

Palestinian Women in Israel – Identity in light of the occupation

Very little research has been done on the Palestinian women in general or on, more particularly, the Palestinian women citizen of Israel. The role and status of women within Palestinian society in Israel are to a great extent determined by political, economic, social, and ideological factors. The women in Palestinian society cannot be separated from her place within the family, for the family remains a major force in shaping a women's identity, determining on whether she can study, work, and marry her relationships as well to people inside and outside her family. In many Palestinian families, moreover, depending on class, social and political status, women move upon marriage from the custody of their fathers and brothers to the custody of their husbands and their husbands' families. At the same time, because Palestinian society in general, and Palestinian society in Israel in particular, has undergone dramatic social, political, and economic changes, women's position within the family and within society has changed as well. Like Arab women elsewhere, Palestinian women in Israel, to a certain degree, have moved in recent years away from traditionally passive and marginal roles in the public sphere into more active ones in domestic and public sphere (ginat 1982, Touma 1981; Nath 1978; Smock and Youssef 1977; Prothro and Diab 1974). This change is evidence both with respect to their Palestinian Identity and the political development in the region (reoccupying the west bank etc.) as well as with respect to traditional structures within their own society.

The first public participation of Palestinian women alongside Palestinian men in the national fight, in civil and human rights, was recorded in 1884 (Warnock 1990). More than 100 years have passed since this first involvement, and Palestinian women continue to play an integral part in the struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination peace and justices.

Palestinian women in Israel have experienced substantial changes, some of them common to the changes all Palestinian women have experienced and some of them unique to the Palestinian citizen of Israel. The changes that started during the Ottoman rule and which have continued under Israeli rule have left their mark on all the Palestinian people.

Palestinian women in Israel today are part of the Palestinian people who remained in their homeland which became the State of Israel after the war of 1948. The role and status of women within Palestinian

society and within the family has undergone dramatic change from the period of Ottoman rule (early 16th century to 1918) to the present. A review of the historical background is essential to an understanding of the process of change, which Palestinian women in Israel have experienced over the years.

In this paper we will examine the Palestinian people during different historical periods without considering separately their current different constituent groups. For only after the *Nekba* (The catastrophe) of 1948 were the Palestinian people divided into the following four parts:

- Palestinian who were able to remain living in their homeland, which became the state of Israel (This part consists 72% of the historical Palestine)
- Palestinian in Gaza, who remained living in their homeland but became under Egyptian rule until 1967.
- Palestinian in west bank, who remained living in their homeland but under the Jordanian rule until 1967.
- Palestinian who were forced to leave their own Homeland and spread in the Diaspora particularly in Refuge camps in the Arab world.

Today after Oslo and the reoccupation of west bank the Palestinian people have to live in more desperate condition of separation especially for those who live in West bank and Gaza. Where the divisions received another subdivision according to A, B, C, areas which were defined by the Oslo agreement. Currently the division is even within one city were different parts of the village or the city are disconnected from each other by Israeli military presences which is making the life of the people impossible.

In this paper we will examining, primarily, the Palestinian citizen of Israel and their different struggles. We will look specifically at the women, their political experience and their changing Gender, national and class identities which are constantly developing and influencing their position and ability to organize within their society.

The Palestinians in Israel, including the women, Underwent a process of politicization as a result of the *Nekba* of 1948 and the further occupation of 1967. The later in particular made them confront major questions regarding their identities – and in their attempt to answer these questions and respond to the new needs which resulted from the social and political changes taking place, Palestinian women in Israel developed new ways to organize. The occupation itself and the *intifada* are but two important stages in this process. It is important first to identity and then to examine the social precedents and patterns which have evolved historically.

Ottoman Period (early 16th century - 1918)

During the Ottoman period, Palestinian society was largely agricultural. Working the land was the basic means of subsistence and survival for the majority peasant population. In working the land, women and men together provided an income for the state and the landowning class, as well as for the whole hamoula.¹ The structure of the society was very hierarchical, and the dominant norms were patriarchal. The Landowners held the ultimate power over the land and the peasants, both men and women. The hamoula was the main social, economic, and political unit where the hamoula's chief was the main decision maker in all aspects of life. The structure of the family was similar to the society structural very hierarchical. Although women worked the land together with the men, unlike the men they did not have any political power.

However, within the extended family structure, in the domestic sphere, the wife of the chief of the hamoula assumed command over all other women in the family, using the same hierarchical order employed by men. Women power n the domestic sphere is affected by different factors, role, class background etc.

Inequality based on Gender differences was more prevalent among the upper landowning classes within which women were largely segregated and confined to the domestic sphere. In this period, many of these women adopted the Ottoman habit of veiling their faces in an attempt to differentiate themselves from peasant women,² who worked the land together with men, enjoyed some social advantages over urban women; yet they nonetheless were situated at the bottom of the social-political structure of the society in Palestine.

British Mandate Period (1918-1947)

At the end of the Ottoman period and beginning of the period of the British mandate over Palestine, social, political, and economic developments led to the beginning of significant structural changes in the family, resulting in a crisis for the peasant class and the beginning of a transformation in women's roles in Palestinian society. The economic-political crisis sparked by the transition to British rule over Palestine motivated some landowners to sell their land to investors, thus leaving the peasant families who worked these lands without a basic means of subsistence. Thousands of peasants found themselves landless and

¹ Hamoula means 'extended family.' Usually, one village consisted of one or two hamoulas. The hamoula was the main social, economic, and political unit, and the hamoula's chief was the main decision-maker in all aspects of life.

² N. Abdo, *Family, Women and Social Change in the Middle East: The Palestinian Case* (Canadian Scholars Press, 1987).

were forced to leave their homes and villages to seek work and shelter in the cities. New structures of landownership and methods of farming served to strengthen the merchant class. This shift of power was further accompanied, and influenced to some degree, by an influx of European Jewish settlers, who brought with them industrialized resources and capitalist aspirations. Agriculture, however, did remain the main source of income for 90% of the Palestinian population until 1948.

These fundamental economic changes initiated a process of proletarianization among some members of the Palestinian peasant class in this period, and ultimately caused serious disturbances in the traditional structure of the extended family. Many landless peasant families increased their dependence on wage labor, which in turn resulted in the decline of traditional relations of dependence within the family, and in migration to towns and de-population of rural areas.

A process of urbanization began to develop with all the infrastructure combined with the new emerging cities such as educational and financial and cultural institutions and opportunities.

These social and political changes and a related fear for their country's future, motivated urban Palestinian women, especially of the upper and middle classes, to take action.³ For the first time, Palestinian women engaged in social activism, organizing charitable societies in the major cities of Haifa, Akka, Jaffa, Nablus and Jerusalem,⁴ mainly during the years 1904-1916. After years of activism at the local level, they gathered on October 26, 1929, in Jerusalem for the first Palestinian women's conference.⁵ Generally speaking, those women who came out to the front line to participate in the national struggle were the wives or relatives of men who were politically involved.⁶

Palestinian women were also affected by the education boom in the Arab world during the late 19th century, which resulted in the spread of schools (especially missionary and private institutions). Educational institutions for girls were founded later in this period: In 1924, for example, Nabiha Nasser, a leading women's rights activist, founded the Birzeit school, later to become Birzeit College, and in 1976, Birzeit

³ M. Rishmawi, "The legal status of Palestinian women in the occupied territories," in N. Toubia, ed. *Women of the Arab World* (Zed Books, 1988), pp. 79-92.

⁴ Encyclopedia Palestina, *Special Studies: Volume III and IV* (Encyclopedia Palestina Corporation, 1990).

⁵ R. Giacaman and M. Odeh, "Palestinian women's movement in the Israeli occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip," in N. Toubia, ed. *Women of the Arab World* (Zed Books, 1988), pp. 57-68; F. Fawzia, "Palestine," in R. Morgan, ed. *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology* (Anchor Books, 1984), pp. 536-539; and M. Rishmawi.

⁶ N. Abdo; and M. Rishmawi.

University.⁷ Though the demand for girls' education was increasing as Palestinians began to realize the important role education could play in helping them survive in a fast-changing and threatening world, by the end of the British mandate only one-third of Palestinian children were in school, and one-fifth of these were girls.⁸

The women of poor classes were engaged in different forms of political participation - sometimes militant - especially during the Palestinian revolution of 1936-1937, but more on an individual rather than an organized basis.⁹

Israeli Military Rule over the Palestinian Community in Israel (1948-1966): A process of underdevelopment.

The increasing participation of Palestinian women in public, social, and political activities stopped short because of the Nakba in 1948, especially among those women who remained within the State of Israel. The Zionist forces Hagana and Etzel (later to become the Israeli army) destroyed the social, political, and economic infrastructure of the Palestinian society. More than 480 Palestinian villages were destroyed (out of a total of 573). Of the Palestinian population, 75%, or 750,000 people, became refugees in neighboring Arab countries, forced to leave by the Zionist forces (later the Israeli army); many hoped to return when the war ended. Only 150,000 Palestinians were able to stay in their homeland within the newly established State of Israel, and of those who did remain, 40,000 found themselves as refugees in their own homeland.¹⁰ Those who remained found themselves within a shattered society whose internal economic and political institutions and organizations had collapsed, and whose cultural traditions were threatened and challenged.

Coupled with the Israeli government's policy of massive land expropriation,¹¹ the effects of the Nakba made it impossible to reclaim agriculture as the mainstay of Palestinian life. During this period, Palestinians faced increased proletarianization and impoverishment, and experienced what Abdo¹² calls underdevelopment and paralysis. This process included the destruction of the social and political infrastructure and the relatively autonomous basis of Palestinian economic life, and it transformed the Palestinians into a minority totally dependent on the Jewish-dominated economy. Moreover, as

⁷ M. Rishmawi.

⁸ K. Warnock, *Land Before Honor: Palestinian Women in the Occupied Territories* (Monthly Review Press, 1990).

⁹ N. Abdo 1987.

¹⁰ The preceding figures were compiled from various sources including E. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (Vintage Books, 1992).

¹¹ S. Jirys, *The Arabs in Israel* (Monthly Review, 1976).

¹² N. Abdo 1987.

detailed below, Israel introduced a sophisticated system of hegemony which included a policy of control and manipulation aimed at undermining the integrity of Palestinian national existence within the newly established state.¹³

Palestinians in Israel were isolated from other Arabs and segregated from Jews by military laws¹⁴ which controlled their daily lives. According to these laws, for example, Palestinians in Israel could not leave their villages for work, for school or for any other reason without a permit from the military authorities. In addition, since the Israeli government confiscated almost all Palestinian lands (97% of the land in Israel is currently controlled by government or semi-government forces) they were forced to search for work outside their villages, and in order to do so they were forced to obtain military permits¹⁵. Moreover, While the Israeli government granted citizenship to Palestinians in Israel, it did not recognize them as a national group; instead, it called them 'Minorities,' 'Israeli Arabs,' and 'non-Jews,' but never 'Palestinians.'¹⁶

Under such traumatic conditions the feelings of insecurity were frequently overwhelming. The continuous absence of the men from their homes and villages (for jobs in cities), their subordination to Israeli Jewish institutions, and their exposure to the behaviors of westernized Jewish women, all intensified the threat to both Palestinian male identity and status.¹⁷ Having lost control over their land and status, present and future, the Palestinian man was left in control of only one domain: his family, his wife, and his children. As Mar'i and Mar'i stated: "one can relate much of men's need to control women to men's sense of insecurity¹⁸. This response was reflected in a renewed emphasis on questions of morality. In particular, the concept of *Ard* (Honor) acquired new importance and meaning considering men's fears and their sense of powerlessness.

As both the present and Future become uncertain, and as Israeli authorities stepped in to control the lives of the Palestinian within Israel, the heritage of the past became the most salient source from which Palestinians in Israel could derive pleasure as a community and on which they could depend for protection and preservation of their

¹³ I. Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State: Israel's Control of a National Minority* (Texas University Press, 1980).

¹⁴ Y. Peled, 'Ethnic democracy and the legal construction of citizenship: Arab citizens of the Jewish state,' *American Political Science Review*, 86, 2: pp. 432-443.

¹⁵ Jirys 1976

¹⁶ After the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967 and because of contacts both with other parts of the Palestinian community and with the Israeli Jews from whom they had been disconnected, their identity was sharpened and became the subject of public debate.

¹⁷ M. Mar'i and S. Mar'i, "The role of women as change agents in Arab society in Israel," in M. Safir, M. Mednick, D. Izraeli and J. Bernard, eds., *Women's World: From the New Scholarship* (Praeger, 1985), pp. 251-259 (in Hebrew).

¹⁸ Mar'I and Mar'I 1985.

identity. Here again women have had to deal not only with the outcomes of land confiscation, military laws and other externally imposed objective hardships but also with the internal subjective hardships reflected by centuries-old patriarchal traditions, which now gained nationally sanctioned importance¹⁹.

Since Palestinian women in Israel were forced to stay at home because of military orders and restrictions placed on them by men in their families, they were no longer able to support their families as producers and lost much of their previous status. Relegated to the private sphere and to domestic roles, Palestinian women in Israel assumed the role of preserver of culture. They were expected to maintain continuity of Palestinian cultural values, and to pass on traditions and values which reproduced their own subordinate status. Shaloufe (1991) analyzes this situation according to the theory of Kreiter and Kreiter (1978) and shows that the Palestinian women were assigned conflicting tasks.²⁰ On the one hand, they were parties to a belief-system with a positive image of Arab women, which viewed them as active in the preservation of cultural, religious and national continuity; and on the other hand, they were asked to accept and internalize a belief-system that defined their status as inferior. In other words, a considerable protein of the culture value system which Palestinian women have been assigned responsibility for upholding consists of the same values, which have discriminated against them and deprived them of equal status for many generations. At the same time, one might argue that there is no real contradiction between the two tasks, because both involve adapting the role of culture preserver in the domestic sphere, including those parts of the culture which reproduce the condition of women's own subordination. **Palestinian women assigned, within the patriarchal system of their society, the role of a major control mechanism**, working along side other agents of control, such as the family and religion values and institutions, to preserve the patriarchal structure and thus the status quo of the society in general²¹.

While some positive changes took place in this period - the Israeli Compulsory Education Law increased the rate of school attendance in the Palestinian community in Israel for boys and girls,²² and compulsory education increased the demand for Palestinian teachers and created opportunities for women to work - overall, women's political and social status did not improve. On the contrary, no Palestinian women's

¹⁹ N. Abdo.

²⁰ F. Shaloufeh Khazan, "Change and mate selection among Palestinian women in Israel," in B. Swirski and M. Safir, eds., *Calling the Equality Bluff: Women in Israel* (Pergamon Press, 1991), pp. 82-89.

²¹ Nabila Espanioly: violence against women: A Palestinian women's perspective, Personal is political: Women's Studies International Forum, vol. 20, Nos>576, pp.587-592, 1997.

²² E. Yisraeli, "Adult education in the Arab Druze sector," *Studies in Education*, 25: pp. 139-154 (in Hebrew).

organization was established during this period except for the Democratic Women's Movement, a mixed Arab and Jewish women's organization.²³ When the economic recession (1965-1967) forced Palestinian women back into the work force, they served mostly as unskilled laborers²⁴.

The Israeli Occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Golan Heights, and its Immediate Aftermath (1967-1975): Renewed shock and adjustment

The Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Syrian Golan Heights, after the 1967 war, came as a terrible shock to many Palestinians who had lived for years under the illusion that the Arab countries would eventually liberate them. The 1967 war destroyed this illusion, as well as that of a united Arab front bound by Egypt's Gamal Abdul-Nasser.

After 1967, a new economic-political situation developed as demand for Israeli products increased employment opportunities for women and men. This process led to increased awareness among Palestinian women in Israel of discrimination against them based on their nationality and class, which, in turn, sparked increased political activism in demonstrations and other public activities, as they entered the labor market and the educational system. Palestinian women joined with men in intensifying demands for full national and civil rights and for recognition as a national minority.²⁵

Most importantly, the Israeli occupation of 1967 re-united Palestinians in Israel with the most important segments of the Palestinian people, the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and dramatically encouraged the process of re-Palestinianization. Meetings between Palestinians from Israel and from the Occupied Territories marked the political renewal of Palestinians in Israel, enabling them to openly identify as Palestinians, and at the same time to begin to demand rights as a national minority in Israel - a process which continues today.

These meetings between the Palestinian who live in Israel and their brothers and sisters, who lived under Jordanian and Egyptian rule and who became occupied in 1967 by the Israelis, opened new doors for the Palestinian community in Israel. If before 1967 they lived under Israeli military rule (from 1948 until 1988) and had become totally

²³ See Nabila Espanioly and Aida Toma: Palestinian Women Political participation. In CEDAW shadow report submitted by Palestinian women citizen of Israel to the CEDAW commission in the UN 1997.

²⁴ Nabila Espanioly: Palestinian women and work: In CEDAW shadow report submitted by Palestinian women citizen of Israel to the CEDAW commission in the UN 1997.

²⁵ M. Mar'i and S. Mar'i.

segregated from Palestinian people and from Arab nations, the occupation of 1967 enabled Palestinians living in Israel for the first time to reconnect with themselves, their people, and their culture. As a result of the occupation, new literature and news from the Arab world made its way into Israel, despite Israeli censorship. Up to this point, the Palestinians living in Israel were simply the Palestinians who remained on their land, but the occupation of 1967 created the need for self-determination vis-a-vis both the rest of the Palestinian people and the Jewish citizens of Israel. Palestinians in Israel started to ask nationally motivated questions such as 'Who are we?' 'What is the relationship between us and the Palestinians under occupation?' and 'What is the connection between us and the State of Israel'? The answers to these questions increased the sense of national belonging among the Palestinians living in Israel, as well as the need for national rights as citizens and as a recognized national minority within the state. This renewed sense of national identity was reflected in widespread public political activity in which women were important participants.

The Palestinians living in Israel also became more politicized and a great deal more realistic after 1967. They recognized that help would not be forthcoming from the outside, and that they would have to find resources within themselves. This realization led to the creation of their own political program. The Palestinian women in Israel who were influenced by this new reality organized first at the local level in women's organizations, which continued the century-old tradition of charitable organizations representing the bourgeois approach of offering aid to others. At the same time, other Palestinian women became involved at the national level with national political organizations. They created new, highly political women's organizations, affiliated with existing political parties or groups. Women's participation in other aspects of public life also increased. For example, from 1969 to 1972, the number of female Palestinian students enrolled in Israeli universities more than doubled (from 141 to 305), while enrollment of male Palestinian students increased by only 25% (from 450 to 565).²⁶ For the first time, women became involved in Arab Student Unions, known for their high level of political activism, and women voted for and were elected as representatives and executives in these unions.

However, despite the improvement in women's position during these years and their greater participation in the labor market, the educational system, and social and political organizations, the status of Palestinian women remained low. According to my feminist arithmetic, Palestinian women in Israel rank tenth in status among citizens in Israeli society, after (1) Ashkenazi men, (2) Ashkenazi women, (3) Oriental men,

²⁶ Id.

(4) Oriental women, (5) Russian men, (6) Russian women, (7) Ethiopian men, (8) Ethiopian women, (9) Palestinian men, (10) Palestinian women. Palestinian women in Israel suffer from discrimination not only because of their Gender, but also because of their national and class identity.

Palestinian Women Taking Their Case into Their Own Hands (1975-1987)

Palestinians within Israel continue to be discriminated against within Israeli society, where they have the lowest class status. Many years of political activism and of changes within Palestinian society which have accompanied the Israeli military rule and the occupation have raised the consciousness of Palestinian women in Israel with respect to their oppression as part of a national minority and as part of their specific class. As a result, they have become more active participants not only in the sphere of family decision-making but also in the spheres of public life which had been traditionally prohibited to them.²⁷ Palestinian women at this time began adopting a new approach: taking their fate in their own hands and acting to change it.

Palestinian women in Israel who have managed to acquire a higher education have had to overcome many social obstacles, although in this period there have been signs within Palestinian society of greater openness to women's working outside the home, especially in white collar occupations and other fields of occupation such as textile. In the 1986-1987 academic year, Palestinian women constituted approximately 48% of all Palestinian students studying at Haifa University. Palestinian women constituted nearly 22% of all Palestinians who had earned a first degree in Israeli universities, and more than 32% of all Palestinian academics in Israel.²⁸

However, meeting both with Palestinian women in the Occupied Territories and Jewish women in Israel increased the feeling of oppression among Palestinian women in Israel. In comparison to Palestinian women in the Occupied Territories, the achievements of Palestinian women in Israel seemed weak. For example, despite the increase in education among Palestinian women in Israel because of the compulsory education law in Israel, the success Palestinian women had at Haifa University remained an exception: In 1986, Palestinian women in higher education comprised only 20% of Palestinian students in Israel,²⁹ while women had reached 40% of Palestinian students in the

²⁷ E. Touma, "Liberation of Arab women not sexual crisis," *Haifa Al-Jadeed*, 12 December 1981 (in Arabic).

²⁸ M. Al-Haj, ed. "Problems of employment for Arab academics in Israel," *Middle East Studies*, 8 (1988), The Jewish-Arab Center University of Haifa.

²⁹ *The Statistical Yearbook for Israel*, Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 1989, Jerusalem.

Occupied Territories.³⁰ This disparity, together with the fact that they were the lowest paid members of the Israeli labor force,³¹ raised awareness of their oppression, and this very consciousness became a prime factor in organizing efforts among Palestinian women in Israel.

During this period, Palestinians organized nationally within Israel, escalating their demands for rights and for peace. They created new committees, which were male-originated and male-dominated³², such as the follow-up committee for Arab Issues (which included all Arab mayors and representatives of Palestinians living in Israel), The Follow-up Committee for Arab Education and Health Issues, and The committee for the defense of the Land, to mention a few. All these committees reflected the politicization and re-Palestinianization of Palestinians living in Israel.

Women in their own way also organized different committees to support Palestinian women in Israel and to develop local services, especially in areas which were important in the light of their new political reality, and which were neglected by Israeli authorities, like the educational framework for preschool children and for women, and committees whose goals were to support women. Many of these committees, like the Nazareth Nurseries Institute, or the Akka Women's Association, have become important Associations supporting Palestinian women in Israel. These Organizations have played an important role in creating infrastructure for professional support for women and for empowering women.

In order to change their social and political situation Palestinian women in Israel shifted their strategy from demonstrations, which were typical prior to this period, to positive action. They took matters in their hands as a way to achieve both local changes, within their own communities, and state-wide change which would lead to recognition of political and national rights for Palestinian people within their independent state along side Israel.

Palestinian women in Israel, like the rest of the Palestinian community in Israel, faced a fundamental conflict between their civil identity as citizens of the State of Israel and their national identity as part of the Palestinian people. To date, this conflict remains crucial for many Palestinians in Israel, and individuals differ in the ways they attempt to resolve it. For those who see themselves as sharing the same national

³⁰ CBS 1982 & 1985.

³¹ CBS 1992. Palestinian women in Israel earn only 60% of what Jewish women in Israel earn. Jewish women earn only 70% of Jewish men's income.

³² To mention a few: The Follow-up Committee for Arab Issues (which included all Arab mayors and representatives of Palestinians living in Israel), The Follow-up Committee for Arab Education, The Follow-up Committee for Health Issues, and The Committee for the Protection of Arab Land.

identity and the same fate as the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories, the solution is to eliminate any differences between the two populations by establishing a Palestinian state over all of the historical Palestine. For the third group, which is gaining power in the last years, is the Islamic movement solution, which relate to the Islam as a political movement and not only religion. They give official statement in all matters that the Islam is the solution. The last group, who see themselves as full citizens of Israel, the solution is to eliminate differences between themselves and the Jewish population, and to strive for equality. The largest group of Palestinians in Israel attempts to solve the dilemma by asserting both that they are an integral part of the Palestinian people and that they are unique because of historical circumstances by remaining on their lands and becoming Israeli citizens. Their solution distinguishes between their civil identity as Israeli citizens and their national identity as Palestinians. As Israeli citizens, they demand national rights as a national minority within Israel, and they strive for Israel to become a state of all of its citizens and not, as today, a self-defined Jewish state.

Each of these solutions to this conflict of identity is reflected in the different activities and organizations on the part of Palestinians in Israel. The last-mentioned solution enables many Palestinians in Israel to be critical of the country of which they are citizens and of its policies toward the people of which they are part. But at the same time this solution of remaining both Palestinian and Israeli citizens also enable mutual activities between Palestinians and Jews who are critical of Israeli government policies so that they can work together towards political change for the Palestinian people.

The situation and the political awakening of Palestinian women in the Occupied Territories also contributed to the awakening of Palestinian women in Israel. Palestinians in Israel in this period intensified their efforts on behalf of and in solidarity with their brothers and sisters in the Occupied Territories. Palestinian women in Israel were especially active in solidarity and protest activities,³³ including joint activities with the peace camp in Israel and with Israeli women's peace groups such as Women in Black, Women and Peace, and Women for Political Prisoners.

The first Intifada (1987-1993)

Palestinian women in Israel have carefully watched the changes among their sisters in the occupied Territories and learned from their experiences. They have seen, for example, that Palestinian women's

³³ N. Espanioly, "Palestinian women in Israel respond to the intifada," in B. Swirski and M. Sakir, eds., *Calling the Equality Bluff: Women in Israel*, (Pergamon Press, 1991), pp. 147-151.

national awareness of discrimination has intensified under the Occupation. These conditions were precisely factors against which Palestinian people in the Occupied Territories organized their protest and uprising. Palestinian women in Israel, who are engaged in peace activities did so primarily for national considerations rather than considerations of gender. When a Palestinian woman in Israel saw a Palestinian Woman in the Occupied Territories facing a soldier, she tended to identify with her and to feel proud of such a woman, just as she would feel proud of a Palestinian man challenging the Israeli authorities. Women in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip actively participated in the *intifada*. In the beginning stages, their participation was not only socially accepted but even highly appreciated. But in later phase of the *intifada* the women who were active began to see the obstacles placed in front of their further achievements of positions of leadership and more militant, non-traditional roles. Palestinian women began to feel the restrictions placed upon them by religious fundamentalists and by conservative traditionalists, as well as by some of the "revolutionaries" who were demanding that women sacrifice fighting back on their own behalf until after the revolution.

Very few Palestinian women in Israel recognize the contradiction of the 'revolutionary man' who speaks about equality but goes home to his wife, mother or sister and acts like a 'sheik', who needs to be waited on and made to feel that he is the boss. This situation could continue indefinitely, because awareness of one's role as a woman and of the oppression suffered at the hands of one's own man and one's own society is frequently more painful than awareness of the oppression suffered in common with one's people at the hands of the 'enemy.' Within Palestinian society in Israel, women's identity is formed, that is, misinformed, by stereotypes and rigid norms through the patriarchal control systems of family, religious and social institutions; women themselves thus frequently internalize a sense of their own inferiority. Yet, Palestinian women's national identity in Israel has actually been nurtured in important ways by discrimination. The Israeli military occupation intensified, among Palestinian women and within Palestinian society as a whole, a sense of national awareness and, to some degree, of class awareness.

When sexual harassment (e.g., assault, rape, strip-searching, intimidation) became an integral feature of Palestinian women's experience at the hands of the Israeli security forces,³⁴ Palestinian women's organizations mobilized to deal with this issue. These victims not only suffered from their horrible experiences with the Israelis but also from the reaction of their own community, which responded by

³⁴ C. Senker, *Palestinian Women in the Uprising: The Israeli Mirror*, (London, 1989); and J. Nevo, "Attack on oppressed women: examination of testimonies from the field," unpublished paper presented in the national criminological conference on May 29, 1989, Jerusalem: Hebrew University.

blaming them. Whereas in some early cases young men had offered to marry the victims in an effort to support and encourage them so that other women could continue the struggle, increasingly Palestinian families responded by imposing greater control over women, forbidding them from leaving home, curbing their studies, and even using violence.³⁵ Nevertheless, Palestinian women spoke out about sexual violence by the Israeli army during the intifada.

Sexual oppression within the Palestinian society, remains present, whatever the woman's marital status; sexual relations are considered acceptable only within marriage; and women are supposed to remain virgins until they marry. After marriage, the woman is expected to be always sexually available to her husband. She has no right to initiate to be participate actively in lovemaking herself, and it is unlikely that she ever has an orgasm. Speaking about sexuality and sexual behavior is a strong taboo within the Palestinian society. Violence and sexual assault within the family or outside the family bring shame on the victims, who tend to blame themselves and to keep the assaults, especially the sexual assaults, secret. But when sexual assault became a weapon used by Israelis against Palestinian women to speak out about their sexual treatment and concerns. Although this process of speaking out remains limited to individual victims and their support networks, it is likely eventually to have greater, more visible effects.

Many Palestinian women in Israel also became involved with Jewish activists in Israeli women's peace organizations and in feminist analyses of the effects of war and militarization on Israeli society. The Palestinian women in Israel who criticized Israeli society, militarism, sexism, and violence, have in turn begun to see these phenomena more clearly in their own society and to speak out against discrimination and violence, especially domestic violence, and against sexual assaults of all kinds. Although this process of speaking out remains limited to individual victims and their support networks, it is likely to eventually have greater, more visible effects.

While the direct effects of the Israeli military Occupation and the Palestinian intifada on Palestinian women in Israel still need to be more thoroughly studied, some consequences already seem evident. First, coming at the end of over fifty years of shifting geopolitical relationships, the Occupation and the intifada have re-oriented

³⁵ Sexual oppression within Palestinian society as a whole remains present whatever the woman's marital status; sexual relations are considered acceptable only within marriage, and women are supposed to remain virgins until they marry (F. Fawzia). After marriage, the woman is expected to be always sexually available to her husband. She has no right to initiate or participate actively in lovemaking herself, and it is unlikely that she ever has an orgasm. Speaking about sexuality and sexual behavior is strongly taboo in Palestinian society. Violence and sexual assault within the family or outside the family brings shame on the victims, who tend to blame themselves and to keep the assaults secret (especially sexual assaults).

Palestinians in Israel in national solidarity with Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Second, while Palestinian women in Israel expressed frustration at their helplessness and the very limited ways in which they could support their sisters in the Occupied Territories, the intifada has very clearly politicized many women. Finally, contact with Palestinian activists from the Occupied Territories, with Israeli Jewish feminists, and with repressive Israeli political tactics has awakened among Palestinian women in Israel a consciousness of the gender inequities within their own society. These responses, including responses to escalating conservatism and Islamic fundamentalism within Palestinian society crystallized around the intifada. New awareness of women's activism and new organizations, such as rape crisis centers and campaigns against violence against women, were created by mainly young, educated Palestinian women in Israel who are now working to create a feminist approach to discrimination within Palestinian society, in the home and at the workplace. At both the local and the national levels, these women's organizations are still struggling toward self-definition. Moreover, feminist consciousness among Palestinian women in Israel remains diverse, as differences, as well as apparent contradictions between organizations, reflect. While no definitive conclusions can be drawn, it seems clear that the Occupation and the intifada have helped in important ways to politicize, re-Palestinianize, and raise the feminist consciousness of Palestinian women in Israel.

The First Intifada had many effects on Palestinian in Israel mainly. Firstly, at the end of over fifty years of shifting geopolitical relationships, the occupation and the intifada have reoriented Palestinians in Israel in national solidarity with Palestinians in the west bank and the Gaza Strip. Second, while the dramatic process of Re-Palestinianization has been for some Palestinian women in Israel as a source of frustration – “We felt helpless because we could not support our sisters” The intifada especially has also very clearly politicized many others: “It caused more involvement in the political arena”: “It had the effect of empowering and giving (us) strength for social and political activities.

The Intifada achievement, which was reflected in the peace process, caused a new source of hope for a while.

Post-Intifada, Peace Process (1993 - 1997)

The effect of the so-called “peace process” upon Palestinians in Israel and especially upon Palestinian women, is very complicated to be described in a paragraph. However, one result that was clear is that women's activities, during that period, concentrate increasingly on women's issues, and on support systems for women in distress (such as

women suffering from physical and sexual violence). In addition, Palestinian women in Israel become increasingly involved in political parties, raising new demands to be part of the decision-making process. This was evident in the election in May 1996, and the years after. One of these effects is to see in the election, for the first time in its history, of a woman³⁶ to share in the decision-making processes of the Follow-up Committee on Arab Education, an NGO which is a national body working towards the development of Palestinian education in Israel and the election of the first women in the Israeli Parliament.

This process of increasing women's political participation is also accompanied by the institutionalization of the Islamic fundamentalist movement. This movement, largely, threatens many achievements of Palestinian women over the years. However, at the same time, we believe that it challenges women who recognize this threat to actively take part in controlling their own lives.

Another effect is the increase in Palestinian NGOs which deal directly with Palestinian citizen of Israel national and civil rights. These NGOs are increasingly studying the discrimination policy of Israel towards the Palestinians citizen and developing different new strategies, such as lobby and advocacy efforts, legal process as well as international advocacy. This is combined with an effort to develop a new discourse, which presents our history and our current political demands in clear forms.

This process faced different obstacles especially the continues confrontation between the Palestinian people and their struggle for self determination and the unwillingness of the Israeli governments to pick peace as strategically choice and was cut shortly by the second intifada.

The Second Intifada 2000 until Today

The accumulated experiences of dehumanization and discrimination experienced by the Palestinian People in west bank and Gaza; the threat on their existents by the Israeli military and Israeli settlers and settlements; as well as the faille of the Palestinian authority to bring about a real change in the daily living conditions of the people, caused a lot of frustration within the Palestinian People. The provocative visit of Sharon to Alaksa signed the outbreak of the second Intifada.

³⁶ Dr. Hala Hazzan, a member of 'The Working Group on the Status of Palestinian Women,' which prepared this report, is a women who was elected in 1995 as Chairperson of The Follow-up Committee on Arab Education (a senior decision-making position).

The Palestinian citizen of Israel expressed their protest in demonstration in all the country. The Israeli police faced these legal protests with brutality and killed 13 person and hundred were injured and jailed.

The Israeli public opinion reacted in an alarming way. It seemed that the entire democratic structure of the state was collapsing. Even the peace movement and especially the mainstream "peace now" movement needed several weeks to react to the violation of human rights in west bank and Gaza and within Israel.³⁷

Palestinian women in Israel are facing daily very difficult challenges:

- The challenge of living and struggling against discrimination, national and sexist discrimination.
- The challenge of living in a society with fundamentalist forces and with globalization effect.
- The challenge to struggle for democracy, and against racism and sexism of any kind.
- The challenge of keeping one's human sanity.
- The challenge of being Palestinian in a state that define itself as the state of the Jews and is in each day reoccupying, killing, and demolishing the infrastructure of our people.
- The challenge to struggle for all that in a peaceful and political means.
- The challenge to struggle for life in a reality which is killing the hope for life even by children.

³⁷ Nabila Espanioly: Nightmare; in Nahla Abdo and Ronit Lebtin (eds) Women and the politics of Military confrontation. PP 100-110

