groups in confronting the ongoing repression of the Israeli occupation. It is argued that PA is not committed to both the social and political emancipation of women. Specifically, the PA has failed to advance women's social and legal status in Palestine by not modifying existing discriminatory legislation, and by engaging in oppressive and patriarchal practices.

The regression of women's progress also stems from divisions among secular women and between more secular and more religious women. These divisions have limited the ability of the women's movement to reach, influence, and convince both men and women that women's oppression and lack of social and legal rights must be given the same urgency as the fight for national liberation. At the same time that Palestinian women's activists in Jerusalem and the West Bank are experiencing attacks and facing barriers to their work, Ṭāl'āt has been using online spaces to draw attention to issues of violence and abuse, occupation, and political stagnation and mobilization of women in several cities over historic Palestine to demonstrate. The establishment of Ṭāl'āt suggests that there are major disagreements about how Palestinian feminism and women's activism against patriarchy and occupation ought to be conducted. Some Palestinian women are not convinced that the women's movement has been successful thus far

and are attempting to redefine the priorities and ways of mobilization. Lastly, this study reveals that there are layers of contradictions in the women's activism and mobilization examined in this study that may seem counterintuitive. However, Palestinian women must work on several fronts to reach their goals while also remaining partners to their fellow Palestinian men.

Research Questions

In this study, I explore the experiences of women from diverse backgrounds to shed light on the larger systems of oppression present in their lives, the variety of ways that feminism is practiced and conceptualized, and how feminist strategies are limited but also adapted to fit their lived realities even as they face crippling, complex, and interconnected barriers.

My research questions are as follows:

1. What are women's individual and collective lived experiences as Palestinian women living under Israeli occupation?
2. How do Palestinian women understand the connections between feminism, occupation, gender equality and women's roles in Palestinian society?
3. What are women's experiences working in and/or participating in women's NGO activities/workshops. How do current strategies of the women's movement as well as philosophical differences about feminist priorities and strategies of mobilization impact the effectiveness of feminist activism as a larger socio-political force?
4. What are the major factors and actors that limit the Palestinian women's fight for greater rights, representation, and gender equality? How do larger systems of oppression such as neoliberalism, occupation, patriarchy, religious conservatism work to limit women socially, politically, and economically?

Roadmap

This study starts by offering a description of the social and political contexts that Palestinian live in so that the reader can better understand the connections between the data, analysis, and conclusions. It first provides an overview of the social and political context of the West Bank and East Jerusalem in terms of how the Israeli occupation impedes and affects Palestinian culture and ways of life. Then it moves on to offer a short summary of feminism and women's rights work in the Palestinian context to illustrate the diversity of ideologies and ways of mobilization. The next sections offer basic descriptions of the Palestinian Authority, the right-wing Islamist group Hizb ut Tahrir, and the Israeli occupation to ensure the reader understands where these entities come from and how they impact Palestinian women and their activism. The first chapter is the methods section which explains the methodology and methods used to conduct this study. It includes the theoretical framework, and descriptions of the research timeline, recruiting methods, interlocutors, data sources, and data analysis. The second chapter offers a literature review that includes a brief history of the Palestinian women's movement from the 1920s until the Oslo Accords including the socio-political factors that influenced the women's movement, women's attitudes and priorities, and ways of mobilization. This helps the reader understand how current women's activism came to be what it is today. It also includes a description of Tāl'āt and the social, political, and legal contexts in which women live and work and that influence their experiences and activism. Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 are the data and results chapters. Each chapter focuses on a specific aspect of the data. Chapter 3 provides more context of the Israeli Occupation and its impacts on Palestinian women. Chapter 4 focuses on women's social experiences in Palestinian society and how they are impacted by neopatriarchy as well as women's conceptualizations of feminism and how these relate to women's realities. Chapter 5 illuminates women's current women's activism and its criticisms, limitations, and possibilities,

and provides a more detailed description of Ṭāl'āt and how some of its characteristics may provide answers to the shortcomings of current women's NGO activism and mobilization. Chapter 6 lays out the other socio-political barriers to feminist activism and expanded social and political rights for Palestinian women. The last chapter is the conclusion chapter which provides the major outcomes of this study based on the data collected and corroboration through other scholarly sources.

Background

Social and Political Context for Palestinian Women

This research was carried out in Jerusalem and surrounding villages, Bethlehem and surrounding villages, Hebron, and Ramallah. The layered socio-political landscape facing the Palestinian interlocutors reveals a host of challenges and burdens, but also pockets of strength and hope for women. A brief description of the current socio-political realities for Palestinian women will set the stage for understanding the social and political context that the interlocutors live in and to understand this study more broadly.

The West Bank

Palestinians are Indigenous to the land, but they are living under the state of Israel, either as second-class Israeli citizens, in Jerusalem with limited rights as non-citizens or in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as occupied subjects in a flailing and non-existent Palestinian state.

Palestinians in the West Bank are currently living under the longest-standing military occupation in recent history which started in 1967 when Israel occupied the West Bank (along with the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem). This move has allowed Israel to control the Palestinian population and to transfer Israeli citizens into the West Bank, where they have established hundreds of

settlements. As of 2022, there are 199 settlements and 220 outposts in the Occupied West Bank. According to Israel, 9.6% of the West Bank is labeled “settlement areas of influence” (Owda, 2023). The presence of these settlements not only takes land away from a future Palestinian state, but also severely limits the expansion of cities and suburbs for Palestinian residents and cuts off the continuity of movement between major Palestinian cities such as Hebron, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Nablus. The bypass roads that Israel has built are meant to make it easy for Israeli settlers to drive between settlements and between settlements and Jerusalem. Palestinians are generally restricted from using these roads which further complicates Palestinian’s movement between towns and cities and significantly lengthens commutes (Btselem, 2017).

Israel controls Palestinian movement into Israel as well as throughout the West Bank through army patrols and the presence of 175 permanent checkpoints (Amnesty International, 2023). The combined presence of settlements and checkpoints severely limits Palestinian economic, social, health, and education development in the West Bank (World Bank, 2023), which in turn lengthens their commute times, prevents children from reaching school on time or at all, places sick and injured people in danger when they cannot reach health facilities promptly, and prevents many women from being able to work in areas that require travel through checkpoints (OCHA, 2022).

In addition to settlements and checkpoints, many Palestinian communities live very close to or at the site of the separation barrier. Israel began building the barrier in 2002, claiming it is for security purposes. The barrier is not built on the 1949 Armistice Green Line which is the internationally recognized border between Israel and the West Bank; rather, eighty-five percent of the barrier runs inside the West Bank. The area between the Green Line and the barrier is

called the ‘Seam Zone.’ At this time about 65% of the route is complete, but once it is fully completed, the barrier will eat up 9% of land in the West Bank including East Jerusalem. Approximately 150 communities living in the ‘Seam Zone’ are cut off from their land, crops, and flocks and require special permits to be able to access them (Btselem, 2017; OCHA, 2022). In and around Qalqilya, the barrier almost fully surrounds Palestinian towns and communities (B’Tselem, 2008). The barrier significantly impedes Palestinians’ right to movement and ability to have an interconnected nation in which people from various areas in the West Bank can visit one another or engage in trade.

Jerusalem

Palestinians living in Jerusalem have either a Jordanian passport and an Israeli permanent residence card or Israeli citizenship. Palestinians with permanent residence cards face strict monitoring of their movement and living spaces because if they live outside of the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem for a certain number of years whether in the West Bank or abroad, they are in danger of losing their residency (B’Tselem, 1997). The policy of physically dividing Palestinians and assigning them multiple types of identification serves as a tactic to make Palestinians feel insecure in their living environments and to pressure residents to leave (B’Tselem, 2019). This is made even more difficult by the fact that there are few options for Palestinian families to build or rent in Jewish-majority areas. The racist policies of the Jerusalem municipality favor Jewish areas in terms of offering more services to neighborhoods and building housing. Most of the construction in Palestinian areas is done by private contractors whereas housing for Jewish residents is often provided through a government program (B’Tselem, 1997). Because of building restrictions and a lack of real estate and buildable land for Palestinian residents, thousands of Palestinians have been forced to build illegally or rent or

buy homes on the West Bank side of the wall but still in the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem (Reliefweb, 2014). These areas are not municipally planned and suffer from a lack of basic services, but they are significantly cheaper than areas on the Israeli side of the wall (Ibid). Only 15% of Jerusalem is zoned for residential buying for Palestinians even though they make up 40% of the city's population (B'Tselem, 2019). According to a B'tselem report:

“In any case, the municipality consistently avoids drawing up detailed urban building plans (UBPs) – a prerequisite for receiving building permits – for Palestinian neighborhoods. As a result, Palestinian communities in East Jerusalem suffer an extreme shortage of housing, public buildings (such as schools and medical clinics), infrastructure (including roads, pavements, and water and sewage systems), trade services and recreational facilities (Ibid).”

These examples of discrimination, control, and erasure are only a small sample of the complexity of life and discrimination that Palestinians living in Israel, Jerusalem, and the West Bank face.

The Diversity of Feminism Among Palestinian Women

There are numerous ways that women take action to gain more rights and access to public spaces, gain more power at home, and conceptualize feminism or women's rights (Holt, 2010; Roald, 2016; Elia, 2017; Ihmoud, 2022). However, for this study, feminism is defined broadly as a concept that includes all of the ways that women act to improve their lives and work towards more equality and equity for women at home and in public spaces (Barron, 2002; Rought-Brooks, Duaibis & Hussein, 2010). For many Palestinian women, a core tenet of feminism is also resistance against colonialism, patriarchy, and Zionism (Ihmoud, 2022). Many secular feminists and women's rights activists believe that women will reach their goals through a

feminist and human rights framework (Richter-Devroe, 2005). For these women, Islam is not the standard by which they measure women's worth, rights, roles, and privileges (Richter-Devroe, 2005). Other women, both secular and religious, do not use the term 'feminism' due to its negative connotations of Western liberal white feminism (Abu-Lughod, 1998). Yet other women believe that Islam, through correct interpretations of the Quran and fair implementation of Islamic law, provides them with all of their rights. Islamic feminists critique patriarchal discrimination in Islamic jurisprudence and focus on Islamic feminist knowledge production as a source of power for Islamic women (Elsadda, 2019). Unfortunately, there is a gap between Islamic and secular Palestinian women in the understanding and philosophy of women's rights and how to achieve them. Richter-Devroe and others (Jad, 2018; Elsadda, 2019) see the lack of cooperation between secular and Islamic feminists as a negative trend and as a lost opportunity for making larger united gains for all women, whether secular or religious. At the same time, many male conservative Islamists often view women's calls for greater rights and an end to patriarchy as a challenge to the power they possess through religious institutions and norms (Elsadda, 2019).

While such challenges have been discussed elsewhere, this study also shows that there are fundamental disagreements among secular feminists, too. They disagree about how to mobilize women, the value or danger of affiliating with existing political factions, and which issues are worth publicly fighting for. Therefore, while this study inspects systems of oppression as barriers to greater women's equality and rights in society, it also considers how social, geographical, generational, and religious factors work to divide feminists and women's rights activists from all backgrounds and ideologies, and how this dynamic not only weakens the fight

for women's rights and gender equality but also weakens women's positions and influence on the national and political levels.

The Palestinian Authority

To understand the Palestinian women's movement and feminist activism, one must also understand the Palestinian Authority (PA) and its context. The PA is the current governing body of the Palestinian people in the West Bank. It was created during the 90s when the Oslo Accords were signed. The Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) is responsible for creating and passing laws. The PA is dominated by *Fatah*, a secular political party established after the "Nakba" or catastrophe in 1948. After Oslo, it was supposed to be an interim governing body that would make way for an independent Palestinian state. The current president Mahmoud Abbas was elected in 2005 and there has not been a presidential election since then. The last parliamentary elections were held in 2006, and the PLC has not convened since 2007 when Fatah split from Hamas (Aljazeera, 2023). Because there is essentially no active national-level democratic processes, Abbas has ruled by decree since 2007. The Oslo Accords have proven to be devastating for the Palestinian people politically, economically, and socially. While the PA maintains legal and security jurisdiction over Area A in the West Bank, it does not have full control over Areas B and C or any control in East Jerusalem. Israel essentially controls the entire West Bank and all land and sea borders of Gaza and the West Bank. Therefore, while the PA tries to act like a capable government, it does not have the legitimacy or legal and political authority to truly act like a sovereign state. This is not an excuse for the PA's violent and unjust behavior towards its citizens and towards the women's rights activists and organizations revealed in this study, but it is important to understand the social and political context in which the PA attempts to govern.

Hizb ut-Tahrir

Researching the Palestinian women's movement revealed various actors that work to prevent and challenge feminism and women's activism and mobilization. One of these actors is Hizb ut-Tahrir. A brief introduction will be given to inform the reader where this movement has come from, what its goals are, and how it directly and indirectly impacts Palestinian women.

Hizb ut Tahrir was established in 1953 by Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani (Taji-Farouki, 2014). He was a teacher and Islamic jurist from northern Palestine (Taji-Farouki, 2014)). Al-Nabhani started a non-violent intellectual Islamic political group that would eventually spread to Arab and non-Arab countries alike. Al-Nabhani and his followers opposed Western leaders, imperialism, colonialism, and nationalism as well as Western-backed Arab leaders claiming that they are all anti-Islamic. Al-Nabhani also blamed the West for attacking Muslims and intending to destroy Islamic religion and culture (Orofino, 2021). While Hizb ut-Tahrir does not directly engage in politics, it works to disseminate knowledge of Islamic laws and principles to greatly influence politics (Orofino, 2021). It believes that the re-establishment of the sovereignty of the shari`a as the most crucial element and factor in restoring the historically glorified Islamic way of life (Taji-Farouki, 2014). While the pillar of Hizb ut-Tahrir's ideology is to influence Islamist politics, it does not recognize secular political parties or nation states as legitimate governors because it believes that the Islamic caliphate is the only Islamically acceptable way to govern the people; therefore, it does not allow its followers to be members of existing political parties or to vote in elections.

Given al-Nabhani's vision of the caliphate as the ideal form of Islamic government, Hizb ut-Tahrir actively aims for the return of the Islamic caliphate to restore the historical greatness and majesty of Islam. As a result, Hizb ut-Tahrir adamantly rejects Western culture and

civilization, given its history of colonizing Muslim countries. Followers view Western colonization as the major factor leading to the breakdown of the Islamic way of life, values, and traditions (Taji-Farouki, 2014). It therefore holds that Western advocacy of democracy and human rights are part of the West's ongoing colonial project that is aimed at suppressing Islamic law and culture and usurping Muslim values. Taji-Farouki (2014) sums up the beliefs of Hizb ut Tahrir members well in this quote:

“Al-Nabhani described a world divided between Islam and ‘unbelief’ (kufr)– which seeks to destroy Islam and finds its most virulent expression in capitalism, itself organically connected to secularism, democracy, and colonialism – and headed by America and Britain. Like democracy, nationalism is a construct of unbelief, used to divide Muslims, while international organizations are vehicles of unbelieving states (p. 46).”

Through pamphlets, books, lectures, meetings, going door to door, and more recently through the internet and social media, Hizb ut-Tahrir aims to spread knowledge and information about Islam, the right path for all Muslims, the reintroduction of shari'a (Islamic law), the corruption and anti-Islamic ways of western countries, democracy, and capitalism which has torn Muslims away from their political and religious responsibilities. (Orofino, 2021).

Even though Hizb ut-Tahrir members are against nation-states and secular political parties and elections, within their non-violent philosophy, they aim to influence politics in their respective countries. In the West Bank, for example, they do not want to create a political party that would compete against Hamas or the PA, but they actively promote or denounce particular issues and causes from an Islamic jurisprudence stance. As it relates to gender and women's issues, Hizb ut-Tahrir actively spreads information about their conservative worldview topics

through their social media pages, lectures, and pamphlets. They also put pressure on government officials to not pass what they view as anti-Islamic legislation (Hattab & Abualrob, 2023).

The Israeli Occupation and its Impacts on Women

Since the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, Israel has militarily occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights making it the longest-standing military occupation in modern history (Azarova, 2017; ECFR, 2017). According to international law, military occupations are meant to be temporary and based on military necessity. Israelis actions in these areas such as the building and investment in Israeli settlements, the forcible transfer of Palestinians inside and outside the territory, and the exploitation of the area's natural resources for the benefit of Israeli citizens only indicate that Israel has no intentions of leaving and ending the military occupation (Azarova, 2017). As the occupying power, Israel is obligated by international law to provide certain services to the occupied population. However, multiple reports and eyewitness accounts prove that Israel does not provide necessary and crucial services and infrastructure to Palestinian populations especially in Area C where the Palestinian Authority has no jurisdiction (Azarova, 2017). The stark difference in the quality of life, services, access to water schools, and necessary infrastructure is shocking. Israeli settlements have paved roads, new houses, new schools, parks, pools, and community centers, whereas many Palestinian communities lack a paved road, access to running water, and consistent electricity (Azarova, 2017). A more detailed description of the occupation and its impact on women will be provided in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 1: METHODS

This study examines Palestinian women's activism in a global south and decolonial/ anticolonial context to illuminate the important but marginalized knowledge of women's voices, concerns, and lived experiences. This study counters and resists colonial (feminist) discourses (Mohanty, 2015). To gain new understandings of systems of oppression through the lens of marginalized voices, this research study examines an understanding of women's lived experiences as women living under a military occupation and being subject to patriarchal and colonial policies and ideologies, oppression, and violence.

Specifically, this study examines Palestinian women's unique and diverse experiences in doing feminist (Mohanty, 2003; Muhanna, 2012; Abu-Lughod, 1998; Khamis, 2019) activism by considering the local and historical conditions that led to this moment as well as women's agency as they conduct "diverse forms of local activism" (Herr, 2014, p. 6). Taking an anti-colonial stance means understanding the contemporary forms of women's feminist activism in the West Bank acknowledging the history of colonialism and the several layers of oppression (patriarchy, settler colonialism, and the Israeli occupation) that impact women, their activism, and their societies. Moreover, it acknowledges that Palestinian women are fighting for their rights without having the right to an autonomous and free country where they could have equal citizenship rights and responsibilities with their fellow men. These perspectives offer an alternative dimension through which to understand socio-political struggles among Palestinian women.

Theoretical Framework

As part of the anticolonial stance of this research, it is also crucial to place Palestinian and Arab women's experiences as women and feminists in terms of global south feminisms

(GSFs). Most GSFs consider post-colonial discourses and theories, but it is important to consider that Palestinian women still live under colonial occupation and many other Arab countries still experience imperialism and the effects of colonialism which impact their local social systems and cultural and religious values. Therefore, rather than studying global south women through a postcolonial lens, it is important to keep a critical perspective on how colonialism and imperialism still affect women today. One way to do this is by acknowledging the capitalist neoliberal economic system that has been forced upon global south countries which have traditionally been colonized and how it creates a perfect storm of capitalist systems and marketization that enables and benefits the Israel occupation and patriarchal tendencies. This perfect storm has created almost impossible conditions for women and the women's movement to overcome the socio-political and physical barriers that prevent them from achieving greater social and legal gender equality and more representation in the political sphere.

As a feminist researcher, I aim to take a critical stance as I collect data from global south women living under occupation. I believe it is necessary to be aware of Western, imperialist, and global phenomena that impact global south women, and I have kept this in mind as I collected the data and wrote this dissertation. One of my aims in conducting this research is to draw attention to and uplift marginalized voices while acknowledging that writing down and sharing the stories and experiences in this study is itself an act of knowledge production. My stance toward the data collected acknowledges Western liberal feminism's failure to fully grasp the gendered aspects of the Israeli occupation and its denial of the reality and urgency of the Palestinian feminist situation and Israeli occupation as an oppressor of Palestinian women (Elia 2017). Rather, Western feminists tend to see Israel as modernized and Palestinians as savage and

backward. In doing so, they often blame women's oppression on Islam and Arab masculinity (Elia, 2017, p. 51).

It is critical to move away from Western rational conceptions of feminism, agency, empowerment, and religion when studying women in the Arab world (Mahmood, 2001). Shedding these preconceived Western frameworks of resistance, agency, and the role of religion, as well as partnering with locals, can open opportunities for establishing new conceptualizations and frameworks of Arab feminisms in their diversity and unique socio-historical contexts (Mohanty, 2003; Muhanna, 2012; Abu-Lughod, 1998; Khamis, 2019). Therefore, GSFs must be conceptualized through “careful examinations of their local conditions in their historical specificity” as well as their agency and voices as they conduct “diverse forms of local activism” (Herr, 2014, p. 6). Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I have adopted a lens that carefully considers the following theoretical frames.

Global South Feminisms (GSFs)

GSFs refer to the types of feminisms that women in developing countries engage in. Global south women and their lives are characterized by “...divergent histories and social locations woven together by the political threads of opposition to forms of domination that are not only pervasive but also systematic” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 46-47). This definition indicates the importance of being aware of the overarching hegemonic structural similarities experienced by women in the global south, but also the diversity of women’s beliefs, values, experiences, and agency in light of the socio-political contexts of which they are part of. While GSFs are not monolithic, there are certain characteristics that unite them. Global south women experience social and political oppression and marginalization that must be linked to their histories with Western racism, imperialism, and colonialism.

Third world women's organizations and communities are marked by the significance of their internal differences, conflicts, and contradictions, as well as the intricate connections between feminist, antiracist, and nationalist struggles that they face. Mohanty (2003) argues that women's histories are characterized by social and economic phenomena such as "...slavery, forced migration, erasure, indentured labor, colonialism, imperial conquest, and genocide" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 52) which have impacted their lives on the social, political, and economic levels. Mohanty argues for acknowledging the "...fluid structures of domination and oppositional agency" (p. 52) found within GSFs. This is especially true for Palestinian women as they must work within a framework of occupation, patriarchy, religious conservatism, and international NGO system on which they have been reliant. While acknowledging the many limitations women face in their feminist activism, this study also attempts to draw attention to women's agency and diversity in countering oppressive systems such as colonialism and patriarchy (Mohanty, 2003). While all global south women experience systemic oppression and the lasting impacts of colonialism, Palestinian women are conducting activism as indigenous, colonized, and occupied people facing opposition to their goals from all directions.

Middle Eastern Feminisms

Under the umbrella of GSFs are Middle Eastern Feminisms (MEFs). MEFs refers to the feminisms practiced by Arab women in the Middle East and North Africa. While these women, their ways of conducting feminism, and their specific socio-political circumstances are vast and diverse, most Middle Eastern feminisms include histories of colonialism, a fight for national liberation, and women's issues being sidelined in favor of national priorities (Herr, 2014).

A basic characteristic of most Middle Eastern feminisms is that they cannot be delinked from the national liberation struggles in which they were or are a part. While transnational feminisms and

Western liberal feminisms consider national movements oppressive for third world women (Herr, 2014), national struggles and women's involvement in them have been instrumental in raising women's feminist consciousness as well as promoting their participation in the public sphere. While Arab nation-states are creations of colonialism that often strengthen autocratic leaders to serve the West (Saliba, 2000), Middle Eastern women made decisions to work with their male countrymen in the national liberation struggle to defeat imperialism and colonialism (Herr, 2014). On top of dealing with foreign domination, women in their activism have had to legitimize their feminist activism amid Western liberal feminists who often essentialize them as passive and dependent, and in the case of Palestinian women, fail to recognize that the Israeli occupation and Zionism—and not Islam—pose the most dangerous threat to women's social and legal rights and greater gender equality (Elia, 2017).

Arab women have historically dealt with forced migration, colonialism, imperial conquest, national liberation struggles, and erasure, all of which have created multiple and various setbacks for women and their diverse quests for equity or equality. The impacts of these forces of oppression have also caused women to organize and mobilize in ways that have historically been fraught with difference, conflict, and contradictions (Mohanty, 2003). While for some, the presence of conflict and contradiction in activism may lead to assumptions of failure of the women's movement, this study aims to illustrate the complex colonial and patriarchal forces that women must simultaneously address. This is an almost impossible task given the increasingly violent occupation that affects gender relations (Ihmoud, 2022) and the "growing influence of religion in public life on national and international scenes..." which has created a reality where "secular voices have been silenced and the voices which remain, always situated within the Islamic framework, are championed as the only authentic and legitimate forms of

political expression” (Valassopoulos, A. Elsadda, H., Moghissi, H., & Cooke, M., 2010, p. 125).

Given these complex challenges and barriers to women’s social and legal advancement, it is important to understand that feminist and women’s rights activism in Palestine is struggling to find its place in both the social and political spheres. Understanding the various types of contradictions present in women’s activism and mobilization reveals that women must work on numerous fronts to address not only women’s social issues, but also colonialism, occupation, religious conservatism and control, and the PA’s failure to stand with them. Addressing these other social and political forces and behaviors require a lot of women power and resources that are not always available to women. MEFs also reveal how global south women not only resist forced labor, erasure, colonialism, and racism, but also challenge Western women who essentialize them as weak, passive, and submissive and patriarchal structures and mentalities. Therefore, more than anything else, examples of MEFs reveal the multiple burdens and levels of domination that Arab women and all global south women must deal with simultaneously as they struggle for women’s rights and freedoms specific to their communities. Mohanty (2015) argues that global south women must engage in the work of decolonizing knowledge to effectively illuminate the true knowledge of their voices, concerns, and lived experiences to counter and resist colonial (feminist) discourse and colonial patriarchal discourses enhanced by settler colonialism (Ihmoud, 2022).

I examined the diversity of Arab women’s concerns and ways of activism to explore and expand our limited understanding of FEMs and their complexity. Doing so in respectful and cooperative ways encourages an understanding of women’s needs, goals, and motivations from their own perspectives and expands the understanding of GSFs as a broad category containing similarities in “...the political threads of opposition to forms of domination...” (Mohanty, 2003, p.

46-47) but also extreme differences in the theorization and implementation of women's activism in its broadest terms.

Neoliberalism and Neopatriarchy

Palestinian women face a triple burden: an economic burden evidenced in the wide class inequalities, a social burden present in the discriminatory patriarchal society, and a political burden implemented through Western colonization and Israeli occupation. One way to better conceptualize this triple burden that Palestinian women speak about is by understanding neoliberalism and how it impacts third-world communities, specifically in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT).

Neoliberalism is a modern form of capitalism that has spread from Europe to the developed world. Modernity, capitalism, and its transformation into neoliberal capitalism greatly impacts the Arab world. To better understand this, one must consider modernity and its collision with the Arab world. Modernity "is a transitional process involving a movement from one mode of knowledge or paradigmatic structure to another radically different, a break with traditional (mythical) ways of understanding reality in favor of new (scientific) modes of thought" (Sharabi, 1992, p. 9-10).

Modernity, meaning rational thought and scientific discovery as opposed to myth and religion, was meant for Europe; but with colonization, modernity was brought to the Arab world. Modernity cannot exist without capitalism and was exported to the Arab world as well as all other parts of the world. In a Western-dominated world market, capitalism in the non-Western world results in various forms of dependent capitalism (Sharabi, 1992).

In the Arab world, ideas and policies of modernity were incorporated into the already existing traditional patriarchal society. The Arab world has not been able to become modern in

European terms in part because of traditional patriarchal socio-economic and tribe/clan structures. Moreover, modernity in the Arab world entailed dependency on Europe. This “dependent modernization” did not lead to modernity; rather, it led to modernized patriarchy or neopatriarchy (Sharabi, 1992).

Neopatriarchy is the collision of modernity with patriarchy and is neither modern nor traditional. Sharabi characterizes it through its “...underdevelopment and nonmodernity—visible in its economy and class structure as well as its political, social, and cultural organization. Moreover, it is a highly unstable formation, riven by inner contradictions and conflicts...” (Sharabi, 1992). Neopatriarchy works within the neoliberal environment to sustain the power and control of male family members, politicians, and wealthy businessmen. In this sense, women remain in their oppressed and marginalized position in society but also are the victims of the commodification of all types of labor.

Neoliberalism, as seen through neopatriarchy and economic policies and its impacts in the Arab world, can be seen through the way that social and political formations and alliances came into being and developed. The Arab petty bourgeoisie “...was an ineffective social force, lacking internal unity and coherence and utterly incapable of carrying out the tasks either of the bourgeoisie (i.e., capitalist economic development) or the proletariat (i.e., revolutionary social transformation) (Sharabi, 1992, p. 9).” This led to a class split that resulted in the formation of two streams of ideology: Islamic revivalism and secular modernism. Broadly speaking, Islamic revivalism sees the West as the negation of the truth of Islam and the glory of the Islamic world while secularists' ideology relies on nationalism, liberalism, and science as opposed to religion (Sharabi, 1992). Before the 1980s, the Islamic revivalist ideology was more peripheral and lacked popular support, but in the 1980s it became a mass grassroots movement. The secularists

are made up of critical intellectuals, writers, professionals, scholars, and students, but they have not been as successful in mobilizing the masses economically, politically, and socially.

The same is true in Palestinian society where liberal secularists have not been able to create beneficial economic development or positive social transformations in their society, in part because of their dependency on the colonizer and occupier. The PA has continued to disappoint the Palestinian people by failing to promote healthy political diversity and debate, failing to establish an independent Palestinian state, continuing to collaborate with the Israeli occupation forces, and failing to integrate youth and women into the political sphere on a large scale. Disenchantment with the status quo and the lack of revolutionary change in Palestinian society, rights, and freedom has allowed Islamist activists to insert themselves more deeply into society. They use mass-based grassroots techniques to recruit followers and rely heavily on social justice activities. Hamas has used social justice initiatives to gain support, while Hizb ut-Tahrir has been able to attract supporters and influence public opinion on political and legal matters impacting women.

Neoliberalism in Palestinian society impacts Palestinians on several levels. First, Israel and its occupation rely on neoliberal policies and activities to control the Palestinian population by acting as though the safety and security of citizens require violent actions towards the enemy, i.e. Palestinians. Safety and security are outsourced to private companies that benefit financially from the surveillance of and violence against Palestinians. In this way, the Israeli government distances itself from the violence and oppression of Palestinians because private corporations are rarely held accountable for their actions. Moreover, corporations, Israel, and powerful Western countries like the U.S. use Palestinian society as a training ground for new technologically advanced surveillance, security, and weapons technology. This creates an environment where

Palestinian lives are undervalued, rendered disposable, and reduced to monetary value. Neoliberalism as economic policy favors the privatization and commodification of goods and services that should be considered human rights or at least accessible to all citizens. When basic services such as healthcare and access to healthy food and security are commodified, there is a greater possibility for inequality and injustice to thrive because financial gains are put above people's well-being (Johnson, 2019).

At the same time, neoliberalism directly and indirectly impacts everyday Palestinian women and larger collective efforts of feminism. Overall, the neoliberalism environment relies on and promotes financial, individual, and male gain and power under a violent military occupation which has led to the immense hurdles and obstacles that women face while working toward greater social and legal rights.

Women's NGOs are part and parcel of this neoliberal economic system of development found in third-world countries. Development efforts and NGOs are praised for their supposed successes and advancement by the developed nations who fund them, but several scholars (Jad, 2008; Jamal, 2015; Farsakh, 2016; Tartir, 2017) question the actual impact of development projects and the authenticity of the women's movement as it manifests itself through women's rights NGOs. In conducting this study, I am aware of the socio-economic realities that were created after the signing of the Oslo Accords in the 90s and how this changed the very essence of the women's movement partly by promoting development and the establishment of NGOs, thereby causing women to become part and parcel of the neoliberal system of individual economic gain at the expense of the collective good. This can be seen through Western donors' prioritizing of Western values such as women's empowerment and boosting civil society while ignoring the tangible realities facing Palestinians such as occupation, oppression, administrative

detention, lack of freedom of political expression and living in safety and security. NGOs and their donors essentially work on short term issues, do not encourage Palestinian initiatives and voices, lack a sustainable and vital vision for the future free of occupation, do not encourage democratic processes and political participation, and work through a hierarchical top-down system that fails to give voice to the marginalized populations.

Neoliberal economic policies have impacted the OPT in dramatic ways by changing local economic standards and how social productivity is measured (Peck & Tickell, 2002).

Neoliberalism reconstitutes social and economic relations and encourages cut-throat competition and the commodification of people and services (Peck & Tickell, 2002). Financial gain and political and social power are prioritized over personal and collective respect and value. In the case of Palestine, people have given up mass-based grassroots activism and political mobilization in favor of bureaucratic and hierarchical style organizations where a paycheck and professionalization outweigh the need for collective action. The occupation and oppression of the Palestinian is financially beneficial for Israel and other developed nations as Palestinian lives are commodified (Johnson, 2019). Private companies and corporations profit from the surveillance, imprisonment, and torture of Palestinians (Haddad, 2012; Johnson, 2019). The safety and security of Israelis necessitates the violence, oppression, and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people. All of these socio-political economic realities created and enhanced by neoliberalism break down social relations between communities, people, relatives, and even spouses. Therefore, women are not only dealing with toxic masculinity, the impacts of a patriarchal society, and a violent military occupation, they are dealing with these things as part of a larger geopolitical economic force that values monetary gain over value for human life and

human rights. This has encouraged the NGO characteristics of top-down professionalization of women's issues and individual gain and achievement.

Acknowledging marginalized, global south women's voices as legitimate producers of knowledge serves to call out and counter Western, imperialist, and colonial narratives as well as male-dominated Palestinian discourses (Stagni, 2024, p. 232). Therefore, this study falls under what Davis (2013) calls a 'feminist ethnography' which she defines as "...drawing on methodological strategies that embrace the everyday experiences of people--especially those forced to live on the margins--as epistemologically valid. Feminist knowledge production, when linked to methodological strategies, should unravel issues of power, and include interventions that help to move toward social justice" (p. 27). Based on this assumption, qualitative data gathered through participant observation and interviews of women's lived experiences produce indigenous, feminist knowledge that highlights marginalized voices and reveals social phenomena not considered in mainstream dialogues. I aim to raise women's voices about their experiences as women and feminists to offer a feminist perspective on women's experiences living under occupation while also acknowledging the neoliberal realities.

Research Approach

To conduct this qualitative study, I relied on qualitative research methodologies because they allowed me to collect data that allows for the in-depth explanation and interpretation of human experiences, behaviors, and social phenomena in their social contexts (O'Reilly, 2011; Butina, 2015). Qualitative data obtained through interactions, observations, and interviews with women provides nuanced and rich data that shed light on complex socio-political realities that help further explain and understand women's social, political, and legal experiences as women living in a patriarchal society under occupation and engaging in feminist activism.

I relied on a combination of methodologies including a constant comparative approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Flick, 2009), as well as narrative (Butina, 2015) and ethnographic approaches, to understand social and political phenomena that women live and struggle with.

Ethnographic methods allow a researcher to examine people, events, and actions in the context of their cultural setting, to understand aspects of their sociopolitical realities and/or culture, but also the larger structures that impact people (O'Reilly, 2011, p. 3). Ethnographic methods allow researchers to gather open-ended data for dynamic and nuanced understandings of the human experience by providing a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of a social phenomenon.

The narrative approach relies on data from people's lives, perceptions, and experiences to understand histories, events, and social phenomena. The main data source for the narrative approach and ethnographic approaches are people's conversations, stories, and narratives; therefore, people's words, expressions, and experiences are the raw data (Butina, 2015). While narrative data can be used to understand the culture, historical experiences, identity, and lifestyle of the narrator, I used this data collection approach and data sources to examine and understand women's personal, collective, and lived social and political experiences as women living in a patriarchal society and under Israeli's violent military occupation (Butina, 2015), and how they both individually and collectively struggle against various forms of oppression.

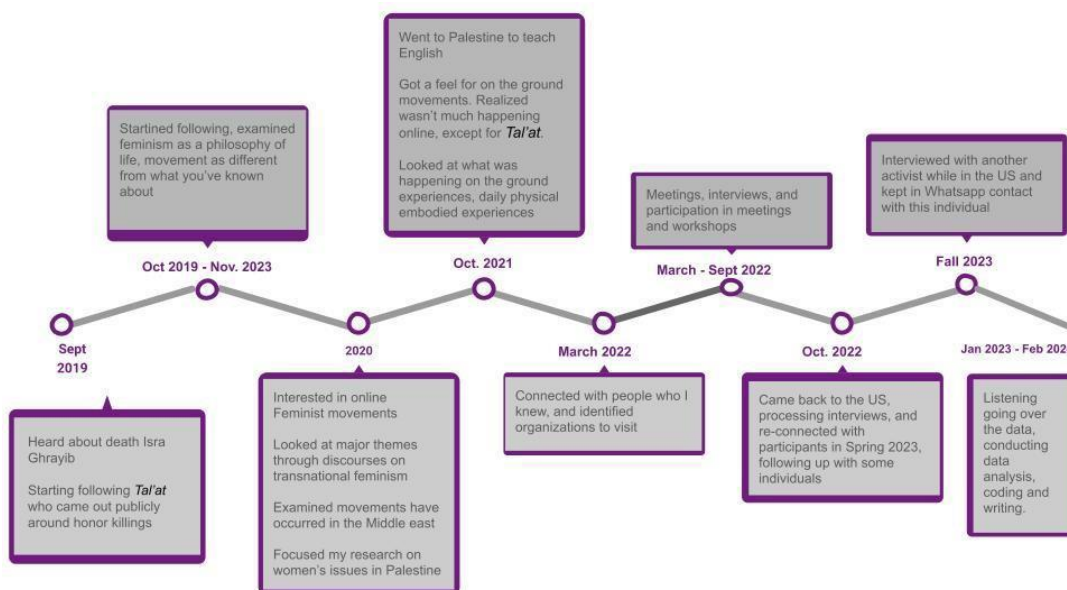
In collecting data in these ways and taking these particular approaches to data collection and analysis, I was able to understand women's personal experiences as women under occupation, but also the collective threads of meaning that were found among all of my interlocutors. Using women's stories and experiences, I was able to understand, describe, analyze, and explain particular social phenomena and threads of realities that women face in their personal and public lives. The data revealed both commonalities and differences in

women's experiences. At the same time, while women experienced oppression, patriarchy, and occupation in diverse ways, there are threads of truths, individual insights and experiences that ran throughout the data and formed collective insights and impacts for women. Though women had different stories and explanations of social phenomena, they all pointed to the presence of larger systems of oppression that manifest themselves through patriarchy, settler colonialism, occupation, and neoliberal actions and policies.

Timeline

The approach I took to collect data across this study is captured in Figure 1. Interview and observation data were collected over ten months from January 2022 until October 2023 and again between August 2023 and September 2023. More interviews and follow-up conversations occurred between November 2023 and April 2024. *Tāl'āt* data collection and observation was conducted periodically beginning in September 2019 and ending in August 2023.

Figure 1.



To collect data, I used semi-structured interviews and engaged in participant observation where I attended workshops and conferences related to women's issues. To collect data about Ṭāl'āt, I followed their tweets and Facebook posts over the years, read articles and watched videos that included interviews with Ṭāl'āt members, and referred to academic articles analyzing Ṭāl'āt.

Recruiting and Outreach

Recruitment started by connecting with friends and connections of friends at Bethlehem University. I relied on snowball and referral sampling to recruit more women in various geographical locations and with varying knowledge and involvement in feminist and women's activism. Most women were very open to speaking with me and some confided in me with some difficult personal issues. Other women were more focused on the larger national issues facing women and the Palestinian people. They live in Jerusalem, Ramallah, a village outside of Ramallah, Bethlehem, villages outside of Bethlehem, and Hebron. Some women describe themselves as feminists and others do not. All the women who worked in a women's NGO describe themselves as feminists. Some women who did not work in an NGO consider themselves feminists, but not all of them prefer the term feminist. Women who do not work in NGOs and are not feminist activists tend to support women's rights overall but believe there are limits to these rights.

Interlocutors

I use the term interlocutors to refer to those with whom I collected data to adapt the approaches that were most commonly used in the articles I read. I refer to interlocutors in the ways that anthropologists use it, this is a shared conversation and a two-way dialogue. In the

interviews, I shared a lot of my own experiences to connect with the women on the human level. I did not want them to feel that I was extracting information from them, so I conducted the interviews more like conversations. I asked questions, but the interlocutors also asked me questions and I shared my experiences and opinions as a woman.

Speaking to a variety of women who had different ideologies about feminism and women's issues was very valuable in understanding the current conditions that women are living under. Each interlocutor sheds light on old as well as new facets of women's lived experiences as they navigate a complex socio-political landscape that burdens women much more than men. Fifteen women between the ages of 21 and 56 participated in this study¹. They come from a variety of geographical areas in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and hold diverse understandings of feminism. I met my interlocutors through my personal contacts, friends of friends, and by attending women's conferences and workshops.

I was able to connect with Palestinian women easily because I had lived there before and because I am fluent in the Palestinian dialect. This seemed to make women feel comfortable with me because they could speak in their native language, and they knew that I had lived in the region for a long time and was aware of the socio-political realities. Because I had lived in Jerusalem and the West Bank for ten years before conducting my study, and because I am married to a Palestinian from the West Bank, I drew on my already established contacts which included friends, colleagues, and extended family members. I met my interlocutors in several different ways. I contacted some interlocutors based on their connections with my friends. Because a friend connected us, these women were willing to speak with me and share their

¹ See Table. 1 below.

experiences. For example, a good friend of mine connected me with her husband who works at Bethlehem University.

Through my friend's husband, I met a feminist student who was one of my interlocutors and my paid research assistant. My friend's husband also connected me with a Palestinian anthropologist. It was very helpful to connect with her and listen to her experiences in conducting fieldwork. She helped me to be aware that in some cases it is difficult to work with very marginalized populations because you see the conditions they are living in, and you feel guilty that you are only there collecting data. This also brought up the activist aspect of conducting anthropological research. We discussed the necessity in using our data to spread awareness and attempt to help the communities that we work with. At the same time, this acquaintance connected me with several other feminist women who work in women's rights and social organizations in the Bethlehem area. She also shared her experience as a Palestinian researcher. She told me how grants and fellowships for Palestinians are much less available and include much less funds than international scholars. This reminded me again of my privileged position as a white Western American who was fortunate to receive substantial funding to conduct my research.

Subsequently, I made contacts with women I met while at feminist conferences and attending a feminist theory course in Arabic. I relied on snowball sampling in which my interlocutors connected me with other interlocutors. I expected to have a difficult time recruiting interlocutors and building relationships with women, but since I speak Arabic and made a conscious effort to be respectful, I noticed most women were comfortable speaking with me. I met the women either at their houses, a coffee shop, or at their places of work. While I would have liked to spend more "down time" with the women I met, I was only able to speak to each

interlocutor once. There are some women that I met multiple times and keep in contact with. I was able to follow up with them about my research.

Lastly, for women's security, safety, and anonymity, I did not use the names of women's employers, and other women's organizations or interlocutors' real names. Instead, I used pseudonyms.

Table 1.

Interlocutor	Region	Age	NGO Employee/NGO participant/Independent	Self proclaimed Feminist Y/N
1. Israa	Hebron	Late 20s	No, started small business making dolls	N
2. Sajeda	Hebron	Early 50s	Y	Y
3. Yara	Village surrounding Ramallah	Mid 20s	No	N
4. Dunia	Ramallah	Early 30s	No, works in an organization	Y
5. Rasha	Ramallah	Mid 20s	No	Y-Muslim feminist (she differentiates herself from secular feminists)
6. Dana	Ramallah	Early 30s	Y	Y
7. Haneen	Jerusalem	Early 50s	No	N
8. Fatima	Jerusalem	Late 30s	No	N
9. Zayna	Jerusalem	Early 20s	Student, recently graduated in 2022	Y

10. Lujain	Jerusalem	Early 50s	Y	Y
11. Ranan	Jerusalem	Mid 50s	Y	Y
12. Rula	Bethlehem	Mid 30s	Yes	Y
13. Khulud	Bethlehem	Early 50s	Y	Y
14. Maha	Bethlehem	Early 40s	Y	Y
15. Ghadeer	Village outside of Bethlehem	Late 40s	No	N

Data Sources

There were multiple sources of data collected across the life of this study. I conducted semi-structured interviews (Appendix A contains the semi-structured research protocol). All interviews were recorded when given permission. I interviewed a total of twenty-three women between the ages of 22 and 55 years old. Only fifteen women's testimonies were included in this study. This is not to say that their experiences and truths are not as important as the others, but due to time and space constraints, it was not possible to include all of them. Some of the interlocutors were mothers and others were not.

I collected data through participation observation. I attended a workshop in Beit Sahur focusing on women who wanted to be elected to local councils in their regions. While attending the workshop, I watched and listened to how women talked to each other, and their attitudes about experiences participating in an election. I paid particular attention to a woman from *Beit Ta'mar* outside of Bethlehem. She was bold and confident as she spoke, and I was inspired by

her story. After the conference, I spoke to her, and she agreed to give me her phone number. I later contacted her and interviewed her about her experience as a woman in the local elections. As I attended these gatherings, I ascertained that more women were trying to get elected and wanted to be in positions where they had more opportunities to be decision-makers.

I took notes during and after the events and after returning home, I wrote down my impressions and observations. I took note of people's attitudes, how they talked to each other, noting their confidence, hesitations, and stances on important issues. Local issues were important to women and men, and I attended a meeting in Hebron with women and police who addressed the issue of safety of women. My observations were focused on how women talked to each other and how they reacted to the conversation topics. An additional data source was the monitoring of online threats from social media and websites. I also consulted scholarly articles and statistics to expand my knowledge of specific social and legal issues.

These data sources were triangulated (Flick, 2009). Triangulation refers to the use of multiple data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena. The collection and analysis of triangulated data sources was part of the research design and encouraged the development of a more complete understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Semi-Structured Interviews

To collect interview data, I developed a list of questions, in Arabic and English, and used questions as a guide. I encouraged the interviewees to speak freely along the lines of major topics outlined in the semi-structured protocol. Data was collected one-on-one, except for two interviews which were conducted with two people. Most interviews occurred at one point in time. Three interviews occurred over time as we met on multiple occasions, and I followed up with three other women after returning to the U.S. Interviews took place over approximately

seven months. All interviews were recorded with permission from the interviewees. I looked to examine what interviewees knew about Ṭāl'āt and to think through what was happening, or not happening, around women's activism in the West Bank. I explore why trends that began with Ṭāl'āt may not have caught on in the West Bank.

I followed up with some women to ask how they were doing especially after the October 7 war. I know it is a very difficult time for all Palestinians at this time, so I did not feel it was right to ask more questions. I attempted to get in contact with at least two women who were members of the Ṭāl'āt movement. I met one woman who spoke on a panel at Al-Quds Bard College that I attended in 2022. She is Palestinian but has either lived or was raised in England. I asked her if she would be willing to speak to me about Ṭāl'āt. She said she could not speak on behalf of Ṭāl'āt but she would be happy to speak with me as an individual feminist.

I contacted her by email twice, but I never received a response. I did get the feeling from this person that she was not interested in talking to me as a non-Palestinian white researcher though she never said this bluntly. I got to know the other woman while I was attending an online feminist theory class in Arabic. I contacted her on WhatsApp to ask her if she would be willing to speak with me. She indicated that she would be interested in speaking with me, but because of her travel schedule and my schedule as a researcher, teacher, and mother at the time I was in the West Bank, we were not able to connect.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with a careful reading with an informed awareness of Ṭāl'āt, which provided me with an informed view of women's issues and struggles in structures of oppression. As I examined the interview data and progressed into the data analysis phase, I began to examine how women organize and the barriers they face in feminist activism. This lens opened up

conversations about the occupation. The analysis process incorporated listening to stories. The stories expressed the magnitude of other challenges that are facing women as they attempt to achieve social rights. While I knew that the experiences of specific interviewees are not intended to generalize, I was attuned to how stories draw out specific issues and themes that were also found in the literature as broader theoretical issues. Interviews collectively offered specific examples and illustrations that helped connect the theory to the real on-the-ground experiences that were subsequently represented in the themes that were ultimately identified.

Specific examples and stories through women's testimonies came together to give a view of some aspects of women's advancement and roles, or lack thereof. Thematic knowledge and the documentation of their stories represented a way of knowing, with several women corroborating themes through their testimonies. The stories women shared made it more real, which connected the theories and the scholarly articles with what's happening in real-time on the ground.

Five Stages of Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed, read, and re-read, coded, and analyzed. This was an inductive and iterative process that took place from the beginning of the study to the end of the analysis. I was continually thinking about the data and attempting to make sense of it by placing it in categories that later led to larger themes and conclusions. Categories and theories were continually tested and scrutinized to ensure that they were true to the data. If they were not, the ideas and theories were modified accordingly.

Stage 1

- Listened to the interviews repeatedly to find flash points that stuck out to her, to get an overview.

- I took time think about which interviews to include (for space and time constraints)

Stage 2

- Listed to each interview that I decided to use, slowly and deliberately, deciding which parts were most relevant
- Had a written-out version of each of the key interviews to go back to in detail
- Read through each of the selected interviews and pulled out key ideas.
- In the process, I decided on what to look for – engaged in coding highlighting the illustrations – anecdotal experiences, connect to general experiences, pulling out specific illustrations, related to the research questions
- Developed a coding scheme – made up of key words or concept – specifically, I coded for critical incidents of life experiences related to womens’ social, economic, and political realities to represent a category or an idea

Stage 3

- Specific experiences or illustrations were combined with a broader idea.
- Overlap and interaction, worked iteratively across the data until it took shape.
- Fit into sections writing, overlapping, tried to decide where the illustrations, and where the ideas fit best.

Stage 4

- Started talking about major realizations, then re-worked the research questions to ensure that the data and research questions are aligned.
- Talked about different ways to talk about the results and organize them.
- Agreed to section the results into larger categories, tried to match the data to those different categories – match the results to those organizational features.

Stage 5

I pinpointed critical incidents of life experiences (both individual and collective) and categorized them into larger collective insights and experiences to understand the major barriers that women face both individually and collectively in terms of their rights and social positions in society. I used specific stories and experiences as my data ensuring they were presented in relevant contexts. When possible, I made efforts to back up stories and realities with scholarly articles that have researched specific issues more in-depth. In the process, I was remembering and thinking about what I know about the historical women's movement, and the current socio-political atmosphere, using that to help make more sense of the data and what women were telling. I worked from the micro level each woman offered to look at the bigger picture and how it fit, what is it contributing to and what is it saying. All the while, I was keeping up on articles to see and help make sense of the data in context. I repeatedly came back to the data again, reconstructing conclusions. I aimed to define the conclusions more specifically and articulate how threads of knowledge and experience fit together to reveal social phenomena. I also strove to make the data accessible for outside viewers to read and understand.

Trustworthiness in Data Analysis

After examining the data, I placed it into thematic groups. Then I stepped away and looked at all of the threads again trying to make connections and understand how they relate. I was continually asking: what are the parts that work together and what are the outcomes of these phenomena? When possible, I followed up with women to confirm specific information that I was given and the connectedness of certain examples. I also wanted to determine whether written

descriptions could be corroborated by interviewees. I also corroborated some of my analysis by comparing it with scholarly articles that offered generalizations of social and political phenomena and theories. I found that much of the data also fit into statistics provided by the United Nations and other international organizations.

I also relied on shared knowledge about what's happening in Palestine and compared ideas with others involved in other types of feminist activism to get feedback about what has been gathered to determine that patterns were not just my own creation or interpretations but those that could be substantiated.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is built upon the knowledge that the Palestinian people live in a settler colonial context under military occupation and that Palestinian women are fighting for women's legal and social rights in the private and public spheres in a global south context (Mohanty, 2003). A global south context acknowledges that women's lives are characterized by "...divergent histories and social locations woven together by the political threads of opposition to forms of domination that are not only pervasive but also systematic" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 46-47). The Palestinian women's movement has a long history of activities and activism that both included and excluded women from diverse geographical and socioeconomic backgrounds (Fleishman 2003, Kuttab, 2012).

Between the 70s and 80s and early 90s, the women's movement went from a grassroots mass-based to a top-down hierarchical movement that began using NGOs to conduct its feminist work within a legal framework that was isolated from the political reality (Johnson & Kuttab, 2001; Jad, 2003; Kuttab, 2012; Hawari, 2019). NGOs have been criticized because they do not respect the socio-political reality and international donors refuse to fund anything "political," despite Palestinians lives being inherently political living under occupation. The separation of the social and political as if they were two disconnected realities, fails to acknowledge women's fundamental right to fight for both women's rights and self-determination and national liberation (Johnson & Kuttab, 2001; Kuttab, 2012). While these are all realities with various causes and effects, researchers agree that the Israeli occupation is by far the largest and most severe barrier to women's greater gender equality and rights especially because it impacts women disproportionately (Rought-Brooks, Duaibis & Hussein, 2010; Dana & Walker, 2021; OCHA, 2022).

Other researchers have documented cases of women in other Arab countries who participated actively in their national liberation struggles, but once national liberation was achieved, they were relegated to the sidelines (Baron, 2007; Elsadda, 2019). Arab women in Algeria, for example, joined their fellow countrymen in fights for national liberation against colonization, but when national liberation was achieved, women did not make any gains in the public sphere (Elsadda 2019, p. 55). Palestinian women have gone through similar struggles for gender equality and national liberation working with their male counterparts throughout the 70s and 80s and in the first Intifada. While Palestinians have not achieved national liberation, they experienced the same phenomenon after the intifadas and even after the PA was established. They did not see a marked effort by the PA to include them in the national political strategy or decision-making positions (Aboudi, Ayaseh, and Abu Ilrob, 2021, p. 17). Similarly in the current context, scholars have drawn attention to a shrinking political space for Palestinian women (Hawari, 2019; Aboudi, Ayaseh, and Abu Ilrob, 2021). This is coupled with the increased attacks by Hizb ut-Tahrir and its affiliates on women's NGOs and individual women activists who promote legal and social rights for women (Abualrob, 2023).

Currently, Palestinian women and women's NGOs are trying to change legislation that impacts women but are being increasingly attacked by Hizb ut-Tahrir and clerics and tribal leaders who question their legitimacy and dedication to the Palestinian cause (Aboudi, Ayaseh, and Abu Ilrob, 2021; Hattab & Abualrob, 2023). Women who promote gender justice and women's rights are accused of taking Western funding which is equated with their focus on prioritizing Western values at the expense of Palestinian and Islamic values. Additionally, because of their efforts to implement CEDAW and modify legislation related to women and families' rights, Hizb ut-Tahrir and some other conservative critics accuse them of being anti-

Islamic and anti-Palestinian (Hattab & Abualrob, 2023). The shrinking political space for women, increased attacks on women's rights activism, coupled with internal disagreements among secular women and between women with secular orientations and Islamic backgrounds, together impact women activists' ability to achieve their social and legal goals in a united front.

To understand the current form of the women's movement, a detailed summary of the history of the women's movement is warranted.

History of the Palestinian Women's Movement: Early 20th Century to Post Oslo Period

The semi-formal Palestinian women's movement has been active since the early twentieth century (Fleischmann, 2003). Palestinian women have been publicly socially and politically active in dynamic ways for over a century. Some scholars argue that Arab women's participation and success over the past decades must be understood in the colonial context in which they were set (Hatem, 2013). As a result, women's gains cannot be understood through a modern feminist understanding of gender and women's equality alone. Rather, examining Palestine's colonial past can help us to understand the condition of Palestinian women today.

For the first half of the twentieth century, most women's participation was limited to middle- and upper-class women who were related to Palestinian political leaders (Augustin, 1993; Kuttab 2012; Fleischmann, 2003). Although women weren't necessarily engaging in direct political action in the 1920s, they were conscious of the resistance struggle against foreign powers and that their charitable work was part and parcel of this resistance (Fleischmann, 2003; Kuttab, 2012). The women's movement in all its forms has always been influenced and dominated by the national struggle (Kuttab, 2012).

Women focused on social and charity work in the early decades of the twentieth century (Fleischman, 2003; Jad, 2018) partly because the Mandate government did not offer these services (Fleischman, 2003). After decades of social and charitable work, and because of the changing geopolitical realities, women began engaging in more political activities in ways that suited the bourgeois class at the time. These activities included participation in demonstrations, writing letters of protest against the British Mandate government and Zionist immigration, and organizing boycotts of Jewish and foreign goods (Kuttab, 2012). Women also engaged in political activism by organizing demonstrations and congresses, writing memoranda to the government, engaging in arms smuggling, meeting with government officials, holding fundraisers, visiting prisoners and participating in international and regional women's conferences (Fleischmann, 2003, p. 3). In March 1920, twenty-nine women wrote a letter to the British chief administrator voicing their concerns about the British Balfour Declaration. In 1921, women helped raise money to send a Palestinian delegate to London to demand "...the abolition of the Balfour Declaration, a halt to Jewish immigration, and the formation of a representative government directly to the British government" (Fleischmann, 2003, p. 108-09).

All of these social and political activities between 1919-1929 paved the way for Palestinian women to eventually establish a public women's political organization in 1929 (Fleischmann, 2003). In 1929, a formal women's movement was born through the establishment of the Arab Women's Association (AWA) (later named the Arab Women's Union (AWU)) during the first women's congress in Jerusalem. While the AWA fought to limit immigration, cancel the Balfour Declaration, and resist Zionism, gender issues were also a central focus of their political vision, even though they were not necessarily pushed publicly at first (Fleischmann, 2003). Palestinian women believed in improving the lives of women, but at the

same time they were constrained by their political reality. The imminent threat of Zionist immigration, coupled with being colonized by a foreign power, were very real and urgent threats that women also confronted.

In Palestine as well as Egypt and the greater Levant, there was gradual liberalization in the early 20th century. The intellectual influence of Islamic reformers who wrote quite boldly about women's issues influenced this liberalization. Women were reading from the press and were aware of what was happening with politics and women in Egypt and Syria. The idea of the new modern women was circulating and being debated among the elite and conflicted at times with the expectation that women would still be the face of the nation by upholding traditions and dressing modestly throughout the national liberation struggle. Women had to be both modern and traditional (Fleischmann, 2003). Women were encouraged to get an education, which usually meant learning domestic responsibilities and good hygiene. Despite this limited education, it was seen as a positive step for economic advancement and fighting Zionism. Drawing on orientalist ideals of Middle Eastern women as backward, oppressed, and hidden behind the veil, the British encouraged education and perfection in the domestic sphere for women. Even though there was a lot of Western influence, and values taught in school, it worked to increase women's confidence, political ambition, participation, and access to the public sphere (Fleischmann, 2003).

The 1948 war resulted in the Palestinian *Nakba*, which displaced approximately 700,000 Palestinian Arabs (www.unrwa.org). About one-third of these refugees were eventually settled in the West Bank, while the remainder ended up in other areas of modern-day Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. The disaster and destruction that war brought, as well as the disillusionment that the surrounding Arab armies could not defeat the Zionists, caused great mental and physical hardship among Palestinians. By the 1960s, Palestinians had a strong sense that they wanted to

free their lands from foreign rule. According to several historians, “the Palestinian national movement in the 1960s marked the emergence of the contemporary form of Palestinian nationalism” (e.g., Budeiri 1995, 1998; Y. Sayigh 1987; Khalidi 1997, cited in Jad, 2008, p. 11).

After the Nakba and until the late 60s, women’s social work and activism was still carried out mostly by mid-upper-class women who offered services and charity to other women. The women’s movement was still considered a bourgeois women’s movement in which other classes of women were not playing active roles but were mostly receiving services (Kuttab, 2012). Women during this period had to deal with the immediate results of the war by treating the injured, supporting families who lost their primary breadwinners, and helping families financially or materially.

The loss of the 1967 and 1973 wars and the Israel occupation of the West Bank and Gaza were both significant events in Palestinian consciousness and caused more women and other Palestinians to become more politically active. The 1970s marked a shift in the women’s agenda from mostly charitable and social work to a focus on more politically focused activities and gender-based causes. Before 1967, most women didn’t disrupt structures of class and gender because it was seen as divisive in the national struggle, but, starting in the late 1970s and until the early 1990s, social work, women’s issues, and national liberation were inseparable (Sayigh, 1981). Kuttab argues that the national struggle went through “a process of democratization” in the period from 1976-1981 (2012, p. 174). Most scholars agree that this period was the most successful in terms of women’s integrated vision for social rights and political rights and the extent to which large sections of the Palestinian population were engaged and actively involved. Jad (2008) and Hawari (2019) describe it as a mass-based, well-connected, grassroots movement that included women from all classes of society including urban areas as well as refugee camps

and rural villages. While the leftist women's organizations had a feminist consciousness and started to work towards a unified feminist vision (Augustin, 1993), women's issues were not prioritized because of the urgency of national liberation.

In the 1970s and '80s, the women's movement expanded to include more classes of Palestinian women as well as women from rural villages and refugee camps (Kuttab, 2012). In 1978, in line with this shift among some women to engage more overtly in political activism, the Women's Work Committee (WWC) movement, which later split into four groups based on political factional divisions, was established (Kawar, 1996, p. 100). The women of the WWCs tried to connect with the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW), but the leader, Samiha Khalil feared their militant background would mar the charitable family rehabilitation organization's innocent appearance which allowed it to continue to conduct its social and political activities (Jad, 2018 p. 18-19).

National issues and a focus on more practical women's issues became central to women's activities in the 1970s and '80s. Women's organizations focused on educating women, providing job training, hygiene classes, childcare, and literacy classes so that women could advance their position in the family and society. There was also a sense that women needed to be more involved in the political issues surrounding them. Before the Nakba and until the 1960s, Palestinians were still engaged in the narrative of pan-Arabism and Palestinian liberation was central to that philosophy. In the 1960s Palestinian nationalism was on the rise, and in 1964 the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was established (Hasso, 2005). Most women worked within the women's organizations, but a minority of women engaged more in the militant activities of political parties in the West Bank, Jordan, and Lebanon.

The largest organization to emerge from the WWCs was the Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees (PFWAC) which was affiliated with the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). It was a very successful and influential force in the Palestinian community. It engaged with women from all social backgrounds and is characterized by strong relationships and connections between women who knew each other well. Initially, gender oppression was not tackled directly but rather integrated into their tactics of empowering women through improved healthcare, education, social assistance, and employment. These issues were seen as crucial to end women's dependence on men (PWWC 1985, 7; PFWAC 1988, cited in Jad, 2018, p. 19).

The women's committees remained active over the years and their work and mobilization during this time placed the women's committees in a strong position to mobilize women and others strategically during the first *Intifada* (1987-1990). After the first *Intifada*, despite women's crucial roles in organizing men and women, and their organizational and material contributions, men did not treat them any differently. Women were expected to return to their traditional roles in the domestic sphere. Women realized that the national movement would not work to address women's issues and women's liberation, and that they can no longer ignore the gender inequalities within Palestinian society (James, 2013).

Despite the setback and disillusionment that followed the first *Intifada*, the women involved in the leftist political and women's organizations, especially the DFLP, made some progress in women's involvement as competent cadres committed to the national struggle and feminism (Hasso, 1997, cited in Jad, 2018, p. 116). Women in the committees that were affiliated with the various political factions were very politically active during the 70s and 80s, and their work cannot be underestimated. In parallel with the national question, they also started

to develop a more direct discourse about gender issues and women's roles in Palestinian society. They made great gains in terms of placing women's issues in the public sphere (Augustin, 1993). However, with the rise in Islamist ideology, popularity, and political involvement in the late 80s and early 90s after the signing of the Oslo agreement, the influence of "...secular leftist-nationalist ideology and women's power and activism in the national movement waned..." and this hindered the "...aspirations long held by the pre-1993 women's movement..." preventing their achievements from turning into a long-term development (Jad, 2018, p. 16).

Women didn't start focusing solely and specifically on women's equality, legal rights, and safety until the 1990s (Kuttab, 2012; Barron, 2002). This is mostly because the issue of gender equality was seen as divisive until the late 1980s, and women always had political and national emergencies to deal with; the national struggle required extensive attention and coordination (Fleischmann, 2003). The Palestinian Authority (PA) was established in 1993, but it only had limited control over the West Bank. The Oslo peace agreement gave the perception that a lasting peace would follow, and this impacted the mindset and momentum of the national resistance movement. Once the Oslo Agreement was signed in 1993, women had already begun shifting their focus to a women's rights agenda delinked from national liberation partly because, at the time, the Palestinian Authority was seen as the fighter for liberation on behalf of the Palestinian people. The women's committees broke up and NGOs with international influence and support took over most of women's activism activities and provided services to women. This was also partly because the PA was not a sovereign independent government and there were not many funds allocated to women's issues. Due to the political fragmentation after Oslo, the fourth generation of women's activists realized that women's issues must take precedence and that they must not wait for national liberation. Mass-based organizations of the 80s became disillusioned

and unmotivated which resulted in "...fragmentation, decline of popular uprising and withdrawal of grassroots activism" (Kuttab, 2012, p. 177). Moreover, the relationship of the political parties and the new government with the women's movement became more formal and bureaucratic causing many women's services to be shut down (Kuttab, 2012). The outcome of this political fragmentation and ensuing bureaucratic relations with the women's organizations created a shift to "...a de-politicized feminist agenda..." delinked from national issues which were the main interests of the majority of Palestinian women (p. 177-78). With the rise in NGO influence and middle-class women working in them, the gap between urban and rural women increased which did not help the unity of the women's movement.

While women stopped engaging in political activity in the 1990s, they started to focus heavily on legal and social issues. For example, sensitive issues such as gender-based violence and honor killings become a large part of their activism. These issues were rarely addressed prior to the 90s because they were still considered taboo subjects. In many Arab societies, the family is considered the private domain and what happens within the family should not be revealed in public (Barron, 2002) and this issue is still relevant in this study.

Jad (2008) argues that there was a significant shift in the Palestinian women's movement between the 80s and 90s. While the first phase was a secular, mass-based women's movement (1970s-early 1990s), the second is more centralized, delinked from national issues, and includes the rise of the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC) and the coming of the "NGO-ization" (1990s to present). Jad characterizes the transition between these two movements as a "shift from "power to" women in grassroots networks to "power over" them by the new elite" (2008, p. 16). Women's NGOs and their style of organization and communication "inadvertently acted to disempower and de-legitimize civil society and secular actors and their

movements" (Jad, 2008, p. 16). Kuttab (2012) calls this period the "professionalization" of the women's movements (p. 179). What is more, the mass-based grassroots phase focused both on women's issues and national liberation though national liberation certainly took the bulk of their work and efforts, while the recent professionalization (Kuttab, 2012) of the women's movement delinks the national struggle from women's issues. During this period, women's overall participation in the movement declined because the structure of NGOs includes a small number of qualified women rather than relying on mass participation and NGOs prioritized the donor's agenda over Palestinian women's immediate needs (Kuttab, 2012). Additionally, after the second *Intifada*, women's problems were directly related to political issues since their husbands or sons had been killed or arrested during the uprising. The double burden of taking care of the household and becoming the breadwinner fell on women. In this way, the NGOs did not focus on women's practical needs that were directly tied to the national liberation struggle.

The absence of a mass-based movement in which wide portions of Palestinian society are involved and that is not in tune with the needs of lower-middle-class women (as opposed to highly educated/professional women), coupled with the de-politicization of women's activism, has had negative consequences the women's movement (Johnson & Kuttab, 2001; Kuttab, 2012). Hawari (2019) and Jad (2003) also argue for a return to grassroots organizations that encourage and foster women's personal networks rather than internationally funded, short-term, project-based, centralized, professionalized NGO women's work. They see the transition from mass-based women's mobilization to the professionalism of NGOs as a major step backward in the success of the Palestinian women's movement. Jad (2003) goes so far as to say that once NGOs took over women's activism, it ceased to be a real social movement (p. 45). She argues that the very essence and structure of NGOs prevent them from being an agent of mobilization and

organizing of the masses since they cannot deal with socio-political or economic issues at the national level.

This study reveals that these negative impacts on the women's movement mentioned above (Johnson & Kuttub, 2001; Jad, 2003; Kuttub, 2012; Hawari, 2019) are still real threats to women's progress today and are even more complicated by the internal disagreements among feminists and activists themselves, the lack of support for women's rights on the side of the PA, and an increase of attacks on women, women's organizations, and women's attempts to modify existing legislation by Hizb ut Tahrir and other influential clerics and tribal leaders\

Ṭāl'āt

Amid this difficult time for women's NGOs, women's coalitions, and individual feminist activities, the online radical feminist movement Ṭāl'āt became public in 2019². Ṭāl'āt is an anti-colonial, intersectional, radical feminist movement that fights for rights, safety, and equality for Palestinian women while simultaneously calling for national liberation. For Ṭāl'āt these two issues are interconnected and must be addressed together. Ṭāl'āt has distinguished itself from the women's NGO movement by remaining financially and politically independent. In this way, it is able to address the most relevant and sensitive social and political issues without reservation. It draws on principles and slogans from the historical women's movement and women's committees of the 70s and 80s by calling for national liberation, but it defines itself as a new version of women's liberation by prioritizing women's rights and safety even when national liberation has not been achieved. Ṭāl'āt members believe that for Palestine to be free, all

² While it is known that at the time of writing (Spring 2024) that Ṭāl'āt is still an active feminist force, their public Facebook posts and Tweets have diminished significantly. The reason for this is unclear/unknown to the author at this time.

members of society must be free (Saba, 2023; Stigna, 2024). As a result, they are distancing themselves from political parties who have in the past and until now, dictated a lot of the women's committees and women's organizations' work (Stigna 2024). While Ṭāl'āt has been able to mobilize Palestinian women all over historic Palestine and abroad through various demonstrations and sit-ins, there is not a lot of evidence that the movement has picked up much momentum among women in the West Bank. Therefore, this study examines how Ṭāl'āt may be one answer to the current weaknesses of the women's' movement as it manifests itself through legal NGO work, but also about how it does not seem to have taken hold in the mass-based grassroots way that it intended. While this study does not have the answer to this question, it reveals the importance of examining Ṭāl'āt and why it was not more successful and offers possible hypotheses for this phenomenon and directions for further research.

Women's feminist activism takes various forms among Palestinian women in various geographic locations. All women face challenges in their activist work and their realities and challenges do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, there are multiple levels and systems of oppression at work to prevent women from reaching their goals. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the "realities and processes of power" as they impact women's movements and processes of working towards more gender equality and representation (Elsadda, 2019, p. 53). According to Elsadda (2019), this has not been done in studies of the women's movement in Egypt and other Arab countries.

Islamic Versus Secular Feminist Outlooks on Feminism

The leftist women's organizations of the '70s and '80s, while they did actively involve refugee and rural women, did not connect with conservative or Islamist women who had different views about feminism including their views of women's equality versus equity in

Palestinian society (Jad, 2018). The secular women's movement did not agree with Hamas on two main issues. They argued for complete equity in their daily work in the political party and that women were equal to men in military activities (Jad, 2018; Khamis, 2010). Islamist women critique liberalism and the notion that the individual matters most. Islamist women consider the collective responsibility that Palestinians have as citizens and this conflicted with liberal feminist notions of women's liberation (Jad, 2018, p. 149). Additionally, Islamist women were critical of leftist feminism because they considered it too much like Western and foreign rather than sincere homegrown feminism (Jad, 2018; Khamis, 2010). Because of this, they prefer to avoid the use of the word 'feminist' (Abu-Lughod, 1998). Khamis (2010) sums up the development of Islamic feminism and its conflict with secular feminism when she writes that Islamic feminism can be understood as a counter to top-down secular feminism "...which was perceived as both alien and imported and to replace it with a more indigenous, homemade version of feminism that operates within, rather than without, an Islamic context and frame of reference" (p. 241). At the same time, Abu-Lughod argues for a different perspective on the idea that secular feminism among Arab women is alien and Western-imported. While secular Arab feminists focus on equality between men and women in ways that fit their societies' cultural and social norms, they also aim to push the boundaries of old traditions and understandings of gender roles. Referencing Kandiyoti (1993), Abu-Lughod (1998) notes how Leila Ahmed categorizes Arab feminists as either indigenous or Western-oriented. Ahmed criticizes Arab feminists whom she considers inauthentic for their adopting of Western liberal feminist values and conceptions of gender (Abu-Lughod, 1998). Conversely, Badran (1995), posits that applying this dichotomy and attempting "... to discredit or to legitimize feminism on cultural grounds . . . are political projects" and that

“...origins of feminism cannot be found in a culturally pure location” (cited in Abu-Lughod, 1998, p. 15).

This understanding of leftist feminist activities as being Western created distrust among Palestinian women from different backgrounds. Jad (2008) argues that in the 1990s and 2000s, with the NGOization of the women’s movement, secularists lost ground in comparison to the Islamists because the former engage in a discourse of women’s rights that is separate from the national agenda. Jad (2018) also shows that Islamist feminists cannot be considered a unified group with unified goals. Her research shows how educated Islamist women had priorities relating to women’s safe and expanded access to the public sphere (p. 154). In this context, Jad argues that women from Islamist and secular backgrounds would benefit from dialogue and finding common ground. Moreover, this study reveals that there are also ruptures among secular feminist activists as well and that they cannot be considered a monolithic group with similar views about how to mobilize women and the most important issues to address. Data reveal that failing to include marginalized and diverse voices and women from various socioeconomic backgrounds and geographical regions in the operation and mobilization of women creates a one among several barriers facing the women’s movement. Based on scholarship about intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Mohanty, 1991), cooperation between Islamists and secular women, for example, could create a more unified Palestinian feminist movement that considers the needs of all women regardless of religious affiliation. A unified approach that also accounts for difference could create a more powerful force against patriarchy and the Israeli occupation.

This study considers these internal conflicts between Palestinian women and how they view women’s issues to paint a bigger picture of the current state of the women’s movement and

how its successes and shortcomings have implications that trickle down to everyday Palestinian women.

Women's Current Social and Legal Context

While the Palestinian women's movement has a long history and strong track record of achieving goals towards gender equality and women's rights, the situation for all Palestinian women, especially women living in Area C, rural areas, and refugee camps remains extremely difficult in terms of their healthcare, economic status, political participation, and their legal and social rights in relations to marriage, divorce, and inheritance (OCHA, 2022; Hattab & Abualrob, 2023). The multiple and complex systems in place in Palestinian society such as economic insecurity, patriarchal and traditional norms and beliefs, Islamic fundamentalism, and the Israeli occupation all contribute to the suffering and oppression of women in direct and indirect ways. As Shalhoub-Kevorkian argues, Palestinian women "...face three connecting forms of oppression: internal patriarchal structures that call for 'the preservation of cultural authenticity'; the external Israeli Occupation that violates their human rights; and external 'Western myths and prejudices against Arab/Palestinian women'" (2003 p. 393, cited in Holt, 2010 p. 414).

In this post-Oslo era, the occupation touches almost every aspect of Palestinian women's lives including security, health, education, family, work, and protection (Rought-Brooks, Duaibis, Hussein, 2010). Throughout the decades since the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and due to a variety of laws that discriminate against women, conservative and patriarchal mentality and the volatility and violence of the Israeli occupation, Palestinian women have experienced various phases some of which women made great gains and others in which women's rights seemed to recede in dangerous ways. Moreover, the lack of grassroots

organizing (Jad, 2003; Hawari, 2019) after the signing of the Oslo Accords, coupled with the increased politicization and militarization of the conflict, do not allow women to participate and have meaningful roles and influence in solving the conflict and achieving national liberation (Holt, 2010). This is partly due to women's weak political participation in government and lack of women in decision-making roles all of which impact women's ability to take control of and address the issues that impact their lives the most or the fate of the establishment of an independent Palestinian State (Doria Feminist Fund, 2022, p. 7; interview Sajeda AlQawasmeh). Even though Palestinian women face some of the toughest barriers towards their goals of women's safety, rights, and gender equality, they are also very defiant and resilient in both fighting the occupation and addressing social issues that impact women the most (Holt, 2010). However, the impacts and effects of the Israeli occupation cannot be underestimated when considering the true plight of Palestinian women. Despite women's hard work and organizing over the years, patriarchal traditions, coupled with the Israeli military occupation and the violence associated with it, make women's rights activists and women's organizations' work extremely difficult. Rought-Brooks, Duaibis, Hussein (2010) argue that "...only through an end to the Israeli military occupation, self-determination for the Palestinian people, and the creation of an independent, viable Palestinian state that the women's movement will be able to make the necessary progress to improve the lives of Palestinian women" (p. 125).

Social Context

Socially, Palestinian women still face many obstacles. Social issues such as physical and psychological abuse, sexual abuse and harassment, uneven wages, and access to decent healthcare facilities and services and to what extent they impact women depends on a woman's socioeconomic level, education level, family dynamics, level of conservatism of the family, and

where she lives. Women living in Area C, East Jerusalem, and Gaza are at increased risk of lacking adequate health facilities and have limited availability of and access to multi-sector protection services such as counseling and protection against violence (ESCWA, 2019).³ Between 2016-2017, there were 22,222 reported cases of gender-based violence (GBV) in the Palestinian territories (ESCWA, 2019). One study indicates that more exposure to violence brought on by the occupation is linked to GBV. The study showed that men who experienced violence from the occupation were more likely to have symptoms of depression and commit sexual intimate partner violence and sexual harassment (Kuttab & Heilman, 2017). While violence is committed against women and all areas of the world, it must be acknowledged that the presence and impact of the occupation create violent social spaces and make violence the norm thus impacting gender relations and hierarchies. While the occupation can't be blamed for everything, it is impossible to ignore it when families are left homeless after house demolitions, women are left to be breadwinners of their families when their husbands are killed or incarcerated. Family relations extend to and are impacted by the political and economic spheres (Rought-Brooks, Duaibis, Hussein, 2010, p. 129).

In 2011, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) conducted a study that showed that 62.2 percent of women who are married or were previously married experience some form of violence from their husband while 21.8 percent experience some form of violence at home by someone else. Lastly, 13 percent of women experience some kind of violence in other places. The women surveyed experienced physical, sexual and psychological violence (Okasha & Abu-Saada, 2014). This situation for women worsened during COVID. (Mahamid, Veronese, Bdier, 2022). In terms of murder and femicide, in 2019, it was documented that 11

³ Social and Economic Situation for Palestinian Women and Girls

Palestinian women were killed in the occupied territories as a result of gender-based violence, while in 2018 it was recorded that 14 women were killed, in 2017, 10 women were killed, and in 2016-2015, 24 Palestinian women were killed” (Doria Feminist Fund 2022).

In terms of healthcare, there are few facilities in Area C, and it is almost impossible to get permits from Israel to build new ones because Israel restricts the building of most new houses, infrastructure and facilities (Human Rights Watch, 2010; ESCWA, 2019). In East Jerusalem, approximately 10,000 women do not have access to government-sponsored health care because of Israeli policies of residency revocation and family reunification that add extra bureaucratic steps for women and families to obtain legal status that includes health insurance (ESCWA, 2019). Overall, the PA focuses most of its healthcare services on childbearing and significantly less on preventative medical services such as breast cancer and cervical cancer screenings for women throughout their lives (ESCWA, 2019).

Lastly, women tend to deny that they have been victims of sexual or physical violence because they feel shame and have moral obligations towards their families. They do not want to talk about their experiences because they want to prevent “status loss and discrimination” (Mahamid, Veronese, & Bdier, 2022, p. 6). As a result, women do not often get the care and support they need to work through these difficult circumstances.

Legal Context

The legal system in the Palestinian Territories is outdated and retains many laws from its long colonial past; laws that do not reflect the needs and reality of Palestinians now. While this legal system is controlled by the Palestinian Authority, external and internal political realities make it very difficult to change laws that will improve the plight of women or to ensure that crimes against women are recognized and that the perpetrators are convicted and punished

(Rought-Brooks, Duaibis, Hussein, 2010). The Oslo Accords created a situation in which the governing body of the Palestinians only has partial control over their land on the legal and security levels. The PA has complete control over area A, only civil control, but not military control of area B, and no control over area C which makes up 63 percent of the land in the West Bank (Bimkom, 2008, cited in Rought-Brooks, Duaibis, Hussein, 2010, p. 126). One major reason that women are not safe legally is that perpetrators of violence or murder of women act with impunity on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides. The Palestinian legal system is unable to investigate and hold criminals accountable in Area C and the Israelis are unwilling to do so (Rought-Brooks, Duaibis, Hussein, 2010). The PA took on a “disjointed legal and judicial system” (Rought-Brooks, Duaibis, Hussein, 2010, p. 126) which includes aspects of various colonial legal systems imposed on the Palestinian people over the last several centuries. The PA can only hear civil and criminal cases in areas A and B, but not in area C (Rought-Brooks, Duaibis, Hussein, 2010).

Because it was assumed after Oslo, that the Palestinian Authority would deal with national liberation and other political issues, the women’s movement turned to focusing on women’s legal rights and status in the fledgling semi state of Palestine. The “need” for grassroots activists as it was practiced in the 70s and 80s seemed less urgent because now the Palestinians had a government body to represent them. The women’s movement had goals “...to improve the legal, social, educational, occupational, and political status of women in all areas of Palestinian society” (Baron 2002, 73, cited in Rought-Brooks, Duaibis & Hussein, 2010, p. 127). This has been seriously impeded by the Israeli occupation and the impact this occupation has on the Palestinian authority and its ability to enforce rules/laws. This is because the judicial system is quite dysfunctional due to “...Israel's destruction of ministries and police stations and the

restrictions on movement of police forces caused by roadblocks and checkpoints” (Rought-Brooks, Duaibis & Hussein, 2010, p. 127). There is an urgent need for cultural and legal reform especially in rural areas because “...classic patriarchy facilitates the creation of cultural frameworks that internalize and strengthen the inferior status of women” (Shaloub-Kevorkian, 2005, cited in Duaibis & Hussein, 2010, p. 128). Current laws do not protect women enough and are often discriminatory toward women. What is worse is that these laws still retain aspects of laws from various colonial systems; therefore, they have not been created by and for specific Palestinian needs and realities. Because men create and dictate the laws, the creation of new laws that benefit women directly is either not being written or are being fought and prevented by Islamic leaders and scholars (Hattab & Abualrob, 2023). What is more, women are expected to uphold the family’s reputation and honor based on her behavior and silence. This often results in women remaining silent rather than seeking shelter, protection, or support (Shaloub-Kevorkian 2005, cited in Rought-Brooks, Duaibis & Hussein, 2010, p. 127).

There are specific laws from the Jordanian Penal Code laws that are active in the West Bank and discriminate against women. For example, Article 308 (Law No. 16 which is in force in the West Bank) dictates that a rapist may marry the woman he rapes. Article 340 protects a male relative who murders his wife or daughter if it relates to issues of “honor.”. Articles 285 and 286 stipulate that if a woman wants to file a complaint of violence or abuse against anyone it must be done through a male family member (Rought-Brooks, Duaibis & Hussein, 2010). The issue with these last two articles is that it is often the male family member who engages in the violence, abuse, or rape in question; therefore, women are not able to trust the male family member to take the issues seriously and present them legitimately in court or in front of a religious leader. “Palestinian women’s associations indicated that the main problems remain in

the lack of legal and social frameworks that criminalize violence against women, punish the offender, or protect the victim and help her to overcome this violence” (Doria Feminist Fund, 2022, p. 8). One way to address this lack of criminalization of violence against women and other issues is to adopt The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW was ratified by the PA in 2014, but was not added to the official gazette which contains all of the laws in Palestine. The PA has not actively implemented CEDAW due to fear of criticism by Hizb ut-Tahrir and other clerics and tribal leaders. The Supreme Constitutional Court also issued a decree that allows courts to not be bound to implement international treaties that conflict with the Palestinian Law (Doria Feminist Fund, 2022). Moreover, women’s role in decision-making processes is still very limited in government and ministry positions as well as in trade, agriculture, and judicial capacities (Doria Feminist Fund, p. 7).

This is a brief description of how the legal system has and continues to impact women’s freedom, safety, and autonomy. The legal aspect is only one of several angles from which to understand women’s experiences in Palestine.

Political Context

In the 1960s, the struggle against Israel was mostly secular as Islam was not a significant part of the resistance. A military resistance that focused on upholding Palestinian identity and recapturing the Palestinian homeland was carried out by the secular parties, namely, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and the Palestinian Communist Party (PCP) under the umbrella of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) (Holt, 2010). Women had representation in each of these parties.

The occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem in 1967 had a profound impact on all Palestinians and especially transformed the roles and responsibilities of Palestinian women significantly. Israeli oppression became more local and intimate, and women had no choice but to participate in the resistance because the Israelis were in and around their homes and villages, so they had no choice but to participate in the resistance (Holt, 2010).

Once the first Intifada started in 1987, women went from having passive to active roles in the resistance and they participated and mobilized people and women in ways that the PA could not have done because they lacked the connections and coalitions that women's organizations built. In the second *Intifada*, women did not have such an active and prominent role because of the violent and militarized nature of the conflict. By the 1980s many Palestinians were not convinced that the PLO and the secular approach was having a significant effect toward their cause of national liberation (Holt, 2010).

By the early 1990s after the Oslo Accords were signed women started looking forward to how they would contribute to a Palestinian State but also how they could influence the laws relating to women. Until now, women still have very limited impact in high-profile decision-making positions in government and legislation (Ernudd, 2007). Despite this, women's rights coalitions such as the Forum for the Opposition of Violence against Women and the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) are working very hard to lobby the PA and lawmakers regarding laws pertaining to rights and protection for women. The Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) makes excuses that they are not able to pass laws because they do not have all of their members present due to arrests by the Israeli military, but as my interlocutors point out, they are still able to pass other laws on different issues. The reality is that any law related to personal status, or the safety of women and children is a hotly

debated issue by some Islamic clerics and tribal leaders who protest and lobby the legislative council and other leaders not to alter these laws because they are against Islam (Hattab & Abualrob, 2023). Because of the Islamists' wide reach and the loud noise they make about issues impacting women, the PA is afraid to stir up anti-Islamic sentiment by modifying laws relating to women and family issues.

Even though Palestinian women have been active in the resistance from the very beginning and had legitimacy in society, they have not been included in attempts to solve the conflict. According to Holt (2010), this is due to the strong prevalence of patriarchy throughout society and the violent character of the conflict. The increased violence of the conflict has made it more difficult for women to participate in the resistance in prominent and meaningful ways outside of supporting their families and raising their children. As Holt concludes, "Since the outbreak of violence in 2000, as fear and the absence of hope have become increasingly prevalent, the 'culture of resistance' has been weakened and women's space for maneuver has become even more restricted. The overall effect, it has been suggested, has been highly negative for women in terms of rights and entitlements and has also tended to separate their areas of activity from those of men" (2010, p. 408). Keeping women out of certain arenas such as politics, legislation, and leadership roles significantly limits their reach and impact on issues of women and national liberation.

The violence of the occupation impacts both men and women. Palestinians have not and do not always see masculinity in the form of violence; rather, it means protecting one's family and meeting social obligations (Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling, 2001, cited in Holt, 2010, p. 409). However, since the Second Intifada, violence against women has increased. This is attributed to the presence of an increasingly violent military occupation that consistently

and systematically discriminates, abuses, and controls the Palestinian population. To have a colonial subject there is a creation of types of difference and otherness. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, race and sex are enhanced to express difference, power, and domination (Holt, 2010). As Holt indicates, the occupation "...seeks to challenge the masculinity of the Palestinian nation by undermining the malehood of the nation" (2010, p. 411). After the Second Intifada and until now, the political situation and national liberation take priority over gender and social issues (Holt, 2010). This makes it difficult for women to speak out or try to find help when they face domestic violence or any type of abuse. It is assumed that women must remain quiet to keep the family together. There is a sense that it would be selfish of a woman to speak out about her suffering because the Palestinian people are all suffering, and the freedom of the nation is the top priority. This is not to say that violence and abuse would disappear if there was no occupation, but this proves that the presence and socio-political dynamics of the occupation and ways that it has created and solidified very gendered roles in terms of the way men and women are expected to behave in society critically hinder women's potential to curb and eliminate gender-based violence and all types of abuse. Moreover, because of the sense of urgency and state of emergency that the occupation and subsequent intifadas have caused in Palestinian society, women don't have safe and supportive spaces to demand their rights and speak out about violence and abuse. If men and most women do not believe in the importance of women's safety in conjunction with their commitment to achieving a free nation, it is very difficult for just some women's organizations and activists to change the prevailing attitudes in their society.

CHAPTER 3: THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION AND WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES

The Pervasiveness of the Israeli Occupation

Throughout researching Palestinian women's experiences as women living under occupation and the gendered realities of being a feminist and working towards women's rights and great gender equality, it became clear that several forces working simultaneously but not necessarily in coordination with one another are influencing, hindering, and challenging Palestinian women in their fight for great gender equality, representation, and legal and social rights. The various forces, which come both from inside and outside of Palestinian society, are intricately interconnected, hinder feminist women's goals and aspirations, and affect different women in unsettling ways. Yet, despite these influences and their impacts, Palestinian women continue to find ways to temporarily overcome these barriers in both their individual and social lives in small and big ways. They are continuously overcoming the odds to be loving, supportive mothers and friends, successful and dedicated professionals and employees, and, when possible, influential political and social figures. However, the most devastating force preventing Palestinian women from living a safer, dignified, and just life and achieving their feminist goals is the Israeli occupation and neoliberal influences. The other negative outcomes for women which come from the effects of international donor funding for women's legal and social NGOs, conservative and traditional society, patriarchy, Hizb ut Tahrir, and the Palestinian Authority are less severe in their impact but stem from and are enhanced by the occupation and neoliberalism. While the effects of the occupation impact women at varying levels of intensity depending on their geographical locations, social and employment status, how politically active, and how

religiously and socially conservative their family is,⁴ it is so pervasive that no aspect of Palestinians' lives is free from it. On the collective level, Israel is threatened by women's and feminist organizations as well, to the point that it has shut down women's, children's, and other civil society organizations because they are political and promote terrorism (The Electronic Intifada, 2011; Amnesty 2022; OHCHR, 2022). This is just one way that Israel stifles free speech, women's advancement, and Palestinians ability to address the social and political issues caused by the occupation. As Rought-Brooks, Duaibis, and Hussein (2010) attest, Palestinian women will never be able to fully achieve their feminist and gender equality goals until there is an end to the Israeli occupation and Palestinians have a sovereign and legitimate government and control over their land, political and social lives, economy, and movement.

This chapter describes the details and context of the Israeli occupation and how it systematically and pervasively affects Palestinian's social, emotional, and economic lives. Understanding how the occupation operates and how it impacts women and women's organizations specifically can shed light on women's lived realities and experiences as well as how and why feminist activists conduct their activism and the source of their successes and struggles. The next section in this chapter focuses on women's personal experiences, both direct and indirect, with the Israeli occupation. I argue that neoliberal tendencies and policies manifested through the Israeli occupation burden Palestinian women's social roles, relationships, and ability to steer the trajectory of their lives. To be a Palestinian woman means to struggle for rights and existence. With knowledge of women's lived experiences, this study aims to reveal

⁴ Because most of the data was collected before the October 7th Hamas attack on Israel and the subsequent Israel assault on Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, it does not generally reflect new developments or changes that women experienced after this date. At the same time, I did reconnect with some of my interlocutors to get a sense of what life is like for women after this devastating and horrific conflict between Hamas, Israel, and the Palestinian people broke out.

specific, systematic, and gendered ways the occupation changes the trajectory of women's lives, impacts social and familial relationships, and limits women reaching their full potential.

1948

The state of Israel was established in 1948 following what the Palestinians call the "Nakba" or the catastrophe and included several massacres of more than 100 Palestinians as well as the displacement of between 750,000 and 1,000,000 people constituting 75% of the Palestinian population (IMEU, 2023). Moreover, more than 400 towns and villages were destroyed or repopulated by Jews between 1948 and 1950 (Ibid).

Israeli Occupation-Realities on the Ground

While Palestinians have been fighting Zionism and ethnic cleansing since before 1948, the Israel occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem has been ongoing since 1967. Since 1948 and until today, Israel has steadily increased its physical control of the Palestinian people by restricting their movement and access to natural resources, confiscating their land, preventing them from expanding urban areas, and arresting thousands of Palestinians without charge (B'Tselem, 2017). As of 2023, 565 barriers control Palestinian movement in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Out of these, 49 are permanently staffed by the Israeli army or private security companies. There are 139 occasionally staffed checkpoints, 304 roadblocks, and 74 earth walls, road barriers, and trenches (OCHA, 2023). According to OCHA, "Over half of the obstacles (339 out of 645) have been assessed by OCHA to have a severe impact on Palestinians by preventing or restricting access and movement to main roads, urban centers, services, and agricultural areas" (Ibid). In addition to the checkpoints, Israel began constructing a 714-kilometer/50-mile-long separation barrier in 2002. About sixty-five percent of it is completed and about eighty-five

percent of it enters into Palestinian land, annexing approximately ten percent of the West Bank. The separation barrier cuts off Palestinian farmers from their land. While sixty-nine gates can allow access to these lands, they remain mostly closed. After the Oslo Accords in 1993, the West Bank was divided into three sections: Area A (18%), Area B (22%), and Area C (60%) (B'Tselem, Conquer and Divide). Area A and B are not contiguous. They are composed of 165 islands; therefore, travel between them can be very dangerous, difficult, and unpredictable due to permanent and flying checkpoints. The Palestinian Authority (PA) has control of security and administrative issues in Area A, and control over only administrative matters in Area B, and no control in Area C. Essentially, the Israeli army has full dominance over all of the West Bank as it controls movement into Areas A, B, and C, and enters those areas at any time to arrest or detain Palestinians. It also restricts building and development in Area C even if the buildings will be used for residents of Area A and B (Ibid). Moreover, it has complete control over Palestinians' movement out of the West Bank into Jordan. For any reason, Israel can restrict Palestinian's ability to leave the West Bank whether for tourism, work, study, or healthcare. Essentially, the PA is only partially in control of forty percent of the West Bank and does not control its borders. Moreover, Palestinians with West Bank IDs cannot enter Israel or East Jerusalem without special permission from the Israeli military. It can sometimes be very difficult to obtain a permit either for medical or family reasons. As a result of the permit system and the complex system of bypass roads, roadblocks, and checkpoints implemented by the Israeli military, Palestinians face difficulties in getting medical care, visiting family members, arriving at schools, work, and universities, and going on family trips and traveling abroad (B'Tselem, 2017). Every aspect of their lives is controlled by Israel and they are closely watched by cameras, watch towers, telephone lines, and social media. Israel holds detailed electronic files of each Palestinian

containing pictures and detailed information about their lives. To enter Israel, they must apply for a permit. At the checkpoints, they can only enter via their fingerprint and magnetic card.

Movement

The road system in the West Bank is very complex and aims to restrict Palestinian movement to protect settlers and limit their contact with Palestinians. B'Tselem explains the extent of the control over Palestinian movement in the West Bank:

“The restrictions on movement within the West Bank have institutionalized the separation between Israeli settlers and Palestinians. The main network of roads was built to serve settlers, on land expropriated from Palestinians. Israel completely prohibits Palestinians from using about 40 kilometers of these roads – including almost eight kilometers of Route 443 and almost seven kilometers within the city of Hebron, near the settlements established there. Another 20 kilometers of these roads are partially off limits to Palestinians” (B'Tselem, 2017, The Present Situation).

In addition, Israel has created an alternate network of roads intended for Palestinians only. Referred to as “fabric-of-life roads,” they are also paved on land expropriated from Palestinians and include tunnels and bypass roads. According to OCHA, Israel has paved 49 kilometers of such roads, including 43 tunnels and underpasses. While these “fabric-of-life roads” do allow for vehicular travel between the Palestinian “islands” that Israel has created throughout the West Bank, Israel still prevents territorial contiguity between these communities, and these routes are often the least direct ways to arrive at one’s desired location. Moreover, this road network that includes several gates and barriers allows Israel to easily cut off movement

between different parts of the West Bank at a moment's notice, effectively trapping Palestinians into small areas (B'Tselem, 2017).

Family Reunification

Family reunification is also a challenge facing Palestinians living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Palestinians holding West Bank IDs who marry someone from East Jerusalem often face difficulties in obtaining family reunification status and are denied residency status and access to universal health care services. This has particularly severe impacts on women who require healthcare related to pregnancy (Daoud, Alfayumi-Zeadna, Jabareen, 2018). Denial of family reunification and residency status leads to poverty due to the high cost of private health insurance, legal fees, and permit extensions needed to obtain rights for families to live together. Moreover, lacking residency status further exacerbates gender inequality because women become more dependent on their husbands because they can't work or move easily between cities. Women's health, emotional wellness, and social integration are negatively impacted as family members are forced to make risky decisions in crossing checkpoints to seek medical care in the West Bank (Ibid).

Female Prisoners

Since the beginning of the occupation in 1967, over 10,000 Palestinian women have been arrested and detained by Israeli occupation forces. In 2018, Palestinian women and girls were routinely arrested from the streets, Israeli military checkpoints, and during violent night raids on their homes, totaling 62 Palestinian females held in Israeli prisons and detention centers, including 6 female children, 9 injured prisoners, and 3 administrative detainees held without

charge or trial (Addameer, 2018). As of May 5, 2024, there are eighty female political prisoners (Addameer, 2024). Additionally, female prisoners are routinely abused, tortured and humiliated, denied sanitary napkins while menstruating, and forced to remain in unsanitary jail cells (El-Karama, 2018).

Disproportionate Impact of the Occupation on Palestinian Women

While the Israeli occupation impacts all Palestinians, women experience it more intensely in ways that most men do not experience (Dana & Walker, 2015). Some women have direct violent experiences with Israeli soldiers and/or settlers. These experiences cause them injury and psychological issues (Rought-Brooks, Duaibis & Hussein, 2010). The occupation restricts people's movement, affects their physical and mental health, limits their educational and economic prospects, changes gender roles and relations (Ihmoud, 2022), and poses a physical threat to people's bodies (Rought-Brooks, Duaibis, Hussein, 2010; Dana & Walker, 2015). Because women are child-bearers, have reproductive health needs, and are normally responsible for their children's upbringing, education, and well-being, women often face worse consequences of the occupation. This is especially true when women must work low-wage jobs, worry about their children crossing checkpoints getting to school, struggle to find adequate healthcare, and are victims of home demolitions.

Women are impacted more by the lack of economic opportunities in the West Bank. The Palestinian economy is significantly weaker and less robust than the Israeli economy because of the occupation, the weakness of the PA, and the restriction of the movement of people and goods. Because of this, most Palestinians try to find work in Israel where the wages, though still very low, are much better than in the West Bank. Working in Israel has several negative

consequences such as the experience of moving through checkpoints each day and dealing with often violent or aggressive soldiers and the lack of job security and benefits for West Bank ID holders (International Labor Organization, 2023). Economically disadvantaged women who must work, are forced to work in service jobs with low wages and poor working conditions in Israel or the West Bank because they are uneducated or have no other choices (Dana & Walker, 2015). For families to make ends meet, the wife usually must work a full-time job, yet she is also expected to take care of the household chores and raise, feed, and educate their children on her own (Ghandour R, et al, 2020).

Lack of Safety Due to Settler Violence and Military Checkpoints

While both men and women experience harassment by Israeli soldiers at checkpoints and other locations, women are impacted more. The threat of violence from Israeli soldiers is real and more pronounced in some areas of the West Bank such as Hebron, Jenin, Nablus, and other towns and villages where Israeli settlements surround and suffocate Palestinian areas. Families who know that their daughter has been harassed by soldiers where witnesses are involved tend to forbid them to continue going through checkpoints or places where they would encounter Israeli soldiers (Dana & Walker, 2015). Just the threat of potential violence is enough for a family to fear for the lives and well-being of their sisters, daughters, and wives. Oftentimes, this translates into women being forbidden from working, limiting their upward mobility, or from continuing their education, preventing them from accessing better jobs (OCHA, 2022).

Israeli human rights organization Yesh Din reported that the Israeli army rarely addresses Palestinian complaints about violence or damage to their property by Israeli settlers and soldiers. It found that ninety percent of these cases were closed with no indictments.

Regarding investigations about injuries to and killing of Palestinian civilians, out of 239 investigations, only 16 resulted in convictions (Rought-Brooks, Duaibis & Hussein, 2010).

Due to the Israeli Occupation, Israel's control of the West Bank through the Oslo Agreement, and the impotence of the Palestinian Legislative Council due to external and internal factors, laws protecting women have not been modified and added to formal legislation. For example, there is a lesser punishment for a Palestinian man who murders a woman from his own family if he claims it was to cleanse the honor of the family. While President Abbas has "issued a decree amending some provisions of the Penal Code No. 16 of 1960 in place in the West Bank..." (Alashqar, 2014, p. 5), the murder of women under the pretense of honor continues to happen in the West Bank. One reason for this is the "fact that the amended provisions have not been used in judicial decisions (p. 5). In his study of 37 court rulings relating to killing women to protect a family's honor, Alashqar found that overwhelmingly, "... judges use different reasoning to obtain the same result: 'honor' is used as an extenuation excuse or as an extenuation judicial reason. (p. 20)." Despite the amendments made by the president, honor killings increased in the two years following the amendment. Alashqar concludes: "It is clear that the Palestinian courts tend to ease punishment of perpetrators of murder of women for so-called 'honour', by invoking Articles 99 and 98 of the Penal Code No. 16 of 1960, and despite the legislative intervention by the Palestinian President under the Presidential Decree No. (7) of 2011, the phenomenon of so-called 'honour killings' has increased dramatically in 2013 compared to the previous two years... (2014, p. 21)." Therefore, the PA has a responsibility to address these crimes and the lack of adequate legislation and application in the courts.

At the same time, there is also no protection for women from the Israeli occupation because Israel does not hold its soldiers and settlers accountable for their behavior because the

Israel army claims that Palestinians are considered a threat to the Israeli army or civilians (Amnesty International, 2022). In this way, both Palestinian and Israeli perpetrators of physical or sexual violence act with impunity (Rought-Brooks, Duaibis & Hussein, 2010).

Home Demolitions

Women also must deal with home demolitions in Area C and East Jerusalem. Home demolitions cause incredible psychological, financial, and physical damage to women and their children (Rought-Brooks, Duaibis & Hussein, 2010). Women often must move in with their in-laws, thereby losing their independence and privacy. They also suffer economically by having difficulty providing healthy food and adequate clothing for their children. Living with in-laws in crowded, small spaces can make it difficult for a mother to provide a safe and healthy space for her children or a quiet space to study and do their homework without disruptions.

Lack of Access to Healthcare in Area C

Palestinian women, especially in Area C and rural areas, face a lack of reproductive health services and accessible and adequate support for Gender Based Violence (GBV). According to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA, 2023),

“Years of restrictive Israeli policies, including on the import of medical resources, have led to a serious deterioration in the availability and quality of health services, with risks of increasing maternal mortality rates.⁹⁹ According to a 2020 UNFPA-led national study, there was a 43 percent rise in cases of maternal mortality in 2020 compared with 2019.”
(p. 28)

The combination of a weak economic system and few resources devoted to healthcare in rural areas and Israeli restrictions on movement and building of health facilities creates a situation where women do not get adequate, reliable, or quality reproductive healthcare. These are facilities and services that men do not rely on like women; therefore, women are disproportionately impacted by building restrictions and a lack of health facilities (Rought-Brooks, Duaibis, Hussein, 2010).

While these examples and statistics help to reveal the scope of the barriers women face being women, mothers, and workers, the next section will offer real-life examples of Palestinian women's lived experience with the occupation. This section illustrates how women must make calculated decisions about their movement, work, and children, always attempting to lessen any exposure to the occupation if possible.

The Data: Women's Experiences with the Occupation

Almost all of the interlocutors spoke about the occupation and its impact on Palestinian women in general and/or on their personal lives. These anecdotes serve to illustrate the interlocutor's real-life experiences and their conceptualizing of the factors that prevent women from achieving their social and political rights and gaining more representation in decision-making positions. It became clear that for the interlocutors, the occupation is a permanent and constant fixture in their lives causing anxiety, stress, and even fear. At the same time, because all of the Palestinian women in this study grew up experiencing the occupation their whole lives, it is just another expected part of life. Not all women are numb to it, but they live their entire lives automatically calculating their decisions based on societal and political (occupation) restrictions, often without even realizing that they do this.

Lack of Safety and the Occupation as Stalker

A major theme that was echoed by several of the interlocutors was the idea of “safety.” For many women, there are several places where they lack safety, such as the workplace, public spaces, checkpoints and border crossings, and even inside their own homes. While not all women feel a lack of safety in all places, most women attempt to avoid certain places and situations to prevent getting into what they perceive as a dangerous situation. Just the fear of what might happen is enough to limit women’s movement significantly, especially when tensions in the West Bank are high. As I traveled to meet my interlocutors either in their houses, a coffee shop, or place of employment, I experienced a small amount of the frustration and insecurity that my interlocutors face when traveling between cities in the West Bank or between the West Bank and East Jerusalem. However, while I struggle to travel in these areas, my experiences as a white American cannot be equated to those of Palestinian women traveling through the West Bank or to Jerusalem. Because of my appearance, I had the “advantage” of appearing like an Israeli settler when I drove through checkpoints. This meant that I usually got waved through the checkpoint rather than stopped, questioned, and checked. When I had to walk through checkpoints, it was much more stress inducing, but because of my American passport, I passed through without incident. What I noticed is that every time I left the house, I had to plan what to wear depending on who I was meeting, calculate each step, be aware of my surroundings, and prepare to talk to soldiers at checkpoints. This in itself was an extra step that I did not experience while living in the U.S. What I experienced living, traveling, and getting around in the West Bank and East Jerusalem is quite simple compared to what my interlocutors shared about their own lives.

I met a woman from Bethlehem named Khulud who shared a lot about her own experience with the occupation. Because I lived in Beit Sahour, it was fairly easy for me to travel to Bethlehem because there are normally no checkpoints. I met her in Bethlehem at her office where she is the director of a women's organization that deals with women's rights in the media, educating women about media and gender, and raising awareness about the power of media and representation. She lives in Bethlehem and has a son and two daughters. She has personally suffered tremendously from the Israeli occupation because several of her male family members have been killed, and she has lost land to Israeli settlers. Khulud is very aware of herself and her society and the heavy burden that she bears from this knowledge and real-life experience shows in her face and expressions. Through her work with women and the media, she has been in some dangerous positions and deals with psychologically difficult issues that she and other women face every day. Observing Khulud's words and demeanor, one feels the profound devastation of the occupation and the weight of its burden and suffocation of the Palestinian people, especially women. Khulud mentioned that she lost her father and brother from the occupation, so she grew up in a family of all women. Because of the occupation and how it changed the social fabric and dynamics of her family, being aware of and fighting for the rights of women was a political issue much before it was a social issue. She said that she faces severe challenges in her life with the occupation being the number one challenge. She says that it affects her communication, movement, safety or lack thereof, and her relationships. She explains how she does the easiest unimportant things in life with fear. She expressed how she feels surrounded by the occupation and at times has little hope. She said "You can't live a normal life when you live in fear. There are no feelings of safety." Unfortunately, Khulud's experience is not unique, but illustrates the

pervasiveness of the occupation for Palestinian women. All women included in this study are aware of and frightened by it at varying levels.

I met another woman named Dunia who is a young professional from the outskirts of Ramallah. Getting to Ramallah from Beit Sahour is a long and complicated journey, whether one goes by car or public transit. I always get nervous when I travel to Ramallah, even though it is only about 18 miles away from Beit Sahour, or 26 if you go the long way around. The short way means traveling through the checkpoint of Qalandia which is known for its slow-moving traffic that winds around cement roadblocks, shops, and roundabouts and sporadic clashes between Palestinians and the Israel army. The long way may take longer or the same amount of time as the short way but does not require one to travel through the congested and dangerous area of Qalandia. It does include a significant amount of time driving on a bypass road which is a type of road built for settlers to get from settlement to settlement (7amleh, Mapping Segregation). With the traffic, checkpoints, and connecting roads, it takes more than an hour to get there. After a long car ride, I met Dunia in a restaurant/bar of her choice. She knew the owners and felt comfortable as a patron there. I learned that Dunia grew up in a politically active family where her father had been arrested several times by Israel. Like Khulud, she recounts how for her, the presence and impact of the Israeli occupation was a harsh reality from her childhood. She experienced family members being arrested and taken from her house. She explains how the occupation was a constant part of her life, but what was harder to grasp as she went through adolescence were the many varying restrictions on her body and life as a female in Palestinian society. She acknowledges that this is exacerbated by the occupation because of its negative impacts on social and gender relations, but the double burden of the occupation and the restrictions placed on her as a woman were still hard for her to comprehend. Her statements

about the occupation and gender illustrate how women's rights and ability to thrive in their lives are intricately connected to safety which is significantly absent among Palestinian women and limits their opportunity (OHCA, 2022).

Arrested by the Occupation

Dunia also shared about her experience with the occupation when she was arrested. She told me that the occupation deals with Palestinian women first and foremost as females before seeing them as people or as Palestinians. Dunia does not think of herself as a woman first; rather, she first considers herself Palestinian. The occupation forces use every feature of her femaleness such as a woman's menstrual cycle, hair, beauty, hygiene, and emotions/psychology against her to cause physical harm, discomfort, and psychological abuse. While she was in prison, the guards did not provide her with any hygienic tools such as pads or razors. They would allow her to go without shaving or doing her eyebrows and then make her feel bad about the way she looked to lessen her confidence. They also threatened to blackmail her by showing her family members photos of her while she was in Turkey. The photos were taken while she was in Turkey and were private photos depicting her without the hijab. She says that women not only have to worry about their family's finding out about their relationships or social activities, but also the occupation which uses this information to harm women's reputations in society and their relationships with their families. This is a real tangible way that the occupation uses gender motifs and norms to pit family members against each other. Several interlocutors have spoken about the goal of the occupation to divide Palestinian society so that they cannot effectively mobilize as a unified unit against Israeli oppression. Dunia's experience reveals how the Israeli occupation manipulates

gender norms and expectations in Palestinian society, as well as family relationships, to intimidate and threaten women and tear up social relationships.

Growing up, Dunia talks about how the occupation, soldiers, and the arrests and imprisonment for her father were normal to her. What was more difficult for her to accept and deal with was the social conflict within Palestinian society. For her, the first conflict was when she became an adolescent. Her body was changing, and she became aware of herself as a woman which translated into many restrictions for her. As will be illustrated in this study, the intense restrictions on Palestinian women are partly a result of the Israeli occupation and the tight restrictions it imposes on Palestinians as a whole and the constant threat of violence which all trickles down to women.

These women's testimonies show how fear and a lack of safety caused by the Israeli occupation create negative experiences, impact social relationships, and prevent women from reaching their social and economic goals. Moreover, the continuous threat of violence and the lack of safety create a constant sense of emergency in which women often feel they do not have the luxury to focus on internal social inequalities in Palestinian society.

Obtaining an ID Card/Family Reunification

Maha lives in Bethlehem and works at a women's NGO. She is married to an Egyptian man and has a son. Her husband faced political isolation in Egypt and could not return there. He also does not have a legal ID from Israel to remain in the West Bank, so he cannot travel anywhere. Before Maha got married, she used to travel frequently and easily to Jordan. Now she feels very restricted and trapped. It is frustrating for her that even getting married has to be political and bring with it restrictions and barriers to one's happiness and dignity. Feeling a bit

on the outside of Palestinian society having married a foreigner, Maha spoke a lot about the issues of identity that divide Palestinian society such as the internal conflicts such as Christians versus Muslims, city versus village folks, and city folk versus refugees, and men versus women. She believes that social relationships are damaged and further pitted against one another because of the occupation and its effects. She says: “In the end, it's the occupation that benefits from these societal divides.” She said it did not used to be like this before Israel occupied them. Dana, another interlocutor who is from Jerusalem but lives in Ramallah, spoke about this phenomenon as well. She said that Jews, Christians, and Muslims were living in peace in the old city and that her Christian grandmother used to cook on Fridays for her Muslim neighbors.

Dealing with the Occupation in Jerusalem

I was connected to a student at Bethlehem University through my friend's husband who is a professor there. Zayna was really excited to speak with me because she had taken a course on feminism a few years ago and felt strongly about it as a Palestinian woman. She explained how there were so many concepts in feminism that were relevant to her, and she felt that it explained a lot of gender-related conflicts in her society. I met her several times during my fieldwork. The first time we met was at a modern-style coffee shop that offered sandwiches and a variety of coffee drinks. She seemed shy at first, but once we got talking she spoke freely. Zayna is a younger woman in her early 20s. She did not wear a hijab and had an alternative style dress and haircut. Her fashion style fits well with her alternative attitudes about gender and women's issues. She is from Jerusalem and studied at Bethlehem University at the time of her interviews. She describes herself as a feminist without reservation, meaning that she does not try to water down her beliefs, even when they seem radical. This has caused a lot of conflict and

friction between her and some of her extended family members. She also revealed that she is bisexual, a risky piece of information to share in Palestinian society because if this was public knowledge, she would face threats and be mocked. Zayna knew that revealing this in the interview would not put her in jeopardy since all data is dealt with with the utmost confidentiality. Moreover, it appeared that she felt that since the researcher was from the U.S. and studying feminism, she could be more open about gender and sexuality in the discussion. She confided that she would not have shared this bit of information with a fellow Palestinian unless she knew they were understanding of these types of issues. I realized that she either had already or would face difficulties in Palestinian society because she would feel that she has to hide this aspect of her identity. She admitted that she has not revealed this information to anyone in her family and most of her friends do not know. At the same time, for Zayna, it was not getting society to accept her bisexuality that mattered so much to her, what was more important for her was for attitudes about women and gender to change

Zayna believes that the occupation takes advantage of an emotional weakness among Arabs which is women. She says that because Palestinians are afraid that their women will be harassed, abused, or raped by the occupation forces, they limit the movement and life trajectory of women in general. She also says that because of these issues, women were not able to publicly engage in the resistance of the Second *Intifada*, unlike their huge presence and impact in the First Intifada. She referenced a story about a woman who was at a checkpoint and the soldiers stopped her. They told her that she would “not leave a girl today” indicating that they would rape, abuse, or sexually violate her. It is not only the worry of sexual abuse or violence that makes crossing checkpoints difficult for Palestinian women. There are also health considerations when having to wait in long lines for several minutes or hours and women have had to give birth at checkpoints

(UN, 2005). Additionally, there are psychological stresses and embodied experiences of being sandwiched between men and/or having to partially undress going through metal detectors. The occurrence of injury and abuse at the checkpoints is real and was mentioned by several of the interlocutors (Aghazarian, 2023).

Zayna also mentioned the phenomenon that many Palestinian men are forced to work for Israeli employers because they seek higher incomes or for a lack of other work. She says that Palestinian men work in discriminatory environments, and this is dehumanizing and demoralizing. When they get home, they often take out their frustration on their wives. For her and other interlocutors, the environment of discrimination, belittling, and violence that the occupation creates by controlling their lives through checkpoints, searches, house raids, and arrests, and supporting Israeli settlers as they attack Palestinians impacts Palestinian society in such a way that creates more stress, tension, and violence among Palestinians themselves.

Two other interlocutors spoke about the challenges of being a Palestinian woman in East Jerusalem. Zayna's mother Haneen and her mother's sister-in-law Fatima both live in Jerusalem and are from conservative families. Haneen got married relatively young but is now divorced. She takes care of her two sons and Zayna. She is very self-conscious that she is divorced and living without a husband. She worries for her daughter Zayna because, she tells me, it is not good for women to live in a house without a male guardian. Both of her sons have special needs, and this has been an additional challenge for her because her husband does not help with raising them. Zayna believes he is embarrassed by them. Haneen works now and relies on Zayna to help her at home. She lives in very close quarters with her in-laws and the neighbors. There is not a lot of privacy in most East Jerusalem neighborhoods. Haneen describes this as both a positive and negative experience. On the one hand, there is always someone to sit and socialize with or

someone to help with something, but on the other hand, everyone knows other people's business because there is no privacy. They also discuss the idea of raising children in these conditions. If there are children who are bad influences, it is very hard to separate your children from them.

Fatima also grew up in a conservative family and got married very young at the age of fourteen. She also described moving into her husband's parent's house when they first got married and how her mother-in-law tried to control her life. She was very protective and didn't allow her to go anywhere without someone chaperoning her. Fatima felt incredibly frustrated and suffocated but eventually learned how to deal with her mother-in-law in a way that did not cause tension within the family. Women are often expected to keep quiet about problems they face related to family, violence, and house responsibilities so that they are not perceived as being rebellious or sowing discord in the family.

For them, the occupation is more constant and direct than some other women in the West Bank who may not interact with soldiers daily or weekly. As mothers in East Jerusalem, they worry about their children being harmed by the occupation physically and psychologically. Haneen says that the hardest part about being a working mother is that if there are clashes with the occupation forces, mothers need to be home. She also says that there is no safety, and she does not feel safe especially when the children are teenagers. She says that mothers try to keep watch over their children because there are settlers everywhere. When something happens, all of a sudden, the kids go and there are clashes, and all of a sudden they are back. She says that it is hard because you cannot tell them what to do; they want to defend their country and be patriots. Another phenomenon that Jerusalem mothers, but not mothers in other areas of the West Bank, face is juvenile arrests (Shalhoub-Kevorkian & Marshi 2021). My two interlocutors both spoke of women they knew who had to deal with this issue. They must make their sons stay in the

house for one to six months as part of their house arrest. In this case, the child misses school, social events, and extracurricular activities. It is difficult for mothers who have to make their teenage sons stay home because their sons start to hate them and accuse them of making them prisoners in their own homes. If the child gets caught, there are severe consequences. The women say that this makes boys more stressed and angrier, and they want to engage in freeing their country even more.

Zayna shared a story about her brother with special needs. The Israeli occupation forces arrested him and put him in prison, which was very dangerous because he has special needs and must take certain medications at specific times. While in prison he did not have this medication. She said that other prisoners knew him and were trying to help and take care of him as best they could. This was very hard for Zayna and her mother. Fortunately, a few weeks later, Zayna's brother was released from prison. The imprisonment of her brother caused Zayna and her mother intense stress and anxiety and impacted their daily routine.

Haneen and Fatima both agreed that both the occupation and society's gendered expectations prevent Palestinian women from reaching their goals. In Jerusalem, women may have to cross a checkpoint to get to work. In this case, she will be dissuaded from going to this job because of the dangers this may pose to her. Women often feel they cannot work since they are responsible for their children and all house responsibilities. She will not have enough time to both work and fulfill her duties at home. Haneen views Israel and the occupation as the source of corruption for their children. Because life is not easy there and it is always stressful, boys tend to lean towards drugs, alcohol, and other immoral activities that Haneen believes are offered by the occupation.

Another issue that women in Jerusalem face is domestic violence. While this occurs all over the West Bank, the situation is different in Jerusalem because if an abused woman wants or needs to get protection from an abuser, she has to call the Israeli police. For Palestinians in East Jerusalem, the Israeli police are their occupier. In this way, women feel trapped because they have nowhere to look to get help. If she calls the police, her husband's family and the community may blame her. In this way, women tend to remain silent about their abuse to prevent scarring their reputation and/or breaking up the family.

The Occupation Implements Laws that Benefit Israelis but not Palestinians

Another interlocutor named Lujain is from Al-Assawiyya in Jerusalem. She works at an NGO in Jerusalem that conducts research on women and their experiences in terms of school education, awareness of gender roles, violence, and other social issues. Based on their research they aim to create projects that address these issues and lessen their negative impacts on women and youth. Lujain is the assistant director of this feminist NGO and has always been a feminist working for women's rights and greater awareness of women's issues among women. She has grown up with a political and feminist background and has a long history of activism and involvement in the national liberation movement and women's issues.

Lujain says that Israel only follows laws that it benefits from. She told me of an incident that proves that Israel does not interfere in Palestinian issues even when they are illegal despite Israel's obligation as the occupying power (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2013; Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). There have been several incidents where Palestinian groups have interfered with events or demonstrations related to women or LGBTQ issues by bullying and threatening organizers and participants. In these cases, complaints have been made, but the

Israeli government does not do anything. In most cases, Israel applies laws to Palestinians if the crime impacts Israelis or breaks a civil law, but if Palestinians break a law that impacts other Palestinians, they do not investigate or follow up on these issues.

The Occupation Silences

I asked Lujain about the issue of women's organizations addressing political issues in their work. She explained to me the situation in Jerusalem is different from the one in the West Bank. In Jerusalem, they cannot take a political stance or discuss specific political issues head-on. If they do so, they will be shut down by the Israeli government. At the same time, in the West Bank, women's organizations also have to be careful because the PA coordinates with Israel on what it deems security matters. Security coordination has been a major component of the 1993 Oslo Accords and its proponents claim it is crucial for peace, state building, and stability (Tartir, 2023). However, according to the political advisor of Al-Shabaka and senior researcher Alaa Tartir, working with Israel on security only creates security for Israeli citizens and settlers. He writes that "security coordination criminalizes Palestinian resistance, professionalizes Palestinian authoritarianism, and denies the safety of the Palestinian people..." and effectively suppresses and silences Palestinian resistance (Tartir, 2023). This is because Palestinians face PA and Israeli authoritarianism in East Jerusalem and the West Bank at various levels (ElKurd, 2018). As a result, women's organizations must be careful about how they speak about Israel and the occupation and what kind of discourse they engage in. In this way, it is clear how the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian people impacts their ability to work towards greater gender equality for women as well as towards resistance and national liberation for the Palestinian people and the

end of the occupation. An end to the occupation would allow for women to be able to focus on social and legal rights as well as greater gender equality.

While I was still conducting my research in 2022, Israel's armed forces stormed, attacked, and destroyed, six human rights and civil society organizations and confiscated documents and computers. Their offices were also barred shut with a welded iron door and on which was posted a document declaring them to be unlawful and ordering them to shut down. The six organizations were Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association; Al Haq; Bisan Center for Research and Development; Defense for Children International – Palestine; Health Work Committees (HWC); Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC); and the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees (UPWC). Before this occurred, I had spoken with a woman, D, who worked at the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees (UPWC). D does not necessarily consider herself an activist, but she works towards great women's gender equality and promoting a more active role for Palestinian women in all spheres of Palestinian society including the economic, social, and political spheres. She spoke strongly against the Israeli occupation and continually noted how it impacts women on every level of life.

Occupation Affects Social Relationships and Enhances Gender Discrimination

Dana lives in Ramallah and works in the women's work committee there. She has studied both in Palestine and abroad for her B.A. and M.A. degrees. In terms of religion, she has a Christian background. The interview was held in an office within the committee's home base. The spaces were somewhat small and crowded and there were a lot of women working in the office. D is very passionate about what she and her people face under the Israeli occupation, and she is deeply committed to expanding women's leadership roles in all spheres of society.

Dana is very critical of the Israeli occupation and says that is the most basic and largest source of women's suffering in Palestine. She also believes that the reason Palestinian society is patriarchal to the extent that we see today is because of the occupation. Sajeda also mentions this in our conversation. She says that the occupation gives patriarchy the right to be stronger in Palestinian society. This puts barriers on women under the pretext that men are afraid for their women's safety because of the occupation. She says that the occupation is interested in portraying Palestinians as having a backward and regressive society. She explained to me that Israel uses the concept of patriarchy and backwardness in its media and propaganda war against Palestinians. They show the fight as Judaism against Islam and progressives versus backward Arabs and Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood when in fact, back in 1948, the society consisted of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. There was acceptance between the religions and people. Especially in the old city, the relationship was great.

Lujain also speaks a lot about the unspoken policy of the Israeli occupation and how it interferes with gender roles and social relationships among people and groups in Palestinian society. This is a point echoed by several of my interlocutors (Khulud, Sajeda, Dana). Lujain blames this on the occupation, but also hints at the PA's involvement as well. She says that the occupation allows crimes such as the murder of women related to issues of honor because Israel benefits from this.

The violence of the Occupation and Female Prisoners

Dana also insisted that it is clear how the occupation supports an inclination towards violence especially violence against women. The occupation wants to increase social problems in society, so in her opinion, political freedom is interlocked with social freedom. She also talks of

the importance of women's roles both socially and politically because over the decades it has never been only men who resist and fight; it has always been that women and the whole family resist the occupation and oppression.

In our discussion, Dana points out how female political prisoners suffer more than other women and more than male political prisoners. At the time of speaking with her, she told me there are forty-two female political prisoners and that they are being deprived of humane treatment and basic healthcare. Many of them do not get feminine napkins for their menstrual cycle. She spoke with women who went two weeks with a period and no feminine napkins. Women also face psychological violence and abuse and lack of access to hygiene products and healthcare. When women leave prison, they experience many psychological problems.

Khulud, the feminist activist from Bethlehem, told me that female prisoners often face stigmas and stereotypes since many assume they have been raped in prison. These women cannot leave the house, and it is not easy for them to reintegrate into society. This is in contrast to male political prisoners who are considered heroes and are celebrated when they return home.

Women are the Biggest Victims of the Occupation

Dana is a huge advocate for women and is also very frustrated about the occupation and the impacts it has on women. She goes on to describe the ways that women are the biggest victims of the occupation. She mentions how women suffer the most in situations of land confiscations, house demolitions, night raids, unemployment, low wages, and youth house arrests which occur in Jerusalem. Since women are responsible for cooking, making a home for their children, and caring for their needs, it is very difficult to carry out these fundamental tasks when their family is under such severe psychological and/or economic stress. Without a safe home or

environment, mothers must find other ways to provide for their children and this can cause extra stress that hinders family bonds.

Dana says that life is particularly hard for women in Area C because they have little infrastructure, like sewage systems, and don't always have running water. There are no permanent health clinics or centers that focus on women's social, physical, and psychological needs. If a child is sick or injured, the nearest hospital is at least one hour away. All of these burdens impact women first because they are responsible for the well-being of the family. Also in Area C, Israel rarely gives building permits and when structures such as schools are built usually by international donor funding, Israel often demolishes them (Doctors Without Borders, 2021; Reuters, 2023). For the first quarter of 2023, 290 buildings were demolished or seized. This is a 46 percent increase with the same quarter in 2022. These are so far the highest number of demolitions in a specific time period in the West Bank and East Jerusalem since 2016. While most of these structures were residential structures, forty-three of the 290 were schools, shelters for livestock and other agricultural needs, and healthcare-related structures (OCHA, Demolitions, 2023).

Even more recently in terms of healthcare access for Palestinians living in Area C, since October 7th, 2023, only 120 of the 172 areas requiring Mobile Clinics are accessible while only forty-four clinics are not functioning at all because of the presence of barriers and staffing shortages (OCHA Reliefweb, 2024).

Also in Area C, since there are almost no services for women or men, there are no social institutions that may interfere if there is a problem in the family. For example, many women are murdered by their male relatives for various reasons such as rape, infidelity, or doing something outside of societal norms. At this point, there are very few legal restrictions on murdering

women and no social momentum toward preventing these kinds of crimes. These realities along with no rule of law and no enforcement of the law (by the occupation or by the PA) in Area C and a lack of social services create an environment that does not dissuade or prevent men from murdering women.

Khulud and her colleague Maha talk about how the occupation has made society more prejudicial and there is more discrimination between groups. This also stems from the political atmosphere that formed after the signing of the Oslo Accords and the formation of the Palestinian Authority which led to a particular social, political, and economic status in Palestine that is summed up well by Mogannam (2024):

“This NGOization move, in combination with the conditions set through the Oslo Accords for Palestinian political elites and wealthy exiles to return to the PA territories, produced a new elite class in Palestine that ushered in a new wave of economic instability through the facade of growing capitalism under occupation (p. 175).”

In this way, Palestinian society also became more divided between city and rural and political exiles and those who had stayed in Palestine all along, many of them in refugee camps. The PA did not give an equal chance for all Palestinians to be involved in politics and the political process including refugees and youth. The corruption of the PA (Hammad, 2021; Hawari, 2022) has divided Palestinian society and made certain groups fight hard to protect their identity rather than fight harder for Palestine as a unified people. At the same time, the occupation is responsible for Oslo and the conditions that it created for Palestinians. The Israelis would not have signed an agreement if they felt that it was bad for them and would lead to a free Palestinian state for Palestinians. Therefore, the occupation has directly impacted the way that the PA behaves and the lack of political vibrance and grassroots organizing. After Oslo, the PA

got its position of power and Israel still held control over all Palestinians but was released of its duties and responsibilities towards Palestinians in areas A and B.

Khulud made another point during our conversation that I've seen in the literature. She said that "no matter what issues you try to deal with and solve in Palestinian society, the occupation and the Israel secret service make bigger problems. The issues never stop." She sees the PA's inability to create new laws a result of the occupation. She says that they would have the laws needed to keep society in check if they had a sovereign nation that could make and implement laws with legitimacy and freedom.

The Occupation, the Permit System, and Collective Punishment

I spoke with a woman from a small village northwest of Jerusalem and southwest of Ramallah. She is from a village called Qatamna which is right next to the separation wall that Israel has built between Israel and the West Bank. She is in her mid-twenties and grew up in a very conservative family in which she saw and felt discrimination between herself and her brothers. While she does not consider herself a feminist, she has worked with women in the Gender and Women's Studies Department at Birzeit University transcribing interviews for research projects relating to gender and women's issues. She has some very strong opinions about women's issues, but still has a conservative outlook on how feminists must conduct themselves. Living near the border with Israel, her village is surrounded by what Israel calls the security wall but by what Palestinians call the separation or apartheid wall. Since her village is very close to Israeli settlements, the first thing she sees when she walks out her door is a large settlement called *Har Adar*. She feels very strongly about the plight of her village being in Area C and mostly cut off from Palestinian Authority control and other Palestinian cities in Area A. She explains that the PA cannot easily get to Area C unless they coordinate with Israel.

Therefore, when there is fighting between families using weapons, the PA cannot get there in time to stop the fighting or try to help solve the issue. And while the Israeli military is in charge of security in Area C, it will not interfere in conflicts between Palestinians. In this way, Area C is essentially lawless.

Not only does the Israeli occupation encourage violence by refraining from preventing and stopping it, but it also engages in collective punishment of extended family members who engage in any type of resistance against the Israeli military or Israeli settlers. This same punishment is not carried out on family members of Jewish settlers who commit violence against Palestinians. Yara offered an example from her village. She said, “There were five young men from my village who participated in the stabbing operations in 2015 and were subsequently killed by the Israeli military. These men were between the ages of 19-22 years old. This is a huge loss for a mother and if she becomes depressed because she has lost a child, the whole household will suffer.” She further explains how collective punishment works. “When a Palestinian engages in an operation to kill or wound an Israeli soldier or civilian, the Israeli army threatens to demolish the house of the family of the perpetrator. The army does not always end up demolishing the house, but they will come to the house with explosives and put Xs where they plan to plant them. This is psychologically disturbing for families because they never know when and if their house will be destroyed and they will become homeless.” Not only does Israel demolish houses or threaten to do so, but it also takes away work permits for all of the male relatives of the perpetrator. In her village, most of the men rely on income from their work as laborers inside Israel, so when they lose their permits, they suffer very badly financially. In Israel, a worker can make between 300-400 shekels a day, but in the West Bank, they only make around 80-100 shekels per day. Another interlocutor, G who married into a family from a village

southeast of Bethlehem named Beit Ta'mar, also spoke about Israel's policy of revoking work permits for Palestinians who either themselves or a male relative take part in any resistance operation or speak out on social media against the occupation.

Ghadeer is in her early forties and married into a family in Beit Ta'amar. She has four children, and her husband works in Israel when the political situation is quiet and workers are permitted to enter. She did not grow up in a feminist family and was not very interested in women's issues growing up. However, in the last five years, she had the opportunity to engage in volunteer work and participate in NGO workshops focusing on women's issues.

Ghadeer also spoke about her worries related to the Israeli occupation. She said, "If I want to talk about politics related to the occupation, they will figure out who my husband is and take away his permit. There is no freedom of expression." Ghadeer notes how they rely on his income to get by. When she talks about speaking about the occupation, she is mostly referring to online posts, tweets, or statements. She also expressed how women working in NGOs are not able to speak up about political issues for fear of losing their jobs or losing funding from their donors. As a result, volunteers and participants in NGO women's workshops and training, but also abide by these rules. Ghadeer expresses both her frustration and her fear about expressing any form of political expression against the Israeli occupation. It is frustrating because they can't speak about the real issues facing Palestinian women and she is fearful of speaking against the occupation because if her husband loses his permit to work in Israel, she and her children will be the first to suffer. It will be up to her to deal with the consequences of not being able to put food on the table, to figure out how to pay her daughter's college tuition, and to not reveal her fear and frustration in front of her children.

Her fears stem from anecdotal stories that she heard about others who have spoken out or simply reacted to a post on Facebook. She explained that a man put a “like” on Facebook about an operation⁵ that he read about in the news. The next day when he went to the checkpoint and scanned his magnetic card, they (the soldiers) told him his permit was suspended for three months because he liked the post. Ghadeer says this is a tactic used to scare others and dissuade them from speaking out or having opinions. These are small acts of retaliation and control that the occupation uses to punish families and make their lives harder. Anytime there is an act of collective punishment on an entire family or a village, women feel the negative effects the most.

DISCUSSION

The prominent descriptive themes that come out of this data include increased anxiety regarding motherhood and raising children, Israel’s use of permits as a form of control, the lack of economic security, the lack of safety, constant fear living in an environment of violence and punishment, preserving their identity in the face of occupation, violence that creates and exacerbates inter-communal conflict, control of movement, difficulties in family reunification, and the negative impacts of the occupation on Palestinian social relations-of which gender is one example. Conflicts between mother/children, husband/wife, and families are fueled by a lack of security and freedom of expression and movement created by the occupation and its racist and violent policies against Palestinians.

My data reveals that these Palestinian women all have experiences with the occupation. Some women's experiences include direct contact with the occupation in which they or their children are physically and emotionally impacted by Israeli soldiers. This is evidenced through

⁵ She did not mention what the operation was, but she was referring to an act of resistance to the occupation by a Palestinian.

Khulud's experiences of soldiers breaking into her house and arresting her husband and son. She spoke of how she does not go to sleep now in her pajamas; rather, she sleeps in normal attire wanting to maintain decency and in fear of being pulled out of bed by the Israeli soldiers. Others' experiences are indirect, non-tangible, and non-physical experiences such as Ghadeer's fear of speaking out against the occupation on Facebook because of what has happened to others who have done so or Yara's experience watching her neighbors be threatened with house demolition and living with Israeli soldiers arriving periodically at their house to place the 'X's that indicate where they will place the bombs that will demolish the house. Women are the ones who bear the emotions that come with arrests, murders, home demolitions, and other violence and have to comfort their children and explain to them why it's happening. They must also find a way to comfort their children and raise them to be strong and resilient. The stories of threatened and real home demolitions and middle-of-the-night house raids serve as warnings to their lives, freedoms, and even existence. The phenomenon of women's hearing of others' tragic incidents with the Israeli military apparatus acts like a cancer. At first, cancer does not physically impair a person. It is present in the body for some time before a person or doctors know that it exists. When it is detected, sometimes it becomes apparent that it has spread to many parts of the body, but it does not kill a patient right away. Rather, it slowly kills off the healthy cells a person has until parts of one's body do not function. Similarly, the occupation radiates through Palestinians' bodies and minds as an all-present and all-pervasive barrier to life. For women, this is much more severe and all-consuming as women not only care for themselves but for their husbands and children. While it does not always physically kill women, the occupation controls their lives and negatively affects their emotional well-being. The worries and stresses that they face in every decision they make from how to get their children to school or how to make ends meet or how to

prevent their children from being injured or arrested by the Israeli military are exhausting. They prevent women from being 'normal' mothers who want to focus on their children's education and well-being and develop their social and career skills.

A woman's reality as a mother, her location and place of residence, political involvement, speaking out, and the extent of her movement between cities all impact how she is affected by the Israeli occupation. However, what is clear is that the occupation touches and affects all women's lives and prevents them from living in freedom and dignity and from reaching their full potential. Through every action that a woman takes, she resists the occupation. In existing, bearing children, raising children, going to work, studying, crossing checkpoints, creating art, and creating traditional Palestinian embroidery, Palestinian women must make huge and continuous extra efforts, but by doing so, they are resisting and fighting for the end of discrimination against women and the occupation. To be a Palestinian woman means resisting hegemonic, patriarchal military violence, but it does not come without a physical and psychological cost.

The next chapter discusses Palestinian women's conceptions of feminism and women's roles in Palestinian society to understand how they view the challenges they face as women and their responses to these challenges. As women face discrimination, violence, and a lack of legal and social rights, it is important to understand that these violations occur in the context of a global capitalist and neoliberal society that drives a brutal, racist, and violent military occupation of Palestinian lands, bodies, and culture. This section illustrates women's real social struggles in Palestinian society by sharing women's personal experiences and their opinions of those experiences. Highlighting these experiences shed light on patriarchal attitudes and actions, and their consequences on women. In doing so, it illuminates the many challenges women face from

within their own societies. It is important to note that Islam, religion, and patriarchal customs and traditions are often understood as the major oppressors and inhibitors of Palestinian women's fight for gender equality and social rights political rights; however, this study highlights how neoliberal policies and occupation enhance patriarchal characteristics and embolden patriarchal behavior and has become more severe and complex being aggravated and sustained by settler colonialism and military occupation.

CHAPTER 4: WOMEN'S SOCIAL EXPERIENCES IN PALESTINIAN SOCIETY AND VIEWS AND CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF FEMINISM

This chapter offers examples of Palestinian women's societal oppression through their personal social struggles to illuminate how patriarchal structures and norms impact women. The second part of this chapter reveals women's attitudes and understanding of feminism and gender equality, women's social roles in society, as well as their lived experiences and realities as women living under occupation. First, I argue that women's specific experiences with patriarchy and discrimination are connected to their definitions of feminism/women's rights. Their definitions of feminism reveal the rights that women lack and the most pressing ways that women suffer socially and politically. Second, I argue that data about women's social experiences of being victims of patriarchal attitudes, behaviors, and discrimination provide a better understanding of the social phenomena that create limits and barriers for women in their private and public lives and lead to feminist activism and mobilization. Third, I show how knowledge is produced through women's marginalized voices and by highlighting their experiences.

Before delving into the data and the results, there is a need for clarification of the use and understanding of the word 'feminism' because it can be controversial. Palestinian women's rights activists and secular feminists do not usually shy away from using the term 'feminist' (nasawiyya) when describing their work towards great gender equality and rights. At the same time, they may not choose to use this word when working with more conservative women in the West Bank to avoid conflict or misunderstanding about their women's NGO projects and their goals. Secular feminists rely on human rights principles and conventions as sources of

legitimacy for their activism. Some women who engage in women's issues prefer not to refer to themselves as 'feminists' because of its negative connotations with Western liberal feminism which has a limited view of gender equality (Abu-Lughod, 1998). Islamist feminists prefer to focus on equity between genders in which males and females have complementary but different roles in society and rely on Islamic texts as their source of women's rights (Khamis, 2010).

These generalizations of various feminist ideologies are illustrated through women's definitions of feminism and experiences with it. Shedding light on how women understand feminism and activism can reveal the scope of the oppression and limitations on women to better understand most how these issues should be addressed.

Social Experiences as Women in Palestinian Society

Expectations of and Limitations on Women's Behavior

Dunia talked frankly about her personal experience growing up as a woman in Palestine. She mentioned that before she considers her femininity, she first sees herself as Palestinian which comes with its oppression and challenges. For her this was expected and standard, but what was more jolting for her was when she came of age and her body started changing. She realized that as her body was changing and she was becoming a woman, which came with many restrictions. She says: "As a woman it's always, you can't wear this, you can't wear that, you can't go out at that time, and you can't study such and such."

Dunia had to fight to get where she is today. It started when she wanted to attend university, and her family would not allow her to choose the major that she wanted. She talked to her guidance counselor about what she wanted to study, and they encouraged her to do what she

was passionate about. This meant she had to lie to her family about it. At first, she didn't feel comfortable lying, but by her second year she had accepted it as part of her life. She had to be smart about what to say and what not to say, she had to be a "smart liar." Dunia realized that she had to fight for everything that she wanted to do. If she gave in, her father continued to limit her life and decisions. She later wanted to continue her studies overseas, but her father forbade her. She needed to get out of Palestine, so she applied to do her M.A. in Turkey because it's close and they are Muslims like her. Her father still did not agree, and she had to get religious permission from a sheikh (a Muslim religious leader) to convince her father to let her go.

I asked Zayna's mother and her sister-in-law about limits placed on women in Palestinian society such as limits on movement, dress, and education/job choice. They believe there are limits to everything including women's freedom. Women cannot go out late and cannot wear short or revealing clothes because they are an Eastern culture, and this is not acceptable. I asked them if they agree with these limits and/or if these limits are in place because of the dangerous environment for Palestinians living under a violent and dangerous military occupation. They both believe that it is right to have limits on women's dress, movement and work choices, and they also believe that this is important because of the reality of the occupation. They also said that they do not prevent women from doing certain things because they live in a "backward" culture; rather, they fear the bad people in society and the dangers of the occupation and its influence on their youth.

Khulud talks about what she sees as restrictions that women face in Palestine. She recounts how when she leaves the house, she has to think, where am I going? She has to dress accordingly, not thinking about casual or fancy, but whether she can wear short or long clothes. She explains that you can't be random going out of the house because everything must be

calculated. This impacts the atmosphere in the house too. Khulud talked about the contradictions she feels as a feminist but who also is aware of the societal restrictions. And since she has daughters, she feels she has to teach them both to be strong and independent but to also understand the society they live in. She often finds herself telling her girls what they should and shouldn't wear, but she states how she does not like doing that. At the same time, she knows the society. As a feminist she feels that she shouldn't talk to her daughters that way, but because of society she wants to prevent them from facing horrible and uncomfortable situations. She does not want to kill their freedom of choice.

I spoke with Israa, a woman from Hebron who has worked hard with the help of some international organizations to start a small business from her homemaking handmade dolls. She expressed the feeling that women have a lot of influence in the house and that they are a part of everything in life. She says that if women are doing well, the community will benefit. At the same time, this responsibility comes with a heavy burden on women. Israa says that "women's giving never ends and they don't ever get a break." She said that to keep giving and giving, women need a break to rest and recharge. At the same time, she feels that women do not speak up for their needs. There is an internal conflict because women get upset when they don't get help or a break, but at the same time, they are not voicing this need. Women are expected to take care of the house and children even if they work. Israa feels that it would be better if fathers were more involved in raising their children.

The Unique Challenges for Mothers in Jerusalem

In Jerusalem, most Palestinians live in close quarters with family and neighbors. I spoke with my research assistant Zaina's mother Haneen who feels that living in close proximity to neighbors comes with positive and negative results. Haneen says "It's good because you feel a

sense of community, and everyone sits around together. In some ways, there are more people to look out for children, but at the same time, if the kids want to go with the neighbors' kids, it is hard to prevent them.” Haneen explained how this is especially scary when there are clashes with Israeli police and soldiers. Haneen said that she and other mothers can't prevent their children from participating in protests or clashes because they want to defend their homeland, and this is their right. At the same time, mothers remain worried and stressed while their children are gone. While the concept of working mothers is not such a strange idea, it is extremely more stressful for Jerusalemite mothers. Haneen explains that when a mother is at work and her children are at home and clashes break out, she feels that she must be home to wait for her children to come back and make sure they are safe. If she is at work, she feels disconnected and fearful that she will miss the moment that her child comes back injured or is arrested. She demonstrates that being a mother in Jerusalem, especially when you have teenage boys, is very difficult because she has no sense of safety.

Haneen says that as a divorced woman and a mother of three children, she feels a lot of burden and pressure on her to take care of everything. She admits that Zaina helps her a lot at home and with her brothers, but it's still a lot on her. Her husband is not very involved in her children's lives because he remarried and had children with his new wife. Zaina believes that her father does not help her and her brothers because her brothers have some special needs and he doesn't want to deal with the extra work and effort that comes with this. Zaina also talked about how her mother feels uncomfortable because there is no man or husband in the house. She is worried that this will give her family a bad reputation and that it will be hard for Zaina to marry someday. Other interlocutors explained how a woman should not live alone without either a husband, older son, brother, or father because she would be perceived as immodest. People will

wonder what she is doing without a male guardian. In general, this is a reason for people to talk about a woman.

Haneen and Fatima discuss how mothers in Jerusalem often must also deal with juvenile house arrests where they are the guards of their own children. If a juvenile child is arrested for any act against the occupation, he may be arrested for a short time and then put under house arrest. In this way, the mothers must punish their own children for taking action against the occupation and this strains the relationship between the mother and the son. Fatima and Haneen explained how they know many mothers who have experienced this, and it is very stressful because it's hard to keep teenage boys at home. If they get caught, there are serious consequences. Haneen says, "The occupation thinks this is a way to educate (punish) them, but instead it makes the boys more stressed and pressured, and they want even more to engage in acts that promote freeing their country."

Fatima is a mother of four. She is a stay-at-home mother and married very young at the age of fourteen. She talked about the stress of being a mother in Jerusalem. She says, "if the children have problems, you have to stand with them and raise them. Her husband does not take part in raising her children at all. She defends him by saying that he has specific responsibilities, and she has her responsibilities. Fatima downplays her role as a mother and all of the responsibility that she carries. At the end of the conversation, she said, "Cooperation is nice. I like the idea of a man that feels with his wife and cooperates with her, but this (phenomenon) is not present in our society." Fatima believes that it is a great concept that a man would help his wife at home and with the children sometimes, especially when she gets home from work tired, but she insists that this concept is not present in her society. When asked why not, Fatima and Haneen said that boys are raised to be like their fathers and forefathers. They see how their

fathers come home from work, are tired, and sit down to wait for their meal. They do not help with the food preparation or with the children and their homework.

Throughout the conversation with Haneen and Fatima, it became apparent that they both like the idea of better cooperation between a husband and wife, but that they don't have hope for this to become reality. At the same time, Haneen's daughter Zaina who is twenty years younger than them and is not married has a very different outlook on the idea of cooperation between herself and her husband. She says that she wants to raise her children, both girls and boys to help around the house. Rula also expresses this feeling when talking about the younger generation and her children. She stated that her children will not accept to marry someone that will not be a partner in all aspects of their lives including raising children and housework.

Fatima talked a lot about getting married young and living with her mother-in-law. She recounted how this was a very difficult time in her life because she was young and naive and didn't know how to deal with her mother-in-law who sought to control her and her husband. She had barely any freedom and could not go anywhere alone. She recalls that as she grew older and had children, she learned how to deal with her mother-in-law. She expresses the stress she feels with raising children. She feels that raising children is hard and comes with many responsibilities. At the same time, she is always at home doing housework or with the children. She is okay with her life the way it is, but she does think differently now. She admits that marrying early at fourteen caused her to lose many opportunities in her life. She says, "I lost my chance to study in high school or at college. At the time I didn't care, but later I regretted it." For her girls, she wants them to finish high school, go to university, and "form their personality" before they get married.

Challenges in Public Roles

Sajeda was born and raised in Hebron and works in a women's NGO that addresses issues of gender and social roles in Palestinian society. She describes her experience being a working Palestinian woman in Hebron. She says, "It's hard, the fact that everyone fights you because you are a woman. Those politically backward (raj'iyya) parties that attack me can easily ruin my reputation, but the law does not protect me from this harassment, abuse, and defamation. I am an able woman economically and socially but not legally. There is no legal protection for me." For her, the patriarchal mentality and the lack of laws protecting women are the hardest things in her life as a woman. Sajeda explains this predicament by noting that there are few women in decision-making roles and this in turn impacts women directly. Many interlocutors who work in women's rights and civil society NGOs emphasize that they are frustrated by the lack of opportunities for women to be in important roles that actually may lead to long-lasting change for women and the issues most important to them.

Public Roles-Local Elections

Ghadeer talked about her experience being a woman in a rural area as she campaigned for a public role in the local council in a rural area of the West Bank. She became interested in the local elections because there is a quota in which a certain number of women must be elected in each city and local council. While the quota is oftentimes understood as just filling the seats with any two women who will participate, Ghadeer takes her elected position very seriously trying to address issues that women in her neighborhood care about. She recalls how the most difficult challenge she faced as a woman running for the village council was when someone in the extended family started to make problems with her just so he could win his place in the council.

She recounts how he was jealous of her popularity and didn't like her confidence. He knew that people knew her and liked her. Because he was older than her and like an elder in the village, she could not do anything to counter him. Instead, she explains how she was confident in herself, and her abilities and she kept intent and focused on her goal without letting him scare her away.

Violence and Lack of Legal Change

Maha says, "Violence is in all places, but the difference is that there are systems of punishment and rehabilitation in other countries. For example, if I was exposed to violence, everyone would be against me. There is no justice in the laws, there is no justice in the procedures. And there are no rehabilitation organizations that can help me to deal with this violence and get justice for facing this violence."

After speaking about the violence in Palestinian society, Khulud linked it to the idea of how society values men versus women. Khulud says "... a man's life has value. I mean here, the whole society. All the life here is that the life of a man is what has value, he is important, and he is the center of importance. A woman, there is no value to her life. She dies, why shouldn't she die as long as she is cleansing the honor of the family? In return, her brother and cousins will raise their heads, and no one will judge them."

No safety nets

Khulud lives in Bethlehem and works at an NGO that helps women learn about how to use media to raise awareness about women's issues. She also works with women on a wide range of social and political issues throughout her more formal work in media training. Dana has

worked with women for several decades and is very familiar with the social problems facing women in Palestinian society.

Women do not have good and consistent social services. Khulud describes the situation saying there is no safety net for women. It is women's and civil society organizations that run the psychological, social, and economic programs and services for Palestinians. These are not all regulated and there is no consistency of services in various areas. Rural areas especially face issues of lack of facilities for health and emotional well-being. There are safe houses, but they aren't well equipped. There are no professionals to work with women who work as prostitutes or who have disabilities or AIDS. Khulud emphasizes that some women are not even safe inside their own houses. She paints a somber picture of the plight of Palestinian women arguing that women are unsafe in several spheres of society, but do not have adequate resources to deal with this lack of safety. She explains how this is a cycle of violence and oppression for women because "If there is no change for women in terms of achieving equality, equity, justice, and elimination of discrimination, then this suffering will remain, especially the violence that is a result of this discrimination."

Israa from Hebron discussed negative experiences about not being able to talk about issues openly and in a safe space even with her friends. She would only dare to tell her sisters or her most trusted best friend with personal details of her struggles and emotions. Israa says this is because of the impact that the community has on women and relationships. In Hebron, if word of one's issues or news gets to one person, it will soon be all over the city. In this way, people will still be talking about an issue and the person or couple themselves have already moved on from it. She firmly believes that one must be careful about who they talk to. Other interlocutors (Fayez, Zayna, Yara) expressed this feeling of not being able to talk to other women about their

problems for fear of judgment, gossip, and embarrassment. Many issues such as sex and violence are taboo issues that are not accepted in Palestinian society. Israa believes this is because women don't know how to talk about these things.

Gender Discrimination

Sajeda is from Hebron and is the director and founder of an NGO there that addresses gender and social roles in Palestinian society. According to her, this organization is one of the few that consistently works in Area C⁶ to meet the needs of women in marginalized communities surrounding Hebron. She confided in me that she grew up in Hebron with the all-encompassing feeling that she was somehow less important and less privileged than her male counterparts. She encountered this directly in her family with her father and two brothers. S attributes her success and strong personality to the fact that she questioned what she saw and experienced as a girl growing up in a patriarchal society. She said that her father sold land so that her two brothers could study abroad in Russia, but when she told him that she wanted to study, he said there was no money left. Hurt and frustrated, she did not let this stop her from continuing her education. She started taking courses at Al-Quds Al-MaftuHa, which is similar to a local community college and did well in them. Because of her grades, she was able to get a scholarship to finish her B.A. She later completed her M.A. in gender studies at Birzeit University, the West Bank's most prestigious university.

Sajeda talked about her experience growing up in Hebron, a very conservative Muslim community. She used to always ask herself why everyone in Hebron looked the same, ate the same foods, and acted like each other. She felt discrimination growing up between her and her

⁶ Refer to the Introduction to understand more about Area C and the extreme challenges women face there.

brothers and other males. She didn't feel that has the opportunity like her brothers to study and build herself. She refused the traditional roles of women and the unfair treatment of the sexes, but this helped her to build her confidence. She used to express how she felt to her mother, and she understood her in some ways but was always too worried about what the community would say. For example, her mother didn't want her to ride a bike because of what people would say about her.

Israa from Hebron talked a lot about how society favors boys, so women are pressured to have boys. This is very similar to what Yara from Qatamna expressed in our meeting. B said people get more excited and make a bigger deal when they know someone will have a boy. She said that when a woman is having a girl at first people will say that it's not good, but then they will later say that it is good because she will help you in the house. She told me about her sister who had six girls. There was so much pressure from society for her to have a boy that she and her husband underwent in vitro fertilization and chose to have a male baby.

Yara also spoke a lot about gender discrimination in her village. She says that while she lives in a patriarchal village, she blames women first and foremost for this oppression. She explains to me how women always wish for a boy when they get pregnant. She has never seen anyone wish for a girl. Once a woman knows that her baby will be a boy, she will spoil herself and stop cleaning and take more care of herself. If she finds out that she has a girl, she will be very sad as if she's lost a child and she won't tell her in-laws. She will clear more and say bad things about girls.

Yara also spoke about her experience with gender discrimination on a personal level. It illustrates how some families raise their girls to believe that beauty, fairness, and getting married are the most important goals in life. Yara explains how her outlook on life was shaped when she

was young. Her words indicate how her gender and appearance were the only characteristics by which she would be judged by society. As a result, she has little hope for her own life. She says, “I don’t have self-confidence. I will tell you about my experience. Since I was born.... First of all, I have a brown skin tone. In society, this is not considered pretty. I knew if I wasn’t pretty, then I would not be able to get married. Because I am brown and a girl, I realized my future was going to be a failure. To get married you have to be pretty.”

Another interlocutor, Dunia, grew up in the Ramallah area. Not only did she grow up in a politically active family, but they were also relatively socially conservative, so Dunia felt gender discrimination in her life as she compared herself to her brothers. She also experienced many limitations on the choices that she wanted to make so she was forced to find alternative ways to reach her goals. For example, when it was time for her to attend university, she was not allowed to choose journalism as a major. According to her family, this was not an acceptable major for a woman. She was determined to study what she loved, so she spoke with the university guidance counselor who gave her advice. In the end, she chose the major that she wanted. She says that for her to get what she wanted sometimes meant lying to her family or finding a third party who could advocate on her behalf.

Dunia also opened up another topic that illustrates discrimination between men and women in Palestinian society. She says that women’s physical and sexual needs are not recognized in society because it’s not expected for women to have desires or needs like men. Dunias says “Women are not allowed to express their desires or needs, whether sexual or otherwise, but men are allowed.”

Identity in Palestinian Society

Several women talked about identity and how it was something that changed depending on who one was dealing with. Some women felt that they were not able to truly be themselves or talk about their lives honestly with most people. Zayna mentions that because she has what seems to be radical views about women, gender, and other issues, she cannot talk freely and openly with her relatives. She tries to share her ideas and influence her relatives to think in new ways, but it is a struggle for her. Moreover, she feels that because she is bisexual and has different views of gender, she cannot completely be herself around her family. She has had multiple conflicts and arguments with family members because of her beliefs. In this way, she must speak and act accordingly depending on who she is speaking to. At the same time, she truly believes in trying to change people's views. She said, "If you don't try to change the people around you, how are you going to grow in this environment?"

She recounted a story about when she was talking to her uncle about his eleven-year-old daughter wearing the hijab. Zayna expressed her reservations about such a young girl wearing the hijab. Her uncle was offended by this and started saying that he did not want his daughter to study in any of the schools that Zayna studies in. He was trying to make her feel that she was wrong and that her views represented a bad example of Muslim piety and morals. This conversation showed her that sometimes if one speaks out about an issue, it can backfire. This incident also taught her that making positive strides on certain women's issues takes tact. She realizes that she can not always be so bold in how she discusses contentious issues.

Another interlocutor Dunia had a lot to say about identity as a Muslim woman in Palestine. She explained to me how women who come from conservative and traditional families want to be different from their families. She was referring to herself as she was talking and went

on to explain that in this case, she has to do things in secret and try to find others who think, and look like her. Dunia has a hard time finding her place in Ramallah between the more liberal and affluent Palestinians who didn't face as many restrictions on their choices as she did, and also the more conservative Muslim friends and family in her life. She recounted how she found a group that she felt like she could connect with but later felt betrayed by them in a way. In this sense, she describes being stuck between her family and friend groups where each one is not where she felt she belonged and each group has its issues. She realized that both of these groups have contradictions. She says: "we are living in a society full of contradictions."

She explains that she was hanging out with a group of women who were from much more liberal families and they don't wear hijab. This group also included LGBTQ friends as well and so she thought the group was more open and accepting. A few of these friends made comments about her wearing hijab while also smoking and drinking implying that these activities couldn't go together. She felt that they were treating her as different and 'other' and patting her on the back by saying "wow, good for you for taking part in these activities even though you wear *hijab*." This hurt her because she didn't like the feeling of being judged. She thought she had found people who were more accepting and modest, but she realized that these friends do not understand what it is like to be from a more conservative family, and liberals are sometimes less accepting than conservatives.

Double Effort and Double Burden as Women

Zayna, a feminist from Jerusalem, talked about women's struggles to achieve their goals. She says that women must make a double effort to do anything in their lives. They have to work much harder than men to get into university or get a job. She explained that getting a job often

relies on relationships and connections. Those who hire employees are usually always men, so women have to have a connection or relationship with men to get jobs easier, but this is not acceptable in society. Overall, women have to look good to get a job and be nice, but at the same time, they are then mistaken for being promiscuous. Zayna does not feel that it is easy for a woman to get a job simply based on her qualifications. Zayna also talks about double standards for women. She explains that a woman cannot live alone because society and her family do not trust her. If a woman lives alone, people will talk about her in a bad way and assume that she is loose and a prostitute. She feels that it is not fair to make assumptions about women living alone. T also discussed the challenges of being a woman in her society. She said that she must put in double effort in everything. To stay at the university, she must get excellent grades so her family allows her to stay and thinks it is worth it for her to study. She feels that she must be successful all the time to prove herself. She notes how this was not the case for her brothers.

Rula lives in the Bethlehem area where she works as a social worker for an NGO that deals with psychological and social issues facing Palestinian women. Her NGO is part of the Coalition of Civic Organizations for the Prevention of Violence Against Women (muntada almunazamāt alahliya limunāhaḍat al'nf ḍid almara'), which is made up of seventeen women's social, legal, and civil society organizations that meet a few times a year and attend a yearly regional meeting about violence against women in Egypt. She has a strong personality and is very passionate about the work she does. One of Rula's experiences exemplifies the double burden theme. She recounts how she was at university while she had children and that was difficult for her. She was studying social work to eventually work in her discipline. When it came time for her to get a job, her husband refused. She explained that he felt their home life and the experience of their girls would be compromised if she worked. She was able to get a friend of

her husband to convince him that if she worked, their situation would be better because the girls would learn more from their mother and gain new ideas and positive influence. She also explained that their financial situation would be much better if she worked. In the end, her husband gave in and allowed her to work. Rula says that he is happy that she works. Rula says “I feel that my daughters are different from the girls whose mothers do not work because they are more independent and voice their ideas.” While Rula was committed to working, she was making a big sacrifice by doing so. She not only provided financial support for her family, but she also raised her girls by herself and was solely responsible for all of the household chores such as cooking and cleaning. Rula carries a double burden of working and supporting the family and also raising her children and maintaining the household. This double burden is not something that men experience.

Dana describes the situation of Palestinian women not as a double burden, but as a triple burden. She says that women deal with the burdens of social class oppression, political/occupation oppression, and society and patriarchal oppression. Dana told a story about her life that surprised her and changed how she sees feminism and also highlighted the gender and religious discrimination that is exacerbated by the occupation. She recounts, “In 2015 I was injured by the occupation forces at a demonstration. I was in intensive care. On social media, they said that she is not a martyr because she does not wear the hijab. I saw all kinds of disagreements and agreements found in our society. First, they say, why did she even go to the streets? Why isn't she covered? She isn't a martyr if she is not covered. Others supported me.” She explains that she is Christian, and she supports al-Aqsa and Muslims. She said that others commented saying that it's not important if she is a Christian. She was frustrated by the fact that despite the political conflict and violence that Palestinians face, no one mentioned or appreciated

the simple fact that there is a human fighting against oppression. She recalls, “I was angry that they all kept trying to put her into a box. I am not any of those things, I am a human. There was no reason for all of those negative comments.”

Violence and Abuse

As in all societies, violence and abuse impact Palestinian women. But unlike other societies, due to the occupation, Palestinian women live in an environment with increased presence of violence daily. In the latest statistics, three out of five (over fifty percent) Palestinian women who are married or were previously married have experienced gender-based violence (UNODC, 2023). This is substantially higher than the world average which is about twenty-seven percent of women (WHO, 2024). By including these statistics and Palestinian women’s experiences of GBV, the researcher does not intend to paint a picture of Palestinian men and Palestinian society as backwards or inherently more violent than other men around the world. Rather, it aims to show that GBV is a serious problem that women face and needs more attention. At the same time, this study intends to show how the occupation is responsible for an overall lack of societal sense of safety and security and has contributed to a political situation where not only do women lack basic resources to deal with GBV when they experience it, they also lack an environment in which they can safely discuss these issues without being ostracized or blamed for them (Mahamid, Veronese, and Bdier, 2022; OCHA, 2022).

There are several reasons to argue that GBV is enhanced by the difficult socio-political environment created by the ongoing Israel Occupation. First, the occupation has created a tense environment in which Palestinians are constantly in danger of settler and/or Israel military violence as they go about their daily lives. Palestinian workers in Israel are treated poorly and do

not have the same rights as Israeli workers. Second, the occupation and the negotiated terms of the Oslo agreement severely limit the PA's ability to govern, protect and provide for its citizens, especially in area C. Because it is not an autonomous and fully functioning government and has been accused of corruption, it does not prioritize funding to provide permanent resources for women and children facing violence. Moreover, the PA has so far failed to modify legislation relating to personal status and family protection. Lastly, the ministry of Education has failed to provide school children with the awareness, knowledge, and tools to prevent and deal with GBV incidents. As a result of all of these factors, awareness campaigns and counseling, legal, and health services for GBV have been provided through NGO short term projects. In this case, these preventative and treatment services are not offered in all areas of equality or through permanent programs. According to the interlocutors Khulud and Maha, the even more difficult hurdle for women facing GBV is that society blames women for this. As a result, women are fearful to speak up and even believe that they should remain quiet and are at fault. If they speak up, the family will suffer because of them (Mahamid, Veronese, & Bdier, 2022). They believe that as long as society continues to view violence this way, it will be difficult to change the reality for women.

Physical and sexual harassment occurs commonly on the buses according to the stories and testimonies of students and interlocutors. Zayna talks about harassment and believes that women should not be ashamed of harassment or abuse. She recalls the first time she experienced sexual harassment, "I was 16 years old, and I was on the bus. An old man touched me, and I immediately went home to shower and felt like I wanted to remove something from my body. I did not tell my mother about it." Zayna says that touching and harassment on the buses is very common. This can occur because girls are afraid to speak up about this on the bus. After all, no

one will believe them, and they are afraid about their reputations. Men deny these accusations and people don't often believe women. Zayna recalls that one time she spoke up when a man touched her and he made her feel guilty about it and that it was her fault because of what she was wearing. Zayna believes that the way to combat this kind of abuse is to teach girls when they are young that they must speak up.

Yara, who is from a rural village to the south-west of Ramallah, talked about the violence and abuse that her sister experienced. Because she is close to her sister, it impacted her a lot. She prefaces her story by saying that men don't like it when women learn more than them or their control is challenged. She describes her sister as very beautiful and not wearing the hijab. She believes that she has beautiful hair and does not understand why she should have to hide it. She is also very confident and smart and is a feminist. She is in school studying medicine. She is against the idea of having a man "buying her" for marriage. She wants to marry someone who understands her. By what she is describing, it is clear that her sister's personality is not well-received in a rural setting. She explains how once her sister was watching Nawal el-Saadawi, a well-known Egyptian feminist, on T.V. Her brother threw the T.V. device so that she could not watch it. Yara explains that Nawal el-Saadawi is considered the devil in her village.

Yara goes on to describe how her sister acted in a way that broke the rules of their traditional way of life. Yara's sister was sitting out one night at a restaurant near Al-Quds University. She was sitting with girl and guy friends and posted some pictures of herself on Instagram. Her brother found out and locked her in the house without a mobile phone and would not let her go to the university. Her sister became very depressed and stopped eating, so they took her to a psychiatrist to get pills. Yara says that after this incident, she has lost her spirit and personality.

Yara also describes her personal experience with physical abuse and violence. She explains how her husband does not respect her because he hits her. She said that she won't tell a professor who is a close friend and teaches in the gender and women's study department at Birzeit University. She thinks that her friend will make a big deal about her husband's abuse because she will want to get justice for her. However, Yara is afraid of what would happen if her husband found out she told someone. She says, "If I got divorced, I would be happy. When he wants to have sex, it's for him. If I forget to wash his pants, he hits me. He hits my daughter too. One time, my daughter was singing songs on YouTube in a loud voice, and he was sleeping, so he hit her because she bothered him. She is very afraid of her father, and I cannot protect her."

Yara says that despite wanting to get a divorce, it is not realistic. She explains that if she gets a divorce, she cannot take her girls with her. In Palestinian society, if a woman divorces, it is customary for her to return to her parent's house. If she has children, this can be problematic. She says that her parents do not want girls in their house because they do not want girls or the financial burden on Yara and her children. Moreover, if Yara wanted to work, her family would not allow her to work as a house cleaner which she is currently doing to make money.

When discussing sexual harassment on the street, H's mother and her sister-in-law said that they believe that you can't change the thinking or behavior of men. In their view, if men see women wearing short or revealing clothes, they will harass them. They said that women must change and cover themselves. Also, regarding men harassing women on the streets, Haneen believes that you can't expect to change his behavior on the street. In her thinking, society and mothers must educate women and teach them how to be aware of these things and prevent them. In this case, Haneen blames women for men's harassment of women.

Rula talked about challenges for Palestinian women specifically about women who are widows or face domestic or sexual violence at home. The traditions, customs, and beliefs hinder her work with these women. She explains to me how women are raised to always sacrifice for the family and to handle any burden no matter how hard. For the sake of the children, women are raised to never speak up when they are suffering from certain issues such as sexual or physical violence. If women do speak up about their suffering and want a divorce, they will face enormous hurdles economically and socially. Without an education, she cannot find a decent job. It is socially unacceptable for a woman to live alone, so even if she could find and afford an apartment, she would face social discrimination and judgment which Rula calls the “social gaze (النظرة المجتمعية).” As a result, most women have no choice but to suffer through their abusive relationships.

Khulud and Maha in their work with an NGO based in Bethlehem that deals with raising women’s awareness about the power of media and how to use it powerfully for women’s issues media awareness, also work with women who have more personal social issues such as having marital issues or being a victim of violence. Khulud explains the situation about women who face marital issues saying that they have no support, so they are stuck in their marriage. A woman can return to her parents, but this is usually looked down upon. In most cases, women can’t afford their own house. Women who live alone are judged by society, so they must either stay with their abusive husbands or in-laws or go back to their parent’s home which is not always a simple solution. This is exactly what Yara discusses when she explains her options in an abusive relationship.

Khulud also discusses the issue of the murder of women and what is traditionally called “honor killings” because the death of a woman who had committed some crime cleanses the

honor of that family. She says, “If you are in your society and hear every day about the murder of women, society accepts that a man kills a woman just because she is in his family, and he doesn't agree with or like her behavior no matter what it is. He kills her and says it's ‘honor.’” She goes on to talk about how legally a man who murders a woman in his family gets a lesser punishment of about three to six months of jail time. At the time of this study, she said that this law is now frozen, but men find other ways around it. For example, if they kill a woman, they say that she committed suicide, have a younger family member kill her, or give her poison. In the case of Israa Ghayib from Beit Sahur, they claimed that fell off the balcony by mistake and that she was possessed by demons.

Khulud says, “In the whole world there is murdering of women, we know this, and we know that if we change the applicable laws, it's not going to prevent this kind of crime, violence against women in the whole world is 30%. Palestine is not more or less, but in the U.S.A. and Europe, there is a law that punishes the criminal, the abuser, and the killer. It (the law) does not run away from punishment. We here, no, we run away from punishment because when he hits his daughter...when she goes to the police to complain about this abuse, the police ask her why she is complaining about such a thing. Meaning that in society, it is acceptable for a woman to be abused.” She continues by explaining how if a woman goes to her father to tell him that her husband hits her, he will tell her to return to her husband, and that it does not matter if your husband hits you.

Women are also complicit in this acceptance of abuse. Khulud says, “Even women, they raise their girls to accept violence and abuse.” Maha repeats Khulud's words about violence saying, “Violence is in all places, but the difference is that there are systems of punishment and rehabilitation in other countries. Here, there is no one to support a woman who faces harassment,

rape, or violence. No people, no organizations, not even the government will support her. The whole system is against women in this way.”

Khulud adds to this saying, “The issue is that all the importance is around the life of a man and his importance. A woman’s life doesn't matter, she can be replaced.” Khulud and Maha are not generalizing about all of Palestinian society in the sense that all men are violent, but they do feel that beliefs about violence and women are overwhelming enough that they impact the entire society and the way they think and behave. For them, the mentality about women’s worth, violence against them, and appropriate punishments for that violence is very dangerous for Palestinian women and all of society. These beliefs in combination with the environment of a violent and oppressive occupation feel very overwhelming for women who work on women’s rights issues because it is difficult for this internal violence to end permanently if the occupation remains. This is the epitome of the concept of the double burden that Palestinian feminists feel as they fight for great gender equality and rights as well as liberation from a brutal occupation.

Women’s Attitudes and Conceptualizations of Feminism

The next section highlights women’s voices and understandings of feminism. These data are organized by major themes related to the meaning of feminism and the experience of engaging in feminism.

Feminism: Fighting on Two Fronts

One main theme of the experience of engaging in feminism is the idea that it includes struggling on multiple fronts and various levels of society. This reality for Palestinian women can be traced to the socio-political reality of living under settler colonial military occupation.

Khulud, the NGO director from Bethlehem who has had multiple negative experiences with the Israeli occupation, believes that feminism is comprehensive and must work on all fronts for the freedom of the country and women because if they only work on feminist social issues by themselves, they will fail.

Sajeda, the NGO director from Hebron, defines feminism as an ideology that requires consistent work by both men and women now and in the long run to achieve justice and equality. She also talked about patriarchy, which for her, can be summed up in the double burden on women that stems from two places:

“The first side is from the occupation and its practice of increasing settler colonialism which harms social relationships and feminism because it generates new burdens on Palestinian women. This is one. The second side is that discriminatory practices of patriarchal oppression are still present in Palestine, and they fight against Palestinian women and are reflected in the context of the culture of the hierarchy of institutions and governmental practices in the national discourse as well as in practices towards Palestinian women. This is feminism in my opinion.”

Sajeda believes that feminism means to acknowledge patriarchy, understand how it works, and fight against it in small and legitimate ways. She sees patriarchy as a challenge to feminism and something that has been strengthened not only by the occupation but also by the capitalist system that the world is governed by. She believes that capitalism generates more patriarchy because it utilizes women as tools and servants to build social infrastructure which create particular types of social relationships.

Another interlocutor, Rula, a social worker who works in an NGO in Bethlehem, spoke about her personal views of feminism and what she believes is expected from women's organizations. Her personal views of feminism are shaped by her difficult job as a social worker.

Rula believes that feminism means defending all groups in society including children, women, disabled people, and the elderly. At the same time, it should work to resist imperialism and occupation and support the rights of all people who experience violence. Rula confirmed that it also means accepting others and their ideas by allowing dialogue. On the larger societal level, Rula believes that feminism should not contradict society, at least not in obvious and huge ways. According to her, change regarding women's issues should come gradually so that it is more likely to be accepted. She emphasizes that, as a woman, she is part of Palestinian society and has a duty in that role to help all in society and to fight against the occupation of their people. Therefore, while she feels a duty to help Palestinian women, she has an equally strong duty to fight the occupation and defend her people.

Rula also discussed her feelings about the women's movement and shared some overarching themes that came out of it. As a representative of her NGO, she attended a meeting of the Coalition of Civic Organizations for the Prevention of Violence Against Women (*muntada almunazamāt alahliya limunāḥadat al'nf ḍid almara'*), which includes members from several women's civil society and legal rights organizations in the West Bank. One important issue that came up during the meeting was that women's organizations and activists are always on the defensive rather than members discussed the idea that the women's movement must work in a balanced way where they address both the national liberation issue by showing their commitment to it and women's rights issues that should not be suspended until Palestine becomes a free nation. While Palestinian women have always been a part of the national liberation movement, there has been an increase in recent years in attacks on women and women's rights organizations by Hizb ut Tahrir and conservative critics who accuse women of being Western puppets because of their focus on women's issues rather than the larger and more urgent national issue. Rula

insists that feminists and women's groups are just as committed to national liberation as they are to defending women's rights.

Feminism and Islam

Rula, when asked about her feminist beliefs and her Islamic faith, said she believes that Islam respects women and gives them their rights and that feminism is a continuation of Islam rather than contradictory towards it. She thinks that if the religious ideas of women were implemented, the situation for women would be much better for women in Palestine. At the same time, she acknowledges that many women are women's worst enemies because women who have patriarchal thinking are worse than men, indicating that they can be more oppressive to women than men.

Despite the pushback on feminism and women's rights work on the part of Hizb ut-Tahrir, clerics and tribal leaders, Zayna does not see any conflict between being a feminist and being a Muslim and/or religious. Several of my interlocutors echo this concept that there is no contradiction between what women and feminists are working toward and what Islam offers women in terms of rights, privileges, and responsibilities.

For Lujain, feminism means equality between the sexes and that women can make their own decisions in their lives. For her, there are issues in Islam that she doesn't accept such as polygamy. She is against this and does not consider it acceptable in feminism. She does admit that versions of feminism can be very diverse in acts and theory. Ultimately for her, she does not necessarily consider Islam against feminism or women's rights, but she believes there are some principles or values that don't align with her understanding of feminism.

Another interlocutor, Rahsa, lives in Ramallah and considers herself a Muslim feminist. Publically, she does not like using the word ‘feminist’ to describe her beliefs and work for gender equality because it’s considered a Western concept in Palestine, and she does not want to deter women from listening to what she has to say. Rasha believes that Islamic texts are the source of rights and responsibilities of Muslim women. This is in contrast with other feminists who rely more heavily on international human rights law to find legitimacy in their feminist activism. For Rasha, there is no contradiction between women’s rights and Islam because Islam is the source of these rights. She believes that there have to be more women Islamic scholars who can interpret Islamic laws and texts from a more gender-equal point of view.

Feminism Must Fit Into Palestinian Social, Cultural, and Religious Norms

Rula talks about how feminism and women’s activism in Palestine cannot be too radical. In other words, it cannot contradict societal norms and political parties and Islamic scholars’ discourses on national and religious issues. This belief and the way she explains it seem contradictory to what she has expressed before about the need to change the social reality on the ground for women. It begs the question of how change can come if women are simply following and going along with what the mainstream political party and Islamic scholars are saying-- the same religious parties and leaders who have attacked several women’s organizations and individual women for their involvement and fight towards great women’s equality and rights or those in the PA who have failed to support them in this efforts toward greater women’s legal rights. At the same time, it is not contradictory at all since Palestinian women do not want to isolate themselves from their male partners in national liberation. It makes sense that the women’s movement wants to simultaneously support women and fight for great social and

political representation and rights while also working in cooperation with their male counterparts. While it is a contradiction of sorts, to be feminist under military occupation and without a sovereign state through which to fight and demand their rights, Palestinian women must fight on all fronts simultaneously while acknowledging and fighting this contradiction and working within their society to do it.

Dana believes that feminism requires both men and women to fight against oppression in all places. She also feels strongly that when adopting feminism, culture should not be imported from other countries. Rather, they should respect and value the customs and traditions of their people when developing feminist ideas and engaging in feminist actions. And like Rula, Dana believes that there are times when these values must be addressed head-on and, in your face, while other issues require a more slow and gradual process to be effective in the long run. This is the idea of being careful about how and when feminists contradict cultural and religious norms. There is a huge sense among the interlocutors that feminism requires diplomacy and tact in Palestinian society.

Haneen and Fatima admitted that they didn't know a lot about feminism. They mostly knew about feminism through Zayna. They attempted to define what feminism means but they were clearly not comfortable doing it and were not speaking in a way that showed their definition was something they believed in. They think feminism gives women their rights in society and work. They said they don't know any feminists except for Zayna and think that it is for women to build their personalities and not have anyone control or offend them. Based on what they know about feminism, it is a positive and negative thing. Zayna's mom says it is positive, but it must have limits. Women can work but must abide by societal norms and morals. She should not feel that just because she works, she can be free. In place of the word 'free,' Zayna's mother uses

the phrase 'like the Israelis.' In her experience being Israel is akin to lacking morals and a commitment to religion and being promiscuous and loose with their bodies. For Haneen, it is of the utmost importance that women keep their morals, their religion, and protect their bodies.

One way for women's activism to fit into societal cultural and traditional norms is by involving men as partners in the fight for women's advancement. While this may be harder said than done, some interlocutors focused on this key point of feminism.

Rula considers it important to involve more men in their work. This can create stronger partnerships with men so that they will back them up in times of crisis when women and their rights are attacked. This thinking has stemmed from discussions in the larger collective feminist meetings, local organizational meetings as well as from the fear of the attacks on their work from Hizb ut-Tahrir and other critics. As in many cases of feminist movements occurring amid political and social upheaval such as in Egypt and Algeria (Baron, 2007; Elsadda, 2019), Palestinian women consider it a priority to cooperate with men. Living under occupation necessitates all citizens including men, women, the elderly, and children to actively work towards their freedom in every action they take in all spheres of their lives.

Feminism Under Occupation Has Limits

Dana prefaces her understanding of feminism by saying, "As long as women don't have a strong public role in society, she cannot fight politically either. As a result, she cannot bring much-needed change. As long as women remain marginalized and under occupation, they will not be able to truly address women's needs." Therefore, while Dana strongly believes in improving women's lives and getting them into decision-making positions, she acknowledges the very tough reality of the occupation.

Zayna feels that feminism is misunderstood. According to her, people understand feminists in Palestine as wanting to be free--meaning they want to be promiscuous, have no boundaries, and not be accountable to their families and society, but Zayna says that is not the goal. She says the goal is to demand basic rights for women, so in this way, terminology matters. For Zayna, it is still important to use the word 'feminism' and connect it to the meaning of rights for women. Many of my other interlocutors were more conservative in this regard preferring not to use the term 'feminism' or 'feminist' for fear that they would be misunderstood, ostracized, or disregarded. Lujain, as an older-generation feminist, talked a lot about legitimacy in women's rights work. For her, it was very important to keep her position of respect in her work. She believes that in order to change people's ideas, one must earn their respect first and then one can influence others more.

Women Have Main Roles in the Social, Political, and Economic Spheres

Khulud had a concise definition of feminism. For her, feminism means that women should have a role in all aspects of life and that women have a main role in decision-making in politics, social issues, and economics. She believes that women must be free to make their own decisions and that no one can impose anything on them. She explained how feminism is not for women only, it also means working towards the freedom of the country and the Palestinian people. According to her, a woman can't be free in a society that is not free.

Dana explained that having a feminist agenda means that services of all types must be offered to both men and women and women must have a role in society and change. She feels that it is just as important if not more for women to take on more public and political roles. She is against the idea that economic support and empowerment create equality between men and

women. She cites evidence in other countries where women are economically strong but still don't experience full justice and equality as women.

Zayna explained how she took a class on feminism at Bethlehem University, and it changed her life. She learned about the male gaze and how women care about their looks because there is pressure to look a certain way because of the way men look at them.

For H, Feminism means that women are like men in all spheres, at home, at work, and in politics. Moreover, she insists that women are not inferior to men and says that she is not around to serve men. For her, when she realized this, it was self-transcendence.

Feminism as Choice

Dunia, a Muslim woman who has been arrested by the Israeli occupation and lives in Ramallah has a very non-traditional understanding of feminism. Her beliefs about feminism are very real and tangible in the sense that they came out of her extensive life experiences as a Palestinian Muslim woman who is not quite a radically liberal feminist but is also not a conservative Muslim. For Dunia, feminism is not in the books, it's not theories, and it's not women going to the streets to demand their rights. For her, it is when she refuses to heat up food for her brother or when she asks, 'Why can he go out at night but not me?' She says: "This is feminism and when I realized this, I denied the feminist movement that comes from books." She explained to me that women don't need anyone to tell them what feminism is. T believes that feminism is giving women the choice to do what they want. She emphasizes that she means the real choice, and not just having a few options to choose from. According to her, women should choose completely how they want to behave and what they want to do. She admits that with the

freedom of choice, some women will stay the same and that's fine, but what is important is that women should have the choice to stay like they are or be who they choose to be.

Non-Feminist Conceptualizations of Feminism

Rasha, a Muslim feminist from Ramallah, explains how her community sees women's rights and feminism. She sees that her society judges women's freedom and rights by measuring to what extent she is allowed to leave her house to work and study. She says, "The community feels that women have more than their share of rights because they go outside of their homes to work and study." She describes this as a glass "ceiling" which represents the limit to where women's freedom can arrive but must not pass. Because society believes that women have more than enough rights, they feel that calls for feminism are nothing more than calls to free women to be more promiscuous, wear more revealing clothes, go out late, go out with men, etc. For these reasons she does not use the word 'feminism' when describing her ideological beliefs about women's rights. In a conservative society, she believes women must draw on tactics that speak to Muslim women and encourage them to get involved with issues facing women without feeling that they will be labeled Western, anti-Islamic, or a 'slut.'

Zayna, who lives in Jerusalem, is in her early twenties and publicly considers herself a feminist, had very similar ideas to share about how feminism is perceived in Palestinian society. When discussing the challenges of being a feminist, she says, "The issue is that if you are a feminist, it means that you are free (promiscuous). Not that you're demanding basic rights for women. There is a stigma on feminism, but feminism is not like that."

When asked how to change the image of feminists, she says, “Feminism is for women’s rights, not for her freedom. The goal is not to free women, so it’s a terminology thing. Words matter.”

Lujain, who is in her fifties and works at a feminist NGO in Jerusalem, also illustrates through her experiences that feminism is understood by members of the Hizb ut Tahrir party and other clerics and tribal leaders as only an assault on Islam which focuses on insignificant women’s issues rather than the occupation. There was a protest about the killing of women at *Duwar Almanara* in Hebron (2020). Lujain recalls that those against their protest attacked the women demonstrating and yelled comments about how women should not be fighting these issues against their people in their own country when the occupation is widespread. She says that they think why would we demonstrate just for one woman who was killed? For them, this is very insignificant, but for feminists, every woman’s life that is taken is important and worth fighting for.

DISCUSSION

This chapter offers examples of Palestinian women’s beliefs, experiences, and analysis of what it means to be women in a patriarchal society living under a violent patriarchal settler colonial occupation. The occupation acts as an overarching umbrella of violence, oppression, and discrimination which trickles down to women in the form of economic and emotional burdens, the absence of feelings of safety and security, restrictions on movement, work, and study, and negative impacts on social relationships with their husbands, children, and others. Women’s social experiences reveal particular problems for women in Palestinian society. The data reveal that women must work twice as hard if not more than men when working, running for local

elections, getting a job, getting permission to go to university, and choosing one's major. The social experiences of women about challenges surrounding gender discrimination, gender-based violence, identity issues, and motherhood occur in the bubble of Palestinian society but are created by, exacerbated by, and intricately connected to the Israel occupation which manifests itself through, walls, checkpoints, racist policies, restrictions on movement, speech, and expression, the protection of settlers at the expense of Palestinian lives, horrific violence, murder, discrimination, and ethnic cleansing against Palestinians.

The solution to some of the issues discussed by the interlocutors in this data set is not found in changing legislation; rather, remedies require a change in broader attitudes about gender, women's abilities, and control of women under the guise of fear for their security. Other issues discussed by the interlocutors such as violence, harassment, lack of social safety nets, and gender discrimination can begin to be solved by modifying outdated legislation relating to women, families, and gender discrimination. However, even these issues require a deeper solution that may be found in raising awareness about these issues to change attitudes and eventually behaviors. More generally, women's oppression can be linked to several factors including the colonial and patriarchal Israeli occupation and its impact on gender relations and attitudes, and patriarchal tendencies.

At the same time, women must deal with and address social issues now despite the ongoing cyclical negative impacts of the occupation and patriarchy on women which are not going to end soon.

The data reveal that feminism among Palestinian women is multifaceted and diverse. Some women choose not to use the word 'feminism' at all to describe their beliefs and actions about women and gender equality. Other women proudly call themselves feminists and, while

they acknowledge cultural, social, and political differences, don't necessarily see fundamental differences in feminism in the East and West except for social and political contexts. However, all feminists and women that I spoke to wholeheartedly and overwhelmingly acknowledged the oppressive, political, and colonial environment that Palestinian women live in which cannot be separated from their experiences of being a woman and the social realities that come along with feminist work and the fight towards greater gender equality and national liberation. Therefore, while these data represent Palestinian women with diverse experiences and understandings of feminism, patriarchy, and gender equality, they all wholeheartedly and unequivocally acknowledge the occupation's detrimental and pervasive impact on their and their families' lives.

Besides the occupation, there were some major themes that were found in all women's definitions and understandings of feminism. These included the need to keep feminism culturally and socially situated in Palestinian history, culture, and religions, women should have the right to study and work in fields/careers that are culturally acceptable, the involvement of men as partners in the fight for gender equality, and the belief that Islam and feminism are not mutually exclusive. Most of the interlocutors also stressed the importance of the idea that feminism must fight both patriarchy and occupation/colonialism simultaneously because one does not come without the other. That is both scenarios of the occupation with women's gender equality and national liberation without gender equality and rights fail to meet women's aspirations. Moreover, it is impossible to have complete national liberation if women are not free, and even if women have their rights in Palestinian society, they will lose them while living under a military occupation. These common threads of conceptualizing the meaning of feminism reveal more similarities than differences between women at varying levels of feminist support and activism.

All data sources provided by women's personal and professional experiences in the private and public spheres create alternative pockets of knowledge producing a better understanding of patriarchy and its impact and feminist aspirations. All of the knowledge produced through women's testimonies reveals snippets of truth that convey the immense struggles that women face socially but are also rebelling against. These snippets of truth also point to the major issues that women want to see addressed in their communities. Currently, not everyone active in the women's movement agrees about how to address these issues, but all levels of oppression must be considered when figuring out the why and how of feminist activism. Part of this process may include great collaboration and conversations between women from diverse backgrounds.

The next section examines how women address women's social suffering and legal discrimination, women's experiences in the NGO system, and limitations on the women's movement to understand the limitations of feminist activism and the women's movement more broadly.

CHAPTER 5: CURRENT ITERATIONS OF WOMEN'S AND FEMINIST ACTIVISM: CRITICISMS, LIMITATIONS, AND POSSIBILITIES

This section takes a closer look at the current ways in which Palestinian women engage in feminist activism and mobilize women to gain greater social and legal rights in the West Bank. It aims to scrutinize how well Palestinian women are meeting their feminist goals and the social needs of underrepresented Palestinian women. It also considers the limitations of this feminist activism and mobilization and offers an alternative model as seen through the online Palestinian feminist movement Ṭāl'āt and why, so far, the Ṭāl'āt model has not caught on in the West Bank.

Overview of Women's Civil Society and Feminist NGOs

Following the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, Palestine is one country that receives the highest amount of international donor funding to prompt democracy, civil society, government, and gender empowerment (Jamal 2012 cited in Jamal 2015 Western Donor Assistance). Between 1993 and 2016, the West Bank and Gaza Strip have received \$35 billion in aid. Seventy percent of this aid (\$24 billion) was dispersed between 2006-2016 for an average of \$560 per capita per year. The Palestinian people are the top recipients of non-military aid per capita in the world (Tartir, 2017 International Aid to Palestine: Time to Change Course). Statistics from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) show that the top six donors are the US, the EU, UNRWA, Norway, Germany, and Britain which provided 70 percent of overall aid (Tartir, 2017). This donor aid is given to support economic and social projects but does not allow Palestinians to use the money to resist or engage in any activity that

could be interpreted as working towards national liberation. Donors tend to support projects relating to key issues that they think are important rather than the issues that Palestinians themselves deem essential (Wildeman, 2019). Ironically, North American donors such as the US and Canada are more concerned about Israel's security from Palestinian violence and fail to mention the importance of the protection of Palestinians from Israel violence in their donor reports (Wildeman, 2019). This Western and colonial aid ignores these larger issues and assumes all of the issues of the Palestinian people are simply economic and social. After decades of aid between 1993 and 2024, Palestinians are politically fragmented, the PA is more authoritarian than ever, and the economy is less stable and more dependent on Israel (Farsakh, 2016).

Legal Rights for Women

Among the many challenges women face in Palestine are the issues of legal rights for women that help protect them from physical violence by creating significant punishment for perpetrators. Khulud explains that women's organizations have been addressing the issue of modifying the family protection law since about 2002. Until today, it has not been modified (Alashqar, 2014).

The women I spoke to who are well-educated about the political environment all mentioned how the women's movement weakened along with the weakening of the political landscape after the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. One interlocutor who works at an NGO in Jerusalem pointed to the fact that before 1993, they were not ultra-rich and ultra-poor because most people were middle class and people inside the same communities helped each other. She emphasizes that after Oslo, all of a sudden there was a huge wealth gap and growing disparity between social classes. The formation of the Palestinian Authority (PA) came hand in hand with

political collapse and a steady flow of international donor money to women's and other civil society organizations. Also, the wealthy political elite who abroad came back and this led to a particular social, political, and economic situation in Palestine that is summed up well by Mogannam (2024):

“This NGOization move, in combination with the conditions set through the Oslo Accords for Palestinian political elites and wealthy exiles to return to the PA territories, produced a new elite class in Palestine that ushered in a new wave of economic instability through the facade of growing capitalism under occupation (p. 175).”

Starting in the early 1990s, hundreds of NGOs were established in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The number of higher-paying jobs exploded for educated Palestinians who spoke English. This in turn served to increase the wealth gap between communities. Also since NGOs are not set up democratically and do not depend on volunteer support, they lack a grassroots approach to social and political issues that would involve a larger percentage of people in the community as decision-makers. Instead, a few elite directors of NGOs and their staff were making decisions about what various Palestinian communities' issues and needs are. This top-down approach conflicts with the bottom-up approach used by the women's work committees in the 70s and 80s. The NGO and PA funding that started steadily streaming after 1993 not only created a deeper wealth gap but also created “...a dependence on colonial and imperialist funding circuits and governing structures to ensure economic stability and survival (Mogannam, 2024, p. 176).”

Because Palestinian women's social and legal organizations are large recipients of international donor funding, one may ask how this funding and the focus on NGO projects impacted Palestinian women, the women's movement, and gender equality. This is a large

question that cannot be completely answered in this study, but this data will shed light on specific experiences of women involved in NGOs and recipients of NGO project funding to illustrate the issues highlighted in the above-cited studies.

CEDAW and NGOs

Another central aspect of women's NGO work that came up in this study is the debate surrounding the adoption and promotion of CEDAW. Women's support for CEDAW has proven to be very controversial in Palestinian society and added more work, stress, and danger for its supporters.

What is CEDAW?

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is a treaty created by the United Nations Commission on the status of women which acknowledges that gender discrimination is still a reality and aims to end all forms of discrimination against women. The Convention deals with civil and legal rights and status of women, human reproduction, and the influence of culture and tradition on gender relations (OHCHR, 1979). Only seven out of 193 countries did not ratify CEDAW including The United States, Iran, Sudan, Somalia, Nauru, Palau, and Tonga Kaye, 2010 (Kaye, 2010).

On April 1, 2014, the state of Palestine signed and adopted CEDAW and became the only Arab country to embrace the treaty with no reservations (Qafisheh, 2019). The official signing of CEDAW without reservations was celebrated by women's organizations, NGOs, human rights organizations, and women's rights activists but condemned and criticized by conservative Muslim parties and entities as well as individuals (Thawabteh & Sleimya, 2022). To be fair, several interlocutors also criticized the PA for adopting CEDAW without reservations because

there are some articles that they feel do not fit the social, cultural, and religious realities in Palestine. Many women feel that this made it more difficult to get the support of Islamic scholars. However other women believe that they would not support it no matter what the treaty contains because laws relating to women and the family are the jurisdiction of Islamic law. According to Schneider (2021, p. 232), the PA's signing of CEDAW and other international human rights treaties is widely understood to be one of the PA's efforts to achieve international recognition and legitimacy. However, legislation in the West Bank has not changed to reflect the most important articles of CEDAW and it is not written in the Palestinian Official Gazette (Schneider, 2021), the official legislative document of Palestine. Moreover, the PA is doing very little to meet the requirements of CEDAW in tangible, practical ways nor have they made efforts or spent money on educating the public about what CEDAW is and its implications in Palestine (Schneider, 2021, p. 260). It took action in 2017 to prevent any articles of CEDAW from being applied legally in courts. This was done through the Supreme Constitutional Court which issued a decree that prevents courts from being bound to implement international treaties that conflict with the Palestinian Law (Hattab & Abualrob, 2023).

As a result, currently, CEDAW in Palestine is seen as an empty promise for women's rights advocates, but still a potentially serious threat to Islam and traditional Palestinian customs and behaviors in the eyes of Islamic scholars, clerics and tribal leaders. Some of the reasons for the government's lack of implementation and action as it relates to

Has CEDAW Helped or Hurt the Women's Movement?

With an understanding of the change in the women's movement from a mass-based grassroots movement driven by women's committees and a large volunteer network to the

hierarchical, top-down professionalization of women's activism through international donor-funded NGOs, the next section highlights the interlocutors personal experiences either working as an NGO employee or participating in an NGO workshop or training. Women's experiences reveal the negative aspects of NGO work described above, but also reveal women's commitment to achieving greater women's social and legal rights as well as the genuine struggles that women face to both solve women's social issues but also prove their commitment to fighting for national liberation.

Women's Experiences with NGOs

This section includes some of the experiences of my interlocutors relating to how they perceived NGO work and donor funding and how it impacts their lives, and work.

I spoke with a woman named Kafiya who is from Nablus but is living and working in Ramallah. She studied law in Australia and finds it hard to navigate the work sector in Palestine. She talked about how Nablus is a very conservative place. She recalls how it was hard for her to grow up as a female there since she has a strong personality and always questions patriarchal norms and behaviors. She considers herself a feminist and even created a page on Facebook relating to Palestinian feminism. She runs this page anonymously for fear of her family discovering her feminist beliefs and behaviors and backlash from conservative groups who defame and threaten outspoken feminists in Palestine. Being from a conservative area in Palestine, she must be careful of people finding out her identity because the term 'feminism' and its principles are often considered very radical and damaging to Palestinian norms and traditions. While Ramallah is a more liberal and open city, she still must be careful who hears her opinions and ideas. She posts about progressive and controversial topics in Palestinian society relating to women and gender issues.

Kafiya is very aware of social and gender issues in Palestinian society. She spoke negatively about NGOs in Palestine. Specifically, she discussed the NGO job market explaining that most people only want to work in NGOs because it will offer them a higher and stable paycheck. People don't care about their work in NGOs because it is not their passion, and it is not related to the deep-rooted political needs and wants of Palestinians. Therefore, there is no pride and excitement in one's work, it is just a job that provides them money to feed their families. At the same time, there is so much competition for this type of job because currently, it is the only way to stay in the middle class and not fall into poverty. Kafiya explained that there are so few job opportunities and the ones available are very competitive. Many people work in these positions and don't believe in the work they are doing, and this is why there is so much apathy among employees. She says, "Very few people do a job because they love or believe in it. There are so few job opportunities and people are forced to do work that they don't believe in or love. This goes back to the occupation and how it suffocates the people, the land, and the economy. NGOs in the end are just a paycheck." She continues by saying that NGO work only aims to temporarily help the Palestinian people through isolated donor-funded projects. Her explanation evoked an image of Palestinian NGOs being small, funded islands inside of most built-up regions in Palestine. Each island extends a few arms like an octopus out into the community. These arms are isolated and short-term projects that either aim to empower people, raise awareness of an issue, or offer them services or financial assistance. After six months or a year, these projects disappear and the people who participated in them are left without anything tangible to deal with the issues that they face while the NGO employees continue to enjoy their high salaries. Kafiya sees this as a colonial way to control the Palestinian people. It is also believed that the occupation benefits from these NGOs and their isolated work. NGOs and their

projects falsely portray an atmosphere of development and advancement for Palestinians. However, dependence on foreign aid and donor-prioritized projects creates a facade of improvement and development. In reality, Palestinians working in these NGOs are not addressing the core problem which is the occupation.

Rula, who works as a social worker in Bethlehem in an organization that supports women with various social, legal, and psychological needs, explained that they do not accept USAID funding. They refuse to sign the non-terrorism agreement because they will not stop their work with families of political prisoners who make up a large percentage of the women they serve. R told me that this agreement does not consider the reality of the lived experiences of Palestinians. It ignores that everything in their life is political and attached to the occupation.

Rula also discussed the financial challenges of running an NGO in Palestine. She said that they do not have a core, stable fund that keeps the organization running with key full-time employees through the times when they do not get outside donor funding. She says this is a huge problem. There are many projects they could get through USAID, but they refuse. At one point, they had to reduce their work to part-time without pay to keep the organization running and providing much-needed services to women. She believes that her organization should be able to run core services no matter what funding they get and that full-time core employees should not have to worry that they will lose their jobs. At the same time, they will be able to offer services consistently.

Lujain who works in a feminist organization in Jerusalem and engaged in women's activism very early on in her life believes in the work that her organization engages in related to research surrounding gender issues. At the same time, she admits that NGOs became independent from each other and less among the people. There is a sense of contradiction in A's

words which indicates the reality of women's NGOs after Oslo until now. In many ways, women truly believe in the work that they are doing, and they genuinely want to help other Palestinian women. At the same time, because NGOs rely on conditional international donor funding and the fact that they are run in a top-down, non-grassroots way that gives a few women decision-making power seems to reveal that these NGOs may be doing more damage than good in Palestinian society. But A, says that women's NGOs still have a national spirit (*nafas watani*) working towards national liberation but that they have strayed from the basis of the women's work committees of the 70s and 80s that were so successful in engaging women from all over Palestine and from all economic and demographic backgrounds. As she spoke more, she began to criticize the funding of the women's movement. She said, "It stopped being a women's movement, instead it became a funded political women's movement (*ḥaraka siyāsiya mumawala*).” She explains that when a movement is funded by outside donors, there are always conditions that lead an organization's work to prioritize the donors' wants and not the women's needs.” For her, this is a negative outcome of the NGOization of the women's movement. She also mentioned that donor funding has more conditions than it used to and this narrows the type of work that they can do.

Several interlocutors who work in women's NGOs spoke about being blamed for accepting Western donor funding for their work. They have been most notably criticized by Hizb ut-Tahrir, clerics, and tribal leaders for this.

The women who work in NGOs have a difficult job balancing the needs of the women they work with and the conditions and priorities of the donors. It appears that women attempt to get the most funding possible to pay their employees and meet the needs of the women they serve, but this is a very difficult job considering that donor priorities are not always realistic or

connected to the reality that Palestinians are living. Specifically, a few of my interlocutors also spoke about applying for specific projects and then having to adjust to the needs of the women when they implemented the project. Lujain told me that when talking to the donors, they must advocate for the needs of the women they support, but that the donors do not always listen. She said that often they apply for a project and then change what they see is necessary when they are working in the field. Lujain feels frustrated by the fact that the donors focus on certain issues when their most important issue is the occupation.

NGO donor funding comes with strings attached as most require organizations that accept funding from them to sign a document that states that they will refrain from terrorism. Most notably, USAID requires this to fund a project. Some NGOs will not sign such an agreement and therefore do not get money from USAID while other organizations do. The problem with this agreement is that the concept of “terrorism” includes many actions including political actions. Palestinian lives and existence are political. Israel controls every aspect of their lives and NGOs often address issues that impact the Palestinian people, most of which are related to outcomes of the occupation. One such issue is Palestinian prisoners. Several women’s organizations work with women whose husbands are political prisoners. While women’s husbands or sons are in prison, women are relegated to head of household and must provide for their families financially and socially. Having relatives in prison is a real issue impacting Palestinian women and if this issue is not addressed, women are neglected and left in very dire economic and emotional situations. There is a situation where the Israeli occupation oppresses the Palestinian people physically, socially, economically, and politically. NGOs are formed to deal with these various issues except for the fact that international donors do not want to engage in politics or “terrorism” by funding projects it deems political. The problem is that every social, economic,

and physical issue is a political issue in Palestine. International donors render these certain issues as merely political thus ignoring the colonial, imperialist, and political reality facing all Palestinians. As a result, international donors are complicit in their oppression of the Palestinian people and severely limit the work that women's NGOs can do to support Palestinian women.

These realities and testimonies reveal the complex and stressful contradictions women working in NGOs face as they attempt to offer useful and life-saving services to women but also fight the Israeli occupation. Despite women's frustration and hate for the occupation, the work of women's NGOs is not fighting the occupation directly; rather, they are treating the symptoms of the effects of the occupation. At the same time, based on what the women told me, some projects genuinely work to raise awareness about gender issues indirectly and increase women's confidence when it comes to dealing with patriarchal issues (Sajeda) or instill gender equality values in youth who engage in trainings and events that target more youth (Lujain).

I asked Sajeda how she addresses taboo issues which are sensitive subjects that are usually avoided. She said that she doesn't always hit the issue head-on or name an issue or discussion for what it is. For example, if the goal of a meeting or training is to help women gain confidence to stand up for themselves and demand their rights at home or in their communities, the name of the training might be related to women's social roles in Palestinian society. Through the workshops, Sajeda and the trainers insert ideas or illustrations to help women start to think about feminist issues on their own. Sajeda also explained how the women know her well and trust her because she continues to come to the same communities. As a result, many of them confide in her and share very difficult issues that they are dealing with as women. Sajeda cannot solve all of these women's problems by herself, but she tries to connect the women to other services that may help them.

Criticisms of NGOs in Palestinian Society

This section will highlight the contradictions that are present in NGO work, funding, and participation in their projects. Women have various experiences that indicate that NGO work is fraught with contradictions and a feeling that women must do the best they can with the not-so-great conditions and realities of NGOs. Some women truly believe in their work in NGOs while acknowledging the shortcomings of the restrictions of donor funding while other women are much more critical of the overall apparatus of NGOs and their role in Palestinian society.

Ghadeer lives in a village outside of Bethlehem and is very involved in volunteering in her community. She is the lead volunteer for the Palestinian Red Crescent in her village, and she participates in workshops and training related to women's empowerment and awareness. She recently decided to run for the local elections and won. Her goal in this is to provide more resources and opportunities for women in her village, something she believes that men do not consider when making decisions about her area. Based on her extensive experience participating in women's NGO workshops and training and her cooperation with them in bringing groups to her village, she is very familiar with female NGO employees and the way NGOs operate. Despite her having participated in several NGO activities, she was very critical of the way they operate and their lack of effectiveness.

Ghadeer is aware that these NGOs get their funding from the U.S. or Europe. She says that there is money available, and the organizations apply for it even if it's not what they want to be focusing on. She feels that these organizations just want to get funding for the director and project managers to benefit financially and to keep their organizations open and running. According to her experience, there is no sense that the NGO women want their participants to enjoy and benefit from the projects. Their work is for themselves more than it is for the women

who they should be serving. She describes it as very mechanical as if the NGO employees just want to check off the boxes which are donor priorities, applying, getting funding, implementing the projects, and writing the reports.

She explained how hard it is for mothers to participate in workshops and training, especially the multi-day events. She says, “When I would go to a nine-day workshop and leave the house, I must cook, make sure everyone is fed and that the kids are taken care of too. This is not easy; it is not easy to get out of the house.” Ghadeer illustrates the challenges of Palestinian women who work, volunteer or participate in workshops. Because the entire family relies on her, a mother must plan, organize, and coordinate so many moving parts to be able to be present somewhere outside of her home. She emphasizes this because she does not feel that the NGO employees care about or acknowledge this fact. She feels that most NGO women consider it a privilege for women to be able to participate in their events. Ghadeer, as a participant, attests to the fact that these workshops and trainings are not all they're cracked up to be because there is no continuity, development, or financial opportunities for women to improve their lives. Ghadeer believes that any economic empowerment project would be the most successful, but NGOs do not focus on this aspect. Ghadeer illustrates her frustration through a small incident relating to transportation to a workshop. She says, “The organization cares about the cost of transportation, they don't want to pay for a private taxi. They are concerned about the littlest things, but if it is them taking transportation, they will use their rights as a NGO employee. They just care about getting the job done and getting their salary. They just want to get the project done to say that it's done, so their organization benefits and not the participants.” Ghadeer feels that the NGOs focus on unimportant details such as transportation and she points out that transportation from the villages is not always easy or time efficient. In this case, to be on time, she has sometimes had to

take a private taxi. She believes this failure to support the participants in something as silly as transportation has a lot to say about how women NGO employees operate and use their money.

In contrast, Ra'ida truly believes that her work as a social worker helping women who face very serious and difficult issues such as divorce, physical abuse, arrest, and social stigma is crucial for Palestinian society because no one else, including the Palestinian Authority, offer these types of services. Rai'da does feel frustrated by the system of donor funding. She believes that her NGO must have a permanent core fund so that the main employees have secure employment. At times, her NGO has faced financial difficulties and had to have its employees work with only half of their salaries. In this way, NGO work is very uncertain at times and there is not always a lot of sustainability and consistency if donors don't continue funding particular types of projects. Despite this, the interlocutors expressed how they had to balance their donor priorities with women's needs, and to do this sometimes required them to change their projects as they were implemented. Women are not necessarily saying that they used their funding for something the donors did not want to fund, but they used it in the best way possible for the women they were serving in their projects.

Khulud who works at a women's media NGO also believes strongly in her work despite her criticism of the NGO funding system in the West Bank. She addresses the particular needs of young women who work in and deal with traditional and social media. She believes that without this kind of instruction and education, women would lose a lot of job opportunities and be less aware of how to speak up for themselves. Because she has been so personally impacted by the Israeli occupation, she also understands many struggles that women face and has a vision for a better future for Palestinian women.

Sajeda, who works with women in remote and marginalized villages in Area C, absolutely believes in the importance and necessity of her work. Her case is somewhat different from other NGO organizations because she, unlike other NGO directors, goes into the field and personally connects to the women her NGO serves. She explained how she is very proud of this because she believes this is the best way to promote change and to ensure that projects are implemented effectively to meet the needs of the local women in the designated community.

Kafiya's experience with NGOs and employment and Ghadeer's experience as a participant in NGO projects and training shed light on the way NGOs function and how people who work in them view themselves versus the participants. From their experiences, we learn that many NGO employees aim to apply for a project, get funding, implement the project, and get paid. Moreover, many of them may not truly believe in their work and view it just as a paycheck. While Ghadeer's story, experience, and critique of NGO projects and training and Kafiya's analysis of NGO employees are their own opinions, their experiences show that there is a very clear hierarchical designation between NGO employees and participants, and working at an NGO is considered a privileged position with a decent salary. NGO employees get the money and decide how and for whom to use it while participants show up and passively take part in the training or workshops that most of the time do not address the most pressing socio-political and economic issues that most Palestinian women face.

Another challenge with working in women's NGOs in Palestine is that women have to cut corners and address issues that are not included in their project proposals or donor priorities. This indicates a broken system that puts stress on NGO employees and does not fully meet the needs of the women who are meant to benefit from the funding and projects. Therefore, whether women believe in their NGO work and whether it is truly benefiting Palestinian women, it is

clear that change is necessary. Moreover, the hierarchical top-down design of women's NGOs does not lend itself to the priorities of the majority of Palestinian women. Western influence in women's NGOs does not allow them to fully address women's most pressing needs consistently and permanently. Women's issues are addressed by individual organizations each of which focuses on specific issues in their regions. While various regions have different priorities and more pressing women's issues to deal with, there is no continuity in the NGO services offered to all women.

Different women's experiences and relationships with women's NGOs reveal different strengths and weaknesses found in their way of operation, priorities, connection or lack of with the local community, and consistency in providing services. Women's experiences also can reveal important insights about the effectiveness of NGO projects and the challenges of addressing the most relevant issues facing the everyday Palestinian women living under occupation. While women continue to discuss the occupation and are aware of its crippling effects on Palestinian women, most NGOs do not address the oppression of the occupation. Rather, they attempt to bandage the wounds caused by it. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that Palestinian women must "do it all." Women's NGOs are under enormous pressure to meet women's social and economic needs since the government does not. While women's organizations are working to meet the immediate needs of women, they also are working to change attitudes and policies that impact women on the social and political levels, and in the private and public sphere. However, ultimately, until the system changes, and women have a say in determining the most prominent issues they face and have autonomy over their funding sources, lasting change will be hard to achieve.

Challenges to the Women's Movement

The women's movement as studied through women's social and legal NGOs and women's coalitions faces several challenges and limitations to its work. The previous sections detailed women's personal experiences with working in an NGO or participating in an NGO workshop or training. Those personal experiences as well as analyses of the NGO-ization phenomenon (Jad, 2003) illustrate the weaknesses in the women's movement that will be outlined in this section. While Palestinian women face obstacles from various other actors and structures of oppression under the Israeli occupation and within the framework of a patriarchal society, this portion of the study focuses on the limitations of the women's movement itself in terms of differences in women's ideological feminist outlooks, structural weaknesses in methods of activism and mobilization, and its struggle with supporting CEDAW in a very anti-CEDAW climate.

Different Feminist Perspectives

One challenge for women in their broader goal of achieving greater gender equality and women's rights is that there are philosophical differences between groups of women about the source of women's rights legitimacy, the most important issues to focus on, and how to go about achieving their goals.

There are serious philosophical differences in the source of legitimacy of feminism, and the means of achieving gender equality. While these differences do not necessarily mean that diverse groups of women cannot work together to reach their goals, the data reveal that Palestinian women from various feminist backgrounds or affiliations do not often cooperate to focus on their common beliefs and goals.

Dunia mentioned how she felt that Ṭāl'āt was only made up of women who came from liberal families dressed similarly and had similar thinking, and many studied abroad. There isn't a sense of diversity or acceptance of all women and their views even if they are not exactly as extreme or liberal as theirs. Women in America didn't have other worries like the occupation. They had a sovereign state, so when they started to organize for feminism---that part was solid. Alternatively, in Palestine, the occupation is first and foremost. Lots of other issues to deal with while dealing with women's issues and suffering.

Sajeda sees challenges facing the Palestinian women's movement. First of all, she doesn't believe that there is a united feminist movement in Palestine despite the presence of women's coalitions for violence against women and changing legislation related to women. She claims that there is no united women's movement because women are diverse and have different priorities. She said that some women don't feel that equality applies to her and that her loyalty and basis for this decision is from the Quran and therefore religious. S personally does not use Islam as a basis for her feminist work though she does work in an Islamic framework while carrying out her feminist work because of the population of women she works with. While other interlocutors didn't see a conflict or contradiction between Islamic beliefs, laws, and norms, Sajeda was more critical of using religion as the basis for feminism.

She describes this situation,

“We work with religious women, but we can work with them as leaders in certain issues.

Multiple wives, early marriage, some don't see it as a problem.

Some issues are very difficult to work with women on. They don't even talk about legal things. It's difficult to work in Hebron because people don't know how to change and adopt new ideas. Also trade and capitalism is king and the parties like Hamas and Hizb ut

Tahrir have a strong hold on people's minds. Feminist work here is hard: capitalism buys women. Here is money, go buy what you need. So, women don't feel that they need to work hard to change anything for women. They have all that they need materially."

Khulud reveals that she is opposed to some of the religious laws and ideas, and she feels that they prevent women from gaining more social and legal rights. She also feels that religion should not be forced upon anyone. She states, "I have my relationship with God, no one can interfere with it. In the 80s there was more freedom."

Structural Challenges- NGOs and Donor Funding

Reliance on International Donor funding

In the past decade, there has been scholarship focusing on the adverse impacts that this amount of Western donor funds has created in Palestinian society and within the women's movement. Some have argued that the massive support of NGOs created NGO-ization and NGO professionalism. Jad (2008) argues that there was a significant shift in the Palestinian women's movement between the 80s and 90s. While the first phase was a secular, mass-based women's movement (1970s-early 1990s), the second is more centralized, delinked from national issues, and includes the rise of the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC) and the coming of the "NGO-ization" (1990s to present). Kuttab (2012) calls this period the "professionalization" of the women's movements (p. 179). What is more, the mass-based grassroots phase focused both on women's issues and national liberation though national liberation certainly took the bulk of their work and efforts, while the recent professionalization (Kuttab, 2012) of the women's movement delinks the national struggle from women's issues. During this period, women's overall participation in the movement declined because the structure of NGOs included a small number of qualified women rather than relying on mass

participation and NGOs prioritized the donor's agenda over Palestinian women's immediate needs (Kuttab, 2012). NGOs did not focus on women's practical needs that were directly tied to the national liberation struggle.

Jamal's (2015) analysis aligns with Jad (2008) in that "... Western donors promoted gender empowerment programs that were disconnected from the local, national and global realities in which the women's movement was embedded..." (p. 233-234), but goes further to say this donor funding to NGOs also "... reinforced political and social hierarchies that ultimately weakened the (women's) movement" (p. 233-234).

Jamal (2015) goes on to say that donor assistance did not consider or try to understand the "...local, national and regional realities in which these movements are embedded..." which undermines the cohesiveness of these earlier grassroots⁷ and social movements, fueling existing political polarization (Jamal, 2015, p. 233;235). Jamal (2015) explains that this failure to understand and respect local contexts and to acknowledge their colonized reality led donor aid to also transform "...collective struggles into individual cases that conceivably could be addressed through rights training" (p. 233). Donor aid and gender empowerment have essentially divided Palestinians, including women, and caused them to work more individually instead of collectively. Jamal's analysis represents the current situation in Palestine for the women's movement and is illustrated in my data and conversations with Palestinian feminist activists.

Farsakh (2016) argues that international donors' disregard for the core of the Palestinian problem of an ongoing Israel military occupation and an invasive Israeli settler colonial project has led to "... the ongoing fracturing of Palestinian politics and the growing authoritarianism of

⁷ The women's movement was at its peak in the 70s-80's (Kuttab, 2012)

the Ramallah government, leaving the Palestinian economy less viable and more dependent on Israel than ever (Farsakh, 2016, p. 48).”

The signing of the Oslo Accords and the formation of the Palestinian Authority alongside the Israeli Occupation create ideal conditions for enhanced and continued gender inequality in the Palestinian Territories (Dana & Walker, 2015). Another unforeseen negative consequence of the signing of the Oslo Accords was that the formation of the Palestinian Authority coincided with the breakdown of grassroots movements that incorporated women from all sectors of Palestinian society and were more geared toward gender equality (Dana & Walker, 2015). The loss of these grassroots movements and women’s involvement in them has been devastating for women’s progress in the West Bank. Dana & Walker (2015) argue that it is the weakness of the PA as a state apparatus alongside the continued Israeli occupation that severely impacts the status and fate of gender equality in Palestine and hinders any progress that has been or may be made in the future for the fight for great gender equality (Rought-Brooks, Duaibis, Hussein, 2010). It is important to acknowledge that in addition to the role of corruption of the PA and the continued Israeli occupation in weakening women’s progress, the influx of international donor aid that supports women’s social services, awareness, and empowerment projects also has a role in limiting grassroots, indigenous, and bottom-up feminism and women’s advocacy among Palestinian women. This is not to say that women’s NGOs are not effective in some of their short-term projects, but that the hierarchical structure that relies on donor priorities rather than the priorities of the Palestinian women themselves does not promote sustainable and permanent structures and services that lead to greater gender equality on a national level for all socio-economic levels of society. At the same time, women who make it their life’s work to fight for women’s and all human rights as well as resist the Israeli occupation find their NGO work

extremely exhausting and dangerous at times. This stems from the burden of having to both work with men and patriarchal institutions in their society, but also to challenge all of them while seeking gender justice and freedom from the Israeli occupation. Khulud says: “When you decide to work on human rights and feminism, you have decided to have an abnormal life.” Here she refers to the difficult position of fighting for women’s rights on the economic, social, and political fronts.

Dependence and Interconnection with Political Parties

While the interlocutors emphasized their fight against occupation and colonialism, they were also very focused on their particular projects and the services that they provided to women and youth in their communities. NGOs mostly work in isolation from one another and normally address relevant issues for the women in their specific communities. Two issues arise with the model of the current state of affairs of women’s feminist and rights activism. The first challenge is that donor funding does not always include money to address specific pressing issues relating to the Israeli occupation because it is considered political. The second issue is that supporting women in their social struggles is an extremely important part of their work, but independent NGOs and women’s activists in NGOs appear to lack a larger vision and plan for women’s gender equality and legal rights on the national level. One reason for this lack is the depoliticization of the civil society and the women’s movement that occurred in the 90s and after Oslo (Hawari, 2019; Aboudi, Ayaseh, and Abu Ilrob, 2021). A second factor could be the presence of three women’s coalitions that focus on particular national issues related to women and include members from several Palestinian women’s organizations. The first coalition deals with CEDAW and its implementation; the second deals with opposition to violence against women; and the third focuses on efforts to modify personal status and family protection

legislation. Several interlocutors spoke about these coalitions as the presence of a broader women's movement that includes a long-term plan for women's greater social, legal, and political participation. However, a few interlocutors indicated that there were some weaknesses with the coalitions in terms of their overall effectiveness and way of operating and others acknowledged that there is not a unified women's movement in Palestine. One interlocutor believes that the women's movement via the women's coalitions will not accomplish enough relevant advances for Palestinian women if they continue to be governed by the priorities of their affiliated political parties who focus on national liberation and leave women's social and political issues on the sidelines.

One interlocutor, Sajeda, is critical of the coalitions because of the way they operate. She says,

“The coalition does not work based on a clear plan. I don't wait for funding, for a woman to be killed, or for issues to start work and collect women to mobilize. We have here our coalitions work only when there is an issue we meet, and at the same time, if the UN supports a project they meet. At the same time, Ramallah always wants to be the leader of the coalitions, and they depend on the funding. When UN women come to offer funding, they call you to a meeting. If there is no support or funding, they let the issue sleep. But in my opinion, as long as we are working on the issue and believe in the message, we have to have a permanent plan that we work on by ourselves without the provision of funding. We have to work earnestly on the issues that we believe in.”

She believes that this is not the current reality for two reasons. First, she says that “Ramallah”⁸ refuses to work collectively and cooperatively with other women’s organizations and that it has to be the lead decision-maker. Second, women in women’s organizations are made up of political parties in Ramallah and as a result, it is their political parties that influence them. She believes this has the potential to have negative impacts on women’s issues and status since the political parties prioritize national liberation and allow social issues to be neglected.

She offered the example of the CEDAW coalition which is led by a woman in the PA’s Fateh party. She says that when Fateh tells her to take it easy and not focus so much on the issues zealously, she listens to Fateh and not the needs of women. The crux of the issue is that women in Ramallah prioritize their political affiliation which is why politics are prioritized over women’s interests.

Ra’ida did not criticize the coalitions but she shared some analysis and conclusions about The Coalition of Civic Organizations for the Prevention of Violence Against Women (muntada almunazamāt alahliya limunāḥadat al’nf ḍid almara’). This coalition of organizations meets a few times a year and attends a regional meeting about violence against women in Egypt. In their previous annual meeting in Cairo, she explained that Palestinian women realized that the women’s movement as it fights for women’s equality in the social and political sphere and the protection of women against all types of violence, has been continually on the defensive rather than on the offensive in the last few years due to the increased attacks by Hizb ut Tahrir, clerics, and tribal leaders. Rather than focusing on important issues for women and raising awareness of these issues among the public, they have reverted to damage control as religious parties are

⁸ Here the interlocutor uses the term Ramallah to refer to one of the biggest cities in Palestine where all of the administrative governmental and legal work is done. Ramallah acts as the quasi-Palestinian capital in terms of its concentration of government, legislative, and their affiliated administrative bodies. Sajeda believes that the women working in Ramallah see their NGOs and their work as the model for the rest of Palestine. They have a sense of authority and superiority over other organizations in other regions.

attempting to distort their work and convince people that it is anti-Palestinian and anti-Islamic. This reality is detracting from the coalition's ability to change the mentality and misconceptions about CEDAW as well as the importance of acknowledging that violence against women is a real issue that can and must be addressed immediately and not after national liberation is achieved.

Depoliticization of women's movement and Top-down Structure-Professionalization. Lack of grassroots organizing

The occupation and international donor aid work together to further entrench the Palestinian people under a system of brutal military occupation, economic reliance on Israel, settler colonialism, ethnic cleansing, and a deteriorating and fragmented political sphere. Farsakh (2016) states that donor-funded projects supported a neoliberal agenda that placed the market rather than political institutions as the defender of democracy. In these projects the individual and their needs and relations to authority were supported over communal, united "...associational relations with authority structures and the state" (p. 49). Farsakh (2016) states that this weakened political vitality and healthy debates about issues facing Palestinians as well as civic and political engagement. Partly through donor funding the Palestinian Authority has become more authoritarian and has failed to include all Palestinian people in politics and decision-making through fair elections and political networking. Unlike the period before the Oslo Accords in 1993, now there is much less political vibrancy and debate and very little room in the Palestinian Territories for opposition to the PA. In the same way, the Palestinian women's movement which was made up of several organizations affiliated with their respective political parties before Oslo, was able to work together and coordinate in ways that men were not. After Oslo, these women's collections and connections lessened and the women's movement was more fractured and split.

Now, women's social and legal NGOs mainly work independently of each other in isolated social and legal projects that serve women in various geographic locations. Most women's organizations make strong connections in the communities they work with, but they still have a top-down structure (Jad) that does not allow women from various geographical and socioeconomic backgrounds to be part of the decision-making process. Lastly, there is no continuity between towns in terms of the quality and type of services and aid/support offered.

Tal'at as an Alternative to Current Modes of Feminist Activism and Mobilization

This section scrutinizes Tal'at's vision, mobilization, and feminist priorities in the context of a de-politicized women's movement in the West Bank to consider how it as a movement provides alternative ways of feminist activism in response to the criticism of the professionalization and depoliticization of the women's movement and its reliance on Western donor funding. It also considers the criticisms and weaknesses of Tāl'āt based on data from this study and its recent lack of mobilization.

“Tal'at,” meaning “women going out” or “women standing up” is an online/offline radical feminist movement created by young Palestinian women whose revolutionary perspective disrupts the historical pattern of placing women's issues on the sidelines until an independent Palestinian state is established. Tal'at first appeared publicly on social media in September, 2019 after the murder of Israa Ghayib by male family members. Israa's murder created an uproar through social media as people condemned family violence and called for social and legal change in the West Bank. After Ghayib's death, Tal'at women organized protests that were held in 12 cities including inside historical Palestine and the West Bank (Saba, 2023). The message of these demonstrations was that violence against women is not only a women's problem; rather, it

must be the core of their struggle for national liberation (Marshood & AlSanah, 2020⁹). Tal'at women are Western educated, tech savvy women actively calling for a broad public approach to women's and other social issues such as sexism, GBV, LGBTQ rights, sexual violence, and to highlight the role of colonialism in women's oppression (Stagni, 2024). Tal'at women use their Facebook page (17,383 followers)¹⁰ and Twitter account (2,844 followers)¹¹ to announce the details of demonstrations, share women's personal stories, advocate for female political prisoners, and to draw attention to family and GBV. The creation of Ṭāl'āt indicates that young Palestinian women renounce the dismissal of GBV as a private family matter. They believe it is a communal issue and that women must unite through online and offline action to expose women's stories and bring these crimes to light. For Ṭāl'āt organizers and followers, it is no longer acceptable to remain silent about women's victimization. It is important to point out that Ṭāl'āt is not simply tackling Palestinian women's social issues. Its members also denounce colonialism, the Israeli occupation, and patriarchy, and highlight their oppression of women specifically. For Ṭāl'āt women, women's liberation and rights as well as challenging systems of oppression are an integral component of a free Palestinian state. Ṭāl'āt's slogan is: "There is no free nation without free women" indicating the movement's belief that national liberation and feminist liberation must be fought simultaneously (Saba, 2023). For Ṭāl'āt women, Palestine is a feminist issue, but their activism places them in a precarious position as both supporters of Palestinian and women's rights, and advocates for intra-societal change of mentalities about men's and women's roles in Palestinian society.

⁹ [Tal'at: a feminist movement that is redefining liberation and reimagining Palestine – Mondoweiss](#)

¹⁰ [Facebook](#)

¹¹ [tal3at_sept26 / X \(twitter.com\) @ \(#طالعَات: نساء حرة = وطن حر\)](#)

Stagni (2024) claims that while Ṭāl'āt is a new and different progressive Palestinian feminist movement, it draws on and stems from previous iterations of the Palestinian women's movement. Specifically, she shows how Ṭāl'āt's slogan, "There is No Free Nation Without Free Women," can be traced to the Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees (PFWAC) which was established in 1982. The PFWAC is documented as claiming that the homeland could not be liberated if women were also liberated (Jad, 2018, cited in Stagna, 2024 p. 223).

Ṭāl'āt was able to mobilize large numbers of demonstrators in cities all over Israel, Jerusalem, and the West Bank. Ṭāl'āt draws on elements of the women's movement over the decades such as a commitment to the national liberation struggle and advancing the social and political position of women to indicate its ideological stance (Stagni, 2024). Ṭāl'āt relies on these foundational Palestinian feminist principles but is different from previous versions of the Palestinian women's movement as well as the current Palestinian women's movement found in the West Bank embodied in the NGO legal and human rights framework and the women's coalitions. First, Ṭāl'āt is an independent grassroots movement that prioritizes distancing itself from current Palestinian political parties due to a lack of women's political participation and advancement in historical instances of women's cooperation with male-dominated political parties (Stagni, 2024). Second, Ṭāl'āt has publicly drawn attention to the Israeli occupation and colonialism emphasizing its anti-colonial stance relying heavily on social media to spread its message and gather a transnational feminist following including the Palestinian diaspora. Third, Ṭāl'āt advocates for the rights of all marginalized groups in Palestinian society including LGBTQ communities showing how a free Palestinian state means freedom for all citizens. Fourth, Ṭāl'āt draws attention to taboo issues such as gender-based violence and sexual abuse that have not previously been publicly discussed (Saba, 2023; Stagni, 2024). Because of the

increased dissatisfaction with the PA as a result of its oppressive policies, colonialist politics, and failure to hold elections, Ṭāl'āt and other social movements have sought to assert youth and feminist voices and concerns to impact politics (Palestine Monitor, 2021; Stagni, 2024).

Ṭāl'āt is trying to re-politicize the women's movement (Stagni, 2024) after it was appropriated by the de-politicized NGO movement which started in the 1990s and continues until today (Hawari, 2019). Stagni (2024) argues that Ṭāl'āt is not introducing a new concept by considering and demanding that national liberation and feminist liberation are priorities of the same magnitude. While this is true, that it is not new, Ṭāl'āt's activism so far has done this in the most bold and explicit way in a broad public arena. What makes Ṭāl'āt stand out is their claim and demand that Palestine is a feminist issue (Stagni, 2024). The meaning of 'Palestine is a feminist issue' is that if only Zionism is defeated, "women and non-compliant subjects would remain subjugated by the patriarchal system" (Stagni, 2024, p. 233). No land or country is truly free unless it follows a true intersectional, feminist agenda because the essence of feminism is that all citizens and all marginalized people deserve equal rights and until all people are free, no one is free.

Criticisms of Ṭāl'āt

Ṭāl'āt's calls would be expected to resonate among Palestinian women given the oppression they face from the Israeli occupation forces and Palestinian society. Yet, women criticize their ways of mobilization, and their activities seem to have retreated from their peak in 2019-2022.

Ṭāl'āt has been successful in mobilizing Palestinian women from all over Israel, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem although most of their demonstrations were based in Haifa. Ṭāl'āt has also branched away from previous iterations of the historic women's movement in an

attempt to solve problems that women faced in previous decades. For example, it has boldly and publicly called for both national liberation from colonial oppression and patriarchal oppression in Palestinian society and drawn attention to taboo topics such as violence, harassment, and rape. However, it has not caught on in the West Bank until now and has even ceased to post on its Facebook and Twitter X accounts. Therefore, while it is a more grassroots, independent movement, it still was not able to connect with everyday Palestinian women living in the West Bank. This could be because, for average women, it is viewed as radical and elitist. It's harder for conservative women to support Ṭāl'āt because their priority is the socio-economic burdens they face daily. As a result, women activists in the West Bank tend to work towards meeting the basic needs of women. Ṭāl'āt is seen as focusing on liberal and theoretical issues and not engaging women from a variety of backgrounds.

Ṭāl'āt's approach is revolutionary because it aims to publicly and consistently call out the system of patriarchy that oppresses women in numerous forms. However, their strategy is considered by some men and women as a betrayal of the Palestinian movement for liberation because it makes Palestinians appear fragmented in their fight against Israeli oppression. Because of the nature of the occupation which affects social relationships and enhances the masculine nature of traditions and customs in Palestinian society, and the importance of the interconnectedness of the family in indigenous Palestinian culture, drawing attention to family violence has been a tricky and taboo topic (Stagni, 2024). It causes a phenomenon in which patriarchal forces in Palestinian society, enhanced by the violent military occupation, call out feminists for their focus on family violence claiming that it is counterproductive to the national liberation struggle (Stagni, 2024). Over the decades of Palestinian women's organizing, this has been successful discourse that has prevented the women's movement from seriously struggling

against patriarchal culture (Stagni, 2024). Though Ṭāl'āt calls out violence committed in the name of tradition and patriarchy, it also condemns occupation and colonialism and considers them supporters and sustainers of patriarchy and toxic masculinity.

Two of the interlocutors were not convinced that Ṭāl'āt is the activist model that best represents Palestinian women. Dunia discussed her experience with and opinion about the online radical Palestinian feminist movement Ṭāl'āt. At first, she followed Ṭāl'āt and even participated in a few of the protests that they organized starting in 2019-2020. She thought that Ṭāl'āt would be an inclusive women's movement, but she had a bad experience at one of the protests. She said that after the protest ended, the Ṭāl'āt leaders thanked women for attending as if they were working for them and not with them. She felt like they should have made more effort to connect with and include all the women who participated in the protests because they were from different backgrounds. She says, "For me, it almost felt elitist."

Rasha, a self-described Muslim feminist criticizes Ṭāl'āt for encouraging negative assumptions and beliefs about feminism and the women who work towards greater women's rights within Islam and in Palestinian society. Because society believes that women have more than enough rights, they feel that calls for feminism are nothing more than calls to free women to be more promiscuous, wear more revealing clothes, go out late, go out with men, etc. For these reasons she does not use the word 'feminism' when speaking with Muslim women about her ideological beliefs about women's rights in the framework of Islam. In a conservative society, she believes women must draw on tactics that speak to Muslim women and encourage them to get involved with issues facing women without feeling that they will be labeled Western, anti-Islamic, or a 'slut.' She said that the general understanding of feminism is very negative among the Palestinian public and she feels that Ṭāl'āt's activism and mobilization embodies these

negative tropes about feminism. She says that in many way Ṭāl'āt has great goals, but it seems that for the general population, they “made the reputation for feminists worse.” She feels that these types of feminist strategies make it more difficult to actually achieve positive advancements for women in Palestinian society.

Despite Ṭāl'āt's relative success in mobilizing Palestinians all over historical Palestine and the West Bank as well as diaspora communities, it has ceased to be publicly active since 2023. They have been mostly silent on their FB page and Twitter (X) account. It's beyond this research to understand why Ṭāl'āt has stopped its posts and tweets, but it is important to look at what Ṭāl'āt means for Palestinian women and its impacts or lack thereof in the West Bank. While there were Ṭāl'āt protests in the West Bank, the bulk of Ṭāl'āt protests were in Haifa. Through my following of women's issues and speaking with women's activists, there was not a lot of talk about Ṭāl'āt. Ṭāl'āt's ways of mobilization did not seem as relevant for women in the West Bank and they have not adopted this radical feminist praxis so far. The answer to this question is not found in this research project, but considering this phenomenon and researching it more is very important in understanding the state of the women's movement among women in the West Bank. There are a few hypotheses about this. First, it may be based on the more conservative environment in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Ṭāl'āt's tactics are seen as radical, liberal, and inappropriate. Women engaging in street demonstrations are, for some conservative Palestinians, considered inappropriate behavior for women because they should not be out on the street. Gender-based violence is still considered a taboo subject for large pockets of Palestinian society, and Ṭāl'āt spent much of their campaign focusing on this issue. Second, because of the increased attacks on women because of their support for CEDAW and participation in demonstrations opposing the murder of women from Hizb ut Tahrir and its

supporters, activists in the West Bank may be fearful of engagement in bold, public activism that is considered anti-Islamic. Third, Ṭāl'āt has expressed public support for the rights of all marginalized Palestinians including LGBTQ people, something women in the West Bank do not publicly advocate for.

DISCUSSION

This section highlighted the main elements of women's and feminist mobilization that women and women's NGOs are currently engaging in. It reveals the contradictions that women feel working in an international donor funded NGO that stem from trying to balance donor requirements and priorities with women's real struggles. While women's advocacy for NGO women's employees and feminists is social and political, there is a sense that they are not truly able to address women's struggles in a way that truly solves the root of their problems because they are so interconnected to the policies and restrictions of the Israeli occupation. Also, the data show that supporting and promoting CEDAW has been damaging to women's organization's legitimacy in the public and their feminist work. Another contradiction that women realize and must balance in their work is that accepting and using international donor funding which places restrictions on what social problems women are able to address and how they address them creates the conditions for Islamic fundamentalists and other conservatives to label them as Western and anti-Islamic. This immediately impacts public opinion of women's organizations and their motives. Because of these contradictions, instead of just engaging in work that advances women's social and legal situations, Palestinian women must address the many criticisms that hinder their work. Since feminist and women's organizations are constantly on the defensive especially after the eruption of the CEDAW and other legislation debates, they must

seriously begin rethinking how their structure and strategies must change. Tāl'āt's independent grassroots feminist organizing is offered as a possible new model for the women's movement due to its independence from political parties and international donor funding and restrictions. While Tāl'āt would certainly be attacked by Hizb ut Tahrir, clerics, and tribal leaders for its focus on calling out patriarchy and taboo topics such as family violence, it has other characteristics that women in the West Bank could benefit from.

Women individually and collectively want more social, political, and economic rights and representation for women and want to be valued and respected in society while also fulfilling their responsibilities as Palestinian Arab women, mothers, wives, and leaders. Due to colonization affects, neo-patriarchy, neoliberal influences on the way that Israel runs the occupation, and global neoliberal capitalism that impacts the Israel and the Palestinian Territories, the broader collective feminist activism as evidenced through most women's NGOs and their way of functioning is also influenced and consumed by capitalist neoliberalism. Palestinian women are working within this broader economic system because it is the overarching system currently in place. Though not all feminists or all women's organizations, the broader NGO women's movement and its coalitions are behaving and acting like the system that oppresses them. The broader collective NGO women's movement in the West Bank mimics the authoritarianism of the PA, colonialism of the British, and the occupation of the Israelis by navigating women's issues through a top-down professionalized elitist form of feminism. I argue that the women's movement in the West Bank has not been able to think outside of the box to regroup and reconstitute itself as anti-neoliberal, anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian by returning to grassroots, mass-based, collective intersectional activism to mobilize the masses of Palestinian women and men to work towards greater rights and freedoms for all of the marginalized people

in the community as a step towards the wider political goal of national liberation. At the same time, I argue that the failure of Palestinian women to function outside of the neoliberal and colonial environment stems from and is interconnected with imperialism, neoliberal capitalism and the colonial, racist, and violent occupation all of which increase and enhance violence and insecurity in Palestinian society and embolden patriarchy behaviors and policies.

I consider Ṭāl'āt as a possible alternative to the current modes of feminist activism in the West Bank. While Ṭāl'āt has so far failed to gain enough momentum in the West Bank and has been silent since 2023, I draw on the characteristics of Ṭāl'āt that could potentially boost the women's movement in the areas where it has failed so far. For example, Ṭāl'āt operated and mobilized independent of political parties and patriarchal influence. They did not allow political parties or influential men to permit what they could post or advocate for. Secondly, they attempted to gather mass-based grassroots following. While based on interlocutors' testimonies, Ṭāl'āt did not do as well in this area, they did attempt to model what a grassroots feminist movement could look like where women choose the issues that are most important to them. Ṭāl'āt did not shy away from criticizing the PA, occupation and colonialism in direct ways. This allowed them to distance themselves from the oppressors and to have an anti-colonial and anti-authoritarian stance. Ṭāl'āt drew attention to very sensitive and taboo issues in Palestinian society such as abuse of power, GBV and LGBTQ rights. While these issues cause anger, disagreement, and possibly distrust in Palestinian society, Ṭāl'āt was bold enough to take a stance on these issues to indicate that they believe that a politically free Palestine must start with a socially free and equitable Palestine. Their boldness on these issues while I consider them a strength for the movement, are also a weakness to them. A few interlocutors and many in the Palestinian community did not agree with the way that Ṭāl'āt publicly discussed and drew

attention to these issues. Ultimately, Ṭāl'āt's activism and mobilization was not without flaws, but Palestinian women may be able to learn from some of Ṭāl'āt's revolutionary characteristics and modes of mobilization that while they seem radical may be able to be utilized in meaningful ways if considered carefully.

CHAPTER 6: OTHER BARRIERS TO FEMINIST ACTIVISM AND GREATER SOCIAL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS FOR PALESTINIAN WOMEN

Manifestations of Patriarchy in Palestinian Society

The previous section has described the depoliticization of the women's movement through a reliance on NGOs to achieve greater women's social and legal rights, women's experiences working in or with NGOs, and points of weakness in the women's movement. This section expands the broader socio-political picture to include specific examples of the ways that "...settler colonialism empowers patriarchal violence and control within native society" (Ihmoud, 2022, p. 285). Two examples of this patriarchal violence and control within Palestinian society researched in this study are the PA and Hizb ut Tahrir. Evidence in this section highlights how the PA and Hizb ut Tahrir take advantage of their positions of power to prevent women from gaining too much power and how their behavior toward Palestinian women activists poses a threat to the vitality of the women's movement and its ability to reach its feminist social and legal goals. While the PA and Hizb ut Tahrir do not cooperate to limit women's activism, their behaviors, threats, and at times lack of action severely limit women's current feminist methods of activism and mobilizing.

The first part focuses on Hizb ut Tahrir and how it has in the last few years increased its opposition to women's social and legal advancement and rights by attacking CEDAW and other legal modifications in the Palestinian basic law related to women and family matters. Not only has Hizb ut Tahrir opposed legal advances for women, but it has also created a successful social media campaign attacking CEDAW, feminists, and women's organizations who support it

framing them as anti-Islamic Western puppets who are destroying the Islamic morals and values of Palestinian society.

Hizb ut Tahrir Opposes Women's Social and Legal Rights Activism

As described in the introduction, Hizb ut Tahrir is an Islamic movement that does not directly engage in politics but rather works to disseminate knowledge of Islamic laws and principles to influence politics and public opinion (Orofino, 2021). Concerning women's and gender issues, Hizb ut Tahrir along with traditional Islamic scholars (Ulama), and tribal leaders have and continue to target legislation pertaining to women and children such as the personal status and family protection laws (Hattab & Abualrob, 2023). The Palestinian women's movement and women's organizations have been pushing for modifications of these laws for decades. In addition to these basic laws, women's and human rights activists have also been advocating for the adoption of the CEDAW (The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), a treaty created by the United Nations Commission on the status of women which acknowledges that gender discrimination is still a reality and aims to end all forms of discrimination against women.

The CEDAW Debate Erupts

The CEDAW debate started heating up after May 11, 2020, when the Palestinian council of Ministers approved a draft law related to family protection against violence which was separate from CEDAW. After it was first read immediately a debate ensued with Islamists, religious, and tribal leaders claiming that this was a CEDAW requirement and not a national need (Hattab & Abualrob, 2023). Moreover, the "Constituent Council of Sharia Lawyers" stated

on 4 June 2020 (Quds-News, 2020) that this drafted legislation would “...would destroy and weaken the Palestinian family (Hattab & Abualrob, 2023, p. 6).” The draft and its review process received strong opposition after it was leaked on social media. Islamic political leaders, traditional Muslim scholars (ulama), clerics, and tribal leaders criticized the law saying that it was derived from CEDAW text and therefore against Islamic law even though CEDAW was not mentioned in the draft (Hattab & Abualrob, 2023).

Feminists and women’s organizations claim that implementing CEDAW is crucial for Palestine and that it does not conflict with Islamic law. However, Islamists argue to the public that CEDAW’s values “...destroy Arab and Palestinian customs and traditions, but, more seriously, contradict Islamic Sharia rules, disobey God, and repeal his Commandments” (Robinson, 2021, cited in Hattab & Abualrob, 2023, p. 2).” Going further, an article in Arabic on wattan.net entitled: *Hebron Clans Declare Their Rejection of CEDAW* includes a list of demands including that women’s organizations are forbidden from entering schools, all women’s organizations should be shut down, and that the PA rescind CEDAW (wattan.net).

CEDAW and Other Legislation is Controversial in Palestinian Society

CEDAW and Palestinian laws relating to women and family matters and the debates surrounding them are controversial in Palestine. According to Hizb ut Tahrir and other critics CEDAW contains articles that directly relate to specific controversial issues related to women’s legal and social rights that are considered an intrinsic aspect of Islam and under the jurisprudence of Shari’a law and not the government. By contrast, secular women’s rights advocates argue that these issues fall under secular legislation. As a result, the issue of adopting and implementing CEDAW has caused intense debate among politicians, Hizb ut Tahrir, religious scholars, and

civil and women's rights activists. Issues relating to women such as violence against women, raising the marriage age, and LGBTQ rights are among the hotly contested topics. While CEDAW is a separate convention not connected directly to Palestinian legislation, it is viewed by Hizb ut Tahrir as a tool used by women's organizations and feminists to advocate for modifying legislation relating to personal status and family protection and the marriage of civil and Sharia law (Schneider, 2021, p. 279). As a result, Hizb ut Tahrir adamantly opposes both CEDAW and any changes to the legislation relevant to women and family-related issues that they view as anti-Islamic (Hizb ut Tahrir, 2022).

Controversial Articles in CEDAW

Adopting and implementing CEDAW has caused intense debate among politicians, Hizb ut Tahrir, some religious and community leaders, and civil and women's rights activists regarding modifying legislation relating to personal status and family protection and the marriage of civil and Sharia law (Schneider, 2021, p. 279). Article 16 of CEDAW is the most hotly debated section because it relates to "...women's equality with men regarding marriage, family relations, and economic equity (Chaudhry, 2016; Jaffal et al., 2022, cited in Hattab & Abualrob, 2023)."

The most controversial articles for conservatives are Article 1 (defines equality between men and women), Article 2 (deals with modifying, changing, abolishing all laws, customs, and practices that discriminate against women), Article 5 (deals with modifying and changing social and cultural patterns to eliminate the idea that there are stereotypical roles for men and women/understanding of maternity as a social function and recognize that men and women have equal responsibilities), Article 13 (deals with eliminating discrimination in economic and social

life-the same rights to family benefits), Article 15 (deals with equality in women's legal capacity to conclude contracts, administer property and treat them equally in all procedures in courts), and Article 16 (deals with the elimination of discrimination in marriage and family relations).

Campaign to Smear CEDAW and the Women who Support it

Hizb ut Tahrir has engaged in a large-scale effort to distort the meaning of CEDAW, claim that it is anti-Islamic and hurts family values and relationships, and defame feminists and women's activists. It uses a Facebook page called "The Mass-Mobilization to Bring Down CEDAW¹²" which can be found at this link, [AntiCEDAW](#), to spread disinformation about CEDAW. They do this by distorting the meanings of some CEDAW articles, focusing on particular articles that are most controversial, and promoting hate speech about feminists, the PA, and human rights advocates and organizations. They do not acknowledge that some women's rights advocates call for accepting CEDAW with reservations. This means that they feel that some articles may not fit in the socio-religious context of Palestinian society while other articles are needed to promote the safety and equality of women. Other feminists do not agree with accepting CEDAW with reservations because they believe that all articles should be implemented. Hizb ut Tahrir uses this Facebook page to portray CEDAW as a tool used by human and women's rights advocates to destroy the Islamic family. One way that they have done this is through the publication of a booklet called "Women and Families are in Danger" that has been disseminated among Palestinian families and is also shared on their FB page. The cover of the booklet also claims that feminist groups, CEDAW, and the PA are to blame for the danger that women and families are in (Aboudi, Ayaseh, and Abu Ilrob, 2021). They also engage in hate speech against feminists,

¹² In Arabic: "الحراك الجماهيري لإسقاط سيداو"

women's rights advocates, and women's rights organizations. They share a post from an activist or organization, and they highlight the sections that they want to attack, and then write a description that portrays the post as "CEDAWIYYA" or characteristic of CEDAW. This usually means that Hizb ut Tahrir is accusing a person or organization of promoting LGBTQ rights and tendencies and/or promiscuity and freedom for women. They focus on the extreme aspects of CEDAW and aim to show that Palestinian women are advocating for rights for women and LGBTQ people that are against Islam. All of the interlocutors explained how they do not fight for women to be freer in the sense of promiscuity or relinquishing their family values and obligations. The women in this study claimed that Hizb ut Tahrir distorts and manipulates the meaning and goals of their work. Rather than wanting to support women to gain more social rights such as safety at home and the workplace and more legal rights such as their right to inheritance and citizenship, Hizb ut Tahrir attacks the idea that there needs to be legislation protecting women. Hizb ut Tahrir's rejection of legal change stems from the belief that this type of legislation will break up the Muslim family structure and prevent men from having authority as the head of the household. It ultimately challenges men's power.

Opposition to CEDAW in the Broader Middle East

It is important to note that opposition against CEDAW is widespread among Islamists in the Middle East and Africa. While most Islamic countries have adopted CEDAW, most of them have filed reservations. This means that these states do not accept particular articles in CEDAW on the grounds that they contradict Islamic law. This has caused debate among Islamists, politicians, human rights activists, and women's rights activists about the legitimacy and implementation or lack thereof of CEDAW. Not unlike Islamists in Palestine, Sudanese women

advocating for women's public empowerment vehemently oppose CEDAW as they consider private life to be guided by Islamic law and not by the state (Tønnessen, 2013).

Hizb ut Tahrir and Islamist Criticism of CEDAW

Tønnessen, in her (2013) article, discusses Sudanese women's opposition to CEDAW. The view of CEDAW in this article is consistent with Hizb ut Tahrir's views of it in the West Bank. She cites some inconsistencies in Sudanese women's disdain for CEDAW and their perception of women's empowerment, while Roald (2016) shows how women take on their families' financial burdens without always gaining more decision-making power. Tønnessen reveals Islamist women's interpretations of CEDAW and their feelings of it in Sudan and through the International Muslim Women's Union as follows; Women in Sudan and Hizb ut Tahrir believe that the West is trying to recolonize the Muslim world by promoting Western concepts of "civilized" and the "freedom" of women. They claim that, through CEDAW, the West influences their ethics and morals and encourages women to be free in a way that contradicts traditional Islamic society and Islamic law. This in turn causes family disintegration and because the family is seen as the "nucleus of society" this negative influence corrupts and destroys society. Critics who oppose CEDAW in the strongest terms claim that it is just a Western ploy to recolonize Muslim nations and consider CEDAW's calls for women's equality and its acceptance and promotion of homosexuality to be out of step with Islamic law and principles. They have their own view of women's rights and obligations in their society where men and women each have their specified social roles and responsibilities. Therefore, equality between the sexes or the erasure of distinct roles for men and women, as it is written in CEDAW, is, in their view, anti-Islamic (Tønnessen, 2013; Thawabteh & Sleimya, 2022)

The Conflation of Liberal Feminism with CEDAW

Islamist critics often equate feminism with CEDAW because feminism is considered Western, anti-Islamic, and colonial. According to Tønnessen (2013), Islamists often understand feminism to be a “monolithic static entity that is backward and ignorant” (Tønnessen, 2013, p. 140). Rather than seeing feminism as an emancipatory movement for women, they tend to see it as freeing women from their social constraints and obligations to the family and community, and promoting promiscuity, adultery, sex before marriage, moral corruption, excessive individualism, homosexuality, and secularism (Tønnessen, 2013) all of which indicate a morally corrupt and decaying society. The more extreme critics vehemently hate feminism in all of its forms, and they view CEDAW as a direct attack on their culture and traditions as well as on Islam itself (Tønnessen, 2013).

The situation in Palestine with CEDAW is similar to that in other Muslim-majority countries but is also very different because of the nature of the PA’s limited power and the presence of the Israeli occupation. Because these criticisms of CEDAW are not simply legal or social but are rooted in the authority of Islam and Sharia law, the feminist activists promoting CEDAW are in a very precarious situation. Through the anti-CEDAW campaign and the spread of misinformation through exaggerating its meanings, Hizb ut Tahrir, some clerics, and tribal leaders have successfully convinced much of the public that it is a Western-imported ideology meant to harm and weaken Islamic society. In the context of Palestine, this framing of CEDAW is even more difficult. Because of the occupation and its oppression of the Palestinian people, CEDAW is seen as an extension of colonialism and occupation.

Palestinian Women Activists' Experiences with Hizb ut Tahrir

This section provides examples of personal testimonies illustrating the ways in which Hizb ut Tahrir in particular is attacking, threatening, and preventing women from organizing and speaking out about gender-related crimes and discrimination. The women activists I spoke with singled them out as the only group that was so aggressive in their attacks and threats against them.

Lujain who works in a feminist studies organization in Jerusalem explained how Hizb ut Tahrir accuses them of taking Western funding and being puppets for Western countries on issues like honor killing. Hizb ut Tahrir believes that women should only be focusing on national liberation and not social issues because this is seen as divisive and distracting from the national liberation movement. She also told me about an incident that happened in Jerusalem involving Hizb ut Tahrir. There was an event relating to LGBTQ rights at a cultural center in East Jerusalem. Hizb ut Tahrir started posting about this event on Facebook and attacking it. Next, they attacked Rania, the director of the cultural center who is a Christian Palestinian. They used her religion to defame her. They posted that because she is a Christian, she is trying to destroy our society and values by supporting these kinds of events. They smeared her reputation online and threatened her. Also, Palestinian men came to the location of the event and prevented people from entering the center. Israel has a law against cyberbullying and Rania made a formal complaint about this incident, but Israel did nothing for her even though it is able to punish the perpetrators of this crime. The women's movement also filed a complaint. Her organization also held an event in Yabous to show support for the director and prove that this center is used for many cultural events. This is also a specific example of what Lujain mentioned in a previous

section about how Israel does not implement laws on Palestinians as long as the crimes create more conflict between Palestinian citizens.

Sajeda recounted the story of how members of Hizb ut Tahrir came to her office and told her in so many words to stop taking money from the West and to work from an Islamic frame of reference relying on the Quran. During this meeting, she asked the men about all of the negative posts and defamation about her on social media that blamed her for being a feminist and CEDAWiyya who distorts Palestinian and Islamic values and traditions. The men were embarrassed about this accusation and downplayed this phenomenon saying that the people who post and make those comments are just younger guys who are not officially members of Hizb ut Tahrir.

Khulud told me how Hizb ut Tahrir has called out her NGO and blamed them also for taking donor money and for making films about topics that Hizb ut Tahir deems immoral and anti-Islamic. She explains how when they made a film about polygamy, they were threatened by Hizb ut Tahrir. These online threats from Hizb ut Tahrir have been very stressful for Khulud and her team and have impacted their work. Khulud says that because they use religion to scare people, the average religious Muslim will fear them and not want to engage in an activity that is perceived as possibly anti-Islamic. Khulud says that these kinds of threats and distortions of their reputations and work are successful in some ways because women do not want to participate in acts or discussions related to women for fear that they will be misrepresented as anti-Islamic. Women could face serious consequences from male family members if they are believed to have engaged in any immoral activities or support, promote, or engage in any action perceived as anti-Islamic or against traditional Palestinian customs and traditions.

During the interview with Lujain, a feminist from Jerusalem, expressed frustration with the contradiction of the women's movement being reliant on Western donor funding and being attacked for this, but also being faithfully dedicated to the issue of fighting the occupation and achieving national liberation. She explains, "Hizb ut Tahrir blames us for taking funding from Western countries and that we are puppets for issues like honor killings. They say we must just be against the occupation, not social issues. Western donors focus on the (social) issues, but our most important issue is the occupation."

These testimonies illustrate how Hizb ut Tahrir and its followers have increased attacks and threats on feminist activists and women's organizations. These attacks aim to scare women and prevent them from continuing their important work. The women in this study have not allowed Hizb ut Tahrir's tactics to prevent them from advocating for CEDAW or other legislation modifications but women have had to spend a lot of time analyzing these threats and filing complaints about them to the PA. They also must consider how women now view CEDAW based on Hizb ut Tahrir's distortion of it and work to educate women on the real meaning of CEDAW. This all takes time away from their provision of services to women and promoting acceptance of legal modifications to the family protection and personal status laws. Women are aware of the dangers of their work and have had to calculate every move they make that relates to laws and issues that Hizb ut Tahrir, some clerics and tribal leaders consider illegal under Islamic jurisprudence.

As evidenced in these data and through other sources (Aboudi, Ayaseh, and Abu Ilrob, 2021; Hattab & Abualrob, 2023) Hizb ut Tahrir has been successful in scaring and intimidating Palestinian feminists and NGO employees and has distorted the reputations of individual women. Women have to deal with the psychological difficulties of being personally attacked. This in turn

may prevent them from continuing their activism. Hizb ut Tahrir has also put the women's movement on the defensive. Rula's testimony in a previous section revealed that when she described the conversations among women's activists at one of the bi-annual meetings of The Coalition of Civic Organizations for the Prevention of Violence Against Women (muntada almunazamāt alahliya limunāhaḍat al'nf ḍid almara'). The women's movement has had to spend time defending its support of CEDAW which has taken away time for more proactive and supportive work to support women. These attacks have cost women and women's organizations, time, money, and psychological stress, and caused others to question the legitimacy of their work.

The next section interrogates the Palestinian Authority's role in limiting the women's movement from making more meaningful progress.

The Palestinian Authority-Reputation with the Palestinian People

PA in between Islamists and women's organizations-no new legislation related to The recent war in Gaza and events during spring 2021 in Jerusalem, Gaza, and Israel demonstrate that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is far from being resolved. While the violence between the Israeli military and Palestinian citizens in Jerusalem, Gaza, and the West Bank is cyclical and continuous, the recent chain of right-wing settler and Israel state violence against Palestinians has made it even more difficult for women's organizations to operate. There are also few political outlets for young Palestinians to express their views. Palestine has a young population with approximately thirty percent of people under age 30 (UNFPA, 2015). These youth and millennials have grown up without the opportunity to vote for the politicians of their choice who will address the issues important to them (Nassar, Online panel 2021). While other Arab countries have experienced increased youth protests against authoritarian regimes using

social media to call for regime change and mobilize independently of political parties, Palestinians have not had their own Arab Spring. This is partly due to the oppression they face from both the Israeli occupation and the PA. The Palestinian government has continuously failed to fulfill the political and social aspirations of its people to live in a secure free, equal, and prosperous Palestinian state. Rather, the PA is seen as an extension of the Israeli occupation as it continues to crush any anti-government dissent (Aboudi, Ayaseh, and Abu Ilrob, 2021; Tartir, 2023). Moreover, since the PA has been in power, there is a significant feeling of political stagnation, lack of healthy political debate, and cooperation between various parties (Hawari, 2019). According to Lujain and Sajeda, this directly negatively impacts the women's movement and its work. Lujain remarked, "when the political vitality and participation is weak, the women's movement will be weak." Sajeda explained it this way, "Because the political movement is weak and there are no elections, there is no movement generally and this makes people sleep. It's not motivating. Political stagnation impacts women too. There is no revitalization."

Because the PA cracks down on any political dissent and Palestinians can not rely on the PA to achieve its national liberation aspirations, young and millennial Palestinians, like so many other young people in the U.S. (BLM) and other Arab countries (Arab Spring events), are engaging in independent activism and connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013) to call attention to injustice and oppressive measures as well as the ethnic cleansing of their people (Sheikh Jarrah¹³). Some examples of these social movements are Tāl'āt, 7amleh, and Palestinian Feminist as well as other independent citizen journalists in the West Bank. As a result, there has been an uptick in protests and calls for action all around the world in support of Palestinians. At

¹³ Mohammad Al-Kurd – Palestine Monitor

the same time, there are dozens of women's rights organizations in Jerusalem and the West Bank that don't directly focus on these socio-political issues but do engage with local women to promote social justice, change in gender roles, and support for victims of violence. Through their workshops that intend to raise awareness about gender roles, family and community violence, and human rights and educate about legal rights, women's organizations are instilling feminist values and ideals into participants in the hopes of encouraging them to take small steps in their home lives so that women are more aware of their rights create change toward more justice and equality for women.

The PA and Women's Advancement

While most of the interlocutors have strong feelings about feminism and gender equality, they also spoke about the challenges that feminists, women's rights advocates, and everyday Palestinians face in their progress toward greater gender equality and rights in the private and public spheres. Some of these challenges come from Palestinian society itself and the socio-political realities that Palestinians face daily with low economic stability and lack of freedom of movement and political expression. The PA has continuously failed to achieve the aspirations of its people and has ramped up its opposition to any decent. Therefore, it lacks legitimacy among the Palestinian people, especially young people. The PA also deals with women in government and other decision-making positions in ways that have some of the characteristics of state-sponsored feminism (*Al-Atiyat*, 2003; Bier, 2011), which has been well documented in Egypt and Jordan. In state-sponsored feminism, public and private spheres are still very separate which allows women to be free to some extent outside of the home in their work, but at home, they are still expected to take on all traditional domestic responsibilities. Regimes try to involve women in state-run development projects but do not engage in conversations or work toward social

change related to patriarchal family structures. Therefore, while the policy was to focus on modernization as an outward characteristic, governments did not intend to promote the reformation of women's social rights holistically (Bier, 2011). State-sponsored feminism can be defined as a phenomenon in which the government seeks to portray itself as progressive and supportive of women's rights and representation but essentially uses women to fill some high-profile roles to publicly show women have gained their rights (Bier, 2011). But these puppet positions are mostly placeholders and there is little evidence that the true values and goals of feminist and gender equality are achieved for women at the lower socioeconomic levels of society (*Al-Atiyat*, 2003). This type of feminism is mostly for Arab governments to indicate to other Western governments that they are similar to "advanced" Western nations in terms of women's rights, representation, and equality. While the PA has adopted international women's and human rights treaties such as CEDAW and taken public steps to prove its commitment to universal human and women's rights, this has mostly been conducted for political gain to obtain international legitimacy and not because the PA believes in these values or is actively working toward them (Cowper-Coles, 2023; Randall, 2023). But since the PA lacks sovereignty over a true state, its ability to deliver even a minimum of services or rights is hampered. Rather, the PA mainly hinders women's activism, as the next section shows.

The PA's Role in Limiting Women's Social, Political, Legal Rights, Advancement and Representation

In further examining the PA's role in the social and political marginalization of feminists, women's activists, and women's groups, this section highlights how the PA limits, challenges, and prevents social and political progress for women. It is argued that the PA has failed to advance women's social and legal status in Palestine by engaging in oppressive, discriminatory,

and patriarchal practices and is not committed to both the social and political emancipation of women. This is illustrated by the PA's lack of support for the women's movement when it comes under attack, its engagement in the abuse and intimidation of journalists and feminists, and its failure to add CEDAW to the basic law and implement it in government and civic institutions. The PA's tactics in limiting women's political participation and social and legal advancement are subtle compared with the outspoken and public attacks on women and CEDAW by Hizb ut Tahrir.

The PA and CEDAW

On April 1, 2014, the state of Palestine signed and adopted CEDAW and became the only Arab country to embrace the treaty with no reservations (Qafisheh, 2019). The official signing of CEDAW without reservations was celebrated by women's organizations, NGOs, human rights organizations, and women's rights activists, but was condemned and criticized by conservative Muslim parties and entities as well as individuals (Thawabteh & Sleimya, 2022). According to Schneider (2021, p. 232), the PA's signing of CEDAW and other international human rights treaties is widely understood to be an effort by the PA to achieve international recognition and legitimacy. However, legislation in the West Bank has not changed to reflect the most important articles of CEDAW and is not written in the Palestinian Official Gazette (Schneider, 2021), the official legislative document of Palestine. Moreover, the PA is doing very little to meet the requirements of CEDAW in tangible, practical ways nor have they made efforts or spent money on educating the public about what CEDAW is and its implications in Palestine (Schneider, 2021, p. 260; Randall, 2023). Doing so requires significant time, effort, funding, and labor and facing severe opposition from Hizb ut Tahrir and other vocal and influential clerics, and tribal

leaders. The PA prefers to maintain the support of the religious and tribal leaders fearing their popularity among mainstream Palestinian society, their social media reach, and their hostility towards the PA and its actions related to CEDAW (Hattab & Abualrob, 2023, p. 9).

As a result, currently, CEDAW in Palestine is seen as an empty promise for women's rights advocates, but still a potentially serious threat to Islam and traditional Palestinian customs and behaviors in the eyes of its critics.

Not only has the PA failed to sign CEDAW into law and implement it thus far, but it has also claimed that many aspects of CEDAW will not be able to be achieved in Palestine due to the inability to adapt laws and legislation in a way that achieves gender equality (Women's Civic Coalition-CEDAW, 2020). Moreover, it has not done anything to fight the campaign against CEDAW. Islamic scholars, tribal leaders, and clerics have caused such a "panic" about drafting of laws related to women and empowerment or personal economic status to prevent them from being passed (Fenick, 2020 cited in Hattab & Abualrob, 2023). They can impact public opinion quickly. One tactic used by Hizb ut Tahrir to prevent any legislation related to women from being written into law is by claiming that it is taken from CEDAW which after the last few years has adopted a reputation of being anti-Islamic (Hattab & Abualrob, 2023). The PA has not confronted Hizb ut Tahrir's campaign against CEDAW or any other opposition to it even though this opposition has been filled with hate speech, misleading information, defamation of women and women's organizations, and personal attacks. Because implementing CEDAW will cost money and resources, and means conflict with the Islamic religious right, the PA benefits from remaining silent to criticism of CEDAW (Randall, 2023).

Failure to Modify Legislation Related to Families and Violence

Two sets of laws within the Palestinian basic law relate to women and family matters. They are the personal status law and the Family Protection law. Feminists and women's organizations are trying to change these laws to provide more protection for women. Both of these laws relate to marriage, divorce, family safety, and economic equity. In Palestine, these are outdated Jordanian laws that have not been changed since the 70s (Musawah, 2018). Arab governments have been hesitant to change these laws because they are connected to Islamic law and changing them may be perceived by the public to be anti-Islamic (Mahamid, M., Hattab, M., & Berte D., 2023). Moreover, the pervasiveness of patriarchal attitudes in Arab society and traditional understanding of Islamic teachings has created the expectation that women's economic, marriage, family, and inheritance issues should be dealt with within the nuclear family (Nimri, 2016; Baburajan, 2020; Souaiaia, 2019, cited in Hattab & Abualrob, 2023). Because men and male elders in tribes and clans normally make decisions relating to marriage, family, divorce and inheritance, allowing these issues to be made within the nuclear family does not allow women to be active decision-makers in these issues.

Moreover, some Islamic scholars label certain issues, such as polygamy and marriage age, as part of their domain, thus rendering them untouchable and therefore unnegotiable topics. As a result, it is less likely that productive conversations around these issues will occur because the public is less likely to discuss or question them (Hattab & Abualrob, 2023).

Starting in 2008, based upon the lobbying and activism of women's organizations, feminists, and human rights organizations, there was a conference to discuss the family protection law called "Towards the Adoption of the Family Protection from Violence Law." The conference spurred discussions about sensitive but important issues relating to marriage, divorce, and family violence. As a result of this conference, a draft law to protect families from violence

was written and shared with the community for comment (Mahamid, M., Hattab, M., & Berte D., 2023). In 2012, it was given to the Palestinian Council of Ministers for all ministers to review and was placed on the 2013 agenda. It was not finalized or given to the president for approval at that time. However, women's and civil society organizations subsequently pushed for its review and revision, and it was finally accepted by the ministers in 2020 (Mahamid, M., Hattab, M., & Berte D., 2023). While this was seen as positive news for women and women's civil and human rights organizations, it was a short-lived success because it faced fierce opposition from religious and tribal leaders who claimed it stemmed from CEDAW and therefore violated Islamic law (AlQuds, 2020). As Mahamid, Hattab, & Berte (2023) argue, most Islamic scholars agree about women's rights in education and work. However, other issues such as women's social roles in society are more controversial. For example, many Islamic scholars do not agree that women have equal rights in areas such as inheritance, marriage, divorce, and her right to refuse sexual acts with their partner. The PA paused the bill and has not taken any further action to get it passed or to change public opinion (Mahamid, M., Hattab, M., & Berte D. 2023).

Hattab & Abualrob (2023) claim that traditional and conservative interpretations of Islam and Sharia law make it very difficult for women to achieve equity and/or equality in their society, but they also acknowledge that there is a small minority of scholars who "...advocate for an interpretation of Islam that aligns with modern human rights and gender equality principles (Abdelnour, 2020; Souaiaia, 2019 in Hattab & Abualrob, 2023, p. 3)." In this way, they don't see the current extremist work being carried out by Islamic scholars and clerics, and tribal leaders as hopeless. There may still be some room for negotiation between aiming for gender equality for women and remaining in line with Islamic law though this will require a more modern, non-traditional reading and interpretation of Sharia law. Most would agree that it is conservative

social and political restrictions that impact women the most as opposed to the religion of Islam itself (Hattab & Abualrob, 2023).

While the issue of passing a law for women and family protection against violence appears to be an easy law to pass, in the context of Palestine it is a hotly debated and divisive subject. At the same time, the PA has chosen not to support women in this debate because it is more concerned with its national reputation and relationship with powerful and influential clerics, and tribal leaders (Hattab & Abualrob, 2023). By not calling out Hizb ut Tahrir and other critics who do not want women to be part of the debate and are spreading false information about proposed legislation, the PA is allowing and promoting a shrinking political space for women and is not committed to both the social and political emancipation of women. This behavior aims to avoid possible social unrest in the current moment, but allowing this increase in internal conflict and disagreement and silencing women's voices will help in the fight for national liberation. This also shows how the PA has failed to unite Palestinians against the first and most violent opponent which is the Israeli occupation. Moreover, by maintaining the status quo of security coordination between PA forces and the Israeli military, the PA is effectively silencing the Palestinian resistance (Tartir, 2023). Because feminists and women's organizations are part of the resistance against Israeli oppression, silencing the resistance includes silencing women's voices about national liberation as well as social liberation.

The PA Fails to Protect Palestinian Women

Following the death of Nizar Banat, a native of Hebron and a critic of the Palestinian Authority (PA), in June 2021 at the hands of the Palestinian Authority (PA), Palestinians became more enraged at their government because of how it deals with political opponents (Hammad,

2021). Women were among those protesting Banat's death and the "restricting freedom of opinion, expression, and peaceful assembly" where protestors and journalists were beaten, threatened, and intimidated (Aboudi, Ayaseh, and Abu Ilrob, 2021 p.67; Hammad, 2021). Women had their phones confiscated and the PA used them to blackmail women by sharing pictures on social media. One woman testified that the government created an Instagram account with her name on it and posted information about her marital status saying that she was divorced because she is a whore. They also sent pornographic material to her father with her name on it (Aboudi, Ayaseh, and Abu Ilrob, 2021).

The PA, through its actions of threatening, beating, and blackmailing Palestinian women who speak out at protests, show their lack of support and respect for Palestinian women and their ability to work alongside men in social and political issues. This PA behavior can be described as patriarchal, oppressive, and authoritarian. Not only does the PA threaten and attack its opponents and journalists, including female journalists who shed light on their violent, discriminatory, and authoritarian actions, it also acts as an extension of the Israeli occupation when it goes along with and participates in Israeli oppression and violence against Palestinians (Tartir, 2023; Randall, 2023).

DISCUSSION

This section detailed the experiences of Palestinian women with the PA and provided other evidence illustrating how the PA does not support women's struggles for social and legal equality, has engaged in oppressive measures towards women, and has remained silent while Hizb ut Tahrir and its supporters spread hate speech about individual women and women's rights organizations and portraying them as anti-Islamic. The women's experiences in this study offer specific examples of how the PA has marginalized feminists and women's rights advocates

creating a “shrinking space” for women in the political sphere on the national level (Hawari, 2019; Aboudi, Ayaseh, and Abu Ilrob, 2021; Randall, 2023).

The PA has stepped aside and allowed Hizb ut Tahrir and other critics to attack, defame, and incite violence against feminist activists and women’s organizations and also engaged in its own versions of patriarchal force. The PA has actively attacked and abused women’s activists and female journalists who were either present at or part of demonstrations supporting women’s issues or speaking out against government corruption (Aboudi, Ayaseh, and Abu Ilrob, 2021). Cowper-Coles’ (2023) analysis sums up the current reality of the PA in terms of its failure to advance women’s rights or support them. Cowper-Coles (2023) states, “Fatah, particularly since they set up the Palestinian Authority, has largely served to reinforce traditional patriarchal structures and aimed not to distort the status quo. They have neither adopted explicitly religious or feminist stances and have not made any particular effort to engage with women” (Cowper-Coles, 2023, p. 123).

Despite political and social activism among some Palestinian women and youth, the reality remains that most women enjoying more “freedom” such as choosing to work, access to healthcare, awareness of women’s rights laws and the impacts of patriarchy are mostly urban and middle to upper class women. Hizb ut Tahrir has a strong influence on religious and conservative families and regions and some rural areas. Their strongholds are in Hebron, Nablus, and some areas of Jerusalem. Because they use religion as their point of reference, their voice is strong and overpowering and does not leave room for diversity in thought, opinion and policy especially as it comes to women. Therefore, while there is a movement among women and youth, and continued efforts by women’s organizations to speak up more about the issues relating to women and their society, the dominant and dictatorial styles and behaviors of the PA and Hizb ut Tahrir

work to limit, dissuade, villainize, and belittle the work that women and women's organizations engage in. They do this by not supporting women in their struggles and by accusing them of focusing on social issues at the expense of the national issue, corrupting Palestinian morals, tradition, and culture, and being anti-Islamic.

CONCLUSION

The main challenges to the feminist agenda that Palestinian women cited were related to philosophical differences between women and their view of feminism, structural challenges relating to international donor funding and the limitations and politics that impact women's mobilization and provision of services, patriarchy which manifests itself through how CEDAW is conceptualized and implemented, the PA and its failure to achieve the Palestinian people's aspirations for freedom, the absence of political diversity of opinions and debate, failing to protect women from threats and abuse when engaging in acts of social or political protest, and religious conservatism and misconceptions about feminism and its goals.

The main conclusions will be detailed here. First, while neoliberal capitalist tendencies through the management and implementation of the Israeli occupation impact all Palestinians, they disproportionately impact women by limiting their social and political progress and placing heavy burdens on them. Moreover, the social barriers that women face can be linked to the ways in which the Israeli occupation restricts Palestinian society more broadly and enhances patriarchy. Second, the women's movement in its current top-down structure of women's NGOs and the limits that are placed on them by relying on international donor funding is failing to adequately reach its goals of national liberation and social and political advancement. Third, because Palestinian women do not currently make feminist cooperation across ideological and geographical borders a priority, they are facing a period of regression fueled by structural (lack of grassroots mobilization) struggles and attacks from the PA and Hizb ut Tahrir. Fourth, Ṭāl'āt's model of feminist grassroots mobilization and blunt calling out of colonialism and patriarchy is a possible solution to the NGO framework of women's organizing in the West Bank, though its

influence so far has been limited. Fifth, the PA is not committed to either the social or political emancipation of women.

The Israeli occupation is by far the greatest challenge faced by Palestinian women in their fight for gender equality and women's rights. As evidenced in the examples provided by the interlocutors such as fear of crossing checkpoints, fear of speaking about politics, fear of the Israeli army storming their homes, home demolitions, revocation of work permits, and difficulties in achieving legal family reunification, Palestinian women lack safety, security, freedom of movement, access to healthcare (in Jerusalem), a stable economy, and the ability to safely engage in political activism. All aspects of Palestinian lives are interrupted by the Israeli occupation. What is more, since the Israeli military controls the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the Palestinian Authority is not able to carry out most of its functions as the governing body of the Palestinian people. It does not have legal jurisdiction in Area C or East Jerusalem so it can not prosecute criminals or deal with social unrest in those areas. At the same time, the occupation does not engage in violent matters or criminal activity between Palestinians even though it has responsibility in International Law to ensure that the lives of the occupied people are not significantly harmed or changed by the occupation (Azarova, 2017; ECFR, 2017).

The occupation also negatively affects gender relations through its heavy restrictions on movement and expression, its continuous discriminatory practices, and its violent ways of controlling the population (Ihmoud, 2022; Dana & Walker). This impact on gender relationships impacts women most directly in their social and family lives which can also severely limit their ability to have equal status in society and take more control of their rights. Dan & Walker (2015) state, "occupation itself serves to exacerbate gender inequalities and reinforces traditional gender norms" (p. 500). Traditional gender norms tend to rely on patriarchal (not Islamic)

understandings of women's social roles in society which in some relegate them to the home and child rearing while others prevent women from their legal right to inheritance or justice when they are victims of family violence.

The lack of women's political participation through women's and feminist activism continues to weaken the women's movement and prevent it from realizing greater gender equality and social and political rights. Johnson and Kuttab (2001) claim that the Palestinian Authority's (PA) domination of the political arena was dangerous for democracy in Palestinian society and that as a result, women's and other civil society organizations should have formed "...a strategy that both addressed gender issues in the emerging state..." and that was "...linked to the very real conditions of occupation and colonialism that men and women faced as daily realities" (Johnson & Kuttab, 2001, p. 28). In order to put pressure on governments and their way of governance, women must be part of the political process. At the same time, Johnson & Kuttab (2001) argue that women's organizations faced an almost impossible task in juggling gender issues in a fledgling state, the oppression of Israeli occupation, and the everyday needs of men and women as a result of the second *Intifada*.

Kuttab (2012) argues that separating gender issues and women's rights from the political system and governance negatively impacted the future of the women's movement and prospects for political representation for women. Kuttab (2012) contends that women's groups must be part of government and the democratic process if they are to make widespread and long-term changes in the way women participate in government positions and their rights in the social sphere. While women's organizations must remain independent from political organizations in order to exert pressure on them, when necessary, it is crucial that they get involved in the political process. Women's lack of involvement in the political process has made them politically weak when it

comes to gaining support for CEDAW and modifying legislation related to women and families. Kuttab's (2012) argument is still very relevant to the situation for the women's movement today. Because women's NGOs do not focus on governance as a core of democratic transformation and therefore do not get involved in the political process (p. 180), women will not achieve their rights "... from within a system that does not express or reflect women's issues" (p. 182).

Currently, Palestinian women's rights, activism and political participation are in peril (Hawari 2019). Some conservative Islamists attack women who promote women's rights or secular issues by labeling them western and anti-Islamic (Hattab & Abualrob, 2023) At the same time, Islamic feminism has risen since the rise of political Islam (Abdellatif & Ottaway, 2007). Many Muslim women believe that feminism is not necessary because Islam already offers gender equality from within its values, principles, and laws (Abdellatif & Ottaway, 2007; Althalathin, Al.Dajani, Apostolopoulos, 2022). They believe in reinterpreting the meanings of the Quran and Sunna in a more gender equal way and that these interpretations must "move with the time" (Abdellatif & Ottaway, 2007, p. 8). Those who promote reinterpretation of Islamic texts reject Western sources of knowledge and influence. This form of feminism sits in tension with secular versions of feminism, even though they have many of the same goals. Secular feminists use secular sources such as human rights law as their benchmark and do not rely on Islamic texts for justification for women's rights. Elsadda states that both secular and Islamic feminists in Egypt are caught up in the "...complex circle of state, religion, and dictatorship" (p. 62). Through my research I argue that this is also true in Palestine because even women who rely on Islam for their arguments for women's rights and advancement are attacked and singled out by Hizb al-Tahrir and other critics. Both the quasi-state rulers (the Palestinian Authority) and conservative Islamist apparatuses seek to manipulate the power of religion for their

(male/patriarchal) own ends. They do not want women to access too much power or gain too much influence as this threatens their own status and legitimacy (Interview, Ranan, Summer 2023, Sajeda, Spring 2023). At the same time, secular feminists tend to stereotype Muslim feminists and not consider them a true partner in fighting patriarchy and advancing women's social and political positions in society (Jad, 2018). Sajeda commented on how she cannot work with religious Muslim women on Islamic issues such as the legal and acceptable marriage age and polygamy because they will not even debate these issues. Because secular feminists, both Muslim and Christian, are vilified as imposing Western ideals and attacking Islam (Aboudi, Ayaseh, & Abu Ilrob, 2021; Hattab, & Abualrob, 2023), Muslim feminists normally do not work with them for fear of being labeled Western and anti-Islamic. This idea of guilt by association has created a non-cooperative and non-inclusive climate that does not prompt women uniting to solve their issues (Elsadda, 2019). If secular and Muslim women made an effort to promote dialogue between each other and work together on the issues that they agree on, the women's movement would be much more unified and able to contain widespread attacks on them by Hizb ut Tahrir for example.

Moreover, the various socio-political factors and realities such as the occupation and the presence of patriarchal forces in Palestinian society along with the women's movement's failure to work towards grassroots, mass-based model of feminist activism that relies on popular support have led to a recession of the women's movement. It is clear that the women's movement needs a new strategy that will help it engage in both social freedom in Palestinian society and simultaneously work towards national liberation because one cannot be present without the other (Stagni, 2024).

In this analysis, I draw on Ṭāl'āt as a model for what the women's movement could strive to be. This does not mean that women in the West Bank have to be as radical or publicly supportive of LGBTQ rights,¹⁴ but it can offer a way for Palestinian women to break free of the activist limits involved in working in an NGO funded by international donors. Unlike women's groups in the West Bank, Ṭāl'āt is an independent movement that does not have any affiliation with political parties. This is because women's rights and demands have historically been marginalized in the social arena (Barron, 2002, Kuttub, 2012; Stagni, 2024). Women in East Jerusalem and the West Bank could learn from the discourse and ways of mobilization that Ṭāl'āt used even if they do not engage in such radical discourse themselves. Ṭāl'āt was able to motivate women to go to the streets to protest the most serious social issues facing Palestinian women such as the murder of women for "honor." Moreover, Ṭāl'āt directly called out the Israel occupation, colonialism, and patriarchy as the forces preventing women from achieving social and political freedom and the Palestinian people from achieving national liberation. These declarations are both strategic but also dangerous because by calling out occupation and colonialism, Ṭāl'āt is cementing its anti-colonial stance, but by calling out patriarchy, it places itself in opposition to mainstream Palestinian society. It appears as if Ṭāl'āt is confronting Palestinian men and refusing to work with them, but really Ṭāl'āt seeks to work with men and women who are supporters of both women's social emancipation and Palestinians' political freedom (Stagni, 2024).

Finally, I argue that the PA is not committed to the social or political emancipation of women. The PA is not actively supporting women's and gender rights and equality by refusing to

¹⁴ Addressing LGBTQ rights was a red line for many women's activists in the West Bank who said that while they support LGBTQ rights, they do not feel it is an issue they have the bandwidth to address at this time. Several women also explained that they did not want to lose their legitimacy in the eyes of the Palestinian public.

amend important women and family related legislation and by refusing to protect women who are victims of hate, harassment, and discrimination based on gender. Moreover, the PA has not supported programs at schools that involved sharing of books that teach lessons related to physical abuse and mutual respect in schools (Interview with Ranan, 3/3/2023). When a program created by women is fought by clerics, and tribal leaders, the PA immediately backs down to avoid confrontation. In this way, women are caught between conservative social groups and the PA, all of whom actively work against them. Currently, women's organizations must work alone and with few resources to offer services and legal counseling to women. The PA wants to appear pious to Islamists, but also secular and progressive to the international community. By ignoring women's oppression and attacks by Hizb ut Tahrir, the PA is failing to protect its citizens and to foster open dialogue on social issues where women have an opportunity to voice their demands.

All women of the global south have been and continue to be impacted by the effects of colonialism, imperialism, slavery, forced migration, ethnic cleansing. Palestinian women specifically have not only faced these hurdles, but they also continue to live under a brutal and racist military occupation that prevents them from living under a sovereign Palestinian state where they can air their grievances and demand representation. Living under a military occupation, one that permanently changes the trajectory of people's lives, poses serious threats to women's well-being, their ability to grow and develop, and even their very existence. This reality has been able to take hold because of capitalist neoliberal policies that bolster the Israeli occupation, promote economic gain over human rights, and permanently alter social relationships of which gender roles are a key part. To be a woman anywhere in the world means facing extra hurdles as part of the neoliberal capitalist economic structure. But to be a Palestinian woman means to live under the immense burden of being a woman of the global south, living

under neoliberal policies and a violent military occupation. The occupation enhances and emboldens patriarchy in Palestinian society, which has dire consequences for Palestinian women and other marginalized groups such as people with disabilities or LGBTQ people. This study draws attention to the fact that neoliberalism and neopatriarchy negatively impact the way that women mobilize and fight for their social and political rights. Better understanding these larger systems of oppression and how they affect women specifically sheds light on how these systems function and provides insights into how they can be resisted and changed. Understanding these larger systems of oppression more and how they affect women specifically can shed light on how these systems function and can be resisted and changed.

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions-While these questions were used as a guide during the interview, I allowed the interlocutor to lead the discussion when she chose to.

Interview Questions for Women Who Work in a Women's Organization

VI. Feminist Organizations (only for women who are part of a feminist movement or organization)

I. Introductions-breaking the ice

1. Let's start by introducing ourselves. I'll go first. What about you? *خلينا اول نتعرف على بعض*
2. Have you lived in XXX all of your life? What do you like most about living here?
عشت/ي في هاي المنطقة طول حياتك
3. How is your work/studies/volunteering etc. going? *كيف دراستك؟ شغلك؟ تطوعك*

II. Daily Experience as a woman

1. Could you describe your experience as a woman/mother/wife?
ممكن توصفي تجربتك كمرأة/ أم / زوجة
2. What is easy/enjoyable about being a woman?
شو الممتع او السهل بانو تكوني امرأة
3. What is difficult about being a woman?
شو الصعب بانك تكوني امرأة
1. What did it take to get where you are today? What challenges did you face and what sacrifices did you make?
قدرتي تتخطيها الي كيف قدرتي توصلي للمحل الي انتي في هلا ؟ شو الصعوبات و التضحيات
4. Could you please describe what a normal day is like for you? Is feminism part of this?
ممكن توصفي يومك العادي وشو مسؤولياتك؟
5. Do you feel that as a woman you have had access to great opportunities? Please explain.
بتحسي انو كونك امرأة خلا عندك فرص كثيرة ؟ لو سمحتي اشرحي
6. Do you feel that as a woman you have been prevented from great opportunities? Please explain.
بتحسي انو كونك امرأة انحرمتي من فرص منيحة؟ لو سمحتي اشرحي
7. Do you feel that you have all the rights that you deserve in your home and public life? If not, please explain.
بتحسي انو عندك كل الحقوق الي بتستاهلها في البيت و في الحياة العامة ؟ اذا لا ليش؟

III. Definitions of Feminism

1. Could you explain how you define feminism? *مممكن تشرحي/ تشرحيلي شو تعريفك للنسوية*
2. What does feminism mean to you? *شو بتعنيك النسوية*

3. How is feminism in Palestine similar/different than feminism in the West in terms of their ideals and ways of conducting activism?? Western ideology كيف بتختلف النسوية في فلسطين عن النسوية الموجودة في الغرب ؟
4. What would you say to someone who claims that feminism is an imported western concept?
5. What are the different ways that Palestinian women engage with feminism? Can you please describe this? في النسوية؟ ممكن النساء الفلسطينيات عشان يشاركو بعملتها شو الطرق المختلفة الي ؟ توصفها / توصيفها
6. Do you believe that feminism is necessary to solve women's issues? If so, what is the role of feminism in solving women's problems?
7. How do most non-feminist Palestinian men/women view feminism? كيف الرجال النساء الغير ؟ بينظروا للنسوية نسويين
8. Can you describe people's views by sharing what they say or do in reaction to feminism? Do you think they understand what feminism is? If not, what are their misconceptions? بعنوا انها صح لا شو المفاهيم الغلط الي ممكن تحكيلي شو رأيهم بالنسوية؟ برأيك يفهمو النسوية بشكل صحيح؟ اذا
9. What is your opinion of CEDAW and the way it is viewed in Palestine?

IV. Your Experience with Feminism

1. How did you become interested in feminist issues? صرتي مهتم/ مهتمة بالنسوية/كيف صرت ؟
2. Do you engage in feminist activism? How did you get involved in feminist activism? كيف ؟بالنشاط النسوي بتشارك ممكن
3. Can you please describe how feminism is a part of your life. تحكيلي كيف النسوية جزء من حياتك ؟
4. Why do you engage in feminist activism? Why do you believe in it? ليش بتشارك/ بتشاركي في النشاط النسوي ؟ ليش بتأمن في؟

V. National Liberation (save this for activists who seem eager to delve more deeply into feminist issues)

1. How do you fight both for national liberation and women's rights at the same time? How does that play out in real life? عن النسوية و عن الاستقلال الوطني في نفس الوقت كيف بتدافع ؟
2. How do you balance keeping unity and solidarity with men and women who don't support feminist ideals or certain women's rights before national liberation is achieved? (How do you balance the priority of national liberation with feminist issues when talking to people who are opposed to feminism?) كيف بتوازن بين الدفاع عن الاستقلال الوطني و عن الدفاع ؟ عن النسوية لما تحكي مع ناس ضد النسوية
3. In your experience, have you been criticized for focusing on women's issues and feminism instead of the national liberation struggle? How are you criticized? من خلال ؟تجربتك تعرضت للانتقاد بسبب تركيزك على المشاكل النسوية بدل المشاكل الوطنية
4. In your experience, how does your generation understand feminism differently than other generations of Palestinians. من خلال تجربتك كيف جيلك يفهم النسوية غير عن الأجيال قبل في فلسطين ؟

VI. Initial Thoughts-Over Situation for Palestinian Women

1. How do you see the current state of women's issues in Palestine? كيف شايف الوضع الحالي ؟للمشاكل المرأة في فلسطين
2. Which women's issues are most crucial to address in your community? برأيك شو هي اهم ؟لازم تتحل بالنسبة للمرأة المشاكل في مجتمعك الي

3. How do you envision addressing and/or solving these issues? What are the necessary steps? كيف برأيك ممكن هاي المشاكل تتحل؟ شو الخطوات الضرورية؟
4. What are the barriers that women face in addressing these issues?
5. Do you support fighting for women's rights only or also the rights of all marginalized groups such as people with special needs, low income families, refugees, and LGBTQ people. Why or why not?
6. How does the PA/Occupation hinder feminist agendas, values, and goals? كيف ممكت الاحتلال الاسرائيلي يخرب من مخططات النسوية ، و مبادئهم و اهدافهم ؟
7. What is your opinion of CEDAW and the way it is viewed in Palestine?
8. Is there a unified feminist movement in Palestine? Why or why not?
9. Is there a disconnect between what feminist activists focus on and their priorities and the needs of the average Palestinian woman?

VII. About the organization

1. What are your main projects activities?
2. Does your organization only focus on solving existing women's problems or does it also work to raise awareness of women's issues to change attitudes and behaviors.
3. If so, what actions do you engage in to change attitudes and behaviors? Among which age groups?
4. How do you utilize social media to advance your cause and how has it changed the work that you do and the impact that you make?

A . Challenges

1. Can you describe some of the challenges of participating in feminist activities? Give examples. امثلة واجهتك و انتي بتشاركي في النشاطات النسوية ؟ اعطيني الصعوبات الي بعض التحديات او ممكن توصيلي
2. What are some of the cyber challenges? Bullying, censorship? Give examples. واجهتني تنمر ؟ ميديا الكتروني او حجب او اي صعوبات على منصات السوشال

B. Successes

1. Please describe the major successes of feminism in Palestinian society? ممكن توصيلي نجاح ؟ كبير للنسوية في فالمجتمع الفلسطيني
2. Please describe successes related to your organization/movement's work in recruiting and mobilizing women. ممكن توصيلي نجاح متعلق في منطمتك من ناحية توظيف و تحريك النساء. mobilizing women.

C. Organization/mobilization

1. How do you and/or the organization you are a member of, talk to women who oppose their ideas? How do they make their argument? انتي كيف انتي او المجموعة الي؟ مع النساء الي بعراضوا أفكاركم؟ و شو حجتهم بتكون
2. In your experience, do feminist activists work to engage women from various socio-economic backgrounds? من خلفيات من خبرتك هل الناشطين السنويين يبحاولو يكذبو؟ socio-economic backgrounds مختلفه اجتماعية و اقتصادية

3. Do you try to connect with Islamic feminists or other feminists who engage in different feminist work? نسويات بشاركو في نشاطات مسلمات او مع نسويات هل بتحاولو تواصلو ؟ مختلفة
4. How is your movement/organization different or similar to other women's movements? How similar and how different? كيف المنظمة او المجموعة او الحركة الي انتي متشابهة قديش او متشابهة قديش مختلفة او ؟ بتشاركي فيها مختلفة او متشابهة مع المنظمات النسوية الثانية
5. Describe the different ways you mobilize women. فيها النساء يتحركو اوصفيلي الطرق الي

Interview Questions For Individual Feminist Activists

I. Introductions-breaking the ice

1. Let's start by introducing ourselves. I'll go first. What about you?
2. Have you lived in XXX all of your life? طول عمرك عايش في ... What do you like most about living here? شو اكثر اشي بتحبو في المنطقة?
3. How is your work/studies/volunteering etc. going? كيف الدراسة/التطوع / الشغل ماشي؟

II. Daily Experience as a woman

1. Could you describe your experience as a woman/mother/wife? ممكن توصفي تجربتك كمراة/ أم / زوجة
2. What is easy/enjoyable about being a woman? شو الممتع او السهل بانو تكوني مراة
3. What is difficult about being a woman? شو الصعب بانك تكوني مراة
1. What did it take to get where you are today? What challenges did you face and what sacrifices did you make? ققدرتي تتخطيها الي كيف قدرتي توصلني للمحل الي انتي في هلا ؟ شو الصعوبات و التضحيات
4. Could you please describe what a normal day is like for you? Is feminism part of this? ممكن توصفي يومك العادي وشو مسؤولياتك؟
5. Do you feel that as a woman you have had access to great opportunities? Please explain. بتحسي انو كونك مراة خلا عندك فرص كثيرة ؟ لو سمحتي اشرحي
6. Do you feel that as a woman you have been prevented from great opportunities? Please explain. بتحسي انو كونك مراة انحرمتي من فرص منيحة؟ لو سمحتي اشرحي
7. What are your 2 biggest struggles as a woman? Can you talk about two examples when you struggled in your life because you are a woman.
8. What are your 2 biggest achievements as a woman? Can you talk about two examples in your life when you were really happy and proud to be a Palestinian woman.

9. Do you feel that you are respected as a woman in your community?
10. Do you feel that equality between you and your husband or you and your brothers?
11. Do you feel that you have all the rights that you deserve in your home and public life? If not, please explain.

بتحسي انو عندك كل الحقوق الي تستاهليها في البيت و في الحياة العامة ؟ اذا لا ليش؟

III. Definitions of Feminism

1. Could you explain how you define feminism? ممكن تشرحلي/ تشرحلي شو تعريفك للنسوية؟
2. What does feminism mean to you? شو بتعنيك النسوية؟
3. How is feminism in Palestine similar/different than feminism in the West in terms of their ideals and ways of conducting activism?? Western ideology كيف بتختلف عن النسوية في فلسطين عن النسوية الموجودة في الغرب؟
4. What would you say to someone who claims that feminism is an imported western concept?
5. What are the different ways that Palestinian women engage with feminism? Can you please describe this? ممكن النساء الفلسطينيات عشان يشاركو بعملتها شو الطرق المختلفة الي في النسوية؟ توصفها / توصيفها؟
6. Do you believe that feminism is necessary to solve women's issues? If so, what is the role of feminism in solving women's problems?
7. How do most non-feminist Palestinian men/women view feminism? كيف الرجال النساء الغير؟ بينظروا للنسوية نسويين؟
8. Can you describe people's views by sharing what they say or do in reaction to feminism? Do you think they understand what feminism is? If not, what are their misconceptions? بعنوا انها صح لا شو المفاهيم الغلط الي ممكن تحكيها شو رأيهم بالنسوية؟ برأيك بيفهمو النسوية بشكل صحيح؟ اذا
9. Do you support fighting for women's rights only or also the rights of all marginalized groups such as people with special needs, low income families, refugees, and LGBTQ people. Why or why not?
10. How does the PA/Occupation hinder feminist agendas, values, and goals? كيف ممكت الاحتلال الاسرائيلي يخرب من مخططات النسوية ، و مبادئهم و اهدافهم؟
11. What is your opinion of CEDAW and the way it is viewed in Palestine?

V. Your Experience with Feminism

4. How did you become interested in feminist issues? صرتي مهتم/ مهتمة بالنسوية/كيف صرت؟
5. Do you engage in feminist activism? How did you get involved in feminist activism? كيف بالنشاط النسوي بتشارك ممكن؟
6. Can you please describe how feminism is a part of your life. تحكيها كيف النسوية جزء من حياتك؟
7. Why do you engage in feminist activism? Why do you believe in it? ليش بتشارك/ بتشاركي في النشاط النسوي ؟ ليش بتأمن في؟

VI. Discourse

4. What did it take to get where you are today? What challenges did you face and what sacrifices did you make?

؟قدرتي تتخطيها الي كيف قدرتي توصلني للمحل الي انتي في هلا ؟ شو الصعوبات و التضحيات

5. Could you please describe what a normal day is like for you?

ممکن توصفي يومك العادي وشو مسؤولياتك؟

6. Do you feel that as a woman you have had access to great opportunities? Please explain.

بتحسي انو كونك مرأة خلا عندك فرص كثيرة ؟ لو سمحتي اشرحي

7. Do you feel that as a woman you have been prevented from great opportunities? Please explain.

بتحسي انو كونك مرأة انحرمتي من فرص منيحة؟ لو سمحتي اشرحي

8. Do you feel that you are respected as a woman in your community?

9. Do you feel that equality between you and your husband or you and your brothers?

10. Do you feel that you have all the rights that you deserve in your home and public life? If not, please explain.

بتحسي انو عندك كل الحقوق الي تستاهلها في البيت و في الحياة العامة ؟ اذا لا ليش؟

II. Initial Thoughts-Over Situation for Palestinian Women

1. How do you see the current state of women's issues in Palestine? كيف شايف الوضع الحالي

؟المشاكل المرأة في فلسطين

2. What are Palestinian women's greatest challenges?

3. Which women's issues are most crucial to address in your opinion? برأيك شو هي اهم المشاكل

؟الي لازم تتحل بالنسبة للمرأة

4. How do you envision addressing and/or solving these issues? What are the necessary steps? كيف برأيك ممكن هاي المشاكل تتحل؟شو الخطوات الضرورية؟

؟كيف برأيك ممكن هاي المشاكل تتحل؟شو الخطوات الضرورية؟

5. Do you engage in women's activism in any form? Why or why not? If so, can you describe it? ليش لا نوع نشاطات لدعم المرأة؟ليش اه و باي بتشارك/ي

؟ليش لا نوع نشاطات لدعم المرأة؟ليش اه و باي بتشارك/ي

6. What are your 2 biggest struggles as a woman? Can you talk about two examples when you struggled in your life because you are a woman.

7. What are your 2 biggest achievements as a woman? Can you talk about two examples in your life when you were really happy and proud to be a Palestinian woman.

IV. Thoughts about Feminism

1. Are you familiar with feminism and its goals? How do you define feminism? بتعرف/بتعرفي

عن النسوية؟اشرح/ي شو بتعني النسوية لالك

2. Please describe how you view feminism. What is your opinion of it? ممكن تشرحي كيف

؟ بتشوفي النسوية؟شو رأيك فيها انت/ي

3. In your experience, do you think feminist activism is good for Palestinian women? Why or why not? Please explain. من خلال تجربتك و معرفتك هل بتشوف/ي النسوية منيحة للنساء الفلسطينيات؟

؟ ليش اه او ليش لا

4. Is there a Palestinian feminist movement? Do you feel that there is a need for a unified feminist movement? Why or why not?

5. Can you explain how you think feminism is faulty ممکن تشرح/ي كيف ممکن نكون النسوية غلط؟
6. What is your opinion of CEDAW and the way it is viewed in Palestine?

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