



A DANGEROUS DECADE

The 2nd Gender Profile of the
Occupied West Bank & Gaza
(2000–2010)



Institute for Women's Studies, Birzeit University

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INTRODUCTION

A Decade of Catastrophe

Rema Hammami

INTRODUCTION

A Decade of Catastrophe

Rema Hammami

For Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the past decade has been one of catastrophic events. First came the collapse of the flawed Oslo peace process in the form of spectacular military violence with the Israeli army killing more than 270 Palestinians in three months in 2000, the majority of them unarmed demonstrators (Hass, 2003). Soon to follow was the international isolation and de-legitimation of the Palestinian leadership and the near-collapse of the fragile institutions of Palestinian self-rule. Simultaneously, Israel's comprehensive economic siege and a crushing mobility regime delivered the majority of the population into a degree of poverty not known since the outset of the occupation. The debilitating network of hundreds of checkpoints and barriers surrounding communities was buttressed by the building of a huge separation Wall that succeeded in annexing ten percent of the West Bank to Israel. And then the iconic leader of the Palestinian national movement, Yasser Arafat, died in mysterious circumstances. In the context of the ensuing power vacuum, Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza, Palestinian parliamentary elections were held, and their outcome brought into the open a deeply divided polity that in Gaza ultimately resolved itself through unprecedented internal violence. And throughout all this, Israel's ongoing everyday violence was punctuated by periods of full-scale military destruction—"Defensive Shield," the 2002 invasion of West Bank towns, and "Cast Lead," Israel's comprehensive attack and invasion of Gaza in December - January 2008/2009 being only the two most devastating instances.

The circumstances that Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza inhabit in 2010 are not simply vastly worse than the preceding conditions; instead, the society, polity, and territorial world that Palestinians now inhabit bear little resemblance to the recent past given how radically the events of the last decade have re-structured them. The main mechanisms for this transformation have been Israeli policy, most fundamentally its potent arsenal

comprised of military violence, economic siege and sanctions combined with territorial control. In this vortex, social and economic life has been profoundly de-stabilized and so too normative gender roles, relations and expectations. As Palestinian households fell victim to ongoing destruction of their livelihoods and the absence of everyday security, many of the former roles and arrangements between men and women and mutual expectations linked to them were placed under severe stress. The question that remains is: in what ways has the intensity and magnitude of political, social and economic violence over the decade decomposed previous gender arrangements, and to what extent have new ones emerged in their place?

While Israel has long used similar policies to suppress and control the population and geography in order to further its project of colonial expansion in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), these policies' intensity and magnitude since 2000 has been of a qualitatively different order compared to the past.

First was the magnitude of Israeli military violence used against the occupied population. In the first week of the 2000 uprising alone, the Israeli armed forces used more than one million military projectiles against largely unarmed protestors (Kaspit, 2002). Israel then went on (for the first time since its occupation began in 1967) to use its entire arsenal of conventional weapons of war against the population, including F-16 fighter jets, Apache helicopters, drones, Merkava tanks and phosphorous bombs. The outcome in terms of loss of human life has been unprecedented. While the Palestinian death toll from direct Israeli gunfire at the end of the First Intifada (1997 - approx. 1993) was higher than 1,000, the Palestinian death toll in the Second Intifada was more than 7,000 by mid-2010 (B'tselem). Similarly, more than 40 percent (10,111) of the approximately 25,000 Palestinian homes demolished by Israel since 1967

were destroyed in the Second Intifada. Post-2000, 75 percent of those demolitions were carried out during direct military action (ICAHD, 2010).

While both men and women have suffered personal violence and loss perpetrated by the Israeli military, these are differentiated by gender. The vast majority of Palestinian casualties at the hands of the Israeli military have been Palestinian men and boys. As such, one can't assume that militarism everywhere privileges men and masculinity at the expense of women. Rather, in a situation of colonial violence like that of Palestine, the opposite may be true—men and boys are made most vulnerable as the primary targets of Israeli violence. And given that it is a man's primary gender responsibility to provide a secure and safe home for his family, it is clear that Israeli military action and policy (including the policy of home demolition) presents insurmountable challenges for Palestinian men in achieving even their most basic masculine responsibilities. In contrast, for women and girls, militarism is largely experienced through the loss of husbands, fathers, sons, brothers and breadwinners—along with the allied impacts these have on their normative gender roles and wellbeing.

The second form of Israeli policy, which is also the most significant for the long-term, has been its use of spatial and economic forms of violence. The infrastructure for the territorial containment of the population has been an ever-evolving part of Israel's occupation from 1967. But in the post-2000 period, Israel's complex "matrix of control" over the oPt has reached globally unprecedented levels. Control is maintained through a host of physical blockades that include the vast network of military checkpoints, military buffers and "seam zones," settler-only roads, the fence (around Gaza) and the Wall within the West Bank. Added to this is the system of bureaucratic restrictions made up of residency policies and the permit regime. The outcome has been a radical contraction of Palestinians' access to their own geography, as well as to each other. No longer is the "occupied Palestinian territory" as enshrined in international law a unitary territory; instead Israel has succeeded in concretizing its' fragmentation into three main territorial units (Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem) with movement between any of them a total impossibility for the vast majority of the population. Within the West Bank, there is even

further fragmentation—with towns and villages corralled into an archipelago of more than 30 disconnected "cantons," each cordoned off from the other by the infrastructure of military obstacles. The logic of this geography of fragmentation and containment is primarily about enabling Israel's project of colonial expansion, as attested to by the data on land alienation in the West Bank. By 2002, 42 percent of the West Bank was under the control of Israeli settlements and allied military infrastructure (B'tselem 2002, 16) and in Bethlehem governorate, for example, 87 percent of the total land area is off-limits to its Palestinian residents (OCHA, 2009: 4).

The impact of this geography of incarceration and disinheritance on Palestinian well-being has been best documented in terms of economic impoverishment. As well, human rights organizations have documented the resulting denial of access to basic rights such as health and education. Such geography's political impacts are only too clear when viewing the manner in which physical separation translated into political polarization between the West Bank and Gaza following the 2007 elections. But while the dynamics of its more longstanding effects in terms of social and cultural fragmentation are still a long way from being understood, it is already apparent that it might have multiple and contradictory interactions with gender. In some circumstances, the mobility regime privileges males over females—for instance, the largest categories allowed access to Israel by the permit regime are "male" categories of workers and merchants. But the converse can also be true, as women are often more able to harness soldiers' assumptions about their identities as mothers or as "the weaker sex" in order to tactically negotiate through obstacles and restrictions. It is among young women especially, however, that one can see the way that the mobility regime has gendered impacts when, for instance, the existence of checkpoints and the proximity of settlements leads to heightened social insecurity and much greater restrictions on their mobility.

The third critical dimension of Israeli violence towards the population over the past decade has been its destruction of economic livelihoods. Like mobility restrictions, economic restrictions marked the period prior to 2000, but became a full-scale weapon of war following the outbreak of the Second Intifada. Wrought through a multi-layered

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series of actions that include direct military destruction, siege effects of the mobility regime, and ultimately outright economic embargo and sanctions, these forces and their impact have also been unprecedented. By 2005, the destruction of physical infrastructure and private and public property alone is estimated to have cost the economy around \$3.5 billion, equivalent to 30 percent of pre-2000 capital stock (UNCTAD, 2005). By 2006 per capita GDP had sunk lower than it had been a decade earlier. Poverty jumped dramatically, increasing from 1998 when one-fifth of the population was under the poverty line to a full third of the population living in poverty by 2006 and more than half of Gazans living in poverty by mid-decade (see Hilal chapter). Thus, from being a middle income developing country at the end of the 1990s, Palestinians a decade later find themselves massively dependent on international food aid (World Bank, 2009: 13). Surviving the immiseration of their livelihoods has perhaps been the most profound, transformative and enduring challenge for Palestinian households over the past decade—one that has created a radical shift in perceptions of household breadwinning. Long-term structural unemployment of male wage laborers over the decade has made the previous model of household reliance on the income of a sole male breadwinner untenable. This has resulted in a host of new livelihood strategies. For instance, increased investments in women's higher education (to enable their access to employment) and a growing preference among young men for employed wives suggest the degree to which the society perceives households comprised of dual-income earning spouses as the only way to secure basic living standards. The knock-on effects of this shift can already be seen in rising ages of marriage among young women, as well as in declining fertility levels.

While the scale of Israeli policies (both separately or taken together) is unprecedented, the policies themselves are not. Many of the harshest features of Israeli control, as well as Palestinian responses to it that we see now were crystallized in the context of the previous "peace process" decade. During that period, the shape of Palestinian society, its political institutions, spatial world and economic life underwent a highly contentious process of re-structuring overseen by powerful forces of "international legitimacy." On the spatial level, the Oslo accords instituted the fragmenta-

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tion of Palestinian geography in the West Bank and Gaza. The West Bank was divided by the whole array of settlements and settler infrastructure into Areas A, B and C, while separation of the oPt into three main zones (East Jerusalem, Gaza and the remainder of the West Bank) became an ongoing feature of everyday life. Politically, this period oversaw the re-structuring of the former national liberation movement into a local autonomy government, the newly-formed Palestinian Authority (PA), given an extremely narrow set of powers, with no control over land, resources, borders or foreign policy. The accords also ironically set the stage for the internal militarization of Palestinian life—with the first-time creation of Palestinian security forces that, until 2000, were primarily responsible for internal policing of the population and putting down resistance to Israel's expanding colonialism.

Finally, with the Oslo accords came the radical re-structuring of Palestinian economic life. Over the 1990s began the ever-growing closure of access to the Israeli labor market that had previously been the cornerstone of Palestinian employment for more than thirty years. Households (especially in Gaza) were hit by levels of unemployment not witnessed since the beginning of the occupation. Both the donor community and the newly-formed PA became overwhelmed with responding to the ensuing economic crisis (and its related political turmoil); "job creation," either through donor "make-works programs" or public sector employment (mostly in the security services), became ongoing crisis management stand-ins, preempting the possibility for wider visions of economic development and possibilities. Thus, while the peace process was supposed to herald in an expansion of citizen rights for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, in actuality it led to a much narrower provision of some formal rights, and an

extremely gendered exclusionary policy towards economic rights and entitlements.

This backdrop of the Oslo period is important for understanding the root causes of the 2000 Second Intifada, but is also critical for understanding why the Second Intifada took the shape that it did and had the types of impacts and outcomes on different levels of life in the oPt. While the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is often viewed as an exceptional case in international relations and conflict studies, it shares a surprising number of characteristics with what has come to be called “Complex Political Emergencies” (CPEs), a concept developed to reflect the new characteristics of conflicts that arose in sub-Saharan African and the Balkans in the 1990s. In contrast to conventional inter-state wars, a main feature of CPEs is that the vast majority of victims are not armed combatants but civilian populations. While the apt framework for understanding Israel’s overall project is settler colonialism, other features of CPE’s relevant to the context of the oPt include:

1. CPEs comprise a hybrid of state and non-state actors. Conflicts often take place simultaneously within and across state boundaries and combine state and non-state actors and combatants (Goodhand and Hulme, 1999).

Israel is a sovereign state, occupying the land and stateless population of the West Bank and Gaza for more than 40 years. The PA is solely a governing authority, with none of the attributes or powers of a sovereign state. The huge imbalance in power between the two—in which Israel is in control of the land, water resources, airspace, the functioning of the economy, rights to citizenship or simply the everyday mobility of Palestinians—accounts for both why mass unrest broke out among Palestinians in October 2000 and why the nature of Israeli response was able to be so all-encompassing and impact all aspects of Palestinian life. Clearly, both Palestinian non-violent resistance and militarism in all its forms has been a product of profound military impotence in the face of the Israeli Defense Forces’ (IDF’s) immense military power. This becomes crucial in understanding the varying challenges that Palestinian men faced, both to their masculine identities as protectors and defenders of their families and communities as well as in their expected roles as liberators of their nation. The military impotence of competing militia

groups vis-à-vis Israel, may also help explain why “resistance” violence evolved into internal violence and ultimately a phase of civil war in Gaza.

2. CPEs are all-encompassing. Unlike conventional war, there are no front lines but violence involves every dimension of society and the lives of the people who are part of them. In comparison to conventional inter-state war, the victims of CPEs are overwhelmingly civilian non-combatants, as well as civilian life (Goodhand and Hulme, 1999).

As suggested thus far, the means that Israel used to suppress the Second Intifada have indeed been all-encompassing, making little or no distinction between Palestinian civilians and combatants. The Wall and checkpoint regime are the most obvious cases in point—ostensibly set up to thwart “militants”, instead they obstruct the most basic movement of the entire population. Similarly, the economic siege and ongoing sanctions regime imposed on Gaza have been universal in their application to the whole population, with basic medicines, school supplies, numerous foodstuffs and everyday household items being as criminalized as weaponry. But perhaps the starkest examples are apparent during periods of open military invasion—in which the IDF’s battlefield encompasses private homes, residential neighborhoods and (in the case of the war on Gaza), even United Nations schools where families sought shelter from IDF bombing. As the statistics on the numbers of homes destroyed by Israeli military action since 2000 indicate, there is no space that is a safe haven for the population from Israeli military violence—instead such violence has and continues to permeate every facet of civilian life. This refusal to distinguish between civilians and combatants was ultimately translated into the IDF’s rules of war; with more than half of the 1,400 Gazans killed by Israel in “Operation Cast Lead” civilians (including more than 250 children), Israeli commanders admitted that the rules of engagement prioritized Israeli soldiers’ lives over possible civilian deaths (Donald Macintyre, 2010). And in the vast majority of media coverage only the death toll of women and young children were counted as “civilian deaths” while males, regardless of age or military status, were all counted as “militants.”

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3. Resource conflict: Sometimes called resource wars, unequal access to and competition for power and scarce resources are usually a central dynamic and prime political causality (Goodhand and Hulme, 1999).

Israel's occupation has not been a "temporary" military presence for over 41 years, but has involved a massive settlement project and its allied infrastructure that, by 2007, had taken up 50 percent of the land area of the West Bank, radically re-organizing and restricting Palestinian geography in the process. Here, the resource at the center of the conflict is Palestinian land and (to a lesser extent) water. This explains everything from why the proposed resolution of the conflict (the Oslo peace process) was designed the way it was, why it failed and why during it, but especially after its breakdown, Israel segregated Palestinian communities into a series of fragmented archipelagos under a system that has been deemed "...one of the most intensively territorialized control systems ever created" (Delaney, 2005: 144). As countless analysts have noted, the logic and configuration of Israel's mobility regime including checkpoints and the building of the Wall, has more to do with extending, protecting and annexing its settlements than it has to do with ensuring its citizens' security within the Green Line. The outcome of loss of land and slow destruction of communities due to un-ending geographic siege and fragmentation, along with the threat or actual violence by nearby soldiers and settlers, has profoundly re-shaped all aspects of Palestinian social, economic and political life over the past decade. Fear of settler or military attack, loss of access to agricultural lands, the splitting up of families and communities through the building of the Wall, or the heightened fears of giving birth due to the existence of a checkpoint are just a few of the myriad ways in which control over land at the center of the conflict can impact entire communities, households and the gender roles and arrangements within them.

4. Protracted duration: Seldom are these crises temporary, after which society returns to normal, because they tend to be embedded in, and expressions of, existing social, political, economic and cultural structures and cleavages (Goodhand and Hulme, 1999).

In terms of duration, while we continue to talk of the last decade as one dominated by Israeli military violence, Israeli structural violence (through policies such as settlement, home demolition, imprisonment, and expulsion) against Palestinians has been ongoing since at least 1967 (if not 1948). And of the last 33 years, in only seven of them (between 1993 and 2000) was there a relative hiatus from Israel's open use of military violence against the population. In terms of the future, we need to recognize (as the population does) that the current configuration of Israeli control through its militarily-imposed reservation-like system seems to be permanently entrenched. After a decade, its logic is not simply short-run anti-insurgency but rather a more permanent logic of rendering Palestinian communities unsustainable environments for their inhabitants. The consciousness of this has already had its impacts: among parents, it has increasingly led to greater investment in children's education as the only permanent and portable asset they can provide them; for others it has led to actual attempts or simply hopes to emigrate. In many circumstances, it has also meant a radical re-shaping of marital choices—with identity cards, permits and the simple possibility of residing together in the future increasingly becoming determining factors in the selection of a spouse.

I. Outcomes: Salient Characteristics of Palestinian Society in 2010

Given this complex backdrop, what are the salient characteristics of Palestinian society as it enters the second decade of the twenty-first century?

A high degree of external intervention with its correlate—a low degree of self-determination or autonomy.

Israel, through its vast military/bureaucratic machinery continues to hold comprehensive and decisive power over all spheres of Palestinian life. Through Israel's control over external borders and the population registry and its internal mobility regime, all aspects of Palestinian decision-making continue to be determined by the limited horizons that Israeli power allows. Thus, on the political level, holding Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC)

elections is dependent on whether Israel allows them. Israel can also simply dispense with democratic outcomes, as it did following the 2007 PLC elections, when it imprisoned the majority of democratically-elected Hamas representatives. On the level of day-to-day governance, both the West Bank and Gaza governments are incapable of undertaking most of the basic responsibilities of government anywhere. They cannot decide who is a “citizen” or who simply enters or leaves the areas under their ostensible control. They cannot undertake basic protection functions, with rights limited to internal and civil policing. Most aspects of economic planning (such as internal and external trade and economic development strategies) are beyond their control. Land and natural resource policy, urban planning and infrastructure are all confined within the physical limits of Areas A and B, which are also enforced by Israeli mandate.

While totally vulnerable to Israeli intervention, Palestinians and their governments are also extremely vulnerable to international actors. Rather than carrying through their responsibilities under international humanitarian law (and specifically the Geneva Conventions) to protect the occupied population, external actors have intervened primarily to affect the political behavior or determine the viability of the Palestinian leadership. Since 2000, international aid has accounted for between 53 percent to nearly 163 percent of annual Palestinian government expenditures (GE), attesting to the degree that the oPt is structurally dependent on external financial support (MAS, 2009: 16). This aid has fluctuated dramatically, with higher aid flows during periods of “humanitarian” emergency (such as during 2002, the watershed year of Israeli military invasions in the West Bank, when it reached 162 percent of GE) as well as when there is a political investment in a standing government. For example, following 2008, support for the West Bank-centered Palestinian Authority was reflected in a 16 percent jump in donor aid as a percent of GE (MAS, 2009: 16). Low international support likewise corresponds with displeasure with Palestinian political behavior, such as following the outcome of the 2006 PLC elections and the creation of a national unity government between Fateh and Hamas, when aid was almost completely stopped.

The outcome of this high degree of external intervention and lack of autonomy is the extremely

narrowed scope within which Palestinians are able to exercise free will, independent decision-making and agency. On the level of government, this is obvious. For instance, in terms of gender, government policy remains severely constrained, restricted to the limited areas of life and population under its jurisdiction while simultaneously unable to freely prioritize resources for gendered ends, given its total aid-dependence on international donors. But it is also apparent in terms of households and their members. Many of the most basic decisions of life—where to live, work or study within the family’s own patrimony—are beyond the ability to choose. As much, the most intimate life decision of who to marry or whether to have another child is often completely constrained by the crippling realities of residency requirements and movement restrictions. And dealing with limited life choices always involves calculations based on gender—usually at the expense of the weaker parties of girls and women.

A High Degree of Securitization without Protection

At present, PA security forces in the West Bank are comprised of approximately 23,000 personnel, while in Gaza the Hamas government has a separate force comprised of approximately 25,000 (Milton-Edwards, 2009). This means a police to civilian population ratio of approximately one to 60 in Gaza and one to 110 in the West Bank, while in liberal democracies the ratio on average is one to 500. Given that in unstable post-conflict situations such as Kosovo the ratio is one to 404, it is clear that Palestinians have one of the highest police-to-civilian ratios in the world (Last et al., 2009: 13, 31). As noted in Penny Johnson’s chapter, while unable to offer protection against Israeli aggression, the security services are also unable to provide the protection of even civil policing to many communities.

The gendered implications of securitization without security are myriad. On the economic level, the security sector budget takes up the majority of government resources at the expense of health, social security and education. Security sector jobs are profoundly gender-exclusionary—as the largest employer within the PA and Hamas public sectors, the security agencies are almost completely closed to women. And given that women’s dress and behavior are often the prime targets of “social

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policing,” the gender divide in terms of who is policing and socially policed is obvious.

Shrinking Space for Public Action: A Domesticated Public Sphere

Israel controls the narrow confines in which Palestinian public action is even possible; outside the confines of Area A, public action (even when visibly non-violent such as in the villages of Ni’ilin and Bi’lin, or in East Jerusalem) has to contend with Israeli military brutality and bureaucratic sanctions. But within the confines of Area A and within Gaza, the space for public action also continues to narrow—partly as a result of the skewed nature of Palestinian securitization. Given that the Palestinian security forces are neither able to undertake nationalist resistance nor provide protection from the fundamental threats to the civilian population (from Israeli soldiers, settlers or Israeli policy more generally), in both geographical regions they have become ever more focused on internally policing the population—politically, ideologically or socially. In the process, in both the West Bank and Gaza, the public sphere becomes more and more devoid of space for public criticism of either the standing government or its policies and particularly (but not only) in Gaza, the security forces increasingly narrow the space for social freedom.

Though the deeper causes of this are rooted in the conflict between Hamas and Fateh (see below), with each government quick to interpret public criticism as linked to the conflict with its rival, other forces (or their absence) also contribute to the shrinking space for public criticism and action. Particularly crucial in this process has been the way that the Palestinian political field has lost the presence of effective countervailing political forces (historically the role played by leftist PLO factions), with the current host of small independent parties now unable to play this role vis-à-vis the two main contending government parties. This same period has witnessed the coming to prominence of non-governmental organization (NGO) institutions, actors and discourses, which since the 1990s have come to dominate what remains of a national public sphere. Though too complex a set of issues to be to be dealt with here, a host of analysts have suggested that Palestinian NGOs now domesticated by international humanitarian or developmental agendas no longer offer alternatives to the narrow

vision of donor-led state-building, but rather help to reproduce it (Hammami, 2000; Hanafi and Tabar, 2005; Jad, 2007). In the process, they have structurally taken over the role of “civil society”, have filled the space for public activism with NGO-style projects and have come to dominate the political field of local public criticism with NGO discourse that is largely apolitical. The hard-won struggle for an autonomous women’s rights movement has not escaped this political fate.

Growing Social Fragmentation and Socio-Economic Inequality

Over the decade, the separation of the oPt into three main geo-political units has become institutionalized. Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank have lived in separate economies and under vastly different political/ bureaucratic regimes (the PA, Hamas’ government, or direct Israeli rule). Given the ongoing enclavization in the West Bank, everyday lives, social and economic possibilities and futures are now vastly different from each other, depending on whether they are centered in an urban center, in Area C, in the Jordan Valley or in a seam zone community caught between the Wall and Israel. This means not only that life chances are increasingly determined by specific geographic settings, but that these processes have led to Palestinian society as a whole becoming increasingly differentiated and unequal.

On the one hand, social and economic circumstances, cultural and political outlooks and identities have evolved separately in dis-connected contexts. The social, cultural and economic ties that used to bring Palestinians from diverse backgrounds and regions into regular contact with each other have been all but severed. Simply put: Gazan students no longer exist in the West Bank; national conferences have long ceased to happen in Jerusalem; and the majority of the West Bank population has never stepped foot on Gaza’s shore. While older generations have the memory of a time when their society was both more pluralistic and cohesive, for most youth, social fragmentation and cultural sameness have been their dominant life experience.

Along with growing social fragmentation, there is also growing economic inequality. As the various chapters in this profile show, for instance that the

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longstanding socio-economic differences between the West Bank and Gaza, rooted in the legacy of 1948, have in the twenty-first century become immense chasms. But while there is much data about the massive rise in poverty over the decade, there is little showing its correlate: economic privilege. In terms of housing infrastructure and consumer goods and services, the presence of wealth has become more visible in cities such as Ramallah (made conspicuous through luxurious housing, cars, consumer outlets and restaurants). Though the presence of wealth itself may not be new, its social visibility is. Until recently, sharp class distinctions (accepted as the norm throughout much of the Middle East) were in the Palestinian context hidden and subdued as part of the nationalist ethic of social equality and solidarity. Taking these two trends together, widening poverty and the visibility of wealth suggest the degree to which class distinctions are both more pronounced and more worryingly and may be increasingly accepted as the social norm.

The Collapse of a Unified National Project and the Rise of a Polarized Polity

Finally, perhaps the greatest challenge facing Palestinians in 2010 is the collapse of their most hard-won and longstanding achievement: their unity as a polity under the national movement as represented by the PLO. The breakdown of the unified national movement into two rival govern-

ments can only be understood as a product of the various processes outlined above. Long-term geographic fragmentation between the West Bank and Gaza, the array of negative interventions by powerful outside forces (most crucially of Israel and the US), as well as the skewed and problematic role of internal security forces all contributed in various ways to this outcome. As well, the profound contradictions in the Oslo peace process played a central role. Once the national liberation movement became transformed into an autonomy government (dominated by Israeli security conditions and solely dependent on forever-stalled negotiations with its occupiers), it at once condemned resistance politics and became incapable of representing Palestinians everywhere. At the same time, all of the issues linked to liberation remained profoundly salient. As such, it is no wonder that a rival movement emerged so powerfully from the wreckage of Oslo and in many ways took up the mantle of national liberation and resistance politics (though in Islamist terms).

However, the collapse of the national movement is not just another outcome of these powerful forces that have succeeded in disinheritng Palestinians from their patrimony and national rights into the twenty-first century. Instead, achieving a unified national movement is the fundamental pre-condition for finding a way forward and beyond them.

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PALESTINIAN WOMEN IN POLITICS Fragmentation and Flawed Governance

Islah Jad

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The political and public life of Palestinian women has been influenced by a number of factors, most importantly successive waves of occupation of Palestine by various forms of colonization; the evolution and growth of the Palestinian national resistance movement; development of the national movement (later the Palestinian Authority); and the evolution and growth of the feminist movement.

This chapter presents and analyses the most important developments in and influences on the political life of women in the occupied Palestinian territory (the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including Jerusalem) over the last decade, i.e., since the start of the Second Intifada. The role of women in politics, at both the official and non-official levels, is touched on from the perspective of citizenship. Impacts on the situation of women by legislative, legal, cultural, economic and political structures are also analyzed. The position of women in the ministries, in particular the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and executive bodies, as well as in the legislative branch, the judiciary, and in local and municipal councils is dealt with, while at the non-official level, unions and non-governmental organizations are considered.

This chapter argues that there have been important achievements at the official political level. These are exemplified by the establishment of the first Ministry for Women's Affairs in 2003, introduction of a quota for women in local elections in 2004 and in parliamentary elections in 2006, and adoption of Resolution 1325 on protection of women in conflict situations. Nonetheless, the colonial context of the Palestinian Authority has rendered it weak and ineffectual. With no control over resour-

es, or indeed its own fate, it has proven largely unable to satisfy the demands of women for freedom, equality and full citizenship and has at the same time weakened the political parties and social movements, including the feminist movement, that were organized within the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Moreover, the breakup of the Palestinian political system leading to two governments, one in the West Bank and the other in the Gaza Strip, has engendered dynamics in both government and society that lead to fragmentation of women's organizational capability, which, in turn, has weakened their ability to contribute to their own liberation or to that of the country, while impairing their achievements. Furthermore, as will be pointed out later, some women have also contributed to the perpetuation of the schism.

General Framework: Oslo Agreements and the Political Situation

The Oslo accords have rendered the Palestinian Authority hostage to Israeli occupation authorities, especially subsequent to the breakup of the final status negotiations in 1999, which led to the Second Intifada in the following year. The economic part of the accords, known as the Paris Protocol, left the Palestinian economy and all development aspirations hostage to Israel. As Jamil Hilal points out in this volume, poverty rates reached unprecedented levels, rising from 20 percent in 1998 to 30 percent in 2006. Adoption by the Palestinian Authority of an economic policy based on a market economy and privatization made

matters worse, exacerbating class differences in society in general, between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in particular, and between the north and south of the West Bank in contrast with its central region.

The Palestinian political system and Palestinian political life have been subjected to Israeli interpretations of the Oslo accords, based on (as pointed out by Hammami in this volume) the concept of “gained sovereignty,” which assumes that direct negotiations are the only means open to Palestinians for achieving freedom and self-determination. Moreover, an emphasis on security, with the Palestinian Authority consigned to the role of ensuring the security of the occupiers and the settlers, has eroded Palestinian civil liberties and constrained the public realm available to political parties holding an opposing view. Profound differences within the Palestinian national movement have resulted.

The weakness and fragmentation of the Palestinian national movement has resulted in the failure to build a political system based on elections and the rotation of power in place of the “revolutionary legitimacy” of the factional quota system of the PLO. The legislative elections in 2006, and the subsequent Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip, have resulted in political separation being superimposed on the geographical separation between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with the political schism leading to two separate political entities in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The chasm has to a great extent altered the priorities of women in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and has impaired their capabilities, as will be elaborated in the following examples.

Case I: Official Policy after 2000

The Ministry of Women's Affairs and Gender Mainstreaming in a Situation of Conflict

With the decline of the Palestinian national movement subsequent to the Oslo agree-

ments, and the resulting weakness of its constituent organizations and parties (Jad 2008), the national mechanism for gender mainstreaming, i.e., the Ministry of Women's Affairs, was founded in 2003 during the difficult conditions of re-occupation and the destruction of all that had been built since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. Most national mechanisms for the integration of a gender agenda are established in a stable state having full sovereignty. The first Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs formulated a similar agenda, ignoring the state of occupation and conflict. Moreover, the later breakup of the Palestinian Authority in two led to two diametrically opposed approaches: one in the West Bank emphasizing nation- and democracy-building and one in the Gaza Strip giving priority to the mobilization and empowerment of women in the resistance and defense of Palestinian rights and existence.

The impact of the ongoing instability on work on gender mainstreaming and the priorities of the Ministry of Women's Affairs can be analyzed as falling into three phases:

Phase I: The Formative Stage—2003

The Ministry of Women's Affairs based its 2004 Plan on the 1997 National Strategy for the Advancement of Palestinian Women, which was based on international and regional conference documents, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against (CEDAW, 1979) and the resolutions of the Beijing Conference of 1995. However, the 1997 strategy reflected the approach and vision of feminist activists and the General Union of Palestinian Women at the time, hence a focus on national liberation, the role of women in opposing occupation, and the mobilization of international cooperation and solidarity to expose the crimes of occupation against women in particular and Palestinian people in general.

Nonetheless, a change in mission and vision regarding national liberation and gender mainstreaming led to a clear shift in emphasis

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towards “construction and development of the democratic Palestinian homeland, and consolidation of an effective civil society governed by national, cultural and humanitarian values” (Ministry of Women’s Affairs, 2004). The three key objectives of the plan centered on a “social agenda” consisting of: securing a government commitment to mainstream gender, democracy and human rights issues in the policies, plans and programs of the various ministries, as well as in legislation and regulations; linking lobbying activities to the development of policies and laws; and building a network of relationships with governmental and international women’s organizations and human rights groups to exchange experiences in applying international conventions on women and human rights, particularly the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, 2004). The plan also focused heavily on the institutionalization of the Ministry’s work and on incorporating it within the body of government through an organizational structure, human resources and a budget.

Phase II: Political Divide—2005 - 2007

The subsequent 2005–2007 plan focused on educational, vocational and technical training of young women; support for women’s access to decision-making positions; and poverty of young women, especially heads of households. These goals were based on the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as on consultation with governmental and other non-governmental institutions. Once again, this plan focused on development and capacity building, with an emphasis on women’s access to decision-making positions, which was popular among women working in the various ministries, supporting them in their efforts to improve their job positions.

With the legislative elections in 2006, the Islamic movement, Hamas, came to power. The first Islamist Minister of Women’s Affairs¹ set out to

¹ Mariam Saleh, the first minister of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs in the tenth government (March 29, 2006 to February 15, 2007) spoke to leaders of women’s

provide assurances. However, ambiguity or lack of clarity over the positions of Hamas vis-à-vis the demands of the feminist movement raised doubts in the minds of some feminist activists. For example, several meetings were held for women leaders, coordinated by The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH), to understand the reasons behind the political “turning of the tables”. The meetings called for a review of the work and discourse of women’s organizations in order to extract lessons. Elitism of feminist work and its focus on educated groups of women in the central West Bank was criticized, emphasizing a need to change the means of communication with women in general. There was no acknowledgement, however, of the importance of opening dialogue with the official newcomer (minutes of MIFTAH meetings, 2006).

The two Hamas ministers introduced amendments to the vision of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs. Notwithstanding a continued prioritization of the fight against discrimination against women in the community and the need to support equality, anti-violence and legal reform efforts (as indicated in the earlier strategic plans), a new element was added, directing the work of the ministry towards support for certain groups of women, mainly young women and the wives and families of killed Palestinians, detainees and prisoners. This trend was to later become the main focus of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs in Gaza after the split between Fatah and Hamas in June 2007. Islamist ministers’ leadership of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs led to paralysis resulting from internal conflicts that derived mainly from political rejection of the newcomers.

Phase III: An Entrenched Divide—2007 and Beyond

After the political split, and in a newly-charged political environment, a fresh strategy for the Ministry of Women’s Affairs was developed for

organizations on November 5, 2006 (Al-Quds newspaper, 2006). Amal Siam, her successor in the Government of National Unity (the eleventh government), which was formed on March 17, 2007 and ended with Hamas’ takeover of the Gaza Strip on June 14, 2007, also called for a meeting with women’s organizations and unions, but only a few responded (Al Hayat al Jadidah newspaper, 2007).

2008-2010. The focus returned to the earlier priorities, with an added new one: combating violence, mainly domestic, against women and building an appropriate related strategy for the period 2011-2015. Worthy of mention here is the reference to UN Security Council Resolution 1325, under which Palestinian women can file complaints concerning the violence of the Israeli occupation to international bodies, especially the International Criminal Court. The new strategy promoted government efforts to put into effect Resolution 1325 and its clauses related to the participation of women in conflict resolution and peace-building. The recommendations did not address how this might be achieved, however.

The political division led the ministry to shift its focus away from the strategic needs of women (understood to be legal reform and an impact on policy-making) towards meeting the practical needs of women and implementing relief policies. This shift was reluctant since, according to the 2009 national report of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, such policies were considered to be "often in conflict with 'social justice'" and with the "state building" aspirations of "mainly secular [non-governmental organizations]" (Palestinian National Report Beijing +15, 2009).

However, priorities soon changed again with the 2011-2013 strategy, which reverted to national issues, envisaging support for women in Jerusalem and women prisoners. The strategy included a number of sub-goals that were difficult to achieve within the specified period. Moreover, the priorities lacked consistency. Combating violence was understood to be directed at domestic violence, rather than violence perpetrated by the Israeli occupation, whether in the West Bank or Gaza Strip, despite the bloody war waged on the Gaza Strip in 2008-2009. Furthermore, low budget allocations did not reflect a real commitment to national issues. Out of a total budget of NIS 43,813,240 or about \$11 million, NIS 200,000 or 2.74 percent was allocated to family law and civil rights programming, while only NIS 128,400 (0.29 percent) was allocated to protecting the rights of women in Jerusalem and NIS 53,000 (0.12 percent) to supporting women prisoners.

Strategies of the Ministry of Women's Affairs were mainly based on the Declaration of Independence of 1988; Palestinian Basic Law; the Palestinian Women's Charter of 2008; international conven-

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tions, particularly CEDAW; and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 addressing women in times of war. The ministry made great efforts to raise awareness about these instruments, in particular Resolution 1325 and the Palestinian Women's Charter. It also succeeded in several other areas, the most important of which was the institutionalization of gender and women's issues in various ministries. Council of Ministers decision (15/12/09 M.W/A.Q) of 2005 urged ministries, particularly larger ones, to establish units for women's affairs, where needed and possible. This decision was not mandatory and unclear, however. The ministry later worked to amend it and specify clearer tasks and an organizational structure. On July 28, 2008, it succeeded in gaining approval for a name change for these groupings, from "women's units" to "gender units", and is working on implementing this change (Palestinian National Report Beijing +15, 2009). Nonetheless, ministries are not required to establish such units.

There are currently 20 gender units in various ministries and official institutions. Their status varies from one ministry to another, depending on the capacity of staff, their positions, and their influence, in addition to the overall vision of the ministry and the political will of the minister. They need more time, effort and capabilities to achieve their goals. Several continue to focus on women's access to decision-making positions, which translates to having more women in each ministry in senior or better positions. Some ministry units (such as in the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Local Government) have been active in forming coalitions with civil society activists in an effort to

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increase their influence, while some are still feeling their way.

The ministry also supported the establishment of women's "communication" centers in key provinces (Hebron, Nablus, Bethlehem, Jenin and Ramallah) through partnerships with civil, government, local, regional and international institutions designed to combat all forms of discrimination against women in all fields. According to documents issued by the ministry and the Palestinian Women's Charter, the aim is to empower women and enable them to participate in public life. Although undoubtedly, this is an important step in mainstreaming women's issues in decentralized arenas, these centers suffer from a lack of essential human and financial resources (Palestinian National Report Beijing +15, 2009). In addition, women and children's departments were added on April 4, 2007 by presidential decree to the structures of the various governorates, with the aim of supporting and developing the capabilities of women and children in all spheres: political, social and economic. These units were not allocated budgets, however, that would enable them to implement plans, programs and activities assigned to them, which, indeed, is a problem facing most of the structures that have been established to institutionalize gender.

Case 2: The Ministry of Women's Affairs in Gaza—Different Gender Priorities

The priorities of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in the Gaza Strip differ from those of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in the West Bank. The mission of the Gaza ministry was changed drastically to reflect a clear emphasis on the mobilization and organization of women, in addition to focusing on the implementation of projects and services for women. ("Report on the Ministry's Plan for 2010"). The plan indicated that the ministry is the female arm charged with implementing the approved government plan for detaching the Palestinian economy in the Gaza Strip from the Israeli economy by strengthening the internal capacities of the economy, achieving food security, and creating jobs for young people, while improving the legal and legislative environment for women, especially the marginalized, and providing them with services

("Ministry of Women's Affairs Plan," 2010). Thus, the ministry did not see its role as limited to planning and influencing policymaking, as did the West Bank ministry. The latter has adopted a Gender and Development (JAD) approach, in contrast with the former's Women in Development (WID) approach relied upon by the former. Working within the WID framework, the Gaza ministry developed a plan for each segment of women, through studies presented at a conference that were ultimately aimed at producing a policy paper that would determine forms of intervention and change subscribed to by all related government institutions concerned (Ministry of Women's Affairs website, www.mowa.gov.ps).

The ministry plans give priority to women affected directly by the Israeli occupation: the widows of Palestinians killed by the Israeli occupation (martyrs), school and university students, school teachers, and children of martyrs. The ministry provides widows of martyrs with psychological, social, physical and legal support. For example, it sought to pass a law amending the period of maternal child custody so that "the judge may authorize the continuation of custody by the mother whose husband has died and who has dedicated herself to raising and nurturing her children, for the best interest of the child, provided the mother is capable, and on the condition of continued follow-up and care by blood relations" (*The Palestinian Gazette, Al Waqaea Al Filistinya*, No. 74: 39). Moreover, the ministry has sought to fill all legal gaps related to the rights of these women to dowry, alimony, custody, feeding and nursery fees and inheritance (Hashish, 2009).

The ministry has also focused on mobilizing young people to face Israeli occupation policies, while promoting in schools and universities virtuous family values derived from Islamic culture. Its plan has included numerous job creation projects for female university graduates in civil defense, first aid, and handling unexploded ordnance. It also engaged a large number of female university graduates in activities aimed at raising women's awareness of international treaties and conventions on women and presenting "the charter of women in Islam as a model for rights and duties" (Ministry of Women's Affairs Plan, 2010). The plan included publication of a semi-annual newspaper covering the steadfastness of women in the war on and the blockade of Gaza. In addition, it addressed young

families within the “cohesive and happy family despite the blockade” and developed a “portfolio suited for a happy family”, programs that offered families an integrated offering on the principles of relations between men and women that seem to address domestic violence, but within the context of Islamic culture. The plan also included several schemes to improve the legal status of women through proposals for amending family law, presenting a Palestinian Women’s Charter to the Legislative Council for its endorsement, and modifying items of the 2005 Civil Service Law to ensure equality of women in retirement. Moreover, the plan called for studies and scientific research on the social and economic situation of women that would serve as a basis for holding an annual conference. Programs were included to support the steadfastness of poor families by enabling them to find a permanent source of income through training in creating income-generating projects, the granting of loans and psychosocial training encouraging women to join the labor market. The plan also envisaged enabling women’s institutions to provide better services for women, through the establishment of a website (Al Shaqa-eq) providing advice, support and training on how to write project proposals and have access to funders, alongside the production of a set of documentary films on widows and female heads of households in an attempt to secure funding for development projects (Ministry of Women’s Affairs Plan, 2010). The budget of the ministry for the year 2010 was \$319,000.

The ministry relies on extensive relationships throughout the Arab and Muslim world to exchange experiences, but also to request support and funding. Ministry officials have participated in several Arab and Islamic conferences. The ministry is also associated with an extensive network of relationships aimed at communicating and exchanging information on the internet, where the ministry’s activities, plans and projects are documented. While communicating with the world, at least virtually, the two ministries in Gaza and the West Bank do not communicate with each other.

In summary, the vision and methodology of the West Bank ministry are different from those of the Gaza ministry. The former focuses mainly on state-building and on mainstreaming and institutionalizing issues of equality within the organs of the Palestinian Authority. In contrast, the latter,

true to the *modus operandi* of the Islamic movement, offers support and services to the mass base of the movement, in addition to targeting women affected directly by occupation. This difference is also reflected in the content of the mechanisms used by both ministries to achieve the rights of full citizenship for women, for example through the Palestinian Women’s Charter (see below).

Case Three: The Palestinian Women’s Charter—Between Cooperation and Conflict

The Palestinian Women’s Charter proved to be a point of contention and a source of conflict between the two ministries. The West Bank ministry sought to entrench the document as a guiding beacon for achieving equality for women, while Gaza officials sought to establish some of its contents, but reverse others to render them compliant with the “Islamic” vision for achieving women’s rights.

Background

Since its founding in 2003, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs has sought to establish the Palestinian Women’s Charter developed by the feminist movement in 1994 as a reference document for policymaking and legislation. The ministry proposed several related amendments to legislation, especially combating violence against women and advocating raising sentences for honor crimes by classifying them as criminal offences. This was in response to several homicides of women that shook public opinion.

Achievements and Obstacles

Using the Women’s Charter as a guide, the West Bank Ministry of Women’s Affairs and women’s organizations worked together and succeeded in lobbying for various legislative and policy changes, among them quotas for women in the electoral law; an increase in the marriage age to eighteen; approval for gender-responsive government budgets; cabinet approval for the establishment of units for women in the various ministries; and securing by the Palestinian Authority of UN resolution 1325. The ministry also prompted the

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president to adopt the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and in 2008 secured his blessing for the charter.

This did not, however, mean a commitment by the Palestinian Authority to abide by the charter as a reference in legislation and policymaking. Indeed, the document has faced major challenges due to a lack of general community consensus. For example, clerics and the Iftaa Council said they believed that the document does not adopt Islam as its reference or as a source for legislation, but rather is based on secular laws and international conventions and that it calls for ripping the Muslim family apart. The document was opposed on the grounds that it includes rights in opposition to Islamic law such as the right of women to assume all public positions with no conditions or restrictions; equality between men and women in testimony before the courts (shehadah); denial of the right of husbands to discipline their wives; an increase in the marriage age to eighteen; abolition of a man's authority and the principle of wardship over his wife; establishing the right of Muslim women to marry non-Muslims; codifying the right of women to obtain divorce; restricting polygamy; establishing a woman's right to seek compensation in cases of arbitrary divorce; and equality in laws pertaining to property and inheritance. The charter was considered "part of the drive to westernize Muslim

women and detach them from their religion and an assault on the basic tenets of Islam; hence abiding by it or even accepting it is prohibited by sharia law". (Hussein, 2010: 17-18). The Iftaa Council called the document blasphemous and appealed to the president not to endorse it. These attacks ultimately prompted the ministry to stop implementing the charter (Hussein, 2010).

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Palestinian Women's Charter: the Islamic Version

The two Hamas-affiliated ministers in the 2006-2007 government and in the 2007 government of national unity adopted the Palestinian Women's Charter with reservations (Al-Quds, 2006; Al Hayat Al Jadedah, 2007). However, once the governing regimes split post-June 2007, the content of the document was changed by the Gaza Ministry of Women's Affairs. Significant changes made notwithstanding, it is to the credit of the Gaza Ministry that it has retained the document, which indicates that there is injustice and a need to develop an integrated rights and political framework, albeit in an Islamic context. Workshops were conducted to promote the contents of the sharply-altered document. In a workshop held on June 5, 2009, the official in charge of policy and planning in the Gaza Ministry stated that the document serves as a legal base compatible with the special identity and culture of Palestinian society but that the original document promoted by the West Bank ministry is not based on Islamic law. He went on to say that "99% of the previous document promoted Western thought that is incompatible with Islam ... being grounded in leftist thought based on secularism. The current Ministry has modified it to bring it in line with Islamic law. Initial re-writing of the document will be accom-

plished through a series of workshops (26 workshops) to be held by experts to study and analyze various issues in the document” (Haron, 2009).

The main objection to the West Bank ministry’s version of the Document is “that it was based on the concept of gender, since it deals with individual rights of women, thereby promoting conflict between men and women.” By advocating complete equality in all matters relating to gender, such as considering testimony of women in courts of law equal to that of men, that version of the document purportedly denies complementarity between men and women (Sabti, 2009). Nonetheless, as Sabti explains, the Gaza Ministry document advocates that Palestinian women have the right to vote and be nominated in general and local elections, the right to equal access to all public offices according to Islamic law², the right to form and join political parties, and the right to enjoy all educational, financial, health and social services granted to citizens by law. There is thus a contradiction between avowed rejection of the principle of full equality and these achievements that are based mostly on the principle of equality in civil rights and penal law. While foundational concepts in the original document, such as gender, are rejected, there is serious work underway, albeit indirect, aimed at encouraging women and engaging them in political, economic, social and community roles that have been denied to them by society on the basis of their gender.

Clearly, there remains a need to consolidate and internalize the gains secured so far, both among women and in society at large. Connections and relationships between the West Bank ministry and the Palestinian Authority have helped the ministry in lobbying centers of power and the government to introduce some changes, such as raising the age of marriage and partially amending the penal code. However, there is reluctance to reform the provisions of the personal status law for fear of a negative public reaction. In contrast, the Gaza ministry also relies on a network of relationships with and support from the Gaza government, but also makes a great effort to mobilize women themselves at the grass roots level, pushing them to reach high echelons of power in both the execu-

2 The position is actually ambiguous. There are those who reject the idea of women holding high state office or in the judiciary. However, views differ between the moderate current (Muslim Brotherhood) and some of the most stringent fundamentalist (Salafi) trends.

tive and legislative branches. These branches, in turn, show a high propensity to respond positively to demands relating to the rights of widows and orphans and to the Islamic version of the Palestinian Women’s Charter, partly because this discourse does not threaten the prevailing gender system, but rather tries to introduce improvements to it. The mismatch between the visions of the two ministries exacerbates the current division between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip socially and intellectually. Each of the two ministries has a different referential framework and vision, as well as contrasting regional and international alliances. Lack of dialogue between the two ministries deepens this division further. Women in both governments bear part of the responsibility for bridging the gap. In the least, they should start a discussion on citizenship rights for women, as well as on priorities under the current situation, where the Israeli occupation still dominates life in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Case Four: Women in Local and General Elections

In the first legislative elections in 1996, the Palestinian women’s movement rejected the institution of a quota for women for fear that it might limit their representation, taking the view that Palestinian society would not discriminate between genders. The results of the election clearly showed this view to be unrealistic. Representation of women was 5.6% (five female members out of a total of 88). The feminist movement then reconsidered and organized in 2000 a comprehensive national campaign to demand amendments to the election law to include an electoral quota for women.

Clearly, introduction of electoral quotas for women, which was approved by the Legislative Council on June 18, 2005 and endorsed by the president on August 13, 2005, played an important role in advancing women within their parties. Under Article 4 of the new law, each electoral list must at minimum include one woman in the first three positions, one woman in the next four, and one woman in every subsequent five positions (Central Election Commission 2006). While in the first legislative elections in 1996, 25 women competed against 647 candidates amounting to a

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female candidacy rate of 3.72%, the proportion of participation in the last legislative elections held in January 2006 increased to 24.2%, with 70 women candidates in party lists, of whom 17 were elected. In local council races, there were 15 female candidates, none of whom were elected. Eleven of the fifteen (73%) ran as independents. These results suggest that women have fewer chances of winning in municipalities without the support of a political party. However, even the four women who represented their parties in the local races did not win. This may indicate that kinship relations and connections at the level of localities, compared with party lists, may have been unfavorable to women. Nonetheless, thanks to the quota system, women's representation in the current Legislative Council increased to 12.9% (17 out of a total of 132 members), as shown in the table below.

However, women legislators did not have the chance to make their mark. After two sessions, the Legislative Council ceased to function. Israel prohibited Gaza representatives from entering the West Bank and arrested a large number of Hamas representatives, and the subsequent split in the Palestinian political system that cut off Gaza from the West Bank paralyzed the council, preventing it from playing its key role in lawmaking and establishing controls and accountability. The fact that the state has no power has thus raised questions about the usefulness of calls to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions. In this regard, Palestine is similar to Iraq. There, women have the highest proportion of parliamentary representation in the Arab world (even higher than the global average of 18.4%), but this hardly matters when the state apparatus is broken and is unable to protect its citizens.

Women in Local Elections

Local elections were held in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in four phases. The first was held on December 23, 2004 in 36 localities; the second on May 5, 2005 in 82, all under the first-past-the-post system in accordance with the 1966 electoral law for local councils No. 5. A quota of 16% was set for women. This raised women's confidence, increasing the number of women candidates from 51 in the elections held on November 30, 2004 before adoption of a quota, to 150 in the West Bank and 82 in the Gaza Strip in the first phase. The final total of candidates was 207 after the withdrawal of some candidates. In the second phase of the elections, there were 397 women candidates; 338 in the West Bank and 59 in Gaza Strip (Katana Nazal, 2006: 33).

A total of 1,322 female candidates were elected, 424 in the first phase and 898 in the second. Women secured a total of 231 seats distributed as follows: 82 through the quota system and 149 through free competition; a representation amounting to 17.4%. The third phase was held on September 29, 2005 in 104 constituencies in the West Bank under the proportional electoral system (lists), in accordance with the 2005 electoral law for local councils No. 10. The final election results were not announced and elections were not held in the city of Hebron and greater Gaza. The results were not disaggregated by gender, but given that the quota for women was 20%, the women's share of 1,018 seats would be at least 203.

The fourth phase was held on December 15, 2005 in 40 localities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip,

Legislative Council Members by Gender and Region, 2007

Indicator	West Bank			Gaza Strip			Occupied Palestinian Territory		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Legislative Council Members	74	10	84	41	7	48	115	17	132

Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2007. *Women and men in Palestine: Issues and Statistics, 2007*, Ramallah -Palestine

again under the proportional electoral system (lists) in accordance with the 2005 electoral law for local councils No. 10. As in the third phase, women were allocated 20%. The sum of the seats held by women out of a total of 414 was not shown in the results, but 25 women were elected from the first five positions in each list (and in the city of Ramallah, a woman was at the top of a list and became the mayor). Approximately 58 women were added to bring the total to 83 (20% of 414). Accordingly, the seats secured by women are estimated at 517, compared with 2,337 for men, making the percentage of seats won by women 22.12%. This amounts to significant progress, compared with a representation of not more than half of one percent previously. It is an important indicator of the extent of acceptance of the presence of women in local councils by the community.

The presence of women in councils is not in itself enough, however. The aim must be to influence council policies and offer more services and care for women, meeting their specific needs that may not be noted by men. The impact on decisions, policies and services requires further research. Moreover, for the quota system to bear fruit, the democratic system itself must be stable and effective. The paralyzes of the Palestinian Legislative Council and the sharp division in the political system have mitigated against that. The increased numbers of women in the public domain is important in changing some stereotypes about women. However, it is not enough for instigating the social change required in gender relations in order to achieve more social justice for women and create a general democratic climate for comprehensive and sustainable development. Also, the quota needs to be applied not only in politics and governance, but in all areas, since women are widely present in some sectors, such as education and health, but almost non-existent in the management of public and private institutions and in the top positions of government.

Case Five: Security Council Resolution 1325, a Missed Opportunity?

Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted at the council's 4213th meeting on October 31, 2000, calls upon UN member states to empower wom-

en, especially those living in countries suffering from armed conflict, reaffirms the important role of women in preventing and resolving international and local armed conflicts, calls for studying the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, and emphasizes the responsibility of all states to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, including those of sexual and other violence against women and girls.

Relevance of Security Council Resolution 1325 to the Palestinian Cause

Security Council Resolution 1325 represents a victory for world feminist movements that pressed for UN intervention to protect women and girls in conflict situations.

For the Palestinians, the resolution has particular relevance. If properly used, it may serve to expose Israeli policies of targeted killing of civilians and intensify international solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle. Notwithstanding total reliance by the Palestinian Authority on negotiations, there has been an almost complete absence of international referential frameworks and UN resolutions in defense of Palestinian rights.³ Resolution 1325 has been neglected, as was the Goldstone report on Israeli war crimes after the war on Gaza in 2009, and the decision of the International Court of Justice on the illegality of the Apartheid Wall.

Palestinians living in what remains of historic Palestine continue to be subjected to all forms of oppression, persecution and violence by the Israeli occupation. Those Palestinians who remained in the 1948 territory are subjected to other forms of discrimination and racism. UN Resolution 1325 applies in both cases. Moreover, there is violence and aggression against Palestinians in the Diaspora, especially those living in the border areas close to Israel, such in refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan. Israeli violence against the Palestinians takes several forms: targeted killings, home demolitions, destruction of civilian infrastructure (road networks, electricity, water, sewage, schools, etc.), tree uprooting, killing at military checkpoints,

3 After more than 18 years of failed negotiations, the Palestinian Authority is now considering turning to the United Nations to push for recognition of the state of Palestine (July 2011).

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violence against farmers by the Israeli army or settlers or both, preventing patients and pregnant women from reaching health services, etc.

How Women Can Use UN Resolution 1325

UN Resolution 1325 resulted in the establishment in 2005 of a Palestinian-Israeli commission called the International Women's Commission consisting of 66 feminist leaders, equal numbers of them each hailing from Israel, Palestine and abroad. The Commission arranged European tours for some of its members, organized hearings before the European Parliament, and called upon international bodies to hold an international conference to solve the "Palestinian-Israeli conflict." The commission could not change any Israeli policies, though it gave the general impression that Israeli women reject such policies; this, in fact, is contradicted by Israeli society's general propensity towards increased extremism and aggression, as confirmed by successive elections. Furthermore, the commission has played a role in promoting the notion that Palestinians are undertaking peace-building, which requires placing Israeli and Palestinian women in decision-making positions in negotiations, so that peace would be built on strong foundations. Thus, the commission adopted the approach of diplomacy and persuasion that has been pursued by the Palestinian Authority since the signing of the Oslo accords. By doing so, it ignored the emergence of peaceful resistance movements aimed at putting pressure on Israel and criminalizing its policies by mobilizing international support (these include the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel launched in 2004, and the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel movement, which was launched in 2005).

Some feminist literature suggests the following phases exist in conflict and violence, with gender issues varying in each phase:

- The **pre-conflict phase**, characterized by the spread of unemployment among men, internal violence of various forms, lack of political stability, and insecurity.
- The **conflict phase**, characterized by indiscriminate violence (against homes, schools, markets, fields, and public places) that claims civilian lives, especially among women and

children, and which has a negative significant impact on the daily lives of the civilian population.

- **Conflict resolution** or the start of the peace process phase, characterized by cessation of all forms of violence and the beginning of negotiations to reach a peaceful solution to the conflict. Usually, women demand to be a part of this process insisting that gender be taken into account, and also to impress the need to reach a peaceful solution quickly to end the immense suffering of women and children in war.
- The phase of **reconstruction and reintegration** of combatants into civilian life. Here also, women have an important role to play. Women engaged in fighting need to be reintegrated into civilian life and their needs taken into account, whether in relation to employment opportunities, participation in decisionmaking positions, or being part of the process of allocating resources available for reconstruction (ElJack, 2003).

In the Palestinian case, for no obvious reason, UN Resolution 1325 was applied as if to a post-conflict phase of negotiations and a reconstruction and reintegration phase, entirely ignoring the conflict phase itself and its devastating effects on all aspects of Palestinian life. This disregard for reality almost paralyzes the commission whenever Israel intensifies its violence and aggression. At such times, the gap between the views of the Palestinian side and those of the Israeli side widens, with the latter adopting a "balanced" perspective, "condemning violence from both sides." Palestinian women leaders pursued a strategy of "demanding and appealing" to mobilize public opinion, rather than mobilizing effective international pressure, countering the crimes and violations of the state of Israel through resistance strategies (calling for boycott of Israel internationally, suing Israeli leaderships in the International Court of Justice for their criminal acts, and issuing arrest warrants against Israeli military and political leaders accused of war crimes). As such, the International Commission for Women stated that Resolution 1325 "emphasizes the need for involving women in conflict resolution, in order to restart negotiations and improve their results." (http://iwc-peace.org/Press_release.htm)

Several international organizations, such as Norwegian Christian Aid or the United Nations

Development Fund, urged the Palestinian women's movement to use Resolution 1325 to protect women from violence. Numerous workshops involving several non-governmental organizations focused initially on domestic violence, though the debate has since then evolved to include national issues related to the violence perpetrated by the occupation.

In an important review, Nazzal (Nazzal, 2009) pointed out that the resolution can potentially be used to protect women and civilians from Israeli and internecine violence that in 2005-2006, claimed the lives of 475 Palestinians. However, failure in this regard may have been caused by the feminist movement not taking the resolution seriously which, in turn, may have been caused by the weakness and ineffectiveness of its leadership and the absence of women from decision-making positions in general (Nazzal, 2009: 33). More than a decade since the resolution was adopted not a single case has been filed under the resolution with any international tribunal to hold Israel accountable for its heinous crimes, nor has any international campaign organized in partnership with international women's movements used the resolution to expose Israeli policies.

UN resolution 1325 is not a referential framework for the Gaza Ministry of Women's Affairs. However, the 2010 Plan of the ministry provided for a project that is based on its provisions. The project, which was to be implemented in cooperation with the Norwegian government, consists of holding workshops on the forms of protection that must be made available to women whenever needed (Ministry of Women's Affairs Plan, 2010). In all, it seems that the Gaza Ministry has not given adequate credence to the resolution, perhaps due to the Hamas government's skepticism over the usefulness of UN resolutions in the Palestinian context (although Hamas did change its position subsequent to the issuance of the Goldstone report in 2009) (Al-Jazeera.net, June 19, 2009).

Women and Informal Political Participation

Over the last decade, the informal participation of Palestinian women in political life has taken many forms, among them participation in the General

Union of Palestinian Women, women's organizations, political parties and elections and social networking on the web.

Since the Oslo accords, and because of them, the occupied Palestinian territory has witnessed a decline of all social and political movements, including those of students, workers and women. The reasons for this are numerous: many movement leaders joined the Palestinian Authority; the Authority itself has combated and contained these movements; and political parties have declined, been circumscribed by the Palestinian Authority, and their cadres absorbed by non-governmental organizations (Jad, 2008).

The Feminist Movement: Cooperation, Diversity and Conflict

The General Union of Palestinian Women was active, along with several non-governmental organizations, in organizing numerous activities around the Palestinian Women's Charter and other issues. Over the last decade, there has been additional coordination and cooperation among the various players in the feminist movement, both at the governmental or non-governmental levels, with the launching of several initiatives to combat violence, increase women's representation in the various councils through the quota system, and address issues related to women in printed, audio and visual media.⁴ This activity contributed significantly to raising community awareness.

These achievements notwithstanding, political organization of women continues to decline. The sixth conference of the General Union of Palestinian Women held from May 21-24, 2009 seemed to be a positive development. Some hoped that it

4 For example, the Women's Affairs Technical Committee has since January 1, 2007 published a bimonthly newspaper, entitled *Voice of Women*. NISAA FM, a women's radio station, was founded June 20, 2010 and offers several radio and television programs, such as *Against Silence* and *Through the Eyes of Women*, that discuss women's issues usually relegated to the private, rather than the public domain. In addition, it contributed to making the Palestinian Authority and the public more receptive to some of the demands of the feminist movement, whether regarding issues of violence against women and children or increasing participation of women in public activities, such as in business, sports, art, music, journalism and the media.

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would herald other conferences of grassroots unions of workers, students, and writers, all under the banner of the PLO. However, the conference faced serious challenges caused by sharp political divisions, paralysis, and fragmentation of all women's institutions in both the formal and informal sectors, including ministries, the Legislative Council, and unions. Moreover, a lack of democratic practices in the unions and organizations affiliated to the PLO eroded its legitimacy, which had been based on "factional quotas."

Following the same old factional quota system and ensuring a majority for the Fatah movement, elections were not truly representative, nor did they help heal the rift between Fatah and Hamas.⁵ Women from the Islamic movement were not given the opportunity to join the union, which is supposed to represent all Palestinian women both in the homeland and the Diaspora. Convening the inaugural session of the conference at the headquarters of the Palestinian Authority gave the impression that the union is not independent, however. Clearly, politics still divides Palestinian women, who do not seem able to take positions independent of party line. A general feminist program linking the issues of liberation to women's issues is yet to unite all Palestinian women.

There has been over the last decade increased coordination among various women's rights organizations active on issues of violence, legal reform, and political participation, such as the Women Affairs Technical Committee, the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling, and the Working Women's Society for Development. However, there has been a major decline in freedom of action and organization. Women's organizations in Gaza have had to contend with interference from the Gaza government, which tightened the procedures for registering new organizations, closed the headquarters of some organizations, and confiscated organizational property (Report of the Independent Commission, 2010). In the West Bank, security services confis-

cated the property, closed or burned the headquarters of several women's charities considered to be affiliated to Hamas, and forced a change of governing bodies of some others (Report of the Independent Commission, 2010: 113-119). These measures have affected the services of these organizations that provide help to a large number of households and care for orphans, the disadvantaged and students. The situation was exacerbated by closing or imposing control over dozens of Zakat committees, placing them in September 20, 2007 under a High Commission for Zakat committees, which led many donors to stop their donations and negatively affected hundreds of families and women (Schaublin, 2009).

Representation of Women in Political Parties

Prior to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, it was difficult to estimate the number of women in political parties due to the secrecy mandated by the Israeli occupation. Since the Palestinian Authority issued the Parties Law legalizing them, it has been possible to refer to some data. However, such data may not be accurate due to the tendency of some organizations to inflate their own size or because they hold pro-forma elections or do not hold them at all.

These data indicate that the number of women in leadership positions in left-wing parties is larger than in the Centrist Fatah movement. However, this does not translate into political power and influence due to the low and declining popularity of left-wing parties since the Oslo Accords of 1993. Only one woman won from each party at the constituency level from the Democratic Front and the Popular Front; one woman from the Popular Front won at the party lists level. The electoral coalition that brought together the Democratic Front, the People's Party and Fida failed to get a single woman elected. Thus, increased representation of women in those parties did not translate into increased participation of women in general political life.

Islamic parties, which include Hizb Al-Tahrir, Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), are opposition parties suppressed by both Israel and the Palestinian Authority. On the

⁵ A meeting was held by the General Union of Palestinian Women on July 7, 2011 to discuss the role of women in political reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas. The General Union was criticized for not taking a part in the discussions on reconciliation. Also at a meeting held through via video conferencing that was organized by the Women's Affairs Technical Committee on February 5, 2009, the General Union was criticized for not being active during the war on Gaza and for not communicating with women there.

Political Organization	Percentage of Women
Fatah Movement	General Conference: 25% Central Committee: 5% Revolutionary Council: 33% Higher Movement Committee: 40% Expanded Movement Council: 11%
Popular Front	General Central Committee: 10% Branch Central Committee: 20% Branch Leadership: 11% Branch Conference: 10%
Democratic Front	Central Committee in West Bank: 19.5% Central Committee in Gaza Strip: 21% Central Command in West Bank: %18 Central Command in Gaza Strip: 13% Branch Committees in the West Bank: 17% Branch Committees in Gaza Strip: 90% Politburo: 2%
Palestinian Democratic Union (FIDA)	Executive Politburo: 30% Central Committee: 19% (elected first female general secretary April 20, 2011)

Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 1997, Unpublished Data

whole, these parties work underground, except, to some extent, in the Gaza Strip. Numbers of women with membership in these parties are not known, but women participated actively and intensively on their behalf in the 2004 local elections and the 2006 legislative elections. Women are active within them and introduce some general women's issues (Jad, 2008).

Women and Governance

Women in the occupied Palestinian territory have undoubtedly achieved increasing visibility in the public arena and in official institutions, whether through elections or government appointments. In

addition, some women have attained positions that were previously exclusive to men in the legislative, judicial, and executive authorities and in the media. Furthermore, some issues that were debated in secret are now publically debated, especially issues of violence against women and so-called "honor" killings.

Nonetheless, women still face numerous challenges and obstacles regarding political participation and governance. The political system tends towards non-compliance with the rule of law and continued violation of basic civil and political liberties, so that "descent into a security or police system has become inexorable" (Report of the Independent Commission, 2010: 37). Participation of women, as advocated by the women's move-

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ment, is conceived of as being limited to women occupying decision-making positions in the organs of the Authority and in the community.

The nature of governance, as is the case for most social-science concepts, is difficult to identify. Nonetheless, generally, the concept refers to decision-making by various groups of people, whether they are in positions of influence and power or ordinary citizens. The decisions taken have a significant impact on men and women, since they define the rules that govern where and how they work and live their lives, how resources are distributed, and which services are offered and to whom. In the Arab region, the idea that the goal of government is to achieve stability and prevent social, economic and political unrest has for a long time been dominant. Some other communities view government as having the goal of achieving security, which is also linked to stability. However, the question is: stability and security for whom and at whose expense?

Some may see that governance relates solely to government institutions. However, there are numerous other institutions in action that make decisions affecting the lives of people and women, such as international forces and institutions (the UN, World Trade Organization, World Bank and others). Civil-society organizations also have influence through lobbying and the organization and mobilization of citizens. Whether in power or in the community, women have not accorded due attention to the rules through which these institutions and organizations govern and control the lives of women. Governance is not only about what women do or want to do in government, it also includes many institutions and levels through which governing is exercised. These include international institutions; occupation authorities; the principles of a free economy, which has created large social gaps in Palestinian society; and lack of protection for fundamental freedoms by the authority.

Having a number of women in decision-making positions in government, local government and in parliament is seen as important for mainstreaming gender in governance. Yet, principles of good governance, such as the rule of law and democracy, are being violated and the corruption and lack of accountability are widespread.

Government in the Arab region has tended to stifle citizens' voices, violating their rights in

general and women's rights in particular, and limiting their freedoms under the pretext of sovereignty, security and stability. The Palestinian political system after Oslo has followed suit. On the one hand, Israel is still expanding its colonial power at the expense of Palestinian national rights, while perpetuating the Palestinian split geographically and politically; on the other hand, Palestinian governance is being established on the basis of violations of citizens' rights and fundamental freedoms. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to see women achieving their right to full citizenship. Women themselves not only did not exert enough effort to bridge the political divide, but have even contributed to perpetuating and deepening it, which not only undermines the possibility of achieving the rights of women to full citizenship, but also raises the specter of loss of their homeland altogether.

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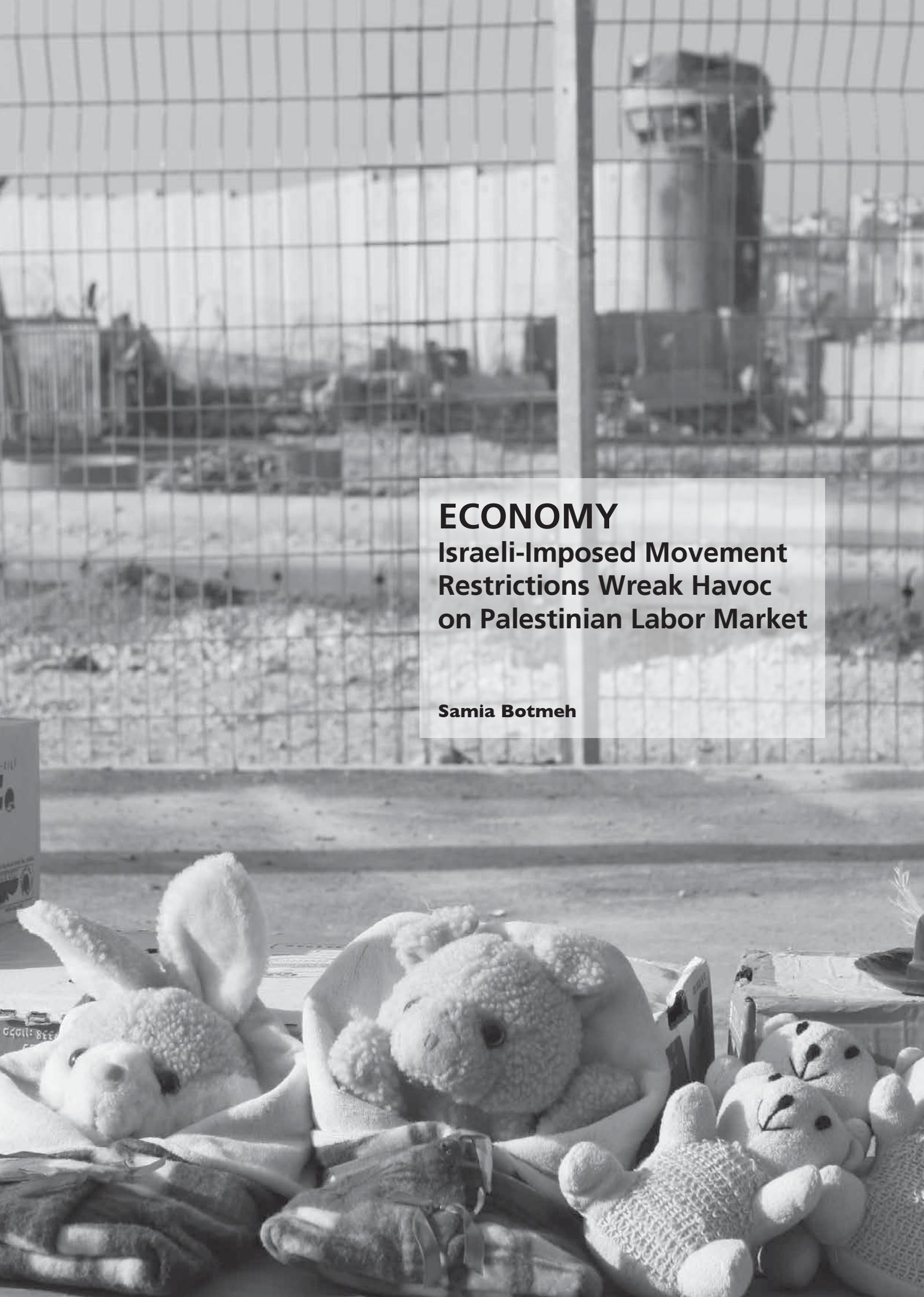
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ECONOMY
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Restrictions Wreak Havoc
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Samia Botmeh

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Introduction & Context: Shifting Patterns of Participation in the Face of Economic Destruction

The shifting patterns of male and female participation in the labor market of the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) reveals the nature of the development challenge facing Palestinian society, as well as the scope and intensity of the economic crisis created by the Israeli-imposed restrictions between 2000 and 2007. The labor market, which is

largely shaped by the nature of Israeli occupation and its evolution since 1993, has been severely and adversely affected by both Israeli restrictions on access and movement within and outside the oPt and Israeli military violence. These Israeli measures cannot be understood in isolation from the impact that they have had on Palestinian population dynamics, social structure and patterns of economic restructuring over the past 15 years.

The extent of the damage to the Palestinian economy caused by Israeli violence and movement

Table 1: Summary of West Bank and Gaza Estimated Macro Economic Trends

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Per capita GDP (constant 1997 US\$)*	1,388	1,348	1,438	1,546	1,612	1,458	1,302	1,191	1,272	1,246	1,282	1,129	1,178
Growth rate of real per capita GDP (%)	-1.0	-2.9	6.7	7.5	4.3	-9.6	-10.7	-8.5	6.8	-2	2.8	-11.9	4.3
Investment (mill US\$)	1,019	1,129	1,267	1,501	2,010	1,467	1,186	727	1,126	1,024	1,081	848	816
Export (mill US\$)	394.2	339.5	382.4	394.8	372.1	400.9	290.3	240.9	279.7	312.7	335.4	417	366
Import (mill US\$)	1,658	2,017	2,239	2,375	3,007	2,383	2,034	1,516	1,800	2,373	2,667	3,479	3,615
Employment (1,000)	309.0	432.0	467.2	533.6	591.6	595.2	508.1	487.1	590.7	604.0	633.0	666	666
- of which % in Israel	16.2	14.1	17.1	21.7	23.0	19.6	13.8	10.3	9.7	8.7	9.9	9.8	9.4
Labor participation rate (%)	39	40	40.5	41.4	41.6	41.5	38.7	38.1	40.3	40.4	40.7	41.3	41.9
Unemployment rate (%)	18.2	23.8	20.3	14.4	11.8	14.1	25.2	31.3	25.6	26.8	23.5	23.6	21.5
Poverty rate (% of pop. with < \$ 2.1 per day)		26.9	25.3	23.3	21	32	45	63.3	-	53.7	51.5	-	-
Inflation rate		5.58	7.62	5.58	5.45	2.80	1.23	5.7	4.4	3	3.471	3.76	6.13

Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), National Accounts (various years), Labor Force Survey (various years), Consumer Price Index (various years). Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute – MAS (2008) *Social Monitor*, 12. Poverty data (1996-2000) is taken from MAS, (2002) *Economic Monitor*, 9. The rest of the years are taken from the World Bank, (2004a) *Disengagement, the Palestinian Economy and the Settlements and West Bank and Gaza Country Economic Memorandum - Growth in West Bank and Gaza: Opportunities and Constraints, Volume II* (September, 2006).

* Excluding East Jerusalem.

Previous page: Stuffed animals for sale by a vendor at Qalandia checkpoint. Photo by Rula Halawani

restrictions is evident when one considers the strong growth trends that prevailed during 1995-1999, prior to the imposition of the restrictions. These positive growth trends were attained as a result of the general sense of optimism about a future peace settlement in the area as well as the relative ease with which Palestinians were able to access external markets, including the Israeli labor market. Fixed investment was over 33% of GDP in every year from 1996-1999, and reached 45 percent in 1999 (PCBS, National Accounts, 1996-2002). Most of the investment was undertaken by the private sector, although a large proportion of this was in residential construction. During the same period, the employment rate increased gradually from 76.2 percent to 88.2 percent of the labor force. Palestinian employment in Israel averaged 135,000 workers in 1999, accounting for about 23 percent of total Palestinian employment (PCBS, labor force survey, 2000). These favorable trends resulted in improved standards of living, reflected in modest poverty rates, which stood at 21 percent of the oPt population in 1999 (see Table I).

While the Palestinian economy was growing, a significant proportion of this growth was in imports, which accounted for about 75 percent of GDP on average during 1995-1999 (PCBS, National Accounts, 1996-2000). However, while the accumulation of a large trade deficit also brought with it dependence on external sources of financing, prior to the imposition of restrictions, the Palestinian economy was also able to contribute to financing this through its own revenues. The deficit in the trade balance was financed through three sources: a) net factor income where employment in Israel was an important source of income (after the dip during the closures of 1995-96, net factor income in the oPt rose steadily during 1996-1999 reaching 21 percent of GDP in 2000, the eve of the Second Intifada); b) net current private transfers, i.e. remittances from the large Palestinian expatriate community around the world; and c) foreign assistance in the form of transfers to finance current public expenditure and development investment projects.

Trends and Indicators

Macroeconomic Developments: Measuring the Economic Crisis

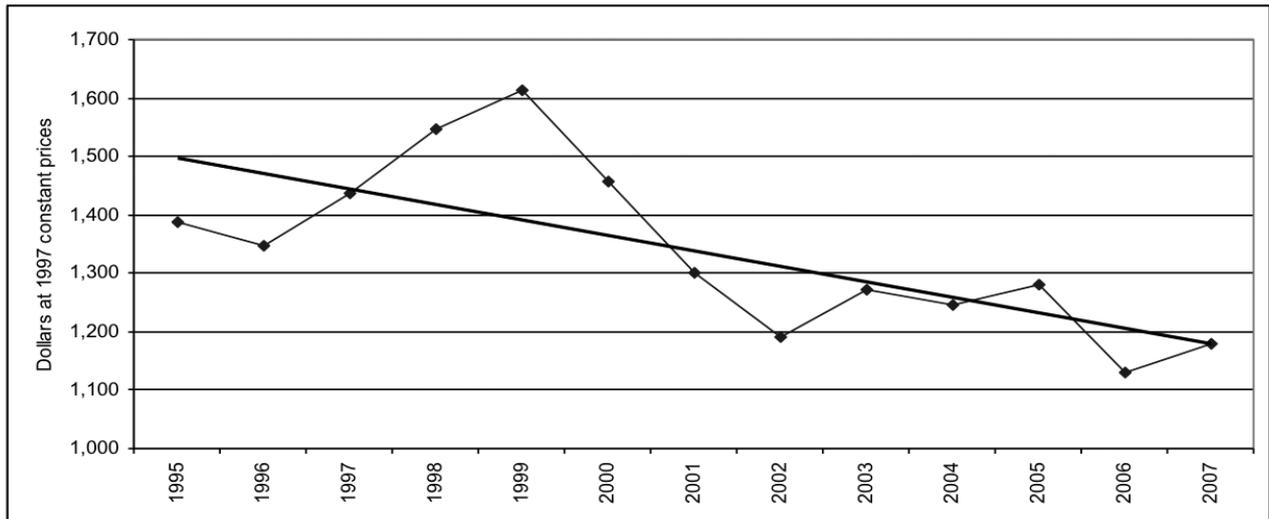
The overall climate enabling improved economic performance in the oPt was short-lived and was abruptly brought to an end by Israel's crushing response to the Second Intifada in late 2000. Israeli-imposed restrictions devastated the Palestinian economy in many respects. The private sector was hit strongly by movement restrictions and the separation of the West Bank from the Gaza Strip. Transaction costs increased to unprecedented levels and eroded businesses profits. At the same time, Israel started withholding clearance revenues, which, according to the Oslo accords, it collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority (PA). As a result, public revenues began to decline dramatically, which was reinforced by rising unemployment and reduced demand. The drastic decline in revenues also occurred when a much stronger social welfare net was needed most (World Bank, 2004a).

As a result of the combined effects of the movement and access restrictions and the violence of the Israeli army, by 2002, real per capita income had fallen to 74 percent of the 1999 level and over one-half of the population was living below the poverty line. By 2007, real per capita income was lower than its 1995 level (see Figure 1). Exports declined by 40 percent between 2000 and 2002. At the same time, private investment fell by 15 percent between 2000 and 2006, while public investment expanded by 40 percent, thanks to international aid, which amounted to an average of \$850 million a year, or 20 percent of GDP. The aid, however, was not enough to resolve the soaring budget deficit, which in 2006 amounted to \$1 billion (World Bank, 2007).

Another immediate impact of the Israeli restrictions was the loss of employment: Palestinians lost nearly 47,000 jobs between the third and the fourth quarters of 2000 and a further 20,000 in 2001 and 2002 (PCBS, labor force survey, 2001-2003). This loss of employment had a huge impact on the Palestinian economy. Unemployment rates, which were around 11 percent, soared to 47 percent in the Gaza Strip and 32 percent in the West Bank in 2002. These high percentages have

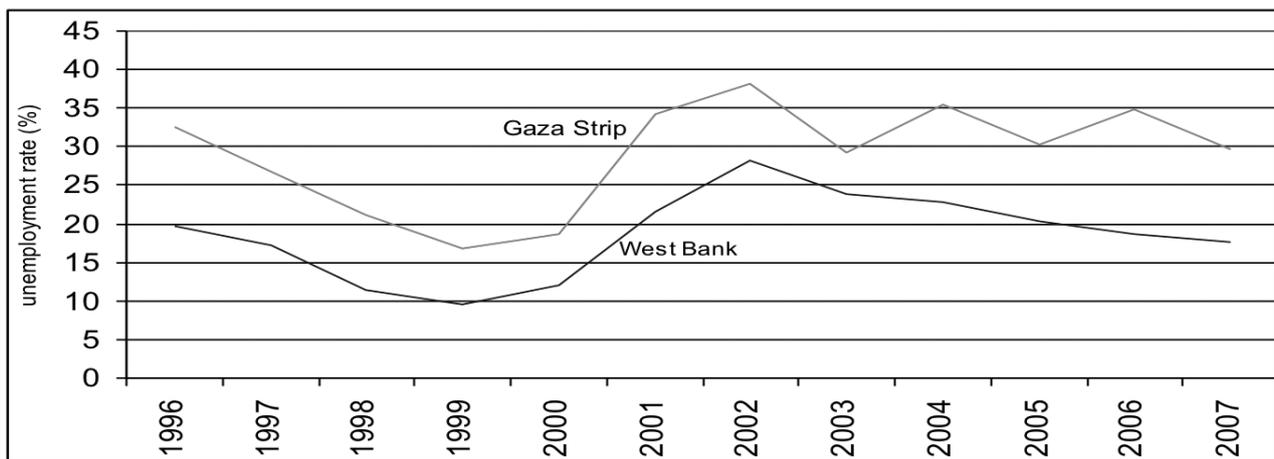
Israeli-Imposed Movement Restrictions Wreak Havoc on Palestinian Labor Market

Figure 1: Real Per Capita GDP in the oPt (1995-2007)



Source: PCBS, National Accounts (various years) and MAS, Economic Monitor (various years).

Figure 2: Unemployment Rates in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (1996-2007)



Source: PCBS, Labor Force Surveys, various years.

since leveled off and currently stand at approximately 33 percent in the Gaza Strip and just over 19 percent in the West Bank (PCBS, Labor Force Survey, 2007) (see Figure 2).

Wages have also plummeted (see Table 2). This is mainly due to the loss of employment and in particular the loss of higher wages in Israel. On average, daily wages for Palestinians working in Israel and the settlements are about two-thirds higher than those earned in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Moreover, the overall decline in economic performance in the oPt resulted in lower standards of living. Before the Second Intifada, 20 percent of the

population was living below the poverty line of \$2.1 per day. That number increased to 27 percent by December 2000, and reached as high as 51.5 percent by 2005. The deterioration in economic conditions and the decline in standards of living further led to a reduction in household expenditures, particularly in the Gaza Strip, where four of every five families had to reduce their spending (see also Hilal's chapter).

Overview of Gender and Labor Force Participation in the oPt

Labor force participation in the oPt is characterized by three main features: 1) low crude participation rates; 2) low female labor force participation;

and 3) large variability over time due to the unstable political situation stemming from the Israel occupation (FAFO, 2002).

The West Bank and Gaza Strip have one of the lowest crude participation rates in the world, currently standing at 21 percent. This is due to a number of factors, including the persistently high fertility rate within Palestinian society, which has meant that the age structure of the population remains skewed in favor of those under 15 years old (45.8 percent of the population is below the age of 15). This is also further complicated by the generally high percentage of non-labor market participants (60 percent).

Female labor force participation is amongst the lowest in the world, currently standing at 15.7 percent, 18 percent in the West Bank and 11 percent in Gaza. These low rates can be traced back to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, when female labor force participation began to decline, reaching single digits by 1995. This trend was associated with the occupation's confiscation of land, destruction of the economy's productive capacity, closing down of all banks, and control of external borders which restricted imports and exports. This negative trend was mildly reversed when the establishment of the PA in 1994 led to the creation of new work opportunities for women, primarily in the public health, education and emerging private financial sectors.

Although the service sector was operational before the PA, it functioned at minimum capacity through the Israeli civil administration and Palestinian civil society sector. Following the establishment of the PA, this sector expanded extensively, providing better employment prospects for women. Nevertheless, despite this brief upturn, female participation rates remained relatively low and experienced significant fluctuations from 1996-2007 (Al-Botmeh and Sotnik, 2007).

A number of studies have been conducted to explain this low participation rate, particularly in light of the fact that Palestinian women have become highly educated over the years. Hammami (2001), for example, attributes the low rates of Palestinian female labor force participation to weaknesses in the manufacturing sector, high unemployment rates, the family-oriented nature of the agricultural sector and negative social attitudes towards female employment in Israel.

The third feature of labor force participation in the oPt is variability and fluctuation over time due to political instability. A few studies have attempted to address this issue by way of examining the impact of Israeli restrictions on the experience of women in the labor market. A study by the Institute of Women Studies (IWS) at Birzeit University (2004) investigated a sample of 23 households and found that women are the social group most isolated by Israel's restrictions on Palestinian

Table 2: Average Real Daily Wages for Men and Women in the oPt

	West Bank		Gaza Strip	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
1996	50.8	39.8	42.7	39.1
1997	62.2	39.2	49.1	40.2
1998	66.9	41.5	53.1	41.5
1999	69.6	46.2	54.7	45.5
2000	70.5	46.0	52.9	41.2
2001	66.8	46.2	44.8	41.8
2002	64.2	47.2	45.3	45.3
2003	60.5	47.3	43.5	44.0
2004	60.3	45.4	44.9	44.5
2005	59.8	46.0	46.4	49.2
2006	60.2	47.0	49.2	50.0
2007	58.9	45.8	44.4	48.0

Source: PCBS, Labor Force Survey (various years).

Israeli-Imposed Movement Restrictions Wreak Havoc on Palestinian Labor Market

movement. The Wall forms part of a prison-like matrix requiring individuals to obtain permits to cross roadblocks and gates; families prefer requesting such permits for male members so that they can travel to work. Women's mobility has thus become constrained, particularly as going through roadblocks and gates has become more difficult and because gate opening hours are not convenient for women.

Another study conducted by Al-Botmeh and Sotnik (2007) investigated the determinants of labor force participation for women in the oPt, including the adverse political developments over the past ten years. A number of the findings of this study are mirrored in our data below and for the sake of comparison, it is useful to restate the study's conclusions: (1) the odds of participation are higher for non-educated and highly-educated females than for women who are semi-educated; (2) women from households depending on subsistence farming are much more likely to participate in the labor force than women depending on other main sources of income; (3) women from the northern West Bank have the greatest odds of participating; (4) the odds of younger never-married women participating are decreasing over time; (5) women often perceive the labor market as unwelcoming due to vertical and horizontal segregation and lower average female wages; and (6) finally, female labor force participation is negatively correlated with number of children in the family.

Amnesty International's report (2005) indicated that recent hardships in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have increased women's unpaid work burdens. Women have had to replace market purchases with non-market production, so they have started baking their own bread and growing vegetables. In addition, women have had to start budgeting much more carefully and strategizing about how and when to purchase goods during periods of closure, when it is difficult for shops to restock. Women have to calculate carefully how to manage with the household's existing food without any clear idea of when and for how long a siege will be lifted.

Another gendered impact of the hardship that Palestinians endured as a result of Israeli measures after 2000 has been the liquidation of savings, particularly savings of women. According to a World Bank study (2004), the first form of wealth that Palestinians liquidated in order to cope with

the hardship post-2000 has been jewelry. This increases women's vulnerability and sense of insecurity, both for themselves and their families.

A study conducted by Olmsted (2008) indicates that in the post-2000 period the structure of the Palestinian labor market has changed. There has been a small decline in male labor force participation and very little change in the labor force participation rate among women. This alone is cause for concern because it indicates a high level of discouragement among Palestinian workers. Olmsted's work further indicates a trend towards a reduction in women's access to paid employment:

A closer examination of women's participation in various sectors also suggests that the types of employment women were engaged in changed considerably between 1995 and 2003. Except for agriculture, women's participation in almost all other sectors declined. This suggests that while overall participation rates have held steady, in recent years there has been a return to working in subsistence agriculture and thus a decline in paid employment. The change in women's representation in the agricultural sector is striking, as are their relative losses in other sectors. [...] The rise in the relative importance of agricultural work and, within this sector, the disappearance of paid positions for women, suggests that women's direct access to wage employment has declined precipitously in recent years and that the relatively stable female labor force participation rate masks a decline in the percentage of women in paid work, both inside and outside the agricultural sector. [Olmsted, 2008, 34-35].

Prolonged Violence and Its Impact on the Labor Market

Within the international literature, the effects of violence on the supply and quality of labor have been poorly conceptualized and underexplored. This literature largely focuses on the consequences of violence for asset wealth, as opposed to examining the consequences for labor participation. However, new debates within the development studies literature address this gap and have identified two possible consequences of prolonged exposure to violence (Cramer et al, 2005). Firstly, collective violence may produce a "retreat into subsistence." That is, as labor productivity is weakened and households are broken up by

violence, households are often expected to shrink further into a shell of survival activities.

Secondly, it is these conditions precisely that can be expected to have the effect of pushing people into participating in labor markets where otherwise they might have resisted participation. In other words, even subsistence becomes unviable, so out of desperation people join the labor force, including women heading households in which males have been killed, have become disabled or lost their jobs. These women's involvement in the labor market will likely take the form of menial jobs of substandard quality by comparison with what they were doing earlier—unprotected work, possibly even illegal in nature.

While clearly, individual cases from around the world are not uniform, the literature does suggest that there are possible sets of consequences of political devastation. Our findings presented below give evidence that the former trend involving the retreat into subsistence is most at play in the oPt.

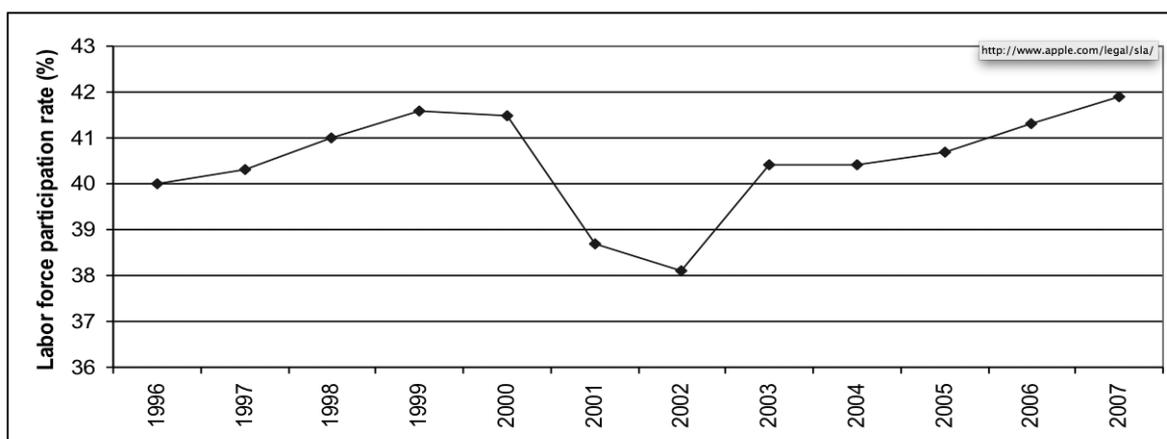
Trends in Labor Force Participation in the oPt (2000-2007)

The immediate impact of the imposition of Israeli restrictions in 2000/2001 was the onset of a rapid reduction in labor force participation (see Figure 3). Participation rates declined from 41.1 percent in 2000 to 38 percent in 2002. By 2007, participation

rates were 41.9 percent—only slightly higher than the 2000 level. Yet, as described below, this figure also masks the severity of the impact on the labor market and the long-term implications of the restrictions for the Palestinian economy as a whole. Similarly, while female participation has since increased, women have largely taken up low-paying jobs in unprotected areas of the economy.

An examination of the 2000-2007 period suggests that the presence of two critical structural breaks in labor force participation requires a separate analysis of the years prior to and including the Second Intifada's earlier years, and then its later phase. The first structural change occurred in 2001 when men and women's labor force participation dropped dramatically as a result of the severity of Israel's crushing response to the Second Intifada and the physical destruction wrought upon every aspect of life in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and particularly its economic spheres. The second structural break took place in 2003, during which the scale of military violence in the West Bank had relatively subsided and the Palestinian population started to devise coping mechanisms and restore some semblance of normality, however fleeting. A comparative examination of the impact of Israel's violent restrictions on male and female participation across these periods while looking at variables of sex and region as well as distinct demographic variables reveals a number of critical trends.

Figure 3: Labor Force Participation Rate in the oPt (1996-2007)



Source: PCBS, Labor Force Survey (various years). Reference group: year 1999.

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Labor Participation Trends by Sex and Region

I. Odds of Participation for Men in the West Bank

Following the imposition of Israeli restrictions in late 2000, men's odds of participation radically declined in 2001-2002. While this trend slightly improved after the year 2003, male participation in the labor market has never recovered from the rapid decline caused by the Israeli violence and movement restrictions. By 2007, a man in the West Bank had only 77 percent the odds of participating in comparison with year 1999. This indicates that Israeli restrictions have had a grave and long-term impact on the labor market prospects for men in the West Bank.

In the context of movement restrictions and the cantonization of the West Bank by the Wall, the slow recovery of labor force participation was compounded by the effects of increasing localization of economic activities. The imposition of movement restrictions within the West Bank has resulted in men trying to search for work within their areas of residence. This is to avoid the high uncertainty, harassment and delays encountered at checkpoints. As noted by men interviewed in the focus group discussions, the localization of economic activities has severely limited men's search terrain and negatively impacted their overall prospects for entering the labor force.

Amid devastation to the local economy and the closure of the Israeli labor market to Palestinians, more young men are staying outside the labor market and entering higher education. The pur-

pose of this education is not just to improve their chances of acquiring work in the local labor market, but also to strengthen their opportunities for emigration.

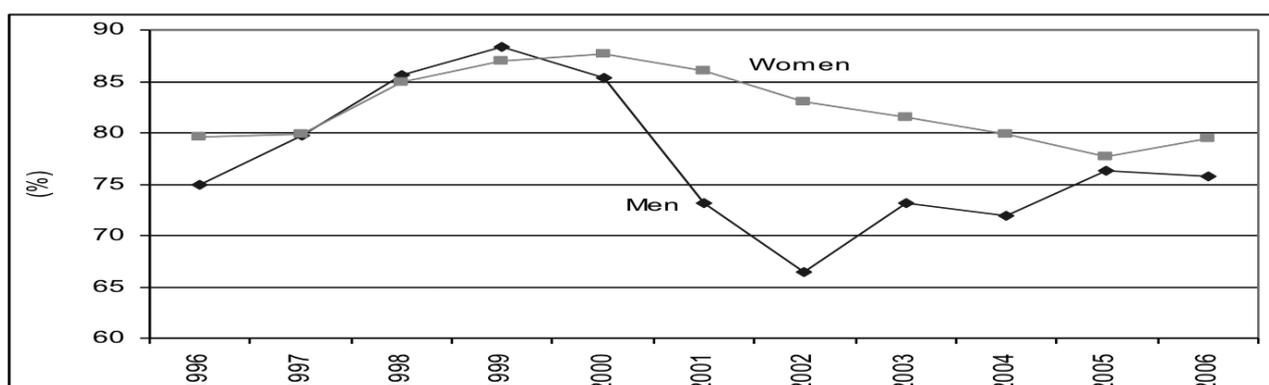
2. Odds of Participation for Women in the West Bank

Women in the West Bank also experienced a dramatic decline in their odds of participation during the height of Israeli restrictions in years 2001-2002 as compared to year 1999. However, in the following years their odds of participation increased to just surpass the prevailing odds in 1999. By year 2007, their likelihood of participation was 1.18 times that which prevailed in year 1999.

The rise in women's labor force participation in the period after 2003, however, does not constitute a growth in women's participation. Rather, it represents a recovery and a return to the pre-intifada average. Women had to return to the labor market to make up for the losses that their families encountered as a result of Israeli restrictions. This finding is supported by the results of West Bank fieldwork where a number of women noted that the loss of income sources within their families has pushed them to search for jobs. This search has meant an increase in their mobility compared to men, but only within their villages, camps and towns. It remains unacceptable for a woman to move from one area to another in search of economic opportunities.

However, most of those who entered the labor market found jobs characterized by low pay and lack of protection. This includes employment as

Figure 4: Employment Rates for Men and Women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (1996-2006)



Source: PCBS, Labor Force Survey (various years)

domestic cleaners, in nurseries or small-scale textile manufacturing shops. Women perceive it as less humiliating for men that women take up these low-paid jobs. The image of the male breadwinner who is the proud provider for his family is a dominating and important image.

3. Odds of Participation for Men in Gaza

Men in the Gaza Strip have been facing huge obstacles in their attempts to join the labor force. They either do not have the right education or skills for the local market after the closure of the Israeli labor market to Palestinians, or, if they have a certain means of production, it has been destroyed repeatedly by the Israeli army.

In the Gaza Strip, with the exception of the year 1996, the odds of participation for men during the entire period under study were lower than our reference year 1999. Again, the lowest odds of participation were during the period 2000-2001. In year 2002, a Gazan man's odds of participation was 70 percent that in 1999. The closure of the Israeli labor market to Palestinian workers and the harsh Israeli measures against the population in Gaza have led to the destruction of the local economy and introduced a widespread sense of hopelessness that affects the overall propensity of men joining the labor force.

Study results highlighted the issue of qualifications and skills mismatch between local economic needs

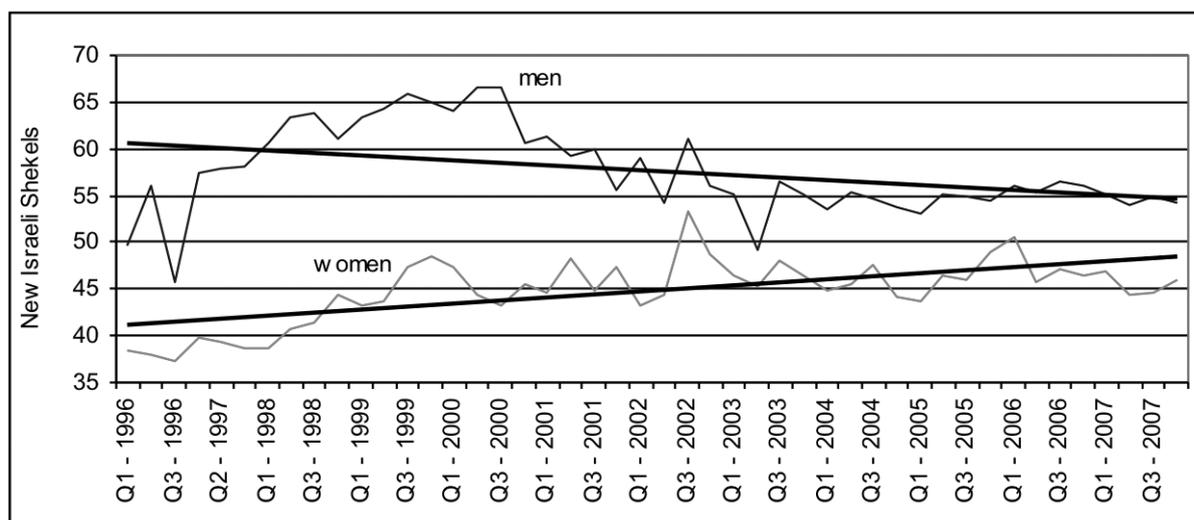
and the skills and experience of the men who lost their jobs in Israel, which appears to have contributed to their difficulties in joining the labor force. Skilled and semi-skilled laborers in Israel who became permanently unemployed after the prolonged period of closure beginning in 2000 typically had limited education and skills and working habits they had acquired in Israel did not necessarily meet the needs and practices of the traditional Gazan economy (Kleibo and Muhanna, 2008). Moreover, if men are lucky enough to have a certain means of production (primarily land), it has been destroyed repeatedly by the Israeli army. Furthermore, whatever subsistence forms of work men engage in usually goes unreported since it is considered shameful for a man to be involved in low productivity or/and low earning economic activities. The result is a pervasive sense of hopelessness; in the face of severely diminished opportunities for employment and production, many men are discouraged from seeking to join the labor force or otherwise find work.

4. Odds of Participation for Women in Gaza

Gazan women's participation in the labor market is characterized by extreme fluctuation over time; this reflects efforts to search for work in desperate "crunch periods" (see Figure 6).

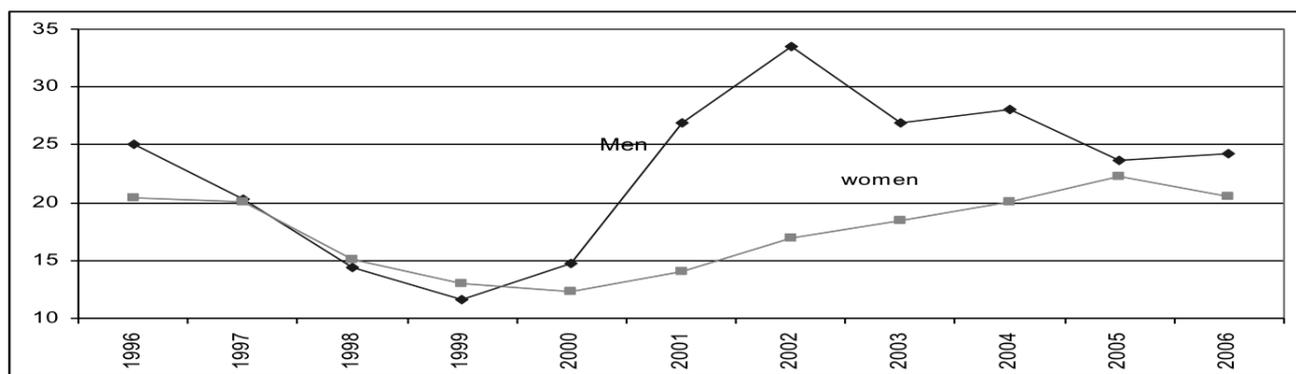
"Women usually intensify their efforts to search for work following crunch periods. The majority of them try to find regular sources of income, even if

Figure 5: Average Real Daily Wages for Women and Men in the oPt (1996-2007)



Source: PCBS, Labor Force Survey (various years).

Figure 6: Unemployment Rates for Men and Women in the oPt (1996-2006)



Source: PCBS, Labor Force Survey, (various years).

the type of work is inferior or even humiliating” (Kleibo and Mohanna, 2008). Women’s increased mobility and their venturing out in search of work should not be seen as a sign of improvement in their economic conditions: it represents a desperate measure to survive and it adds to a woman’s burden within her own family.

Labor Force Participation Rates by Other Demographic Variables

I. Age

Women who entered the labor market a decade ago are choosing not to leave; they have stayed in the labor force as a result of the deterioration in economic conditions. Age improves a Palestinian female’s odds of participation until she reaches her mid-50s, and then her odds of participating begin to decline. Younger women aged 15-24 have the lowest odds of participation. The odds of a woman aged 15-24 participating in the labor market was 19 percent that of a woman aged 35-44 in the period 1996-2000. In the later two periods, 2001-2002 and 2003-2007, the likelihood of a woman aged between 15-24 participating in the labor market declined to 16 percent and 14 percent, respectively.

This is a reflection of a number of factors: first, women who entered the labor market a decade ago are choosing not to leave and second, they have stayed in the labor force as a result of the deterioration in economic conditions. Another factor explaining the low participation of younger women is the slow growth of the economy, which means there are few opportunities for the younger generation of job seekers. The hostility of the labor market towards women is confirmed by the

longer duration of unemployment among those who choose to enter the labor market. According to the ILO (2006), despite the similar levels of unemployment amongst females and males, female unemployment duration is four times that of males.

For men, the odds of participation are highest in the age group 25-35. However, over time, as is the case with women, there are few opportunities for the younger generation of job seekers. The odds of participation for younger men have been declining and more young men are pursuing higher education. This finding is confirmed by the rise in the percentage of men staying outside the labor market for education purposes. Younger men and their families believe that education is the only means through which they can improve their chances of participation in the labor market.

2. Educational Attainment

Education increases the odds of a Palestinian female’s participating in the labor force. In particular, a female who has completed a bachelor or a master’s degree has the greatest odds of participating. Interestingly, however, the odds of participation for females with 10-12 years of schooling are the lowest, and are even lower than the odds of a female with no education. This is true for women in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This pattern reflects the fact that the jobs available for women in the labor market either require high education or little education. This is attributed to the structure of the oPt economy, which lacks a labor-intensive manufacturing sector and restricts employment opportunities for women to, on one hand, the agricultural sector, and, on the other, health care, education, and office work such as the financial services sectors. Accordingly, women who

tend to participate in the labor market either have very high education, which suits the service sector, or none at all.

Over time, the odds of a female with higher education or one with no education participating in the labor force have been increasing, while the odds of a woman with 10-12 years of schooling participating have been decreasing. The likelihood of a woman with a postgraduate degree joining the labor market has increased from 18 times the probability of a woman with high school education to over 37 times that probability. This indicates that the structural imbalances within the labor market are being strengthened. Horizontal segregation, whereby women are located in a few sectors, is being reinforced over the years.

The importance of education to families despite the dire economic situation is confirmed through qualitative fieldwork: families still value the education of their daughters and sons. However, whenever families seem to need to make a choice, they prefer that their male children drop out of schools and universities rather than their girls. This is linked to the fact that women with degrees have a better access to socially-accepted jobs than men with degrees.

Still, given the dire economic situation, education by itself, as some older women noted, is not enough. Social mobility is also important and families emphasize the importance of building networks to improve the chances of their graduated daughters' chances of securing employment.

More young men have been enrolling in higher education to improve their chances of competing in the local economy after the closure of the Israeli labor market. As for the results of education for men, Israeli violence and restrictions have had the greatest impact on men who have no education. The odds of participation for a man without education were 35 percent the odds of participation of a man with 10-12 years of schooling in the period 1996-2000. This declined sharply in 2001-2002 to 28 percent odds for a man with high school education. This implies that education, which was not required for work in Israel, is now becoming more important.

3. Marital Status

Married women are less likely to participate in the labor force than women who have never been married or those who are divorced, or widowed. This lower probability of participation of women who are married can be explained by the persistence of strong traditional values in the oPt, where a woman's primary role is still seen as caring for her family. Consequently, married, divorced and widowed women are likely to have a heavier domestic burden, particularly in caring for their children. This finding is expected, given the high fertility rate in the oPt—the average number of children is 6.6 births per woman in the Gaza Strip and 5.2 births per woman in the West Bank (PCBS, 2005).

While married women are less likely to participate in the labor force than single women, the trend is changing in favor of married women. The odds of participation for single women are falling. Before the Second Intifada, the odds of a single woman participating in the labor market were 2.6 times that of a married woman. Since the Second Intifada, the odds for a single woman participating declined to 1.8 times that of a married woman. Fieldwork indicates that married middle-aged women have easier mobility than young single women. Married middle-aged women face fewer social restrictions and thus enter low paid and unprotected jobs. It is socially acceptable, on the other hand, for single women to work in "good" jobs, which usually means working within an institution that has a number of women staff members. This includes work as teachers, nurses, or in factories. However, other forms of work are not as socially acceptable for young single women. That of street traders, domestic servants, or any other forms of work in which a woman needs to interact with a large undefined public or in a very personal setting are not acceptable for younger women. Since there have been fewer of the formal "socially" acceptable jobs, single women have less chance of joining the labor market.

4. Region

Women living in the northern region of the West Bank have the highest odds of participating in the labor force compared to those living in central governorates. This is due to the fact that the northern region of the West Bank has the most active agricultural sector. With loss of employment

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in the private sector resulting from external and internal closures, it is likely that the availability of work in the agricultural sector in the northern region has mitigated the impact of the loss of jobs within this region. Over time, these women continued to gain grounds in the labor market and the odds of their participation has increased. In the period from 1996-2000, the odds of participation for northern West Bank women was 1.5 times that of women living in the central region. In 2003-2007, the odds of participation for northern West Bank women rose to 1.7 times that the odds of central region women. Israeli violence during 2001-2002 had the strongest negative impact on women in Gaza. The odds of their participation declined from 1.2 times to only 63 percent the odds of a central West Bank woman.

The odds of labor participation among men, as explained earlier, are the lowest among men in the Gaza Strip. This is a reflection of the destruction of the local economy and the closure of the Israeli labor market, which combined have depressed prospects for work and hence the likelihood of participation in the labor force. Over time, the odds of participation for men in the northern region of the West Bank have been declining. This is likely due to the completion of the construction of the Wall in the northern region of the West Bank which is barring men from entering markets.

5. Locality

Women located in urban and refugee camp areas are less likely to participate in the labor force than women located in rural areas due to the fact that women in rural areas have opportunities to find work in the agricultural sector. During the Second Intifada, the odds of participation for women in rural areas declined, and then began to recover in later years.

Men in urban centers have the highest odds of labor participation. This is due to the fact that urban centers provide more formal sector jobs that have been least affected by Israeli restrictions. Public sector employment and jobs provided by international organizations and donor countries are mostly located in urban centers; hence, men within these areas have had the most stable labor force participation prospects. Men have increased their work in this sector but, as previously noted, it is only viewed as supportive to women rather

than a man's area of work. Women continue to dominate the sector.

Trends in Employment in the oPt (2000-2007)

The present reality of employment in the oPt is a result of an interaction between a number of political and economic factors. Israeli restrictions, including closures, checkpoints, road blocks, curfews, incursions into Palestinian cities and finally the siege of Gaza have all resulted in major repercussions for employment. In 2007, nearly 78.5 percent of those in the labor force were employed, with slightly higher employment rates for women (81 percent) compared to men (77.9 percent). Employment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip has been severely impacted by Israeli restrictions. Employment rates hit their highest points in year 1999 for men and year 2000 for women (see Figure 4). Thereafter, Israel's military violence and movement restrictions within the West Bank and the continued siege of Gaza reduced employment rates drastically. Although men's employment rates declined more sharply than women's as a result of Israeli restrictions imposed after 2001, men's rates also reversed direction and started to increase after 2002. Women's employment rates, however, continued declining throughout this period and only leveled off in year 2007.

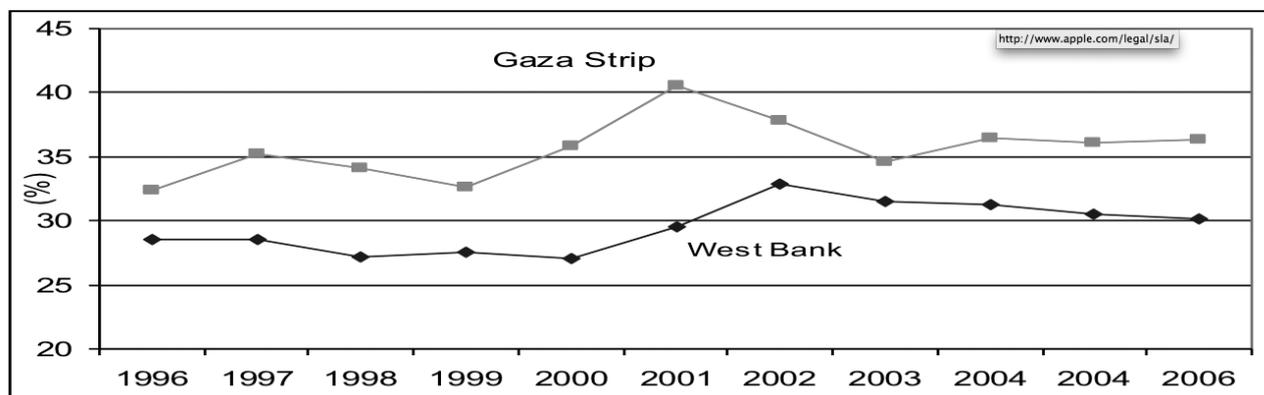
A review of the structural changes within the employment scene is critical to understanding the impact of Israeli restrictions on employment. Since 2001-2002, the structure of employment has become characterized by three key features that have major implications for gender differentials in the Palestinian labor market. These structural changes are:

- Fall of Palestinian employment in Israel
- Decline of employment in productive sectors
- Convergence in the wage gap between men and women

1. Fluctuation and eventual fall in Palestinian employment in Israel and the settlements

Before 1993, Israel and the settlements absorbed 40 percent of the employed work force in Gaza and 30 percent in the West Bank (Farsakh, 2004).

Figure 7: Percentage of Men Outside the Labor Force (1996-2006)



Source: PCBS, Labor Force Survey (various years).

After 1993, the number of Palestinians working in Israel fluctuated in relation to the intensity of the closures. In 1999, before the Second Intifada broke out in the fourth quarter of 2000, work in Israel and the settlements absorbed 16 percent of the Gaza working population compared with 26 percent of the West Bank employed workforce. These percentages represented a total of 135,000 Palestinian workers.

The immediate impact of Israeli restrictions in 2000-2001 was the loss of about 47,000 jobs and a further 20,000 in 2002. By 2007, employment in Israel and the settlements dropped to around 13 percent of all those employed in the West Bank (62,000 workers) and zero percent of the workforce in Gaza Strip. Palestinian employment in Israel and the settlement's labor market has always been dominated by men. Work in Israel and the settlements was never a significant contributor to Palestinian women's employment. In 1999, at the height of Palestinian employment in Israel, only 0.7 percent and 2.7 percent of Gaza and West Bank employed women worked there, respectively. Although women were not directly affected by Israel's closure of its market to Palestinian workers, their employment was negatively impacted by spillover effects into the local economy. In addition to the indirect economic repercussions on women from the loss of employment in Israel and the settlements, there was the heavy burden that women had to deal with in the form of the psychological effects of this loss on their husbands, themselves and consequently the family as a whole.

Refugee women dependent on men who lost their jobs in Israel tend to face a harder life than rural or urban women, particularly since they are less likely

to live nearby to their close relatives (parents and siblings), a circumstance that heightens hardship when cash money is urgently needed. Rural women not only live nearby close relatives but are more likely to be able to sell poultry or vegetables produced for family consumption, while women living in the camps have little to sell other than some items from UNRWA food assistance (Ibid).

This loss of employment had devastating effects on these men, women and their families; the emptiness, humiliation and loss of pride experienced by men unable to fulfill their expected role as providers, the burden on women having to deal with both the practical and emotional repercussions of this, has pushed the losses well beyond economic figures. This is particularly the case in the Gaza Strip.

2. Decline of employment in the productive sectors

The sectoral patterns of male and female employment show that the share of employment in the productive sectors—manufacturing and construction—has declined drastically. The decline in the share of manufacturing employment is most significant for women in the Gaza Strip. Manufacturing, which accounted for 15 percent of women's employment in Gaza in 1996, plummeted to two percent in 2007. Yet this decline predated the structural break that took place in year 2001-2002 as result of Israeli restrictions, i.e. the share of women's work in this sector has been declining since 1996.

The decline of the manufacturing sector in Gaza, particularly in terms of the employment of women, resulted from the restructuring of the Israeli

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manufacturing industry. The textile industry had relied for a while on subcontracts with mostly-women providers in Gaza and its decline has had implications for the employment of Gazan women working in this sector.

As for men in the Gaza Strip, there is a visible decline during our structural point—2000, that is—as a result of Israeli measures; before this date the share of employment in manufacturing was declining, but at a visibly lower rate. In total, manufacturing's share of men's employment declined from 15% in 1996 to 7% in 2007. The decline in the share of manufacturing employment both in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is indicative of the decline of the private sector as a whole, the rise in uncertainty as a result of closures and movement restrictions, as well as the sharp rise in transaction costs.

The share of employed persons working in the construction sector has also been declining. The construction sector is dominated by men, hence, women's share of employment in this sector was marginal to begin with. Israel's closure of its market to Palestinian workers after September 2000 affected this sector significantly. In 1999, 24 percent of Palestinian men from the West Bank worked in the construction sector; by 2007 only 14 percent were still working in this sector. In the Gaza Strip, the decline was much more drastic; in 1999 the share of male employment in the construction sector accounted for 20 percent to decline to 5 percent by 2007.

3. Convergence in men and women's wages

Available data indicate that, while domestic employment fell by 15 percent between 1999 and 2002, wages decreased by five percent only (World Bank, 2004). This suggests discrepancies between supply and demand for workers as a result of closures. It also reflects the differential wage scales applied in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The differential wage scales are a function of labor shortages in certain areas as a result of closures. They are also influenced by the size of the expatriate donor community and the wages they pay.

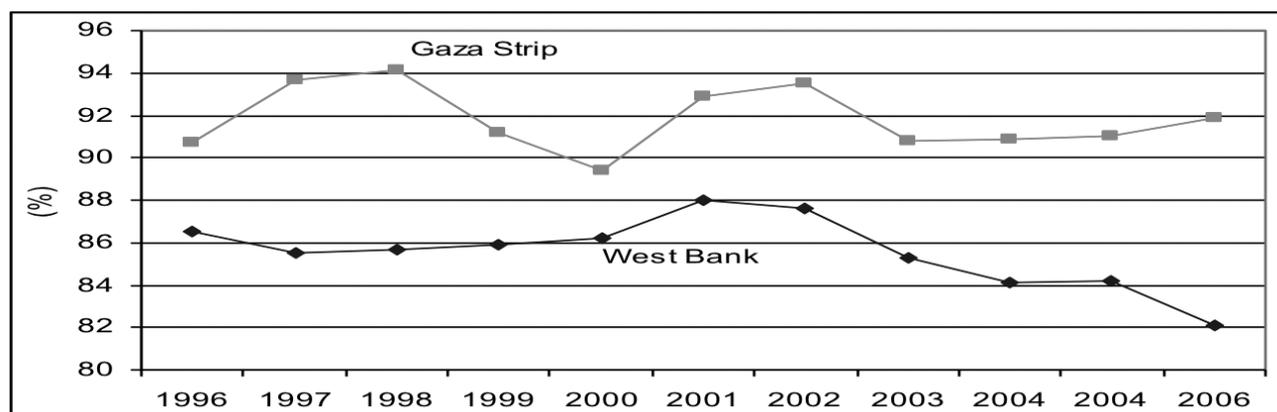
The result is that real daily wages for men have declined, while wages for women have kept pace with inflation. The decline in men's real wages took place both in the West Bank (-15 percent between 2000 and 2007) as well as in the Gaza Strip (-19 percent between 2000 and 2007). On the other hand, women's wages increased by 14 percent in the West Bank and 22 percent in the Gaza Strip during 1996-2007. This is because the loss of male employment in Israel has meant huge losses in wages, since the average wage in Israel is higher than that in either the West Bank or Gaza. It is also due to the fact that waged women are mainly concentrated in the service sector in the government and international organization, which has meant that many women have kept their jobs.

Table 3: Unemployment Rates for Men and Women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

	West Bank			Gaza Strip		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
1997	17.2	17.6	17.3	26.5	29.9	26.8
1998	22	17.8	11.5	20.8	24.4	21.1
1999	9.2	11.1	9.5	16.9	19.3	16.9
2000	12.8	9.9	12.1	19	18.5	18.7
2001	23.3	10.9	21.5	35.3	24.2	34.2
2002	30.9	14	28.2	39.1	28.4	38.1
2003	25.5	15.8	23.8	29.6	26.8	29.2
2004	24.3	16.6	22.9	35.9	31.6	35.4
2005	20.8	18.3	20.3	29.6	35.2	30.3
2006	18.9	17.6	18.6	35.1	32.3	34.8
2007	18.3	15.5	17.7	29.7	27.7	29.7

Source: PCBS, Labor Force Survey (various years).

Figure 8: Percentage of Women Outside the Labor Force (1996-2006)



Source: PCBS, Labor Force Survey, (various years)

Trends in Unemployment in the oPt (2000-2007)

During the years after the Oslo peace agreements (1996-2000), male and female unemployment rates were steadily decreasing (see Table 3, Figure 2).

The percentage of unemployed male workers declined from a high of 20 percent in 1996 to ten percent by the end of the year 2000, while the percentage of unemployed female workers declined from 18 percent to eight percent during the same period. However, the start of the Second Intifada disrupted this trend, whereby Israeli violence and restrictions pushed unemployment rates up substantially. Overnight, between 2000-2001, the numbers of unemployed jumped from 99,000 to 170,000 workers: a 70 percent rise.

As Israel imposed closures and severe movement restrictions both within and between the West Bank and Gaza, male unemployment rose substantially (see Table 3, Figure 6). In the West Bank, male unemployment rates rose from nine percent in 1999 to 23.3 percent in 2001. In the Gaza Strip, male unemployment increased significantly; from 19 percent in 1999 to 35.5 percent in 2001. These rises came about as a result of the combined effect of the closure of the Israeli labor market and the contraction of the private sector due to movement restrictions.

Despite the sudden rise in male unemployment following Israeli violence and restrictions in years 2001/2002, these rates started to level off in 2003. By 2007, male unemployment rates were similar to their levels in 1996. In contrast, for women, unemployment rose in 2000 and has continued to rise through 2007. This indicates that women are

facing huge difficulties in attaining employment and now have to compete with a large pool of men who were previously employed in Israel.

In making comparisons between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip among men and women, the data reveals that unemployment rates are much higher and more volatile in the Gaza Strip. The highest male unemployment rate recorded in the West Bank in 2002 stood at 31 percent, and 39 percent in the Gaza Strip in year 2002. Female unemployment rates in the Gaza Strip are also higher and more volatile than those in the West Bank. Unemployment rates among women in the Gaza Strip rose from 16.9 percent in 1999 to 34.8 percent in 2006, compared to 9.5 percent in the West Bank.

Among women, those with 13 years or more of education have the highest unemployment rate. The impact of the Israeli restrictions in year 2000/2001 reinforced this trend and made it even more difficult for women to acquire employment. This is a consequence of the contraction of the Palestinian economy, which resulted from continued Israeli restrictions. Also, as explained above, married women who used to withdraw from the labor market are staying on longer, which means that there are less chances for younger women in general, and the highly-educated in particular. Thus, although education is an important prerequisite for female employment in formal labor, it is difficult for young, highly-educated women to enter the labor market as first-timers.

Another important finding is that overall, those most affected by unemployment are the youth.

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Summary of trends

- The impact of Israeli restrictions on the labor market participation of men and women during 2001-2002 was overwhelmingly negative.
- The impact of the Second Intifada was most heavily felt by men, both in the West Bank and Gaza. Participation is becoming much more difficult for men, for reasons to do with lack of local employment, closure of the Israeli labor market, destruction of businesses and fields, increasing transaction costs as a result of movement restrictions and the severing of regions from one another.
- **The odds of labor participation for men never recovered from the extreme decline experienced during these years, while that of women returned to its pre-Intifada average.**
- **Evidence suggests a greater involvement of men and women in survival activities. This is particularly true of women, who ventured out to search for any job, even if low paid and unprotected.** In the Gaza Strip in particular, more women, especially housewives who traditionally have not been involved in economic activities, are venturing out to search for coupons, aid, and any form of assistance they can find to help their families and unemployed husbands.
- **The impact of Israeli violence has also been most felt by younger men and women.** The odds of participation for the age group 15-24 declined after the start of the Second Intifada and thereafter.
- Since the start of the Second Intifada, **the odds of a female with a higher education or no education participating in the labor force have been increasing, compared to women with 10-12 years of schooling.** This implies that structural problems in the labor market for women—which allow either highly-educated women or women with no education some involvement in the labor market—have been reinforced by Israeli violence. Women with some years of education are more persistently excluded from the labor market. While the likelihood of a woman with a postgraduate degree joining the labor market has increased from 18 times, the probability of a woman with high school education has increased to over 37 times.
- **Israeli violence has most prominently affected the odds of participation for a man with no education. The least educated who formerly worked in Israel do not have access to employment in Israel and now have to compete within the local economy of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.** In addition, the destruction of the business sector and productive capacity of the Palestinian economy means that the local economy has become even more competitive.
- **Women from the northern West Bank have the greatest odds of participating in the labor market.** This can be attributed mainly to the strong agricultural sector in the northern West Bank region, which acts as a relatively stable source of labor market outlet. The opposite is true for men; the odds of participation of men in the northern region have declined. This is mainly due to the difficulties of accessing the Israeli labor market due to the building of the Wall, which prevents workers from smuggling themselves into Israel.
- On the whole, the employment scene in the West Bank and Gaza has changed drastically. The **closure of the labor market in Israel devastated men's employment opportunities in Israel.** Israeli restrictions and violence also devastated local employment and impacted negatively the productive sectors. This means that **the economy is losing its productive capacity and productive employment.** As a result, **services are the biggest provider of employment, including the government sector, health care, education, restaurants and transport.** Much of this sector relies on support from the international community and thus represents **primarily non-sustainable work forms.**
- **Although a wage gap remains between men and women, their wages have been converging over time.** This is mainly due to the fact that higher wages for men have been lost in Israel.
- Regarding unemployment, male unemployment has returned to pre-Intifada levels, while women's unemployment continued to rise. Unemployment rates remain highest amongst younger groups of the population (15-24 years old).
- Regarding those outside the labor market, the percentage of women staying outside the labor market in the West Bank is declining. At the same time, **the percentage of young men staying outside the labor market for education purposes is rising.** This is a sign that the labor market is becoming more competitive. Young uneducated men used to have an important outlet for their work in Israel but this has ceased, and hence they are compelled to improve their qualifications and skills to join the local market or to improve their chances of migrating.

Unemployment rates are highest amongst 15-24 and 25-34 year-olds. This is particularly true after the year 2000, our structural break point. At the same time, men's unemployment rates level off, while women's continue to rise.

Trends Regarding Individuals Outside the Labor Force in the oPt (2000-2007)

In 2007, nearly 60 percent of working-age Palestinians had neither participated in any type of recorded economic activity, paid or unpaid, nor were searching for work (PCBS, 2007). This percentage is much higher than in Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (where it is around 30 percent) and surpasses its equivalent in many other Middle Eastern countries.

The percentage of men staying outside the labor force has increased over time, particularly after 2001-2002. This is particularly true for men in the Gaza Strip (see Figure 7). As for women, the low female labor force participation means a high non-participation rate (see Figure 8). The rise in the percentage of women outside the labor force in Gaza is associated with the dire situation of the economy there. All economic sectors have been badly hit, and women are limiting themselves to work in the informal sector, which is becoming less predictable. On the other hand, women are expanding their activities in searching of aid wherever they are able to find it.

The devastation of the Gaza Strip economy is likely to have grave consequences for the structure of the labor market. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) data does not allow clear analysis of the "discouraged worker" effect, but one can expect that it is very much at play. Fieldwork has revealed the huge sense of hopelessness and apathy on the part of men, and the reliance and dependence of families on aid for survival. This creates long-term problems associated with the underutilization of labor among Palestinians. These problems include loss of productivity, non-capitalization on talent and skills, and additional grave social repercussions.

The reasons men and women remain outside the labor market differ considerably. Over time, the impact of Israeli restrictions also becomes visible through the experiences of those outside the labor market. For men, the predominant reason for

The legislation in force in the West Bank and Gaza before 2000 was substantially disadvantageous to workers. Hence, the 2000 law attempted to bring labor legislation in line with international standards (mainly the International Labor Organization) and those found in neighboring countries.

remaining outside the labor force is education, while for women, the reason is home-keeping. However, what is interesting is that in both cases, the number of men and women staying outside the labor market for education is increasing over time, while home-keeping for women is on the decline as a reason for keeping women outside the labor market. This indicates that men and women are trying to improve their competitive edge in the labor market by seeking further education. As explained in earlier sections, this is a reflection of the dire situation that is symptomatic of the Palestinian economy as a whole.

III. Issues, Actors and Opportunities

Overview of the Legal Environment and Labor Force Participation

The labor market in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is governed by a number of laws and institutions that work to regulate and facilitate the functioning of this market. In terms of legislation, Palestinian Labor Law Number 7 of the year 2000, which became effective on December 25, 2001, provides the legal framework. This law resulted in the unification of labor legislation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Before this date, Jordanian labor law of 1965 was in effect in the West Bank and Egyptian labor law of 1964 was applied in the Gaza Strip.

Israeli-Imposed Movement Restrictions Wreak Havoc on Palestinian Labor Market

The legislation in force in the West Bank and Gaza before 2000 was substantially disadvantageous to workers. Hence, the 2000 law attempted to bring labor legislation in line with international standards (mainly the International Labor Organization) and those found in neighboring countries. It has been difficult to assess the law's impact on the propensity of workers to work or employers to provide employment, since its introduction coincided with the start of the Intifada in September 2000 and the related market instability.

However, in terms of workers' rights, the Palestinian labor law is an improvement on its Jordanian and Egyptian predecessors. The law requires employers to insure their employees with a locally-licensed insurance company against work accidents and provides workers with the right to have sick leave for medical treatment due to a work accident for a maximum period of 180 days while receiving 75 percent of his/her wages. The period is not considered as part of his/her paid annual holiday. The law stipulates a period of 14 days annual leave and this period increases to 21 days after five years of work.

Palestinian labor law forbids the employment of children under the age of 15. Despite this legislation, in 2004 a PCBS survey found that 3.1 percent of all children aged 5-17 were working. Two-thirds were working as contributing family members and 71 percent of the children worked to meet economic needs. Nonetheless, 95.4 percent of children aged 6-17 were attending school (PCBS, July 2004). It is illegal to employ under-18-year-olds in dangerous and harmful work, in night jobs, during holidays, at weekends or in overtime. Those who are under the age of 18 are to work for an hour less per day than adults, have a right to a paid annual holiday of three weeks, and are entitled to free medical examination during and on completion of employment (Hilal et al, 2008).

The labor law demands equal rights for women, in addition to some specific rights. These specific rights include: the right to be protected from dangerous employment and arduous work (as defined by the Ministry of Labor), the right to be protected from working additional hours during pregnancy and the first six months after giving birth, and the right to a fully paid maternity leave of ten weeks (as from at least six weeks after giving birth). Mothers also have the right to a fully paid hour per day for feeding their less-than-one-

year-old infants. They also have the right to take a one year unpaid vacation to care for a child or to accompany a spouse. The law also specifies the type of jobs that can be performed by women at night time, for example jobs in hospitals, restaurants, theatres, cafés, cinemas, music halls, etc. It is worth mentioning that public health law (Number 20, 2004) gives priority to mothers and children in the provision of health care, considering this an integral part of the development strategy of the Palestinian Authority. Special care is to be given to women during pregnancy, birth, early childcare and to child development.

Labor law applies to work in both formal and informal employment, including all types of employment regardless of the size and type of the establishment, the number of people it employs and whether it is registered or not. All that is required from the worker or employee to claim his rights is to provide tangible proof of employment. The proof does not necessarily have to be a written contract, but it can be in the form of a pay slip, the testimony of other workers, an oral acknowledgement by the employer, etc.

Limitations of the Labor Law and Implementing Agencies

Most small establishments do not apply the law for several reasons. Apart from a possible lack of knowledge of the law, most small establishments employ relatives, friends and neighbors. An even more important reason for lack of compliance to the labor law is the absence of special courts dealing with labor disputes that make any lawsuit lengthy, costly and exhausting. This leads workers and employees to settle their cases outside the courts and to accept much less than what the law guarantees (Hilal et al, 2008).

The labor law in its present form excludes large segments of the Palestinian labor force including: own-account workers, seasonal workers, unpaid family workers, domestic workers and those involved in unpaid domestic care and reproductive work at home. The law is clearly not sufficiently gender-sensitive and does not protect women working within the previously mentioned spheres. The fact that the greatest majority of women are not unionized and the Palestinian women's movement is not unified and well-organized to advocate for working women's rights explains why these

rights are not fully specified and spelled out in detail by the law. Although the labor law is clear in its clause for equal treatment between men and women, it does not specify penalties for employers who violate this article of the law (Human Development Report, 2004).

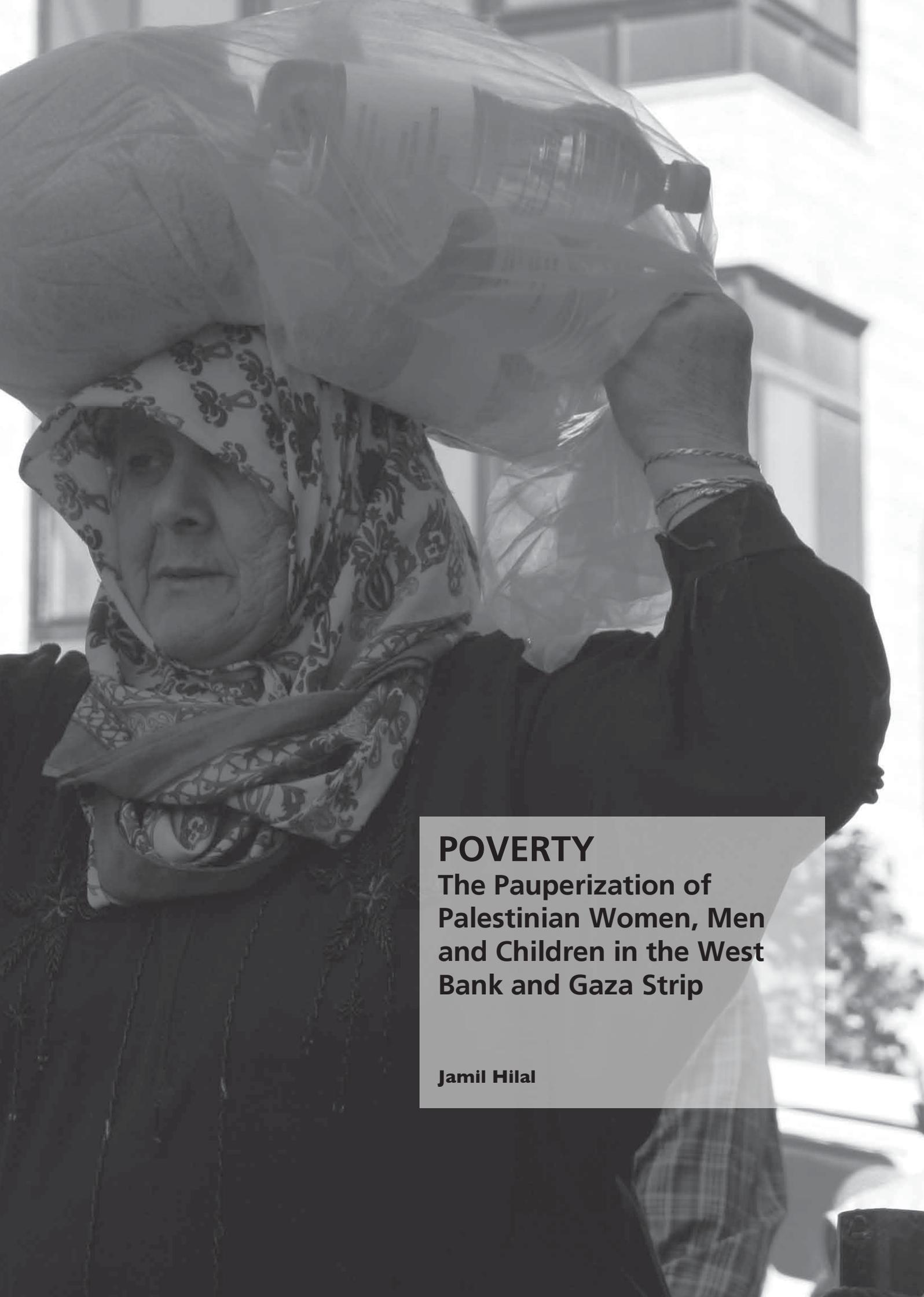
From the point of view of employers, the labor law has several ambiguities. Many employers indicated that the law would be more effective with a number of clarifications, including the following: 1) Adding special provisions covering part-time employment. The law fails to deal with this type of labor. 2) Providing better protection for the rights and duties of employers and workers in short-term contracts. 3) Clarifying the article that allows employers to sack workers for “technical reasons”; the law does not explain what these are. 4) Establishing a committee to deal with dismissals, such as those found in neighboring countries. 5) Clarifying the provisions that cover the issue of workers leaving their jobs before the end of their notice period. 6) Expanding health and safety regulations, which are currently very cursory. 7) Activating the committees specified in the law that encourage employers, the government and trade unions to work together on resolving issues such as wages and working conditions (Al-Botmeh, 2007).

Private sector employers have indicated that their production costs rose by about 6-12 percent as a result of implementing this law. This has been a huge rise in costs that coincided with other jumps in costs as a result of Israeli movement restrictions, including transaction costs. The highest contributor to the rise in costs has been, according to employers, maternity leave for women. There were calls among workers and employers for this cost to be shared between employers and government, so employers do not discriminate against women and disadvantage their chances of employment (Al-Botmeh, 2007). As mentioned earlier, there are no courts specializing in resolving labor disputes. As a result, according to trade unionists, thousands of unsettled labor disputes are blocking the judicial system and awaiting resolution. This has weakened confidence in the courts of law which, through their passivity in resolving labor dispute cases, have effectively encouraged employers to violate laws and procedures protecting workers’ rights.

In addition to providing no protection for women and men in self-employment and unpaid family work, the Palestinian labor law and its by-laws do not regulate work performed by women in agriculture, as paid domestic workers, or home-based production and service workers (mainly women running home nurseries and women producing food for sale or working from home producing sewing, embroidery, etc...). Nor does the law address unpaid work in family economic activities (Hilal et al, 2008).

There is an urgent need for workers’ trade unions to strengthen their autonomous democratic self-organization and to attract active membership of a much larger percentage of workers in general, and women workers in particular. There are no official records of the number of members of trade unions; estimates are available from union leaders, but they have a clear interest in inflating the size of their unions. In 2006, the percentage of those in the labor force classified as unionized stood at 19.4 percent (Al-Botmeh and Odwan, 2006). Trade unions are empowered by law to engage in collective negotiations; thus they need to develop the ability to engage in social dialogue and consultation to better ensure that workers rights are protected and enhanced.

In conclusion, and while stating the overall domination of the Israeli occupation over all aspects of life in the oPt, it can be said that the legal environment for work suffers from a number of problems related both to the laws as written and their implementation. The introduction of the Palestinian labor law, which tries to address the deficiencies of previous laws, falls short of coverage and clarity. The law also pushed the cost of production upwards for employers at a time when businesses were suffering enormously as a result of Israeli restrictions. This has had repercussions, according to employers, for the exclusion of women, who these employers say are costly employees, particularly for small establishments. There are also issues related to implementing agencies, including the Palestinian Ministry of Labor and its various committees, as well as the ineffectiveness of the Palestinian trade union movement. All of these deficiencies hinder the smooth functioning of the labor market within the oPt, which is further complicated by Israel’s movement restrictions.



POVERTY

**The Pauperization of
Palestinian Women, Men
and Children in the West
Bank and Gaza Strip**

Jamil Hilal

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I. Introduction and Context

This paper views poverty as a feature of socio-economic, political and cultural processes that generate different forms of inequality, including gender and generational inequalities. Its focus is exclusively on impoverishment among Palestinians in the West Bank (WB) and Gaza Strip (GS) while maintaining awareness that poverty needs to be mapped and analyzed among the other Palestinian communities; i.e., within the Green Line, and in the diaspora or al-shatat. Israeli colonial settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WBGS) whose numbers exceeded half a million by the end of 2008 do not feature in the Palestinian poverty map.¹ The causes of the sharp rise of poverty in the last decade in the WBGS are explored.

The first comprehensive survey of poverty in the WBGS was published in 1998.² It relied mainly on an analysis of a survey of household consumption

and expenditure.³ Using the same methodology, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) published a national poverty report for 2006. Other reports on poverty in the WBGS have been issued by the World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), among others.

II. Trends and Indicators

Mapping impoverishment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

Comparing data on poverty before and after the Second Intifada reveals the following features of poverty in the WBGS over the last decade:

I. There has been a substantive increase in the incidence of impoverishment and inequality.

In 1998, the poor (i.e., those living under the national poverty line⁴) comprised one-fifth (20 percent) of all households in the WBGS,⁵ while in 2006, they formed 30.8 percent of total households.⁶ Before the eruption of the Second Intifada, there was a relative decline in the incidence of poverty corresponding to a decline in unemployment rates resulting from a relative easing of Israeli

1 The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), estimated the population of the Israeli Jewish settlements to be 500,670 at the end of 2008 (See Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute - MAS, *Economic and Social Monitor 17* (September 2009) 3.

2 The definition of poverty developed by the Palestinian Poverty Commission in 1997 and adopted officially by the Palestinian Authority (PA) combines both absolute (deep) and relative features. It was based on a budget of basic needs for a household of six individuals (two adults and four children). Two poverty lines were established according to actual spending patterns of Palestinian families. These were termed "deep poverty" line, and "relative poverty" line. The first was based on a budget for food, clothing and housing (the absolute basic necessities), while the second line added other necessities, which included education, health care, transportation (for work), personal care, and housekeeping supplies. The two lines were adjusted to reflect the different needs of families based on their consumption (i.e., household size and number of children). (See "National Poverty Eradication Commission - NPEC," *Palestine Poverty Report 1998*. Ramallah: Palestinian Authority.

3 For a reading of the data of 1998 poverty report, see Jamil Hilal, "The Making of Poverty in Palestine" in M. Petmesidou and C. Papatheodorou, *Poverty and Social Deprivation in the Mediterranean* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2006) in association with CROP, and International Social Science Council.

4

5 Deep poverty in 1996 and 1997 averaged 14 percent and 12.5 percent in 1998.

6 PCBS, *Poverty in the Palestinian Territory, 2006: Main Finding Report*. August 2007, 16.

closures, and in response to the generation of new employment opportunities in the Palestinian labor market, particularly in the government sector, and to a lesser degree in the private and non-governmental organization (NGO) sectors. This was accompanied by a tangible increase in the average daily wage at the time.⁷ The eruption of the Second Intifada, following the failure of Palestinian-Israeli final status negotiations in July 2000, was met with ruthless and repressive Israeli measures that included constricting the employment of Palestinian labor from WBGS within the Green Line; the imposition of curfews, closures, erecting hundreds of military checkpoints with the aim of restricting the movement of people and goods; and the construction of the Segregation Wall. Unemployment consequently rose among Palestinian in the WBGS from 11.8 percent in 1999 to 31.3 percent in 2002, and 22.2 percent (15.9 percent in the WB and 36.0 percent in GS) in the second quarter of 2009.

Poverty and unemployment gaps widened between the WB and GS as a result of the blockade imposed on the latter. Unemployment in the GS reached the highest in the world in the fourth quarter of 2008, more than double the rate in the WB (44.8 percent in GS, and 19.8 percent in WB).⁸ A United Nations report in 2002 concluded that a total economic collapse in the WBGS had been averted only by the continued injection of budgetary support from international donors, the release of some of the PA revenues withheld by Israel, and humanitarian aid.⁹ A similar conclusion that foreign aid prevented the Palestinian economy from total collapse was reached in the summer of 2009 by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).¹⁰ In 2008, foreign aid represented a third of the gross domestic product

7 The average daily wage increased from 54.3 NIS (New Israeli Shekels) in 1996 to 68.5 NIS in 1998 (PCBS, February 2000, 10).

8 MAS, *Economic & Social Monitor Volume 15*, September 2009 (table 12), and *Volume 17*, September 2009 (table 11).

9 Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories (UNSCO), *The Impact of Closure and Other Mobility Restrictions on Palestinian Productive Activities 1 January 2002 - 30 June 2002*. October 2002, 5-10.

10 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Geneva, 14-15 September 2009, "Report on UNCTAD assistance to the Palestinian People: Development in the Economy of the Occupied Palestinian Territory". Geneva. August 7, 2009.

(GDP), at a time when GDP per capita in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip was 30 percent lower than 1999 figures.¹¹

Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) data confirms a widening of inequality between the richest and the poorest in the WBGS. In 2007, the poorest 10 percent of the population in the WBGS consumed 3.4 percent of the total monthly household consumption compared to 4.4 percent in 2006. The richest 10 percent households consumed 26.6 percent of total monthly consumption in 2007 compared to 20.7 percent in 2006. In the WB, the increase by the same group was from 21.6 percent in 2006 to 25.8 percent in 2007, and in GS it jumped from 17.2 percent in 2006 to 31.8 percent in 2007. In other words the richest 10 percent of households in the WBGS consumed in 2007 eight times more than the poorest 10 percent of the households.¹²

2. The territorialization of impoverishment

There is now a distinctly uneven territorial distribution of poverty that presents itself in the following ways:

Poverty incidence in the GS is significantly higher than in the WB, and poverty is unevenly distributed within the two regions. Significant differences in the incidence of poverty exist, by region and type of locality. Impoverishment is much more widespread in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank. In 2006, its incidence was 24 percent in the WB compared to 50.7 percent in GS, and deep poverty stood at 13 percent in the WB compared to 34.8 percent in the GS.¹³ Factors accounting for this wide disparity were: the absence of economic (and territorial) integration between the two regions, the weaker economy of the GS in comparison with the WB,¹⁴ the higher percentage of refugees in the

11 The World Bank, *Palestinian Economic Prospects: Aid, Access and Reform. Economic Monitoring Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee*, September 22, 2008. In 2008, foreign aid to the PA amounted to \$1,763.1 million compared to \$497 million in 1999. See MAS, *Studies on Social Capital in the Palestinian Territories*. (Ramallah: 2009) table 2.

12 PCBS, "The parameters of poverty in the Palestinian territories: a press release issued on the occasion of the World Day for the Eradication of Poverty," October 12, 2008 (Ramallah).

13 Ibid., 21.

14 Ibid., 16.

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Strip, Gaza's extremely high population density, and the brutal blockade imposed on the GS by Israel and the international community.

Variations in poverty incidence are also found in sub-regions within the two areas. In 1988, the incidence of West Bank poverty increased as one moved away from the central districts (Jerusalem¹⁵ and Ramallah) to both the north and the south of the West Bank.¹⁶ In the Gaza Strip, on the other hand, the incidence of poverty increased as one moved from the north to the south.¹⁷ In 2005, variations in the incidence of poverty (measured by actual consumption of the household) between the sub-regions of the WB were more extensive: 22.5 percent in the northern WB compare to 34.9 percent in the southern WB and 11.0 percent in the center.¹⁸ Significant variations in the incidence of poverty also existed inside each governorate.¹⁹

The incidence of poverty in 2007 in the WB decreased by 13.2 percent, and by 8.1 percent in the GS. The resulting increase in the poverty gap between the WB and GS (19.1 percent in WB, and 51.8 percent in GS) is indicative of the widening geo-political and economic polarization between the two regions. Not only are there more poor households in Gaza than in the WB, but also the poor in the GS are much poorer than the impoverished in the WB.²⁰

15 According to Israeli figures, 35 percent of households in 2007 were below the poverty line in Jerusalem; 23 percent for Jewish households compared to 67 percent for Arab households (see Jerusalem Institute for Israeli Studies, "Press release – 2009 Jerusalem Day." Accessed September 9, 2013 at http://www.jiis.org/upload/news/jer_day_2009.pdf).

16 Poverty incidence in the Jerusalem governorate was 3.1 percent (with deep poverty at 2.3 percent) in 1998. The low incidence of relative poverty in East Jerusalem is related to the fact that most of this governorate was annexed by Israel in 1967, and a high percentage of the families has access to work both inside Israel and in the Palestinian areas. These families come under Israeli jurisdiction and thus have access to welfare provisions which are not matched in Palestinian areas. However, according to Israeli poverty measures, Palestinians in Jerusalem have a higher poverty incidence than Israeli Jews.

17 PCBS, *Poverty in Palestinian Areas*. (Ramallah: February 2000).

18 PCBS, *Poverty in the Palestinian Territory* (2006) table 3.

19 See World Bank, *Poverty in the West Bank and Gaza* (Washington: February 2001).

20 PCBS, *The parameters of poverty in the Palestinian territories, 2007*. (October 2008).

3. Profiling poor people, not "the poor"

The poor are not a homogeneous group. Impoverishment is generated and maintained by power structures that operate at the level of household, local community, society, as well as regional and international levels. They are the same structures that generate and maintain inequalities in wealth (income and property),²¹ access to jobs, entitlements to basic services (education, health, housing, healthy environment, running water, electricity, etc.) and opportunities for political, social and cultural participation. The impact of militarized settler-colonialism, dispossession and ethnic cleansing are factors that need to be recalled to explain the origins of the ongoing processes of impoverishment related to control of natural resources, the confiscation of land, the imposition of collective punishment, demolition of houses, imprisonment, killing and maiming, restriction of movement, control of borders, territorial fragmentation, and various modes of repression and oppression. This is the backdrop of any meaningful discourse of poverty and deprivation. But that does not invalidate the need to refer to the dynamics that relate to class, gender and locality in Palestinian society that make certain groups more vulnerable to poverty than others. The following are the groups that data show to be more exposed to poverty in the WBGS:

a. Large households have a higher incidence of poverty

In 1998, the highest poverty rate was recorded for the largest households with ten or more members.²² If one excludes childless households (about 15 percent of all households), then the incidence of poverty increased consistently as the number of children per household increased.²³ The same feature was found in 2006 where the incidence of poverty increased as the size of the household increased; it rose from 13.1 percent for single-child

21 Data for 1998 show that access to land does reduce the likelihood of poverty. About 16 percent of households with access to land were, in 1998, poor compared to 22 percent for those without such access. Moreover, poor households lacking access to land are worse than poor households having access to land (PCBS, February 2000, 22).

22 PCBS, *Poverty in Palestinian Areas* (Ramallah: February 2000) table 5.

23 Ibid. table 7.

Impoverishment is generated and maintained by power structures that operate at the level of household, local community, society, as well as regional and international levels.

households to 15.7 percent with households of two to three members to reach 57.8 percent with households composed of ten or more members. There are two reasons. First, most institutional assistance tends to exclude households that have able-bodied male adults in working age, even if they are unemployed. Second, most emergency assistance for the unemployed does not take into consideration the number of dependents.

b. Female-headed households have a higher rate of poverty than other households

In 1988, the incidence of poverty among female-headed households was 25.6 percent compared to 19.8 percent among male-headed households. Deep poverty among these families was 16.8 percent compared to 12.1 percent among male-headed households. In 2006, the incidence of poverty among female-headed households was 35.6 percent compared to 30.3 percent among male-headed households. Deep poverty among female-headed households was estimated at 23 percent compared to 18.2 percent for male-headed households.²⁴ It is worth noting that refugee camps have a higher incidence of female-headed households while villages record the lowest incidence, and the WB has a higher incidence of female-headed households than the GS.²⁵

The participation rate of men in the labor force remained, in 2009, lower than it was prior to the start of the Second Intifada, while there was an increase in the participation rate of women as more of them sought employment in the labor market in an attempt to compensate for the loss of

24 Ibid., 19, and table 3.

25 In 2003 the incidence of poverty for female-headed households were as follows; 9.7 percent for camps; 9.3 percent for towns, and 8.0 percent for villages (see *Palestine, Human Development Report 2004*. (Birzeit University: Human Development Programme, 2005) 161.

income of men,²⁶ as further explored in the chapter on labor and employment.

The majority of Palestinian households are single-earner households and they depend, therefore, on the income of the male breadwinner. This fact means that divorce or widowhood increase the vulnerability of women since most are not in paid employ and have, on average, a longer life expectancy than men and are less likely to re-marry after widowhood or divorce. In 1998, divorcees and widowers had a higher rate of deep poverty than did households whose heads were married and households whose heads had never married.²⁷ In 2006, some 8.6 percent of women (aged 15 years and above) were divorced, separated or widowed compared to 1.1 percent of men (aged 15 years and above).²⁸ Widowed and divorced women, as well as wives whose husbands have been martyred or held captive by the colonial state, tend to attract the attention of charities, relief agencies and PA support institutions. The fact that they continue to have higher rates of poverty than male-headed households can only mean that the assistance they receive is less than what is required to raise them above poverty lines.

Poverty incidence varies by the source of income of the household; the highest incidence of poverty was found in households that had their basic income from transfers and relief assistance (42 percent).²⁹ Women in paid employment are concentrated in certain occupations in lower grades than men in the public sector, private sector, and the NGO sector.³⁰ The average daily wages earned by women do not exceed 83 percent of the average daily wage of men.³¹

26 MAS, volume 17, September 2009, 12.

27 PCBS, *Poverty in the Palestinian Areas*. February 2000, table 10.

28 PCBS, *Women and Men in Palestine: Issues and Statistics, 2007* (Ramallah: August 2007) figure 3.

29 PCBS, *Poverty in the Palestinian Territory, 2006*, 14.

30 MAS, *Economic & Social Monitor, volume 2*, 68.

31 The percentage of average women wages to those of men was estimated at 70.6 percent in 1996, , and 71.0 percent in 1999, and 75 percent in 2001, and 82.67 percent in 2003 and 81.4 percent in 2008, MAS, *Social Monitor Issue Number 8*, May 2005, & PCBS, *Annual Report: Labor Force Survey 2008* (Ramallah: 2009).

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c. Children are the major victims of poverty

In mid-2009, children (under the age of 18 years) in the WBGS represented nearly half the population (49.4 percent) and children under the age of 15 constituted 42 percent of the total population. Data on poverty in WBGS is conclusive that households with more than four children tend to be highly vulnerable to poverty. In 2006, no less than 39.1 percent of households with five to six children were poor, and 25 percent were in deep poverty. Households with five or more children constituted 43.6 percent of all poor households (including households without children), and formed 47.5 percent of all households with deep poverty (including households without children).³² This gives an indication of the degree to which children are the greatest victims of relative and absolute poverty. It is not surprising to find out that more than 70 percent of nine-month-old children in Gaza were, in 2008, anemic³³ and that a large percentage of children in WBGS get little or inadequate protections from PA institutions, international agencies and local NGOs.³⁴

The PCBS labor force survey for the second quarter of 2009 revealed that the percentage of employed children, whether paid or unpaid, amounted to 3.9 percent of the total number of children in the age group (10-17 years). **Over 70 percent of all employed children were unpaid family members.** The same data also showed that the average weekly working hours for employed children in the age group (10-17 years) was 43.3 hours.³⁵

d. The elderly are more exposed to poverty than other age groups

Households whose heads were 65 years old or more in 1998 had the highest rate of poverty, revealing the inadequacy of both formal and

informal support systems for the elderly.³⁶ In mid-2009, those aged 60 years and more represented 4.4 percent of the total population of the WBGS (4.9 percent in the WB and 3.7 percent in GS). In 2007, some 7.6 percent of the people aged 60 and over in the WB were widowed males compared to 47.6 percent of that age who were widowed females. In 2007, half of those aged 60 and over were under the poverty line, but this phenomenon was more pronounced in the GS, with 75.3 percent of poor elderly compared to 39.5 percent in the WB.³⁷

e. Refugees have a higher incidence of poverty than non-refugees

Data on poverty in the WBGS clearly indicates that the refugee status of the head of the household increases the likelihood of poverty (both income and consumer poverty). It is reasonable to relate this to the dispossession and dispersal that refugees were subjected to in 1948. In 2006, a third (33.3 percent) of households headed by refugees was poor, which is higher than the rate found among households that were headed by a non-refugee (29.1 percent). The difference is more striking with deep poverty which stood at 29.1 percent for refugees, compared to 17.0 percent for non-refugees. Households in refugee camps have higher rates of both relative and deep poverty than either town or village dwellers.³⁸

f. Those with low "cultural capital" are more vulnerable to poverty

Poverty is negatively correlated with education (i.e., "cultural capital"). The higher the level of education the lower the rate of poverty. This was evident in data for 1998³⁹ and in data for 2005.⁴⁰

32 Ibid., table 1, 30.

33 See also the Save the Children website, accessed September 9, 2013 <http://www.savethechildren.org/countries/middle-east-urasia/west-bank-and-gaza-strip.html>.

34 Institute of Community and Public Health, Birzeit University & The National Plan of Action Secretariat for Palestinian Children, *Child Protection in the Palestinian Occupied Territory* (Ramallah, April 2006).

35 PCBS, Information sheet on the Occasion of "International Day of the Child", November 19, 2009. Last accessed September 9, 2013, http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/child_int_day_E.pdf.

36 Jamil Hilal & Magdi Maliki, *Informal Social Support System in the West Bank and Gaza Strip* (MAS, Ramallah: January 1997).

37 PCBS, Information sheet on the anniversary day of the elderly, October 1, 2009, last accessed September 9, 2013, http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/ELDERLY.pdf

38 PCBS, *Poverty in the Palestinian Territory* (2006) table 1.

39 PCBS, (February 2000) table 11.

40 MAS, *Economic & Social Monitor*, December 2007.

4. Relation to the labor market as a determining factor

Data confirms that employment does not provide adequate protection against poverty. Indeed, in 2006, the employed poor comprised nearly two-thirds (64.7 percent) of the total poor in that year, while the unemployed poor and those who were outside the labor force comprised 15.5 percent and 19.8 percent respectively.⁴¹

It is necessary to make several observations here.

Participation in the labor force lowers the incidence of poverty but does not protect against it. In 2006, the incidence of poverty (based on real consumption) for households whose head was in the labor force was 29.3 percent (27.2 percent for those employed and 43.0 percent for those unemployed but seeking employment), while the incidence for those outside the labor force was 38.3 percent. Similarly, for the same year, the incidence of deep poverty for those inside the labor force was 16.6 percent (14.8 percent for those employed and 28.7 percent for the unemployed) and 28.9 percent for those outside the labor force.⁴² Also notable is the decline in the rate of male participation in the labor force (from 70.7 percent in 1999 to 66.8 percent in 2008), and a rise in the participation rate for women (from 12.3 percent in 1999 to 15.2 percent in 2008). This last observation applied to both the WB and GS.⁴³

Conceptualizing direct mechanisms of impoverishment

For the majority of Palestinians in the WBGS, the first decade of the current century has been a decade of extreme insecurity and a highly fragile economy hooked on foreign aid, fuelled by a divided political movement with paralyzed and obsolete national institutions, and enforced by a blockade of the Gaza Strip that amounts to mass starvation. The fact that the battered and fractured Palestinian economy did not collapse completely under the Israeli pressures was explained by the World Bank by the cohesion and resilience of Palestinian society, the continued delivery of basic

41 PCBS, February 2000, table 12; *Palestine Poverty Report 1998*, table 13; and *Poverty in the Palestinian Territory* (2006) 17 & table 1, 30.

42 PCBS, *Poverty in the Palestinian Territory* (2006), table 1, 30.

43 PCBS, *Annual Report: Labor Force Survey 2008*.

services (by the Palestinian Authority and UNRWA and relief and charity organizations), and donor support which enabled the PA to continue employing a sizeable percentage of the employed work force.

A number of factors intervene to determine the groups that are subjected to impoverishment and by what direct mechanisms. Clearly factors of class, gender, age, education, type of locality, and region are all pertinent in determining the following:

I. Position in the labor market

This encompasses the *employment status* of the head of the households (and other adults in it). It makes a difference whether one is a paid employee (salaried or daily wage), or an unpaid family worker, self-employed (either as a professional or as a skilled or semi-skilled craftsman or mechanic), or unemployed (for a short, medium or long period). Position in the labor market also covers the *work situation*, which determines whether the position of the individual in the labor market is secure, insecure, or marginalized for one or more of a number of reasons (disability, gender, age, lack of skills, illiteracy, etc.).

Certain groups have weak negotiating positions in the labor market. Women, sizeable sectors of the disabled, the old, and those with no or little education and skills stand in a weak negotiating position in the labor market and are likely to be exposed to unprotected employment.⁴⁴ The possession of “cultural” capital (such as education) reduces the chances of impoverishment, as it can be cashed into the labor market for better jobs and high salaries. The possession of “social capital” (networks of social relations) can minimize the risk of poverty through increasing chances to employment and to job advancement (i.e., using *wasta*, or connections).

2. Possession of and access to property (wealth)

The lack of material capital or property exposes the individual to higher chances of poverty in comparison with those who possess such material. The chances of impoverishment increase if the lack

44 Jamil Hilal, Saleh Al Kafri, and Eileen Kuttub, “Unprotected Employment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip”, ILO (Regional Office for the Arab State) and Center for Arab Women Training and Research, June 2008.

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of material capital is combined with low “cultural capital” (high education and skills) and low “social capital”. Women in Palestinian society tend to be excluded from the inheritance of land and estate and tend to possess less material capital. Most Palestinian women are governed by patriarchal power relations within the household. Power relations within the household affect the distribution of income and resources between the members of the household. Studies are needed on the impact of power interactions within the family on patterns of consumption. Data from surveys on Palestinian households reveal that the majority of women—regardless of level of education—do not spend their income on their personal welfare.⁴⁵

3. Access to systems of social security

Poverty can result from the deficiency of entitlements to institutionalized and/or informal social protection. Access to institutionalized or the informal social protection is essential for individuals who are excluded from the labor market and have insufficient material, cultural or social capital. Studies on the Palestinian poor have indicated that they tend to be or become socially isolated (to minimize their social interaction and relations).⁴⁶ Other studies have suggested that the poor tend to have less “social capital” (i.e., membership in formal and informal associations) with which to escape poverty or to guard against it.⁴⁷

4. Access to basic services

Access to basic services such as health and education is not evenly accessible to all (in terms of location and quality). Major hospitals and higher educational institutions are located in towns in the WB and access to towns for villagers has been made difficult as a result of road blocks, checkpoints, the Separation Wall, colonial settlements, by-pass roads, and imposed closures. Also not all the poor have access to information on what services are available to them and how and where to access them.

45 Rita Giacaman & Penny Johnson (eds.) *Inside Palestinian Households* (Institute of Women Studies & Institute for Community and Public Health, Birzeit University: 2002).

46 Jamil Hilal & Magdi Maliki. “Informal Social Support System in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.” (Ramallah: MAS, 1997).

47 Mohammed Nasr and Jamil Hilal. “Measuring Social capital in the Palestinian Territories.” (Ramallah: MAS, 2007).

III. Issues, Actors and Opportunities

How citizens understand and confront their impoverishment

A participatory poverty assessment report that covered all 16 governorates of the WBGS with their urban, village and camp communities as well as the different categories of the poor that was conducted during the summer and winter of 2001-2 described how the poor understood the making of their poverty and how they confronted it. The causes of their poverty, as they conceptualized these causes, can be grouped under the following headings:⁴⁸

The turbulence of the labor market: Unemployment, low wages, and insecure employment were mentioned by those surveyed. Communities relatively far from towns and other centers of employment and lacking basic services emphasized these as factors facilitating the generation of poverty in their community. Israeli colonial policies were frequently mentioned as factors that directly affected Palestinians’ access to work and movement.

The lack of access to basic services and infrastructure: These were referred to frequently in relatively isolated villages and communities lacking electricity, asphalt roads, piped water, a public sewage system, schools and clinics.

Disablement of the breadwinner: Illness, particularly chronic illness of the breadwinner, and disability, insufficient or low levels of formal education were recognized as factors generating poverty. Old age, addiction to drugs, and alcoholism (mostly in the Jerusalem area) were specified as factors responsible for the inability to earn a sufficient income.

Earlier dispossession and forced exile: This was mentioned most frequently by camp dwellers as the dominant cause of their poverty, and was mentioned by returnees who had been expelled from Kuwait after the 1991 Gulf.

Male attitudes towards women working outside the home: Restrictive male attitudes were mentioned

48 Ministry of Planning and International Co-operation with UNDP, *National Report on Participatory Poverty Assessment (Voice of the Palestinian Poor)* (Ramallah: July 2002).

by women as undermining their ability to seek work outside their homes. Having a large family and early marriage were frequently cited, mostly by women, as factors generating poverty.

Nepotism and patronage: Unemployed young people, particularly university graduates and particularly in the Gaza Strip, linked their poverty to lack of access to connections in the political and economic fields. They identified *wasta* (connections) and *masubia* (patronage) as practices to blame for their failure to get employment and falling into need.

In the same study, various strategies to address or alleviate hardship were mentioned by heads of poor households (women and men). Many of these strategies pointed to a crucial role for women in implementing measures to minimize the impact of income reduction or cessation on household members. The following were the strategies most frequently mentioned:

Cultivating new sources of income and maximizing participation in the labor market: This meant initiating tiny enterprises (such as selling sweets, selling or sandwiches and the like), investing very small amounts of capital (“penny capitalism”) raised from family savings or borrowed from credit organizations in very small businesses. This explains, partly at least, the rise in the percentage of self-employed in the labor force when there was a high rate of unemployment.⁴⁹ It also meant pushing new members of the household into the labor market, and/or having the unemployed seeking work they previously shunned for various reasons. A corollary to the higher rates of poverty has been the readiness of more households to accept the idea of women seeking work outside the home. Alongside economic hardship evolved more tolerant attitudes towards women engaging in paid employment. It also meant adopting radical measures such as immigration. Lastly, it involved in some cases members of the households taking up a second job (usually in the evening) to reduce loss of household income.

Rationalizing spending and reallocating resources: Households whose income is reduced or stopped

49 The percentage of those classified as self-employed in the WBGs rose from 18.7 percent in 1999 when unemployment was 11.8 percent to 27.8 percent in 2003 when unemployment was 25.6 percent (MAS, *Economic & Social Monitor*, September 2009, table 4.

respond first by re-prioritizing their spending to address basic needs. Basic needs were defined by the Palestinian poor as food, housing requirements, clothing, education and health. Cuts are made in expenditures on these basic needs, including health and education, as income is diminished. Poor households tell of resorting to herbs when they cannot afford to buy medicine from the pharmacy and of seeking traditional healing when they cannot afford the doctor’s fee. Some stopped sending their children (or some of them) to school, and instead found them work or apprenticeships. Some admitted accepting to marry off their daughters very young to reduce household consumption.

Minimizing socializing: Many of the poor consciously reduced the number of visits to relatives, particularly on social and religious occasions, in order to cut expenses incurred in travel and gift-giving. This inability to fulfill social obligations explains why prolonged poverty could entail gradual social isolation or self-imposed exclusion.

Spending savings and selling valuables: Those with savings used them, and those with valuables (such as jewelry, which usually belonged to women) started to sell them to spend on the basic needs of their family.

Seeking assistance from relatives and/or social support institutions: Seeking support from both formal (governmental and non-governmental relief) institutions and informal solidarity networks is one common strategy of poor households.

Borrowing: Poor households reported resorting to borrowing from relatives, friends and storeowners in their neighborhood. Borrowing implied a tacit understanding that repayment would be made as soon as it is possible to do so, and often resulted in tension in cases where repayment was delayed (particularly with shopkeepers). Neighborly relations involved mutual acts of support, particularly in borrowing basic food necessities and in paying electricity and water bills.

Joining political parties, seeking NGOs activities and joining saving cooperatives: Some hinted that they have joined political parties hoping to receive assistance and patronage of one kind or another. Others said they attended courses sponsored by NGOs, which provided in kind assistance for those who attend. A popular device that was used was

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the establishment of joint savings cooperatives. These are set up between individuals (in most cases women) in the same neighborhood or from the same kinship group where participants pay a regular monthly amount of money whose sum is then given (by rotation) to one participant each month.

In conclusion, the poor are in constant struggle and use various initiatives to overcome the diversity of hardships that they face.

The limits of social support schemes in operation

The Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) passed in June 2001 a law of social insurance that was signed by the PA president in 2003. A board of directors was established for the public institute of social insurance that included representatives of workers, employers, and the government. The law provided for social protection for those employed in the private sector and in civil society institutions in two areas: for work accidents (to be transferred from the labor law to the social insurance law) and creating an old age pension for all employees (apart from those in the public sector) based on a system of deductions from both the employee and the employer. This applied equally to men and women. In response to recommendations from the World Bank, the PLC was asked to amend the law so that it could be applied in stages.⁵⁰ In effect, the law was frozen to give priority to poverty alleviation. Thus an effective pension scheme was sabotaged in practice, while on the other hand, no tangible poverty alleviation took place.

It has also been argued,⁵¹ rightly, that support programs for Palestinians held in Israeli prisons because of their opposition to the Israeli occupation and families of those killed (*shuhada*) and wounded as a result of actions initiated by the military settler-occupation should be differentiated from other programs of social assistance. These beneficiaries should have a special fund providing entitlements normally reserved for those that render a service to the national cause.

50 It seems the PLC did amend the law to read that it could be applied in stages, but no time was set for its implementation. However the collapse of the Palestinian economy, the Hamas electoral win, and the sanction imposed meant that nothing was done to rescue the scheme.

51 Yasser Shalabi & Hassen Ladaweh, "Targeting Palestine's Poor: Current Criteria and Suggested Approaches," (Ramallah: MAS, 2009).

A Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection was proposed in 2004 to create jobs, finance small projects, and provide training facilities. However, efforts to secure the necessary funds ceased following the paralysis of the PLC. Similarly, a food security project that was supported by the European Union was withdrawn for the same reason. Food insecurity is estimated to have risen in the WBGS from 34 percent in 2006 to 38 percent in 2007 (reaching 56 percent in GS).⁵² The Israeli war against Gaza resulted in a 20 percent increase in food insecurity. The overall level of food insecurity rose to 75 percent of the population as estimated by the Food and Agriculture Organization/World Food Programme, increasing need among the nearly 80 percent of the population already dependent on assistance before the war.⁵³

A proposed law for the protection of the unemployed has been presented to the Legislative Council but since January 2006 the Council has been unable, because of sanctions, restrictions on movement, and the imprisonment of a large number of its members by Israel, to fulfill its responsibilities.

The failures of existing anti-poverty programs

Continuing high rates of poverty (both income and consumption) indicate that social support programs (formal and informal) have not been meeting the basic needs of the majority of the poor households. A survey of patterns of consumption in mid-2006 revealed that two-thirds of all households in the WBGS (58 percent in the WB, and 84 percent in GS) had to reduce their spending on basic needs during the period between mid-2005 and mid-2006. Reductions of spending included education (51 percent of households) and health (62 percent). The reduction in food consumption is likely to have an effect on children, women and the elderly. Of those surveyed, 61.5 percent reported they do not have the money to pay for their basic

52 World Health Organization (WHO), "Health Conditions in the Occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem and the occupied Syrian Golan", Report by the Secretariat, 7 May 2009,.6.

53 World Food Program & Food and Agriculture Organization (WFP & FAO), "Report of Rapid Qualitative Emergency Food Security Assessment (EFSA)" (Gaza: 2009).

The ministry's programs leave two-thirds of the families in deep poverty without social assistance. The ministry also acknowledges a decline in the services provided by UNRWA in the camps as there has been a reduction, for political reasons, in donations to the agency by two of the largest international donors (the US and Canada).

daily needs;⁵⁴ 72 percent reported they had to reduce expenses; 45 percent borrowed money; and three-quarters postponed paying their bills.⁵⁵

Following the Israeli war on the GS in late December 2008 and early January 2009, households there increased their expenditures on basic needs while reducing expenditures on education and general health. Unemployment also exacerbated the ability of impoverished families to send their children to school.

The fact that 18 percent of those receiving assistance in the WB consider relatives and friends as their first source of assistance is a sign of the weakness of the formal support system (the PA, UNRWA, relief and charitable organizations, *zakat* committees, etc.), not necessarily a sign of the strength of the informal support system.⁵⁶

The Ministry of Social Affairs acknowledges the existence of 165,000 families in deep poverty in the WBGS in 2009. Its two programs of cash assistance cover only 5,000 families selected from “the poorest of the poor,” and another assistance program covers 51,000 families selected from “hard cases.” In other words, the ministry’s

54 PCBS, *Survey of the Impact of Israeli Unilateral Measures on Social, Economic and Environmental Conditions of the Palestinian Household: Main Findings*. (Ramallah: September 2006).

55 PCBS, September 2006, table 4-5.

56 FAO and WFP, “Socio-Economic and Food Security Survey Report,” (Jerusalem: 2009). See also MAS, *Studies on Social Capital in the Palestinian Territories*, 2009, 35.

programs leave two-thirds of the families in deep poverty without social assistance. The ministry also acknowledges a decline in the services provided by UNRWA in the camps as there has been a reduction, for political reasons, in donations to the agency by two of the largest international donors (the US and Canada).⁵⁷

The amount of assistance is too small to make an impact

PCBS data points to the following features concerning social assistance:

1. Two-thirds of Palestinian households reported they needed assistance (in 2005 and 2006).⁵⁸ In the second quarter of 2006, some 29.4 percent of Palestinian households stated that they received assistance during that period, compared to 27.2 percent in the last quarter of 2005. Data reveal wide regional differences: only 15.3 percent of the West Bank households received assistance compared to 56.9 percent in the Gaza Strip. During the second quarter of 2006, two-thirds of the households that received assistance received it once (66.7 percent in WB, and 68.4 percent in GS); one-fifth received assistance twice (16.5 percent in WB, and 23.5 percent in GS); and the remainder received assistance three times (16.8 percent in WB, and 8.1 percent in the GS).⁵⁹

2. The bulk of assistance is provided in the form of food (80 percent—62.4 percent in the WB and 86.7 percent in the GS) and only 18 percent is in the form of cash (31.2 percent in the WB and 10.2 percent in the GS). Only 2.5 percent benefitted from emergency employment, with the rest (i.e. 2 percent) participating in other forms of support.⁶⁰ This clearly shows that the aim of all assistance programs is to prevent malnutrition and hunger, i.e., to alleviate severe poverty, rather than to eradicate it.

57 See <http://www.alhourriah.ps/ar/?page=det&id=3872>, last accessed September 9, 2013.

58 MAS, *Economic and Social Monitor* vol. 5, 70.

59 PCBS, *Survey of the impact of Israeli unilateral measures on social, economic and environmental conditions of the Palestinian household: Main Findings*, (September 2006) table 4-8 and table 4-9.

60 *Ibid.*

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3. In 2006, the average assistance received by most households amounted to less than \$70 in a period of three months: 47.8 percent of the assistance received was valued at less than NIS 200 (less than \$46.5 at the time); 24.5 percent at between NIS 200-299 (between \$46.5 and \$69.5 at the time); and those who received more than NIS 300 (\$70) constituted 27.7 percent of the aid-receiving households. The mean value of received assistance was NIS 200 (\$46.5). In the GS, it was NIS 150 (\$35).⁶¹ In other words, the amount of assistance given is only intended to prevent starvation. Only 13 percent in the WB and 15 percent in the GS received assistance every month.⁶²

4. In 2006, one in every ten households in WB depended totally on assistance (formal and informal), in comparison to one in every four households in the GS. These figures refer to households in which social assistance formed their main source of income and not the percentage of all households that received assistance. The latter formed just over 29 percent of all households (15 percent in WB and 57 percent in GS) in the second quarter of 2006.

5. The percentage of the population with health insurance did increase. In 2005, just over 80 percent of the population (74 percent in the WB, and 97 percent in GS) had basic health insurance, compared to just over half in the year 2000. This is partly due to measures taken by the PA designed to cover maternal and child health care and extend health insurance coverage to vulnerable groups including the unemployed. In 2007, a survey found that about two-third (64 percent) of households in WBGS enjoyed some type of health insurance coverage, while 17 percent of households indicated that they had partial coverage and one-fifth had no coverage at all.⁶³

A postscript

Palestinian society in the WBGS remains under the control of a settler-colonial power engineering an apartheid and racist regime. The WBGS went through a geo-political polarization facilitated by “bantustan-like” territorial fragmentation and a dislocated and enfeebled economy that is highly dependent on foreign aid and donor strategies.⁶⁴ Palestinian society has also witnessed the widening of inequality between the rich and the poor since the establishment of the PA. In many ways “rent-seeking” has become a dominant feature of the PA (in both its regional manifestations), the private sector, and most civil society organizations. With PA institutions paralyzed and PLO institutions outdated and their legitimacy challenged, the Palestinians, including those in the WBGS, are not only without national institutions but also without a national leadership.

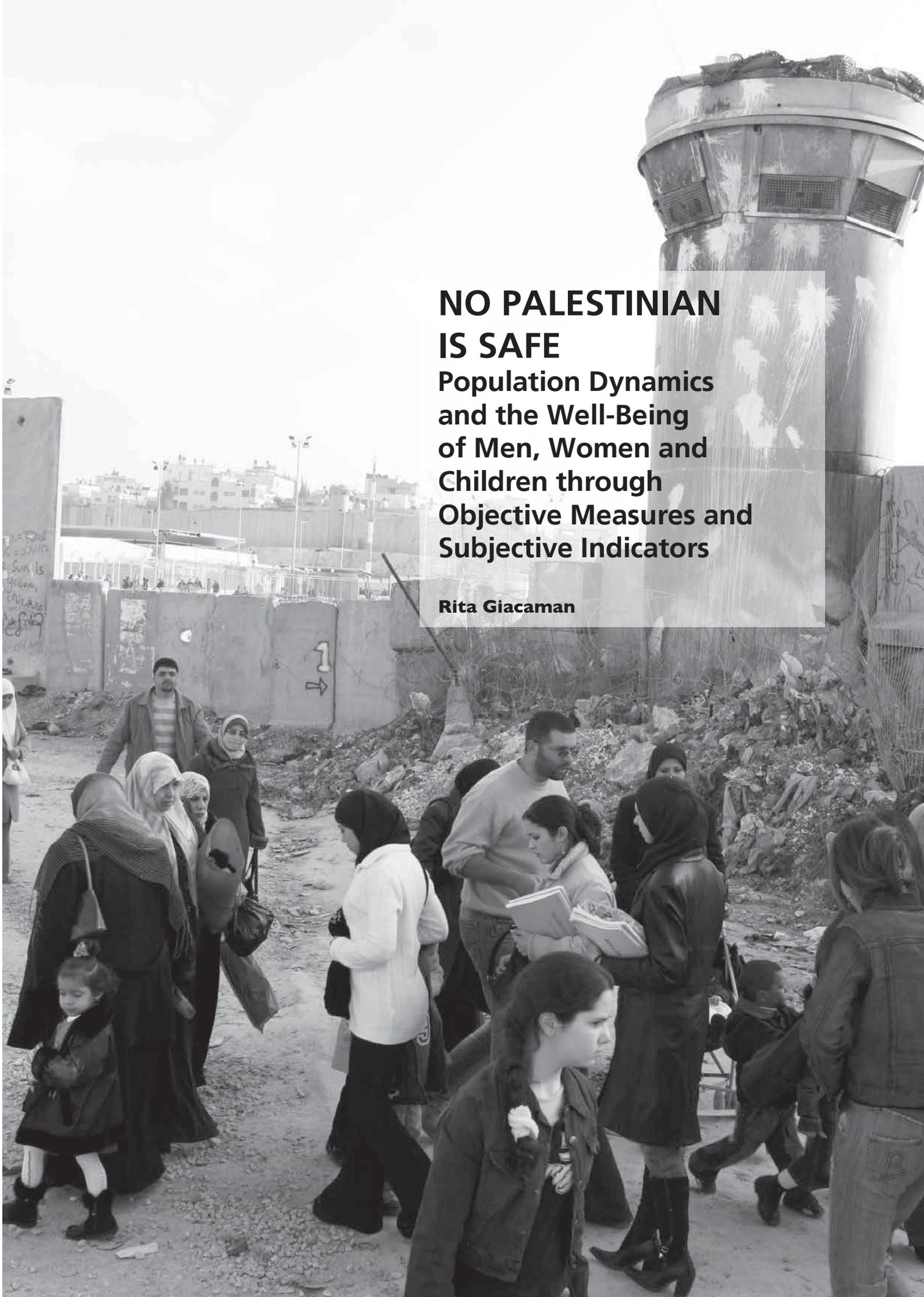
Empowering Palestinians in the WBGS to organize themselves to defy and challenge the colonizing apartheid state requires being guided by the principles of equality and social justice in fashioning their society rather than leaving it to the whims of the colonial power, the donors, or the market. There is a need for legislation to establish a decent minimum wage, to provide formal protection to the unemployed, and to re-activate the social insurance law to be implemented in accordance with the resources available and with added attention to those with special needs. A strategy of widening the free provision of health care and education to cover all citizens would be an empowering strategy. Such a strategy should be based on the appreciation of women’s role in the provision of care and the right to participate in the paid labor force.

61 Ibid, table 4-11.

62 PCBS; *Survey of the impact of Israeli unilateral measures on social, economic and environmental conditions of the Palestinian household: Main Findings* (November 2005) table 9.

63 Survey by Near East Consulting, “Survey of Health in Occupied Palestinian Territory,” published on May 24, 2009. According to the survey the most prevalent obstacles to care delivery were financial and capacity constraints; 25 percent of respondents said they could not afford care, 23 percent that there were too many other people waiting, and 17 percent that there was not enough staff attending to them.

64 Anne Le More, *International Assistance to the Palestinians After Oslo: Political Guilt, Wasted Money* (London and New York: Rutledge, 2008).



NO PALESTINIAN IS SAFE

**Population Dynamics
and the Well-Being
of Men, Women and
Children through
Objective Measures and
Subjective Indicators**

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Population Dynamics and the Well-Being of Men, Women and Children through Objective Measures and Subjective Indicators

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I. Introduction and Context

A decade of crisis, violence, and various forms of human rights violations and human insecurity has made life for Palestinians harder, more dangerous and less secure. While such a comprehensive crisis has spared no one, it has affected the health and well-being of population groups differently, whether by gender, social class or location. Have these political transformations been accompanied and complicated further by demographic, family life and health changes? How have violence and violation affected population health, and not only the state of disease?

This essay will provide an overview of available statistical and other data to answer some of these questions and delineate time trends, as well as to point to future challenges and directions needing attention from researchers and policymakers alike. These challenges cannot be understood, let alone met, unless objective measures of health are combined with subjective indicators in a wider human security framework that addresses the social suffering triggered by sustained war-like conditions and rights violations.

In conditions of chronic conflict, high levels of exposure to violence, and pervasive insecurity, the human security framework complements the biomedical framework, and offers us the opportunity to make the link between health and well-being, and the sociopolitical conditions that Palestinians are enduring. For Palestinians, as a people who were never safe (Das, 2006) and who to this day continue to experience violations daily, enduring the social suffering associated with war, health cannot be explained solely by objective measurements. The human security framework focuses on people and their protection from social, psychological, political and economic threats that undermine their well-being (King et al., 2001). It emphasizes

the capability of people to manage daily life and the importance of social functioning and health. (Caballero-Anthony, 2004).

Thus the importance of this causal framework (from human insecurities and violations, to social suffering, to negative health outcomes) is that it allows us to reveal the Palestinian reality and the broader determinants of the health of women, men and children. It prompts us to analyze health more comprehensively beyond body counts and morbidity patterns. It leads us to the use of indicators essential for the study of the consequences for health and well-being of war and conflict, and for the exposition of the humanitarian crisis Palestinians are enduring, where the 'home front is the battlefield,' especially in the Gaza Strip.

II. Trends and Indicators: Consequences of Crisis

Fertility unusually high but declining

Table I indicates that the population of the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) has increased from 2.9 million to 3.8 million in a decade, a reflection of high fertility and a sharp decline in infant mortality pre-1997. While the fertility rate declined, from 6.1 Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in 1997 to 4.6 in 2007, it remains higher than expected given the relatively high educational levels of Palestinian women, and in comparison with fertility rates in other neighboring Arab countries – with a TFR of 3.7 for Jordan, 1.9 for Lebanon, 3.8 for Syria and 3.1 for Egypt (Abdul-Rahim et al, 2009). This decline may be an indicator of improving women's health over time, because of the association between high fertility levels and maternal mortality, and the added

Previous page: Palestinians walk past a guard tower in the Wall. Photo by Rula Halawani

Table 1: Demographic and health indicators

Indicator	1995- 2000	2005- 2007	1995- 2000	2005- 2007	1995- 2000	2005- 2007
	West Bank	West Bank	Gaza Strip	Gaza Strip	Total WBGS	Total WBGS
Total population	1,873,476	2,350,583	1,022,207	1,416,543	2,895,683	3,767,126
Total fertility rate	5.6	4.2	6.9	5.4	6.1	4.6
Average family size	6.1	5.5	6.9	6.5	6.4	5.8
Nuclear families	74%	80.7%	71.8%	73%	73%	78%
Population growth rate - yearly				++	3.8%	2.8%
Infant Mortality Rate	25	23	27	29	25.5	25
Boys						27
Girls						23
Age						
Persons <15 years old	45.1%	41.3%	50.2%	48.3%	47%	45%
Persons 15-29 years old						27%
Persons < 30 years old						72%
Persons 15- 64 years old	51.1%	55.3%	46.9%	49%		
Persons 65 years or more	3.8%	3.4%	2.9%	2.7%	3.5%	3%
Men > 60	3.1%		2.4%		2.9%	
Women > 60	4.1%		3.2%		3.7%	
Male/female ratio	103.2	103.1	103.1	103		103
Average life expectancy						
Women					72.2	73.2
Men					70.7	71.7
Median age at first marriage – women					18	18
First cousin marriage	26.8	26	31.5	32	28.1	28.1
Malnutrition: mod- erate or severe stunting (low height for age) among children <5 years	6.7%	7.9%	8.2%	13.2%	7.2%	10.2%
Maternal mortality rate					100	
Disability					1.9%	2.7%

Table collated from: PCBS. Population, Housing and Establishment Census 2007. Census Final Results in the West Bank. Summary (Population and Housing). August, 2008; PCBS. Population, Housing and Establishment Census 2007. Census Final Results in Gaza Strip. Summary (Population and Housing). December, 2008; PCBS. Press Release 2008. President of PCBS announces the final results of the Population and Housing Establishment Census 2007. West Bank; PCBS. Press Release 2008. President of PCBS announces the final results of the Population and Housing Establishment Census 2007. Gaza Strip; PCBS. Men and Women Statistical Reports Series (Analytical Report Number 3). Woman and Man in Palestine. Issues and Statistics 2008, Issue 3. December 2008; PCBS. Health Survey 2000. Final Report. November 2001; PCBS. Palestinian Family Health Survey, 2006. Final Report. December 2007; PCBS 1996, 2000, 2004, 2005 DHS and PAPPAM data sets; Abdul Rahim, H. et al. Health in the Occupied Palestinian Territory 2. Maternal and Child Health in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Lancet, 2009; 373: 967-77.

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burdens on women that usually accompany large family sizes, with possible negative effects on her health. This question is important to research in the future.

As a partial consequence of this decline in TFR, the average family size declined as well, from 6.4 persons per family in 1997 to 5.8 in 2007. Family size is also influenced by the proportion of nuclear and extended families among the population. The table indicates that the percentage of nuclear families rose slightly during the past ten years, from 73% in 1995 to 78% in 2007. While nuclearization may increase women's status and autonomy within the family, in the context of the oPt, one is also compelled to raise the question of possible negative ramifications of nuclearization of family life. As observed locally, extended family support, mostly by women, during childbirth, in child care and meal preparation is a primary form of support allowing women to work outside the home, given the almost absent public or institutional support for working women. Increasing restrictions on mobility due to geopolitical and financial reasons, and increasing movement of young couples from their homes of origin to seek employment in cities, especially the center of the West Bank (Taraki, ed., 2006) may have partially induced this nuclearization and diminished this support system so crucial for women, especially working women with young children.

Infant mortality: the significance of stalling

The table also indicates that Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) has not changed much during the past decade. IMR declined during the 1980s and early 1990s, but has "stalled" or slowed down since then and remained at a relatively stable level of 25 deaths/1000 live births. Stalling is an unusual demographic phenomenon suggesting a slowdown of health improvements, a possible increase in health disparities, or an indication of deteriorating conditions (Giacaman et al., 2009) relevant to all of the population, not only children. Analysis of the 2006 PAFAM data, moreover, indicates that IMR is actually increasing in the Gaza Strip, reaching 29 deaths/1,000 live births on that year, and quite likely to have increased even more since that time, especially since the Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip of December 2008-January 2009 and the ongoing siege and strict closures endured by the population there.

Youth bulge

The age distribution of the population has also changed. There is a decline in the percentage of children < 15 years old from 47% in 1997 to 45% in 2006, and a corresponding increase in the percentage of people 15-64 years, that is, a decline in dependency and a rise in the number of people who are eligible to participate in the labor force. What this implies given the Israeli policy of separation and economic strangulation, and high current rates of unemployment and poverty levels, especially the high unemployment levels of young people, remains speculative.

As the proportion of children < 5 years old is declining, the proportion of Palestinian young men and women 15-29 years old is rising, and forms 27% of the population, bringing the proportion of those under age 30 to make up 70% of the total population. In demographic terms, these figures seem to signal the beginning of a new trend, called the "youth bulge," the result of declining IMR and high fertility levels. It is maintained that large youth cohorts in a population increases the susceptibility of countries to political violence (Urdal, 2006). One would argue with this approach in that it situates violence "within" young people, especially boys who usually manifest distress through increased aggression and behavioral modification, compared to girls who report higher levels of somatic complaints (Giacaman et al., 2007). In contrast, it can be argued that increased violence may be the result of their aggression, the lack of personal freedoms, and the lack of space for economic, social and political participation that brings about this violence to begin with: that is, their lack of integration into society and alienation.

The advent of TV, the internet, and cell phones may also have intensified intergenerational conflict, as modern technologies have allowed Middle Eastern (including Palestinian) youth to witness what is happening elsewhere in the world, and to connect to a world unknown to their parents. This is believed to intensify young people's desire for change, rather than the reproduction of the old way of life, and for seeking the personal freedoms that other youth enjoy. We must also reflect on the probable additive effects of Israeli military

violence, experienced daily by the majority of the population, including young people.

Challenge of aging

The proportion of people 65 years or more has also changed slightly during the past decade, down from 3.8% in 1997 to around 3% in 2007. This decline may be a distortion, a reflection of the increase in the proportion of young people, given that the absolute number of the elderly increased during the past decade. The average life expectancy also seems to be rising from 72.2 years for women in 1997 to 73.2 in 2007 and from 70.7 for men in 1997 to 71.7 in 2007. However, caution should be taken when interpreting the data on average life expectancy. This is because it remains incompatible with global trends where the difference in life expectancy between men and women is usually at least 4 years. This discrepancy is probably at least partially due to the fact that, to date, average life expectancy is calculated by projecting from infant mortality rates, which have declined over time, and therefore produce a parallel increase in life expectancy. The more accurate method for life expectancy calculations is based on age specific mortality rates, which are still unavailable for the oPt.

Combining the gradual aging trend in the oPt with the increasing nuclearization of families begs the question of who is and will be taking care of the elderly and how, given the almost complete absence of institutional (as opposed to family) elderly care. The fate of the elderly and the way they are being cared for in nuclear households, which lack the physical, emotional and social support needed by the elderly, and which is usually provided by younger adults in the family, is a key question. Given age gaps in marriage, and the higher life expectancy of women compared to men, women are disproportionately widowed and thus particularly vulnerable in old age. Overall, the demographic trend observed during the past decade presses the issue of elderly care as a priority for future investigation, policy formulation, and intervention.

Early marriage and increasing singlehood

Data from 1996 - 2004 could indicate a slight rise in women's age at first marriage (PCBS DHS 2000,

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2004) for a certain period, if judged by the proportions married under the age of 18 years over time. In fact, however, the more appropriate method of delineating time trends is by comparing the median age at first marriage over time, and this remained constant at age 18, as was the case in 1995. Further data analysis is warranted to assess this issue more comprehensively. However, initial analysis of PCBS data 1997 - 2007 seems to indicate that we may have a rise in the proportion of marriages under 18 years of age, with a simultaneous rise in singlehood, affecting various regions of the oPt differently, with the highest levels of early marriage found in the Hebron District, and the highest levels of singlehood in the Ramallah/al-Bireh District (Abu Rmeileh and Hammoudeh, unpublished data). These changes are bound to influence women's health status. On the one hand, early marriage and early pregnancy are risk factors for health and other complications. On the other hand, other than potential social and family life problems, increasing singlehood carries with it the risk of the lack of access to health care services, since most, if not all, current health services cater to maternal and child health needs, as if women's health needs only pertain to reproduction, and thus omitting the health needs of single and married, non-pregnant women. This is yet another area requiring further investigation, and dis-aggregation of data in analysis.

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First cousin marriage also remained remarkably constant during the past decade, with 28% of marriages noted as first cousin marriages in 1997 and again in 2006. This phenomenon remains largely unexplained, although the socio-economic conditions that Palestinians have endured, especially with increased closures and siege, and the negative ramifications of these conditions on economic and social life may offer us a partial explanation (see Johnson in Taraki, 2006). Clearly, more research needs to be done in order to understand why this phenomenon is unyielding, and its consequences on family life and health, including fertility patterns.

Death, injury, disability and imprisonment

Since the beginning of the Second Intifada in 2000, the bombing of civilian areas and use of gunfire by the Israeli army has increased civilian deaths to proportions substantially higher than deaths during the First Intifada. From September 28, 2000 till December 26, 2008, almost 5,000 Palestinians, including about 1,000 children were killed by Israeli military action, the majority civilians (B'tselem, 2009). The 22-day Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip from December 27, 2008 through January 18, 2009 alone, led to the death of about 1,400 people and the injury of about 5,000 (Amnesty International, 2009). As of September 2009, there were more than 7,000 Palestinians held in Israeli jails, mostly men, but including women and minors (B'tselem, 2009). These high levels of death, injury and disability due to injury (estimated by the author from PCBS figures at 6 percent of the total disabilities of about 3 percent prevalence rate, or around 7,000 persons) and imprisonment place a high burden on individuals, health services and society. This is especially the case for families who have lost their livelihood with the death, disability or imprisonment of breadwinners, and women, since they are the primary caretakers of the family, including the disabled. Because very little is known of the fate of such families, every effort must be made to investigate the consequences of the violence of death on the lives and well-being of the living, the remaining family members.

Diseases: objective indicators: stunting of children, maternal mortality

With the stall in IMR indicating deteriorating conditions in general, malnutrition among children under five years of age is also on the rise. Table I indicates that the percentage of stunted children under five years (low height for age) has risen from 7.2% in 1996 to 10.2% in 2006, and that stunting levels are higher among the children of the Gaza Strip, and probably rising since 2006. Stunting levels are another indication of overall deteriorating population health conditions. Stunting is also associated with increased disease burden and death including compromised cognitive development and educational performance (Walker et al., 2005) and obesity and chronic diseases in adulthood (Sawaya et al., 2003).

The Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR, the annual number of deaths of women from pregnancy-related causes per 100,000 live births) was estimated at around 100 in 1997 (Abdul-Rahim et al., 2009). Unfortunately, this important indicator continues to be either unavailable through surveys or flawed and impossibly low when based on calculations from the Palestinian Ministry of Health's records. In 2005, the MMR was estimated at 15.4 in Ministry reports, although the Ministry acknowledged the improbability of such estimates, pointing to the probable under-reporting of deaths as part of the problem (Ministry of Health, 2006).

Epidemiological transition: women and chronic disease

The population of the oPt is undergoing an epidemiological transition, with non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, diabetes and cancer having overtaken communicable diseases as the main causes of morbidity and mortality. Thus, chronic diseases are fast becoming a major public health problem. Chronic diseases today account for over half of the total death in the oPt, while communicable diseases account for less than 10 percent of total mortality rates (Husseini et al., 2009). In contrast to the international literature, where men are generally found to be at higher risk of developing chronic diseases and dying compared to women, various studies conducted in the oPt indicate that Palestinian women have similar or higher rates of chronic disease morbidity compared to men, similar risk of

mortality from chronic diseases and higher levels of obesity and anemia (Abu-Rmeileh et al., 2008; Husseini et al., 2003; Abdul-Rahim et al., 2001).

Despite changes that appear to be similar to changes taking place in more developed countries, anemia levels among women continue to be high, with anemia levels among non-pregnant women found to be slightly higher than among their pregnant counterparts, at 35% of married women of child bearing age and 31% respectively (PCBS, 2002), and presenting another contrast to the global literature, where pregnant women have higher prevalence rates of anemia compared to non-pregnant women. If we combine this information with our knowledge that Palestinian health care services and health research tends to be fixated on prenatal services and maternal and child health, ignoring the needs of non-pregnant, single, menopausal and elderly women, and with the continued local emphasis on chronic diseases as a major concern among men only, we can only conclude that an urgent priority for research and intervention is addressing women's health status and morbidity within a broad public health framework not restricted to maternal and child health, but rather one that addresses the needs of all Palestinian women, regardless of marital and pregnancy status.

Health: subjective indicators reveal low quality of life, distress, fear

It is increasingly being acknowledged today that low income, inadequate housing, unsafe workplaces and lack of access to facilities, in addition to conflict, have negative effects on health. Other than death, injury, disability, displacement, and lack of access to health services, conflict entails a constant exposure to life-threatening situations, and can lead from stress, through distress, to disease (Watts et al., 2007).

The human security framework therefore opens up the space for using subjective measures—reports by people themselves assessing their insecurities, the threats they face, and their own health status, such as self-rated health, quality of life, and well-being—to complement objective measures and to assess health outcomes (Schallock, 2004). In the case of the oPt, these measures provide us with the means through which we can evaluate the impact of warlike conditions on population health status in ways that cannot be captured by objective measures alone.

To assess the quality of life of Palestinians living in the oPt, the World Health Organization's (WHO) quality of life index was used in a 2005 survey

Table 2: Reported feelings, fears, worries, and threats

in a random representative adult population sample of the oPt

1 in 2 Palestinians fears for themselves in their daily life.

Almost all Palestinians fear for their family's safety in their daily life.

Almost 2 in 3 Palestinians feel threatened by losing their homes, their land or being forcibly uprooted and dispossessed.

Almost all Palestinians worry over their future and the future of their families.

Almost 1 in 2 Palestinians lives with distress, anxiety, worry and grief.

Almost 1 in 3 Palestinians feels incapacitated.

More than 1 in 3 Palestinians feels deprived.

More than 1 in 3 Palestinians feels that suffering is part of their life.

More than 1 in 3 Palestinians is fed up with life.

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containing a representative sample of adults from the general population. Life quality in the oPt proved to be lower than that in almost all other countries included in the WHO study (Mataria et al., 2009). The study also showed that respondents had high levels of fear regarding daily life; fear threats to personal safety and safety of their families; fear loss of incomes, homes and land; fear for their future and the future of their families; and many experience feelings of *hamm* (which in Arabic refers to feelings of the heaviness of worry, grief, sorrow and distress) anxiety, incapacitation, and deprivation (See Table 2). Most people reported being negatively affected by the constant violations related to the Israeli military occupation, Israeli-imposed closures and siege, and inter-Palestinian violence.

It is interesting to note that, overall, women had higher quality of life scores compared to men (Mataria et al., 2009). These results are surprising given that Palestinian women are generally disadvantaged compared to men in view of the patriarchal social order which discriminates against them and restricts their freedoms. These results raise the question of a possible paradoxical protective effect of patriarchy which restricts women's movement outside the home, while pushing men to move beyond the domestic sphere in search of family livelihoods. The public sphere, or the men's world, is fraught with daily threats of violation and distress (when, crossing checkpoints, for example, where they may be held, stripped, detained, humiliated and prevented from crossing) and may explain these results.

Studies on the West Bank revealed high levels of psychological distress at home especially during Israeli army invasions, including severe distress, sleeplessness, uncontrollable fear, fatigue, depression and hopelessness (Giacaman, 2004). Other studies found that collective exposure to violence and humiliation were also significantly associated with negative health outcomes. A study of adolescents in the Ramallah District revealed that exposure to humiliation was significantly associated with subjective health complaints (Giacaman, 2007), while collective exposure to violence was significantly associated with negative mental health outcomes, even after adjusting for sex, residence and other associated factors.

These studies are also significant in that they demonstrate variation between boys and girls in

their exposure to violence and the development of symptoms. While the level of exposure to violence was extremely high for both sexes, boys reported significantly more exposure to violence such as having been beaten by the Israeli army, humiliated, used as a human shield, exposed to tear gas, body searched, and detained or arrested, among other violations. In contrast, girls reported significantly higher levels of symptoms, including depressive-like symptoms. These results are consistent with other studies of both the oPt and elsewhere, and can be partially explained as gender differences stemming from the way in which boys and girls are socialized, with societal norms allowing greater freedoms for boys, especially outside the domestic sphere or the school, and consequently leading to higher exposure among boys, compared to girls (perhaps the paradoxical protective against violation effects of patriarchy on girls).

Studies completed in the Gaza Strip in 2008 revealed similar results to those of the West Bank, with high levels of distress and fears, especially among children. Children were reported as being highly exposed to traumatic events, such as witnessing a relative being killed, seeing mutilated bodies, and having homes damage. These studies reported several psychosocial problems, including behavioral problems, fears, speech difficulties, anxiety, anger, lack of concentration at school and difficulty in completing homework (United Nations, 2008).

III. Issues, Actors and Opportunities: The Challenges Ahead

This brief review raises key challenges and offers directions for future research and action. A most important overall finding is related to the weakness of local scientific research and analytical capacity. While the PCBS is "way ahead" of local analytical capacity in producing quality data sets covering a range of issues, these data sets remain largely unanalyzed. Most grey literature reports utilizing PCBS data are restricted to the presentation of simple percentages without further analyses, as if the data explains itself. Furthermore, in the process of searching for indicators of time trend changes, inconsistencies in reporting of even simple percentages are observed, necessitating that

researchers analyze the data themselves sometimes, using the PCBS data sets in order to arrive at reasonable estimates reflecting realities.

A probable cause of this problem is the lack of attention from universities and government alike to the significance of building up the research base in the country and the importance of the production of evidence for policy, planning and interventions. Another probable cause is the lack of peer review of produced grey materials, where reports are published without having been submitted for review by individuals who know the subject and who can assist and mentor writers in improving their capacity and producing quality reports. Lastly, quality statistical data analysis requires a good amount of training combined with practice over extended periods of time. One-off training schemes without close follow-up and mentorship is not sufficient, especially when the research base locally is so weak, and the opportunity to complete analyses is not usually part of formal work, even at universities.

Quality records are essential for policy and planning not only for addressing maternal mortality, as noted above, but all other disease conditions as well. Furthermore, drawing on health records for quality information gathering and health system building is a much cheaper method of gathering data than by periodically conducting surveys. This is precisely why vigorous capacity and record keeping system building at the Ministry of Health and other ministries continues to be an urgent priority for action. Relying on periodic surveys is an expensive endeavor. Quality improvement of the existing information systems, which may take some time and effort, is ultimately cheaper, and more effective.

A main finding of this report relates to what already has been observed by various groups locally: a shift in demographic trends towards a substantial increase in the proportion of young people in the population, and a generally aging population. Both these groups will urgently need the attention of policy and interventions in the near future, if they don't already. Unless we cater to the needs and aspirations of young people, we are likely to have violated them, and consequently produced the context in which they can become violent. Clearly, and as the most recent Arab Human Development Report recommends, taking youth issues seriously and addressing their unmet

needs and investing in them is necessary in order to promote human security. Youth can be seen as agents of change and progress if invested in through quality education entailing skills and "knowledge-based capabilities" corresponding to the needs of the local, and global economy. Investments in health, housing, and labor markets should be made in order to meet the needs of youth as a workforce, and provide them with what is required to increase productivity (Arab Human Development Report 2009). This contrasts with investments focused on providing activities and entertainment for young people to keep them "off the street," as we sometimes observe in the oPt. Thus policy and operational investments in youth are not only a question of human rights and social justice; this investment can also have potential economic benefits and can increase societal security as well.

As more and more people reach old age, they are bound to require the presence of a variety of services, not only health services but also home care, social services care, even "meals on wheels." This is not only a matter of human rights, equity, and justice; it is also a matter related to decreasing the burden of elderly care imposed on young people, especially women, so that they can more effectively participate in the labor force. This can rejuvenate the economy, and improve women's and elderly people's autonomy, quality of life, dignity and self-confidence as well.

Otherwise, while perhaps not much can be done in relation to the daily and chronic Israeli military violations that the population is exposed to, it is absolutely vital to "do no harm." Palestinian people's violations have their roots in socio-political causes and, consequently, these require socio-political resolution, not the prescription of tranquilizing medications, psychological therapies, or the labeling of trauma and distress as sicknesses, which risks pathologizing the social suffering of war, adding more burdens on the victims. Indeed, our study of psychosocial mental health institutions in the oPt during the height of the Second Intifada was indicative of a fixation on therapies, to the exclusion of advocacy for the removal of the root cause of people's distress and suffering (Giacaman, 2004). While it is certainly true that some in the population require medications and therapies, their proportions are very small. The large majority of Palestinians live between the ease - dis-ease

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continuum, affected daily by exposure to violence, trauma and distress. And although they exhibit symptoms which are a natural consequence of this exposure, they are not sick. They are violated and call for the end of violation and for justice to be attained.

Finally, this essay demonstrates the usefulness of combining objective (medical and demographic) and subjective measures (people's reports) to assess demographic trends and health status, and to frame health in a broad public health perspective, encompassing the social determinants of health. There is every reason to believe that the human security, social suffering and symptoms causal framework is a more appropriate framework to use not only to expose and understand the Palestinian people's predicament and health, but for the exposition and understanding of the health and well-being of other populations, especially in conflict settings.

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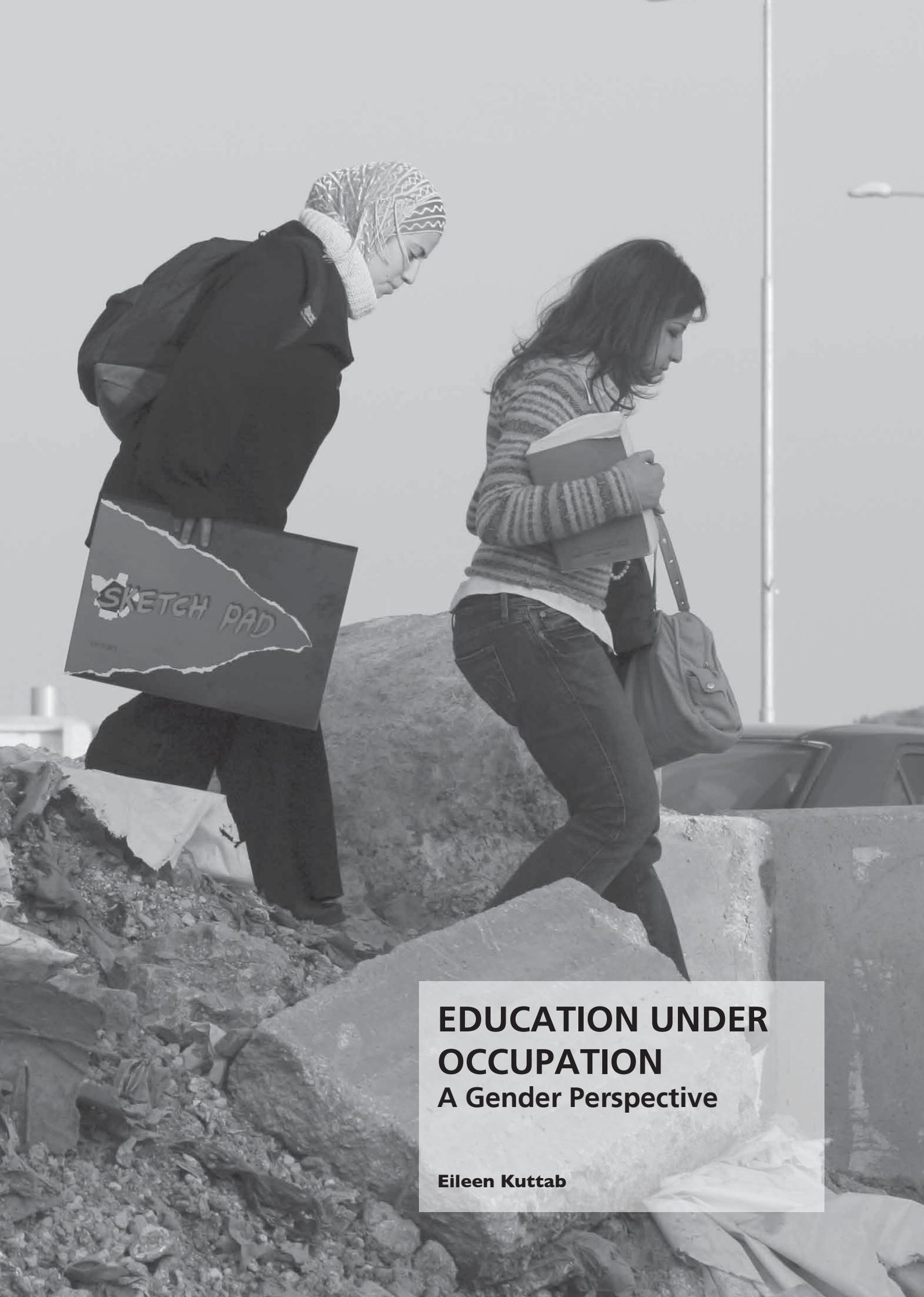
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**EDUCATION UNDER
OCCUPATION**
A Gender Perspective

Eileen Kuttab

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I. Introduction and Context: Education under Occupation

More than 40 years of colonial occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip by Israel and comprehensive control of the Palestinian education sector by Israel's military administration has served to transform education from a tool for sustainable development to a tool for the eradication of national identity. Since 1967, Israeli policy toward Palestinian education in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) has involved systematic manipulation, censorship and control of the curriculum, and the introduction of a new political geography and history. This was combined with continuous under-funding and neglect of the sector in relation to the maintenance and development of both the human and physical infrastructure (Abu Nahleh et.al., 1999).

Additional measures used by Israeli authorities (such as curfews, restrictions on mobility through checkpoints and siege, and detention of students and teachers) served to further consolidate Israeli control over and undermining of the education sector.

At the same time, due to powerful student movements and teachers' unions within academic institutions, which struggled for national self-determination and academic freedom, schools and universities were transformed by Israel to spaces of political struggle and confrontation.

During the escalation of political oppression, particularly during the different national uprisings that started in 1987 and in 2000, intensified Palestinian political activism and resistance included the promotion of alternative spaces for learning. This was especially the case during the long closures of educational institutions that occurred during the First Intifada.

Palestinian resistance to the systematic undermining of their educational process and institutions has taken different forms. On the formal level, universities created alternative decentralized systems for teaching by substituting the campus with alternative public spaces in different geographic areas. This decentralized process of learning has, on the one hand, succeeded in challenging the occupation's policy of collective punishment, and, on the other, ensured the practice of the right to education by offering the minimum requirements of an academic life. On the informal level, Israeli-imposed restrictions on education mobilized different sectors of society, among them mass-based organizations representative of a popular authority. Israeli-imposed school closures were thus transformed into opportunities for informal learning as civil society organizations, popular committees and grassroots efforts led to popular alternative education initiatives in neighborhoods across the oPt that substituted for the extended disruptions to formal schooling. Although limited, this experience proved additionally radical by responding to critical gaps in the school curriculum, addressing the missing dimensions related to national identity, and introducing the original history and geography of Palestine as alternative knowledge. This knowledge represented an informal alternative curriculum, which created an important space for students and teachers to exchange critically, reconstitute reality, and promote a critical view of the existing teaching system, including its curriculum. However, this experience was terminated by the Israeli authorities when popular committees were banned and outlawed, ending in the arrest of most of their members between 1989-1991 (Tarakji, 1991; Kuttab, 1993).

When the Palestinian Authority (PA) took control of administration and management of the education system in August 1994, Israeli policy had not only left the education sector dilapidated, alienated and under-developed, it had effectively restricted

Previous page: College students make their way over a mound of rubble, one of hundreds of barriers erected by the Israeli military in the West Bank. Photo by Rula Halawani

the establishment of an alternative educational system that could enhance critical thinking and understanding of new political, economic and social realities, enhance Palestinian identity, or even produce critical knowledge.

II. Trends and Indicators

Educational Sector under the PA: Vision and Mission

Since the establishment of the PA, in 1994, two ministries were established: Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). These were later merged into a single ministry, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), in an effort to restore the educational sector and review and assess the problems, challenges and needs of promoting an educational system able to enhance sustainable development.

The PA faced a tremendous task in restoring and re-building the education sector following the long-term absence of a national administering body. The absence of sufficient numbers of classrooms and adequate facilities like laboratories and libraries was particularly challenging, given the rapidly expanding student body and the large scope of work and the limited financial and managerial capacity of the PA. (For details, see Abu Nahleh, 1999). Within this context, the PA undertook to develop the physical infrastructure and produce a national curriculum as its first priorities.

At the visionary level, the ministries have prepared and produced different assessment reports, consecutive five-year plans, and strategic documents defining the philosophy and vision of the Palestinian educational system and emphasizing fundamental principles, including “Education as a Human Right” and “Education for All.” The PA considered education the basis for citizenship and a tool for sustainable economic and social development and the realization of an independent democratic state (Abu Awad, 2005). While these were important principles to adopt, we must question whether these principles have been realized over the last two decades and to what extent the different kinds of challenges and problems emerging during this period have been addressed.

Various international and national reports, drawing on statistical data produced by the different ministries and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), generally recognize significant achievements in the Palestinian education sector. This chapter more specifically provides select quantitative indicators for viewing progress in relation to gender, while also seeking to understand and examine the recent period’s vision and mission and its relevance to the developmental role assumed to produce a “citizen.” Other issues include the impact of the educational system on gender roles, the nature of the existing gender gap, the relation of the educational sector to the donor community, and the kind of influence foreign agendas have had on the educational system and curriculum content. Although these issues have not been researched extensively, different indicators allow for some preliminary assessments.

While this analysis examines the kind of challenges that the educational system confronts, it also seeks to promote a discussion on the kind of changes that are required, especially in higher education in the context of the 21st century and the uniqueness of the Palestinian situation. Hence, it is important to address the challenges that confront Palestinian educators and institutions at the present time, and examine the implications of different directions and visions for higher education and how these variously impact the process of state-building and contribute to the development of citizens that are able to critically re-interpret their social and economic reality and introduce changes necessary to create the conditions for sustainable development.

Gender Mainstreaming: Five-Year Plans

Despite unfavorable political conditions and economic challenges, significant improvements have been achieved in the education sector, both in general terms and specifically in relation to bridging the gender gap. Quantitative indicators demonstrate progress made during the last decade, as well as the obstacles hindering realization of fundamental principles like education for all, or equal opportunities for males and females.

Enrolment in basic education is similar to universal ratios, and the gross enrolment ratio for secondary school is above 80 percent. Access to basic and secondary education is equitable on the basis of

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gender, location (rural and urban), refugee camp, and household income (World Bank, 2006). In fact, these indicators place the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the leading position across the Arab region. Enrolment in tertiary education is also high, even for middle-income countries, reaching more than 40 percent for ages 18-24 (Ibid). However, challenges among both sexes remain. For males, economic conditions can play a role in increasing the rate of dropping out of school, given the pressure to work. For girls, early marriage, lack of access to secondary schools in rural areas or oppressive Israeli that target female students are all significant obstacles to attending school. Nonetheless, geographic accessibility of schools for girls has significantly improved over the last five years due to the ministry's commitment to realizing the principle of "Education for All."

Literacy Rates and Gender

Although the literacy rate for men is higher, reaching 97.4 percent compared to 91.7 percent for women in 2009, female literacy has increased by 7 percent between 2000-2009, compared to a 3.5 percent increase for men (see Figure 1). Illiteracy is primarily concentrated in older age groups, suggesting that education for girls has increased in importance and value (PCBS, 2010).

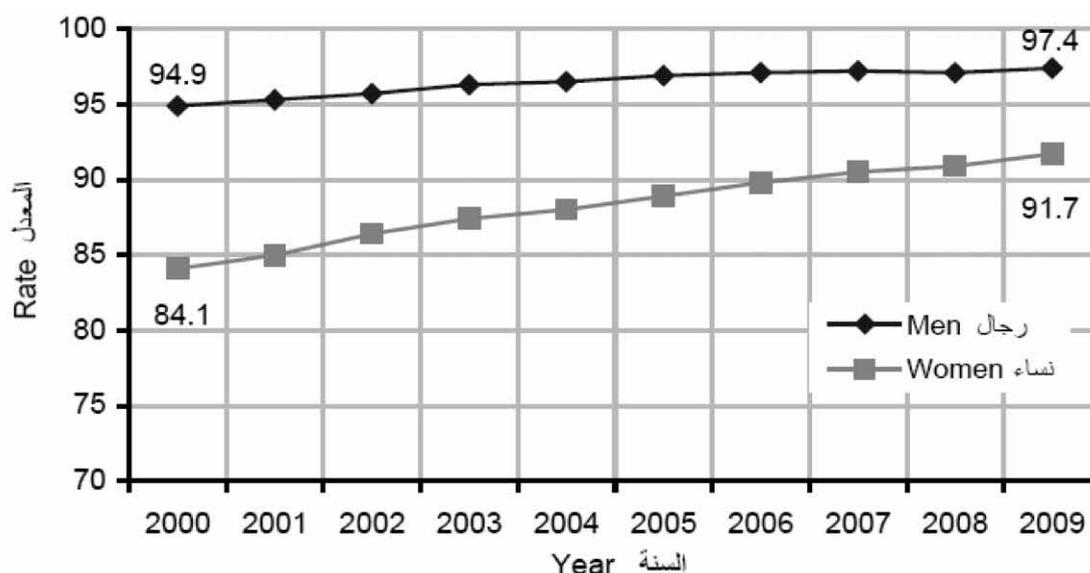
Enrollment Patterns in Basic Education

Statistical data produced by the PCBS indicates a continuous increase over time in the number of students enrolling in primary and secondary education (see Figure 2).

The number of students enrolled in basic education increased and female students accounted for 49.4 percent of all students, which is almost parallel to the proportion of the female population for this age group. However, there was a decline in gross enrollment rates in basic education, from 96 percent in the scholastic year 2002/2003 to 89.2 percent in the year 2006/2007. The net enrollment rate in basic education declined from 92.2 percent to 83.9 percent for the same period. This represents the lowest enrollment rate since the establishment of the MoE, due to a decline in students entering the first grade. This can be explained by factors such as decreasing fertility rates and increasing immigration rates in the same period (DSP, 2004). According to the data, and contrary to familiar patterns, the gender gap has been in favor of females with student enrollment in basic education higher for girls than boys.

At the high school level, the number of students enrolled rose from 51 percent in 2002/2003 to 64 percent in 2006/2007, indicating a higher enrollment of students, especially of female students. Examining gender distribution, for all the selected

Figure 1: Literacy rates among women and men 15 years and over (2000-2009)



Source: PCBS, 2010. *Women and Men in Palestine: Issues and Statistics*.

years rates of female enrollment were higher than male enrollment rates (see Figure 2).

At the same time, data for the scholastic year 2009/2010 indicates a continuation of the same pattern where male and female enrollment in basic education remains equal, while disparities persist in enrollment rates between female and male students in secondary education, favoring female students. Female enrollment is 54 percent compared to 46 percent for males (see Figure 2).

The higher gross and net enrollment rates in the ranks of female students relative to males is indicative of the increasing numbers of student-aged males joining the labor force either to contribute to the deteriorating economic conditions of the family and/or to escape from school due to low academic achievement. This trend emerged in Gaza before the West Bank, as parents increasingly perceived education for males as a weak guarantee of a viable economic future for their sons, especially due to increasing unemployment (Hammami, 2009). In contrast, for women, education is increasingly perceived as securing greater opportunity for employment. Hence, parents tend to invest in female education in hopes that it will contribute to family income in the immediate future or as a marriage resource, especially since men are seeking educated or employed spouses as a substitute for the usual breadwinner (Ibid).

Based on these findings, and given the large number of unemployed graduates from universities and institutes, perceptions of a direct link between the completion of university studies and employment, and the assumption that education is a guaranteed gateway to the job market, have been weakened. This missing link necessitates a more thorough look at PA economic policies and development plans to ensure that they better address the socioeconomic causes of the setback in student enrollment in secondary education and pursue the required steps of aligning the labor market with a developmental approach that can enhance growth and steadfastness in the face of the occupation.

School Failure, Repetition and Dropping Out

Despite the decline in rates of school dropping-out and failure in recent years, the pattern underwent a change during the academic year 2006/2007. The percentage of failure for both sexes at the primary level increased. Failure among males rose from 1.5 percent in 2002/2003 to 4.1 percent in 2006/2007, while the rise in failure rates for females was less acute: from 1.2 percent to 2.5 percent in the same period. According to various reports, this rise can be attributed to a decline in student academic achievement as a result of Israeli occupation policies, including the siege imposed on Palestinian communities on the one hand and the PA's inability to sustain teacher salaries over extended periods on the other. Both of these have resulted in

Figure 2: Average overall enrollment by gender and educational stages for different years

Educational stage	Scholastic year	Average overall enrollment			Net average enrollment		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Basic	2002/2003	95.5	96.6	96.0	91.5	92.5	92.0
	2006/2007	88.4					
		90.0	89.2	84.7	83.1	83.9	
	2009\2010	50.6	49.4	50.0	----	----	
Secondary	2002/2003	59.9	68.6	64.1	48.2	54.0	51.0
	2006/2007	70.3	81.6	75.9	59.5	68.6	64.0
	2009\2010	45.9	54.1	50.0	----	-----	

Source: PCBS, 2008. unpublished information; PCBS, 2010, *Women and Men in Palestine: Issues and Statistics* (No. 4).

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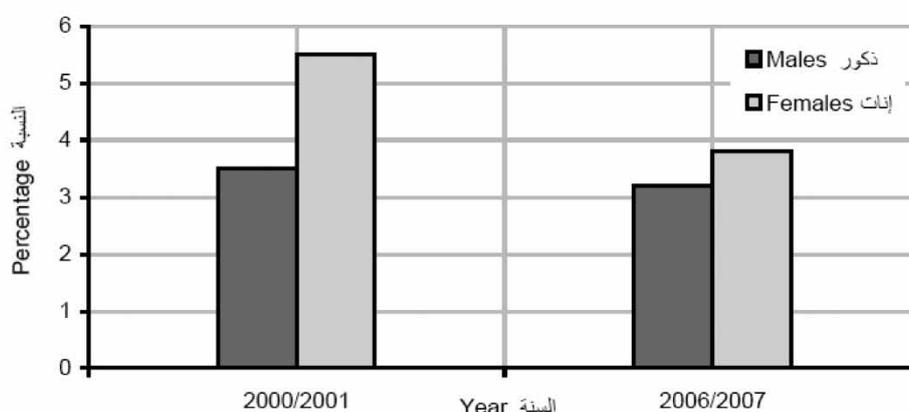
serious interruptions to schooling. Teachers' absences from schools for long periods of time as a result of both movement restrictions and strikes have negatively affected student achievement, especially at the primary level when critical foundations for learning should be acquired (PCBS, 2010). At the secondary level, the overall percentage of failing students was 1 percent in 2007, with female students maintaining a slightly lower rate of failure (0.7 percent) compared to males. This could be attributed to girls' relative focus on educational achievement due to their more limited opportunities for engaging in social and recreational activities outside the home, and/or their limited role in the political conflict as a result of social constraints.

Data also indicates increases in the overall percentage of students who drop out of school at both the basic and secondary stage. As shown in tables 3a and 3b, the percentage of male students who dropped out of primary education increased from 0.9 percent in 2002/2003 to 1.3 percent in 2007, while among females the same decreased from 0.6 to 0.5 percent. At the same time, overall dropout rates for secondary education decreased slightly from 3.7 percent to 3.4 percent, indicating a more positive attitude towards secondary education among both genders. However, unlike the above where the percentage of female basic students that drop out decreased, the percentage of female student dropouts remained higher than their male counterparts in secondary education in 2006/2007, despite a significant decrease in the gender gap. This suggests that policies of the MoE

and changing social attitudes regarding girl's education have contributed to the reduction of the dropout rate among older female students but have not yet completely overcome the gender gap. At the same time, other factors such as poverty and the need to generate additional income for the household have also increased the dropout rate of male students, particularly at the secondary level. Addressing dropout rates thus requires a national policy capable of solving the economic problems faced by Palestinian households, mainly alleviating the pressures that force students to drop out of school. Programs that promote internships for students at the secondary level can be helpful in preparing them for the labor market and gradually opening up opportunities for students to earn a sustainable income.

Reports produced by the MoE monitoring male and female student dropout trends indicate that the primary reasons for attrition are related to the student her/himself, her/his family, or security conditions with considerable variations according to gender. The primary reasons for male students to drop out are: first, lack of interest in education; second, the inability to study and achieve; and third, employment. For girls, the primary reason was marriage, while the inability to study, and employment ranked second and third, respectively. The gender differences in ranking the reasons have social as well as academic implications (UNESCO, 2007).

Figure 3a: Dropout rates in secondary stage 2000/2001 & 2006/2007



Source: PCBS, 2010. *Women and Men: Issues and Statistics*, no. 4.

However, ministry data does not indicate whether the lack of interest of students in education is related to a lack of incentives or deficiencies within the educational system and environment, the family's economic situation, security conditions felt by the student and/or family, or other factors.

Enrollment Patterns of Students in Secondary Level

According to PCBS data for the last decade, the distribution of students in different academic and vocational disciplines continues to be based on expected gender roles. Both male and female students prefer to enroll in humanities and scientific disciplines, compared to other disciplines. At the same time, female students pursue humanities more often than males, aligning themselves with expected gender roles.

The MoE goal of attaining the enrollment of 15 percent of the secondary school student body in vocational schooling has not been met; enrollment rates did not exceed 4.4 percent. This failure has been attributed to a variety of factors, foremost among them the limited scope of the vocational training areas on offer, and cultural perceptions about the image and value of vocational training as compared to academic disciplines. Manual skilled occupations continue to have low status in society, attracting the students that are the least academically-able. For students who have good academic capacity, the limited scope and relevance of vocational training fields in relation to the labor market increase the attractiveness of a university educa-

The low level of enrolment in scientific and industrial sectors of vocational training results in the expansion of the service sector at the expense of the productive sectors like industry and agriculture, the latter of which are known to enhance employment and decrease structural imbalances in the labor market.

tion. The different available streams of vocational training—mainly industrial, agricultural, commercial, hotel and home economics—make these areas unpopular for both students and parents. At the same time, they maintain the gendered nature of secondary education, as most girls enter literary streams leaving them concentrated in education where more than half of government school teaching staff are females. Hence the feminization of the public sector, especially in the education and health sectors, has reproduced the gendered trend of the labor market, where industry sectors are considered an extension of male and female gender roles, especially in their socializing and caring nature (PCBS, 2010).

In conclusion, trends confirm the persistence of cultural and stereotypical gender roles as the main

Figure 3b: Failure/repetition and dropout rates by stage and sex 2002/2003 and 2006/2007

Primary Phase	2002/2003			2006/2007		
	Male Students	Female Student	Total	Male Student	Female Student	Total
Basic stage						
Failure\ Repetition rate	1.5	1.2	1.4	4.1	2.5	3.3
Dropout rate	0.9	0.6	0.7	1.3	0.5	0.9
Secondary						
Failure\ Repetition rate	1.4	1.1	1.3	1.0	0.7	0.9
Dropout rate	2.6	4.8	3.7	3.0	3.8	3.4

Source: PCBS, 2008. *Women and Men: Issues and Statistics*, no. 3, prepared by Institute of Women Studies.

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factor impacting girls' choices in both academic and vocational training, as they avoid manual labor and opt for education that fits into accepted norms. The literary stream opens options for jobs in education, as humanities and teacher training are areas considered to be acceptable for women (UNESCO, 2007). However, the low level of enrolment in scientific and industrial sectors of vocational training results in the expansion of the service sector at the expense of the productive sectors like industry and agriculture, the latter of which are known to enhance employment and decrease structural imbalances in the labor market. This is exemplified in the underdeveloped infrastructure of the vocational sector where laboratories, workshops and equipment are unable to accommodate the changes required by the labor market, and which is in turn one of the reasons why students don't enroll in this sector.

Higher Education Trends

According to 2010 data from the MoHE, 55,946 new students enrolled in higher education programs in 2009/2010 (55.4 percent females, 44.5 percent males). Exactly half enrolled in traditional universities that offer bachelor and graduate degrees; 12.4 percent in university colleges offering bachelor degrees, diploma and vocational diplomas; 8.4 percent in community colleges offering only

diplomas; and 28.6 percent in open universities offering bachelor degrees and other qualifying certificates. In general, 4.2 percent of students were in graduate studies, 44.6 percent in bachelor studies, 0.7 percent in diploma programs, and 0.6 percent in other degree programs (MoHE, 2010). Hence, the focus has been on traditional universities, including open universities, indicating student lack of understanding about the labor market.

At the same time, a review of MoE data for select academic years indicates that the number of female students who enrolled in traditional universities has risen from 13.4 percent in 1994/1995 to 92.8 percent in 2007/2008, while their male peers enrolling in traditional universities increased from 16 percent to only 75.3 percent in the same period (see Figure 5). As such, the gender parity index is in favor of females, increasing from 0.9 in 1994/1995 to 1.3 percent in 2007/2008.

Enrollment in community colleges has been low, not exceeding 4.9 percent for females and 8.2 percent for males. This reflects a general preference among Palestinian students, especially females, for traditional universities as a means of enhancing employment opportunities. This preference finds merit in PCBS data on employment that indicates that women with degrees in higher education are more employable.

Figure 5: Students in higher education for selected academic years

Academic year	Community Colleges				Universities*				العام الدراسي
	كليات المجتمع		الجامعات*		كليات المجتمع		الجامعات*		
	فجوة الجنس GPI	إناث Females	ذكور Males	كلا الجنسين Both Sexes	فجوة الجنس GPI*	إناث Females	ذكور Males	كلا الجنسين Both Sexes	
94/95	1.2	2.3	1.9	4.2	0.9	13.4	16.1	29.5	95/94
97/98	1.3	2.4	2.0	4.4	0.8	22.9	29.6	52.5	98/97
98/99	1.2	3.0	2.6	5.6	0.9	27.3	33.6	60.9	99/98
99/00	1.2	2.8	2.4	5.2	0.9	30.4	35.7	66.1	00/99
00/01	1.4	2.9	2.2	5.1	0.9	35.4	40.3	75.7	01/00
01/02	1.3	3.0	2.4	5.4	1.0	39.6	43.9	83.5	02/01
02/03	1.0	3.0	3.0	6.0	1.0	48.5	50.0	98.5	03/02
03/04	1.0	4.1	4.5	8.6	1.0	56.3	57.2	113.5	04/03
04/05	0.8	4.0	5.1	9.1	1.2	67.7	61.5	129.2	05/04
05/06	0.8	4.8	6.4	11.2	1.2	74.5	64.8	139.3	06/05
06/07	0.8	5.0	6.4	11.4	1.2	86.1	72.1	158.2	07/06
07/08	0.6	4.9	8.2	13.1	1.3	92.8	75.3	168.1	08/07

* بيانات الجامعات تشمل طلبة وخريجي الدبلوم المتوسط والبيكالوريوس والدراسات العليا في الجامعات والكليات الجامعية.

• Universities data include students and graduates of intermediate diploma, bachelor and higher education in universities and university colleges.

Source: PCBS, 2010. *Women and Men in Palestine: Issues and Statistics*, no. 4.

Still, open university education programs have become an important avenue for students who are unable to attain the grades required in the secondary school certificate examination (*tawjihi*) to enter certain disciplines. In addition, the flexibility and decentralization of the open education system has positive outcomes for female students who can enroll in classes according to their own schedules, social conditions, and different geographic areas. Nevertheless, only 4.2 percent of students who complete secondary education enroll in university colleges, and only 7 percent enroll in community colleges. This reflects the ministry's lack of interest in developing these sectors, despite their importance in qualifying students at the technical level. Enrollment in open university programs is significantly higher in the West Bank than in Gaza.

Despite the above-noted positive trend of rising enrollment rates of women in universities, hidden gender stereotypes of social significance confirm continued gender gaps and discrimination against women. For example, female students typically enroll in local universities (represented in these numbers) due to limited financial opportunities and social constraints, among them taboos against females travelling and living independently outside the country rather than remaining under direct family supervision.

Likewise, the percentage of male students enrolled in local traditional universities is lower for two reasons. Some males are obliged to work due to

the family's economic conditions, while others travel outside the country to attain better education as they are considered to be the main breadwinners.

On another level, gender streaming in disciplines is another indicator of the gender gap. In general, the structural imbalance between academic and vocational disciplines continues in higher education. Almost two-thirds of students are clustered in humanities, social sciences, and education, as compared with technical and scientific disciplines such as engineering, manufacturing, construction, science and agriculture. This results in expanding unemployment among new graduates, as there is a mismatch between the specialization of graduates and the requirements of the labor market. This is particularly so for female students as they continue to follow traditionally "female disciplines" like humanities, business administration, education, social sciences or areas that represent an extension of their expected gender roles, despite MOHE efforts on several levels to encourage girls to enroll in all streams (UNESCO, 2007) (see Figure 6).

Thus, although Palestinians are among the most educated in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, its educated workforce is not correlated with economic productivity. As discussed earlier, the level of demand for graduates of both tertiary and vocational training institutions in most disciplines is weak, resulting in an oversupply of certain professions and high rates of unemployment and poor utilization of formally-acquired

Figure 6: Distribution of registered students in higher education according to specialization and gender 2006/2007

% of female students	% female students	% male students	General Program
69.7	44.8	22.6	Education
65.6	13.0	7.9	Humanities & Arts
39.9	23.6	41.3	Social Sciences, Commerce and Law
46.3	8.2	11.1	Sciences
29.6	3.6	10.0	Engineering, Manufacturing & Construction
17.8	0.2	1.0	Agriculture
57.0	6.4	5.7	Health and Social Work
32.7	0.2	0.4	Other
53.7	100	100	Total

Source: Ministry of Education and Higher Education. 2006/2007 Annual Statistical Abstract of Higher Education Institutions

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knowledge and skills. In addition, substantive gender differences persist. Female labor force participation is the lowest in the region, even though women represent 50 percent of those enrolled in tertiary education. Since women are selected into a limited set of subjects in tertiary education, they are then directed into a limited number of sectors in the labor market. This feeds problems of segregation in the labor market (both vertical and horizontal), despite the overall high qualifications of women.

Higher Education Faculty and Staff

Reviewing the 2009/2010 data from the MoEHE indicates a wide gender gap between males and females among PhD holders. Only 229 females were PhD holders that year compared to 2,577 males, while 884 females held master's degrees compared with 3,987 males. These gaps have a variety of gender implications. First, females are not being represented within the decision-making structures in universities since certain qualifications and seniority are required for appointment to higher levels of decision making, in turn undermining gender concerns or gender specific policies within academic institutions. In addition, if one asks why the disparity exists, the explanations are also gendered. Opportunities for higher education for women remain limited; due to their reproductive roles and responsibilities, women are often unable to leave the family to continue their education outside the country (as no local universities that offer a PhD degree), or to take the time required to develop their research as required. Hence, cultural and social pressures once again constitute significant barriers, adding to financial obstacles where parents prefer to support presumed future (male) breadwinners.

In 2012 at Birzeit University, one of the leading Palestinian universities where women have played an important role in developing the university, and where female professors are assumed to have greater representation within the hierarchy, 38 percent of employees were female and only 28 percent of the faculty were women. Only 18.3 percent of these women held the rank of full professor, just three of 35 women were associate professors, and only 31 of 128 assistant professors were females. Low and seasonal representation of female faculty members on the University Council or Academic Councils indicates a clear absence of

women in decision-making and a hiring policy that does not work for gender parity in hiring, qualifying or representing women in the university as a whole (Kuttab, 2012).

III. Issues, Actors and Opportunities

Global Trends and Local Accommodation

Quantitative indicators alone cannot deconstruct and expose the underlying structural obstacles and challenges within the education system, or promote the right recommendations to meet these challenges. Going beyond simple enrollment, for instance, one should consider the quality of education, adaptability of education to the labor market, real possibilities for gender equality, and education for positive change and development. How education might enhance development and mainstream gender, or move education forward as a learning process that enhances critical thinking and enables students of both genders to strengthen their abilities to shape new realities and make social transformation a possibility, should also be addressed (Ghali, 1998:10; UNESCO, 2007; Kuttab, 2010).

Historically, higher education institutions, and in particular universities, have marketed themselves in the public sphere and justified public funding for their activities on the grounds that they serve the public good. They have traded on their enlightenment inheritance that they are the guardians and creators of knowledge produced for the greater good of humanity (Lynch, 2006).

However, over the last decade, education in general and higher education in particular have been transformed increasingly into powerful consumer-oriented corporate networks whose public interest values have been seriously challenged (Giroux, 1999). There are principles and practices that critics find in the 21st century university, where the "historical legacy" of the university conceived "as a crucial public sphere" has given way to a university "that now narrates itself in terms that are more instrumental, commercial and practical" (Ibid., 1999).

Critical theorists have outlined significant social repercussions as a result of the shift in higher education from academic values to market values

and commoditization and marketization that has taken place in the West. These include:

“an increase in socio-economic disparities and loss of opportunities for the disadvantaged and marginalized; retreat of the state from its earlier role as welfare provider including in education; deformation of educational goals, motivations, methods, standards of excellence and freedom of expression; neutralizing and destroying potential pockets of resistance to global corporate expansion; and alienation of the youth as all aspects of cultural and social life have been commodified. Cuts in public expenditure have opened up avenues for privatization of the education system. As a consequence, fundamental concepts like equality have been called into question.” (Hill and Kumar, 2008)

Critics of neo-liberalism explain that once neoliberal goals and priorities become embedded in a culture’s way of thinking, institutions that don’t regard themselves as neoliberal will nevertheless engage in practices that represent and extend neoliberal principles such as privatization, decentralization, unrestricted competition, the retreat from social engineering, and the proliferation of markets. In this context, universities have responded by raising tuition and passing the burden of costs to the students who become consumers and debt-holders rather than beneficiaries. They have also entered into research partnerships with industry and thus courted the danger of turning the pursuit of truth into the pursuit of profit on one hand, and distorting critical knowledge on the other. Or, they have hired a larger number of short-term, part-time adjuncts who are in no position to challenge the university’s policies and practices. In short, universities have embraced neo-liberalism (Ibid.).

These global trends, combined with the Palestinian political situation of continued colonial occupation that has long defined and framed Palestinian higher education parameters, have meant that, while aspiring to become modern, the Palestinian educational project embodies a schizophrenia of traditionalism and modernity within its discourse and practice. This is reflected in educational policies, discourse, curriculum, and administrative procedures and governance.

As elsewhere, “structural adjustment” of the national education system has become a key focus of multilateral and bilateral assistance in the oPt. In the initial stages of the implementation of the Oslo

agreement in 1994, the World Bank introduced structural adjustment policies as an entry point for transforming the Palestinian economy to a neo-liberal style market economy. This approach disregarded the colonial occupation of Palestine and imposed a post-conflict agenda by promoting a new culture and value system to build the market economy; both formal and informal education has been a critical tool in this adjustment process.¹

Emphasis on “Modernity”

The impact of global trends and particularly the role of the donor community post-Oslo in introducing liberal values and principles within the Palestinian development and education discourse is clearly reflected in the different five-year-plans and strategic documents of the Palestinian MoEHE. A recent ministerial report, “The Future of Palestinian Higher Education,” articulates several broad objectives for Palestinian higher education: providing knowledge, “enhancing students’ intellectual capabilities and the ability to conduct research and investigations, [...] maintaining Arab/Islamic culture and consolidating its values to instill objectivity, democracy, and respect for others.” It further

1 Although the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have been the main players in defining the parameters and content of the different national development plans, including education policies, other donors like USAID and GTZ have also shared in supporting and enforcing the neoliberal paradigm, which adopts capacity building as a tool for building the new neo-liberal individual (not citizen) who will be the agent for promoting this kind of economy. Both of these institutions have had their role in promoting and strengthening the capacity of institutions, USAID in the area of law, strengthening the supreme judicial council, the ministry of justice, court administrators, and other institutions like universities who are responsible to prepare the theoretical framework of lawyers to adopt and adapt to more liberal laws and values. A project entitled Nitham (Rule of Law Program Justice and Enforcement) that is financed by USAID is part of this program. One of its main responsibilities is the development of the Legal Education program for students and faculty members, including the launching of a new law school course, expanding law libraries and sponsoring US study tours to learn modern teaching methodologies and improve course curriculum. In addition, one of the objectives of the project is to evaluate civic education curricula for grades 1-9, and train civic education teachers to reflect the neo-liberal culture to children from the first day of their entry to schools (USAID, 2009). Simultaneously, vocational or technical training is promoted mainly by the Japanese (JICO) and Germans (GTZ) through programs responsible for producing the required entrepreneurs or workforce to work in proposed future industrial zones that are meant to become the main institutions generating employment for Palestinians.

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targets one other specific, critical objective: “We consider that one of the most important priorities of higher education [...] is [to contribute to] Palestinian national integration and development.” The report also recommends that priority be given to assuring widespread access to higher education, increasing both its quality and relevance and course work, and developing appropriate research institutions that can address societal needs.

Similarly, according to the five-year-plan adopted by the ministry, the vision for education in the long-term states that:

“education is to prepare human beings who are proud of their religious values, nationality, country and their Arab and Islamic culture; who contribute to the development of the society; who actively seek knowledge and creativity; who interact positively with the requirements of scientific and technological development and who are capable of competing in science and technological development and in scientific and applied fields; who are open to other cultures and regional and international markets, and a society based on equality between genders, build up higher education system which is accessible, multiple, decentralized, diversified, flexible, effective, efficient, sustainable, competitive and qualitative” (MoHE, 2008).

Even the Palestinian Reform & Development Plan (PRDP) maintains the position that education is a basic human right and a vital tool for socio-economic development and instilling moral values and civic responsibility, and hence commits more than 30 percent of its proposed budget to education. The focus is on modernization of the education system that prepares Palestinian citizens, particularly youth, for the future, hence it includes modernization of the curriculum in the line with the PA’s vision of a future Palestinian state, a state based on a knowledge economy, connected to the global community that embraces humanistic values and is tolerant.

Such a discourse reflects the absence of internal harmony as it combines traditional positions used for local consumption and political reasoning (like the phrase “education is to prepare human beings who are proud of their religious values, nationality, country and their Arab and Islamic culture”) with modern principles reflecting neo-liberal qualities addressed to the West and the donor community. What is relevant in this description are the neo-lib-

eral qualities that are viewed as the basis for a new modern educational system focusing on selective neo-liberal qualities like flexibility, effectiveness, efficiency, competitiveness while maintaining traditional concepts and paying lip service to cultural heritage to placate the community. Whether an educational system and content can develop through this paradoxical binary of traditionalism and modernity is questionable.

Gender Mainstreaming in Education

Within this context, the ministry has, to some extent, included a gender dimension in its new policies and strategic plans. The ministry formed a Committee on Gender during the implementation of the first five-year plan (1999-2003). Its aim was to achieve gender mainstreaming in all the policies and plans of the ministry. Although this can be viewed as a positive gesture, the gender review conducted in 1998 by a team from the Institute of Women Studies at Birzeit University on the plan argued that gender as a category of analysis, or a cross-cutting issue has not been structurally embraced or used in all sections of the plan, and hence the gender impact is likely to be partial at best and not strategic in nature. The review further observed that the majority of policies and applications within the ministry have been gender-neutral and not gender-specific, thus ensuring continuation of the gender gap.

The discourse of the plan also placed great emphasis on “nation-building,” where democratic values and principles like “building a strong civil society” or “human rights” “democracy” as concepts seemed strong, yet these were neither structurally or organically reflected, nor operationally integrated into the document as a whole. Thus, for example, although the use of the concept “democracy” should clearly entail the inclusion of women at different levels including decision-making and policy formulation as a necessary component for equity, participation and human rights and a main factor for sustainable development, this has not been functional.

Another obstacle for gender equity was the adherence of the plan to the Palestinian National Development Plan, i.e. the plan’s endorsement of the market economy and privatization as tools for sustainable development have negative implications on gender and female students who are thereby

marginalized and whose opportunities for quality education are diminished. Most of these plans were prepared by experts who minimized the input and participation of local staff and departments with long-term experience. This has produced an up-to-down planning process, limiting democratic participation.

In short, while enrollment has been an important achievement in relation to bridging the gender gap, the question of how to attain quality education or equality as the vision for future Palestinian society remains uncertain and difficult to answer without a thorough investigation.

De-contextualization of Curriculum

Equally dangerous, researchers have warned that the new school curriculum, developed by the PA under the tutelage of international donors in the post-Oslo political era, is depoliticized, thus undermining Palestinian identity. The civic education curricula emphasizes the West Bank and Gaza as the geographic space for Palestinians and ignores the *Nakbeh* (the 1948 exile), thus abolishing collective memory while enhancing the concept of citizenship, democracy, human rights, equality and rule of law as abstracted from political reality. Under the guise of the ostensibly apolitical nature of the neo-liberal agenda, knowledge is distorted and depoliticized; the ideological underpinnings of neo-liberalism are hidden in a language of economic efficiency and the hearts and minds of students and faculty are silently colonized. If a student outside Palestine should read these texts, they may believe that Palestine is already an independent, democratic state that respects the rule of law, as the emphasis on the Declaration of Independence makes it look real. Favoring “professionalism” over social responsibility and refusing to take positions on controversial issues disconnects students from political agency, renders them incapable of taking a political stand, and encourages them to refrain from doing so in the name of academic responsibility.

Emphasis on Cost-effectiveness and Efficiency

One of the recommendations of the World Bank that is gaining acceptance is to decrease expenditures on education or “saving” by increasing the number of students per class. The World Bank argues that since they have measured no substan-

Such a discourse reflects the absence of internal harmony as it combines traditional positions used for local consumption and political reasoning (like the phrase “education is to prepare human beings who are proud of their religious values, nationality, country and their Arab and Islamic culture”) with modern principles reflecting neo-liberal qualities addressed to the West and the donor community.

tive increase in academic performance when class sizes are reduced from 45 to 35, these reductions are therefore costly, irrational and unnecessary. Most higher education institutions have adopted this model in undergraduate courses to ensure cost effectiveness, thus resulting in the neglect and de-development of content, quality, communication skills and discussion space and other methodologies that promote critical thinking and produce critical knowledge. Such activities require fewer students in a classroom and their abandonment emphasizes the production of commercially-oriented professionals rather than public interest professionals (see Giroux, 1994). In the Palestinian context, some universities have gone beyond increasing the number of students per class to a strategy of cancelling or decreasing the number of courses that aim to develop critical thinking, like cultural studies courses, or marginalizing some social science departments because they are not market-oriented.

Another World Bank proposal for reducing education expenditures has been the demand for a reduction in teachers’ pay and an increase in their productivity by lengthening their workdays and increasing student-teacher ratios, again undermining quality. In this context it becomes important for the teachers’ unions to understand the link between structural policies and creeping neo-liberal processes that will jeopardize the quality and effectiveness of higher education in maintaining its public goals.

Education under Occupation: A Gender Perspective

Re-defining Quality: Performance Measurements and Compliance Undercut Creativity and Criticism

The “quality” of education is increasingly reduced to quantifiable measurements of standardized “learning outcomes” and a culture of trust in professional integrity and peer regulation is being replaced by a culture of compliance dictated by “performance” indicators. Constant pressure to perform is leading to a widespread sense of alienation and feelings of a lack of personal authenticity, particularly as standardized points of reference increasingly serve as the basis for assessing the value of one’s work, regardless of how detached from context, learning needs and student competencies they might be.

Moreover, a trend toward the quantification of research activities in Palestinian local institutions is undermining the pursuit of original research. The measure of educational and research worth becomes the ability to provide what is measurable in the market. As universities become increasingly dependent on contract research, this will leave little time to develop the critical and creative conceptual frameworks or original research that follows. In addition, such measures weaken the position of the humanities and critical social sciences, as most research and teaching in these fields do not service the for-profit sector and their remit is to educate for the public.

More broadly this “marketization” of the education system poses a threat to the very existence of critique and creativity itself. Public universities were established to promote independence of intellectual thought, to enable scholars to work outside the control of powerful vested interest groups. So the principal contribution of a university to society is measured by the quality of the knowledge that it generates, the habits of critical thought it institutionalizes, and the values of openness and democratic governance it promotes. If this is not reproduced and maintained, then education will lose its historical role and become a commodity that is standardized and uniform with other education systems abstracted from the political and social reality, where agency and resistance become obsolete and irrelevant in the face of the market economy, and more people are transformed into technocrats, bureaucrats and consumers alienated from the appropriate ideological and theoretical frameworks. Education will serve hegemonic discourse and undermine rather than

foster critical knowledge, the only product that can generate the required democratic change and a more equal economic and social system that opens equal spaces for disadvantaged and marginalized individuals.

Palestinians are among the most educated people in the world. Due to their political situation and the continuous instability, they put great value on education and still view it as a valuable commodity—one that is portable and can enhance their survival wherever they go, in an ongoing context of Israeli transfer policies. Nonetheless, reviewing the limited studies produced by local researchers on education and the various ministerial strategies and plans, particularly the five-year plans and the strategic plan covering the period between 2008-2012, one can conclude that the seeds and principles of neo-liberalism are already well-embedded and integrated within Palestinian higher education policies and practices. If maintained and continued we can predict that this approach, will, on the one hand, transform—when the situation permits—the educational system into a commercial neo-liberal project furthering social class disparities and alienating the genuine historical objectives of education. It will do this by creating a new cultural system that enhances individualism, competition and consumption at the expense of collectivism, solidarity, cooperation and production fundamental values underpinning Palestinian resistance and steadfastness. On the other hand, we can expect this approach to create and produce a “citizen”—if this term within the political context is appropriate—who is either a consumer or an entrepreneur, characterized by the motivations and qualities of the free market (Manteaw, 2008) or “citizens” that perform as human capital and a future workforce. In the latter scenario, these citizens, with the help of external educational and technical engineers or locally trained experts and technocrats, would be given the skills and disposition appropriate to encourage scientific and technological innovations in order to compete efficiently and effectively in the free market.

More advocacy by Teachers’ Unions on the effects of commodifying education, in terms of its role, quality and content, should at this stage be used to obstruct the process of integrating neo-liberal accommodation to the global at the expense of the local. At the same time, the accountability of the state in relation to the education sector should also be questioned.

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**VIOLENCE,
GENDER-BASED
VIOLENCE AND
PROTECTION**
A Dangerous Decade

Penny Johnson

VIOLENCE, GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND PROTECTION

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I. Introduction and Context: Interrelated Forms of Violence

When a group of third-graders in Amari refugee camp were asked to describe the kinds of violence that surround them, Rania spoke up:

“The Occupation, the checkpoints, between girls at school, kids on the street, between families, hitting without reason.” (Johnson, 2006: 21)

This child-eye’s view captures the multiple forms of violence facing Palestinian women, men and children in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) and is a productive starting point for our analysis. In Rania’s world, one form of violence slides almost seamlessly into another, and physical violence (hitting), systemic violence (the Israeli occupation) and structural violence (checkpoints) are all related. Her perception is shared by Palestinians of all ages and tells us that there are no impermeable borders between the violence of the Israeli occupation, Palestinian public violence and violence in homes and among family members. At the same time, a “translation” from public violence and insecurity to family violence is obviously not automatic: individuals, families, communities and the society as a whole have moral, social and legal resources that offer prohibition and protection. In what circumstances does political violence, most saliently the violence of the Israeli occupation, enable or increase other forms of violence against women and girls, in Palestinian families and among Palestinians? What legal and social resources do women, families, society and the polity have or need to prevent such a “translation”? What forms of violence, including gender-based violence, have increased over the last decade and how can women and girls – and men and boys – access justice and protection?

This brief review cannot offer definitive answers but will examine trends over the last decade characterized by profound insecurity and severe threats to Palestinian lives and livelihoods in the West Bank and Gaza. Neither can it include the full range of Israeli occupation violence and rights violations – the subject of volumes of human rights reporting. **The focus here will be on the right to life, violent crimes against both women and men, and domestic violence.**

At the same time, it is also useful to reflect on what has *not* occurred as a result of the pervasive public violence, oppression and instability of this period. Most notably and unlike other societies enduring long-term conflict, Palestinian families have largely stayed together, although clearly enduring many burdens and tensions. There has been little “male flight” – and as far as can be determined, no dramatic increase by Palestinian perpetrators in the killing of women (although internal fighting has taken a large toll on male lives), rape or other grave crimes against women and girls by Palestinians. However, there are other trends that are pronounced in this dangerous decade for Palestinians that have strong gender implications. Looking at the last three years alone, we find in particular Israel’s increase in lethal violence against Gaza and Gazan civilians, as well as a range of other trends from increasing prominence of Palestinian inter-family feuds, sometimes with lethal consequences, to widespread public perception of an increase in family tensions and domestic violence. Most pronounced over the decade are the repeated failures of the international community to meet its obligation to protect the occupied Palestinian population, as well as a crisis in trust in Palestinian institutions and government, exacerbated by the split in the Palestinian political system since June 2007.

Direct killings of Palestinians by Israeli army or settlers. 2005-2008

	Gaza	Of whom women/girls	West Bank	Of whom women/girls
2008 (through December 26)	414	17	46	0
2007	300	4	84	3
2006	523	47	134	4
2005	107	1	83	0
TOTAL	1344	69	347	7

Source: Calculated from lists of fatalities compiled by B'Tselem.

II. Trends and Indicators

Recent trends in violence by the Israeli Occupation: no place safe in Gaza

In the period at question (2000-2009), the pervasive state violence of the Israeli occupation increased dramatically in extent, but has also taken on new and dangerous directions during the war in Gaza. In the *eight years* since the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada until 26 December 2008, the Israeli army or settlers in Gaza killed 3,004 Palestinians (calculated from fatalities recorded by B'Tselem) while in the *22 days* of Israel's December 2008/January 2009 war on Gaza, the Israeli army killed 1,434 Palestinians, of which 235 were fighters, 239 civil police, and 960 civilians. At least 300 were children. According to Gaza's Ministry of Health, 114 women were killed and nearly 1,000 wounded.

Home as battlefield

A prominent feature of Israel's assault on Gaza – also found in other Israeli attacks on Gaza in the past three to four years – was the erasure of the distinction between civilians and combatants and thus between home and battlefield, both with gendered implications. Indeed, slightly over one-fifth of all Palestinians killed in the Gaza war died inside their own homes (Al Haq, 2008: 7) And these are deaths by policy. As succinctly, if chillingly, put by Israeli philosopher Asa Kasher of Tel Aviv University, whose proposed military code of ethics for a “just war on terror” (Harel, 2009) guided Israeli army conduct in Gaza:

Why should I force him [the Israeli soldier] to endanger himself much more so that the terrorist's neighbor isn't killed?... From the standpoint of the state of Israel, the neighbor is much less important.

The battlefield thus moved into the homes of “neighbors,” with devastating effects and clear gendered implications: in Israel's war count of Gazan dead, women and child deaths became unavoidable or “collateral damage,” while all male deaths were counted as militants.¹ (Johnson, 2010) During the Gaza war, the homes of “neighbors” were targeted over and over again by Israeli rockets and tanks, destroying or making uninhabitable the homes of over 50,000 Gazans,² most of whom have been unable to rebuild due to the Israeli ban on cement and other building materials and most of whom are living with relatives in crowded and tense conditions. In this context, findings from focus group discussions conducted by a Gaza non-governmental organization (NGO) that domestic violence has risen among displaced families (Culture and Free Thought Association and UNFPA, 2009) is hardly surprising.

Israel's lethal policy during the Gaza war was a continuation of its disregard for civilian life exhibited in Israeli attacks on Gaza over the past several

1 Palestinian human rights organizations and health officials count 1,434 Palestinian deaths during the war, 235 were fighters, 239 civil police, and 960 civilians. At least 300 were children. According to Gaza's Ministry of Health, 114 women were killed and nearly 1,000 wounded.

2 The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (2009) in Gaza reports that 2,214 Gazan homes were completely destroyed and a further 3,242 rendered uninhabitable, affecting 51,842 individuals. As of October 2009, very little rebuilding has been accomplished, due to Israeli restrictions on the entry into Gaza of cement and other building materials.

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years. If we examine Israeli killings over the past four years (excluding the war), the greater exposure to violence for Gazans is obvious:

- **Even before the war, about four times as many Gazans (1,344) died in the four years leading up to the war from Israeli violence as did West Bankers (347).**

Men and boys are by far the greatest victims of Israel's deadly violence – with 340 male deaths as opposed to 7 female deaths in the West Bank in this three-year period, and 1,275 male as opposed to 69 female deaths in Gaza. It is well worth noting that:

- **Half of all female deaths were of children, their ages ranging from under 1 year to 16. The most common location women were killed was inside their own homes.**

Overall, since December 2008, females have accounted for about 6 percent of all deaths by Israeli violence, according to PCBS figures and about 1 percent of all prisoners. It is therefore the impact of male death and imprisonment on women and family life that are of the greatest significance – they are often not only deprived of loved ones, but also of the main breadwinner and source of family protection and welfare.

Access to justice

The most powerful instrument for access to justice – international humanitarian law – is the least utilized, although the adoption of the 2009 Goldstone report by the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly offers some hope for effective action on war crimes during the Gaza war, as examined in the concluding section of this chapter.

Despite limited Palestinian governance, Palestinians are still tried in Israeli military court. Palestinian complaints against and cases raised within the Israeli justice system have been largely ignored, although Israeli law, whether military orders governing Palestinians under occupation or municipal law governing Israeli settlers has enormous bearing on the lives of Palestinian women and men. For example, **in the last victimization survey of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2004), 57% of the crimes**

reported by victimized persons were committed by Israeli soldiers or settlers.

These crimes are not in the jurisdiction of Palestinian justice and police services. **Women (particularly rural women) have been complainants in cases against Israeli settlers.**

Trends in Palestinian Violations of Right to Life

Decrease in deaths due to internal fighting, but deaths due to family feuds and revenge in West Bank and tunnel deaths (lack of public safety) in Gaza increasing

Despite ongoing Palestinian public concern over an increase in crime and violence, murders of Palestinians by Palestinian perpetrators dropped significantly from 2007 (at 585) to 2008 (at 191), largely because of a decline in internal fighting, which accounted for 343 deaths in Gaza in 2007. Sixty-five percent of all deaths in 2007 were in the age group 19-35, reflecting the large proportion of young men killed in internal fighting. It is probable that not only the families but society as a whole have not come to terms with this tragic loss of life. Eleven women also died in the internal fighting in Gaza in mid-June 2007. Female deaths decreased significantly from 45 in 2007 to 19 in 2008.

Homicides/femicides rose again in 2009, although not to 2007 levels, with women accounting for 30 and children accounting for 39 of the 237 deaths. Negligence and lack of public safety were major causes of child deaths, accounting for 60 deaths in Gaza tunnels (all male), a critical issue that needs to be addressed.

- In both 2008 and 2009, women were victims in about one in ten killings.

Are “honor” killings the leading cause of female death?

In 2005 and 2006, “honor” killings were the leading cause of femicides, and indeed many people may equate killings of women with this crime. But in 2007, internal fighting was a main cause. And overall for both men and women, in both 2008 and 2009, deaths in family feuds, deaths from misuse of arms by police and citizens and deaths from lack of public safety (principally in Gaza) are new and disturbing leading causes.

Killings by Palestinian perpetrators (2007-2009)

	2009		2008		2007	
	Gaza	WB	Gaza	WB	Gaza	WB
Family feuds/ revenge	15	25/6	23	33 (1 ♀)	39	37
Internal fighting	28	8	4		343	3
Misuse of arms by police	1	4	33	1	16	8
Misuse of arms by citizens	11	3	24	5 (1 ♀)	37	9
Unknown circumstances	23	10	19	12	53	11
“Honor”	5	4	2	1	8	10
Collaboration				0	0	5
Lack of public safety/tunnel deaths	60 (tunnel) plus 11	13	29			
Deaths in detention	9	3	2	5 (3?)	6	0
Total	162/3	68 (70)	136	55 (57) (10 female)	503 (502) (14♀)	82 (83) (14 ♀)
TOTAL	237 (30♀, 39 children)		191 (19 ♀)		585 (45 ♀)	

Source: Independent Commission for Citizen's Rights, Annual Reports for 2007, 2008 and 2009. These reports, an excellent and indeed almost unique source of information, contain some minor internal inconsistencies in the figures. In 2009 it is not clear if deaths in detention are counted in the final figures.

An “honor” killing is generally defined as when male relatives (usually a father or brothers) kill a female relative for “engaging in, or being suspected of engaging in sexual practices before or outside of marriage” (Abu Odeh 2000), although there is an on-going and important debate to widen this definition. While honor killings are perpetrated by family members and relatives, they differ from ordinary acts of domestic violence not only in their extreme severity but in their characteristics. In Abu Nahleh’s examination of case files for the Palestinian Forum Against Violence Against Women, she found that all “registered” honor crimes in 2005 and 2006 were committed by members of the victim’s natal family, with brothers as the largest category of perpetrators, followed by fathers and other paternal relatives—a similar pattern to that found by other researchers in earlier studies (Kressel 1981: 146) using our definition of these crimes above. Several of the murdered women were Christian. Gaza and West

Bank villages witnessed the highest proportion of these crimes.

Although “honor” killings for most years when statistics are available have been in the range of ten to twenty, the Independent Commission for Citizen's Rights (ICCR) registered only three “honor” killings out of nineteen female deaths in 2008, a surprising drop, given that in 2006, there were fourteen reported “honor” killings (of 28 women killed) and in 2005, seventeen “honor” killings. The figures for 2008 may represent an anomaly, as these killings rose again in 2009 where ICCR recorded four “honor” killings in the West Bank and five in Gaza.

Researchers on these crimes have pointed out that some killings registered as “honor” crimes may have other motives, such as economic, (Abu Nahleh, 2006) while “unknown” deaths may include such crimes as perpetrators cover up the crimes as accidents. In a study in the 1990s,

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Kervokian points to the number of deaths of females attributed to “fate” as doubling between 1996 and 1998 (Kervokian, 2004: 57).

A Note on Low Reported Rape

If homicide statistics are problematic, rape statistics are more so, as it is fair to assume that many rapes, particularly those that occur within family circles, are not reported. Cases of rape may also be settled by customary law—where in some instances rape victims are married to their violators. The fact that there was only one person in prison for rape in 2006, two in 2005 and none in 2003 and 2002, according to PCBS’s annual crime tables, suggests that the police (which barely existed in 2002 and 2003) and courts have not been able to offer significant recourse to rape victims. Reported incidents of rape remain relatively low, with figures declining from 1999 and with Gaza figures substantially less than those in the West Bank. This decline should be taken with caution, given the weakness of police presence in the 2001-2005 period. In a January 2009 interview, security services spokesperson Brigadier Damiri noted **twelve cases of reported rape in the West Bank in 2008, five of which were in the Ramallah district. The police’s annual report also noted 50 cases of attempted rape.** He also noted that “conservative districts” had less reporting, although perhaps not less actual crime.

One form of rape – incest or child rape inside families – is rarely reported and is perhaps one of the least explored issues in research on Palestinian society. Discussions with staff at Mahwar, the first shelter for victims of family violence, suggest that some of the young women sheltered there first suffered sexual violence as children at the hands of family members.

Trends in Access to Justice: Contradictory Results Since 2005

Two faces of Palestinian policing

The strengthening of police capacity since 2005 in the West Bank – after its almost total collapse in 2002 as a result of the Israeli invasion and reoccupation of Palestinian towns – and the effectiveness of policing in Gaza under the de facto government since 2007 have increased what might be called “everyday” security for many Palestinians. The

streets are safer, criminals are apprehended, and investigations are carried out, although for the West Bank, this is true mainly in Area A or the main Palestinian towns. (The Oslo accords divided the oPt into Area A under Palestinian civil and security control, Area B under Palestinian civil and Israeli security control and Area C, the majority of the West Bank, under complete Israeli control.) As the head of national security in Bethlehem said in a December 2008 interview:

All the criminals and wanted persons just move to B or go to the hills in C. All law violators can escape. The Israelis are concerned only about one thing – Israeli security – and not about Palestinian security.

Palestinian police need “coordination” from the Israeli authorities to operate in Area B, where most Palestinian villages are located and cannot enter Area C (which includes parts of the Old City of Hebron). In an interview with the head of criminal investigations in Hebron, he described an incident where a Palestinian child was murdered in a feud between Palestinian families near the Ibrahim Mosque in the Old City. Despite his best efforts, he was refused “coordination” by the Israeli authorities and was forced to go in civilian clothes to take affidavits. Five other people subsequently died in the feud.

While there have clearly been improvements in civil policing in both the West Bank and Gaza, this policing has been accompanied by increased activity by the security services, which is the other face of Palestinian policing. Security services, who receive a much larger proportion of international aid and training than do the civil police, largely act against those who are perceived as political enemies. Security services in the West Bank and in Gaza have been guilty of torture and abuse of prisoners and of holding prisoners without trial. (Al Haq, 2009)

Police protection can have some negative consequences for women and girl’s public freedoms. In Gaza, the operation of a morality police is worrisome in this regard, as is the reputed police practice of referring some cases to customary arbitration, rather than to the courts.

Courts and prosecution

Both in the West Bank and Gaza, the prosecution of criminal cases in court has improved in the last

two years, after the near crippling of the court system in the first years of the Al-Aqsa Intifada. However, the civil court system is sometimes undermined by the operation of a High Security/ Military Court that employs a 1979 Palestine Liberation Organization Revolutionary Penal Code. The judiciary at present is overwhelmingly male – only 12 percent of judges and 11 percent of prosecutors-general are female (PCBS, 2008).

Although not usually dealing with cases of violence, the Shari'a court system remains the most trusted among the Palestinian population, and the most utilized by women. While judges and officials in this system are overwhelmingly male, the March 2009 appointment, of the first two female judges to the Shari'a court – one in Ramallah and one in Hebron – is truly groundbreaking.

Customary law

In many settings in the West Bank and Gaza, customary law is utilized in resolving disputes (and crimes) and contains principles and practices of compensation, exchange and collective mediation that generally exclude women as participants, although addressing them as victims. Of particular relevance to our subject, customary law is often used in cases of murder, as well as in attacks on “honor,” including rape, where the respected men in the community (*rijaal islah*, or men of reconciliation) may persuade the rapist to marry his victim to stave off family and community conflict. Murder cases can be resolved through compensation and the subsequent reconciliation of families, with obvious implications for justice in the case of “honor” killings. An important study of the informal justice system in the oPt (Institute of Law, 2006) found that the informal “system” was probably as extensive as the formal one, although this study is based on interviews, rather than a survey, and fieldwork was undertaken in 2004, before police were re-introduced into West Bank towns.

Paralysis of parliament and executive lawmaking

The paralysis of the Palestinian Legislative Council since the June 2007 split in Palestinian governance has enormous implications for women's (and men's) access to justice, as democratic legal reform remains at a standstill. In the absence of parliament, lawmaking has continued by executive order,

but this method is democratically suspect and likely to be highly ineffective or inappropriate for any new legislation that would improve women's access to justice. For example, a penal code that would unify the codes in the West Bank and Gaza was brought before the Palestinian Legislative Council in 2003, but remains in draft. Initiatives for a unified family law still need to be debated and discussed in a representative and effective parliament as a forum for the public.

Trends in Gender-Based Violence

Understanding and addressing gender-based violence in Palestinian society is complicated by both too much silence and too much exposure. On the one hand, Palestinians, and not only male perpetrators, are reluctant to bring family and “private” issues to public attention, or particularly to police and courts, a silencing shared by many other societies as well. On the other hand, “violence against women” in Palestinian, Arab and “Muslim societies” had been framed and sensationalized by Western media and politicians and even deployed as reasons for military intervention such as in Iraq and Afghanistan. In Palestine itself, donor gender agendas and their funding interest in gender-based violence includes individual male violence but often seemed to exclude the pervasive colonial violence in which Palestinian women, men and children live their lives, and sometimes meet their deaths.

In the last decade, the first national survey on domestic violence (PCBS, 2006) offers us some benchmarks for assessing the frequency and severity of some forms of domestic violence in contemporary family life. An often-repeated statistic from this survey is that about a quarter of married Palestinian women (23.3%) reported in 2005 at least one act of physical violence, and one in ten (10.9%) one act of sexual abuse, of which the most common was the husband refusing contraception despite the wife's request. As the Institute of Women's Studies has pointed out in several studies (IWS, 2009, PCBS, 2006), it is important to further analyze the data to understand both the **frequency and severity** of physical and sexual abuse. It is also relevant to note that the **most common form of family violence is psychological** with almost two-thirds of married women reporting at least one incident. Common forms of such abuse included husbands' shouting or

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cursing, as well as more serious form of verbal humiliation.

When we examine the **frequency** of physical violence and sexual abuse experienced by married women in 2005, we find:

- About one in ten married women (9.4%) experienced three or more acts of physical violence, less than half a percent (.4%) experienced three or more acts of sexual abuse.
- Frequent acts of psychological abuse were considerably more extensive, with almost half (47%) of married women reporting three or more acts in the year 2005.

PCBS data is clear that the most common acts of physical violence (for married women by spouses) by far were pushing strongly (the most prevalent), slapping the face, throwing an object or twisting the arm or pulling hair, while a small (but not to be neglected) minority report possible life-threatening attacks. The Institute of Women's Studies thus asked PCBS to create a new variable representing acts that could cause severe harm or were "life-threatening". As the table below shows, about three married women in a hundred suffered such violence at least once in 2005.

For three in a hundred married women and four in a hundred unmarried women to be exposed to a

serious (criminal) level of violence is by no means negligible, but it also emphasizes the need to both distinguish among forms of criminal and non-criminal violence and to devise appropriate strategies for intervention accordingly.

- **Women in homes exposed to Israeli violence or where husbands suffer long-term unemployment more vulnerable to physical abuse**

Analysis of survey data shows clearly that women whose "husband has lost his job because of measures of the occupation" are more vulnerable to all types of abuse, with 30 percent suffering at least one incident of physical abuse, as opposed to 21 percent of women whose husbands did not lose employment.

A study by five researchers using more complicated methods of analysis of the PCBS data showed a clear correlation between exposure to political violence and spousal violence (Clark et al., 2010).

Focus group discussions in Gaza (Qleibo and Mohanna, 2008) confirm that long-term male unemployment—both of heads of households and unmarried sons—is linked to increased domestic tension and violence. However, these discussions also show that difficult conditions may also increase partnership and cooperation between husbands and wives and for unmarried daughters

Percentage distribution of married women exposed to types of violence by region (2005)

	oPt total	West Bank	Gaza Strip
Exposed to any act of physical abuse at least once	23.3	23.7	22.6
Exposed three times or more	9.4	8.8	10.4
Exposed to life-threatening violence	3.1	3.3	2.8

Percentage distribution of unmarried women over eighteen exposed to violence by region (2005)

	oPt total	West Bank	Gaza Strip
Exposed to any act of physical abuse at least once	25.0	25.4	24.1
Exposed to life-threatening violence	3.9	4.0	3.8

Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2008. Domestic Violence Survey (December, 2005-January, 2006) Database: Ramallah - Palestine. (Unpublished data from PCBS, calculations by author).

Percentage of ever-married women exposed to violence by type of violence when husband lost job because of occupation (2005)

Type of violence	Husband lost his job because of measures of the occupation	
	Yes	No
Physical Abuse	30.5	21.4
Psychological Abuse	70.2	59.6
Sexual Abuse	14.1	10.0

Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2008. Domestic Violence Survey (December, 2005-January, 2006)
Database: Ramallah – Palestine (Unpublished data).

who help maintain the family by receiving “coupons” (for food and basic supplies). They also show men, particularly younger men, trying to avoid venting their anger and frustration on family members by staying outside the house. Other factors that enable or disable violence are discussed in the concluding section.

A Note on Female and Youth Suicide

In September 2009, the Department of Planning and Research in the Palestinian police raised an alarm, warning that reported suicide attempts in the West Bank were already up 65 percent over 2008 figures, with the increase largely due to female attempts. (Actual deaths are much lower at eight recorded in 2008 versus 312 attempts). Most attempts seem to be by young women (and men). In a visit to the Hebron police department where a chart on youth suicides is displayed prominently, the head of criminal investigations explained that suicide attempts rose in the summer among young people and gave the explanation of exam pressure and failure, as well as family and social tensions. Self-inflicted violence is thus an important category to address in campaigns against violence, and one suspects that a climate of uncertainty and insecurity about the future as it is enacted in family tensions especially, as well as lack of opportunity and mobility, contribute to the anxiety and despair that might motivate young people, both male and female, to inflict violence on themselves.

III. Issues, Actors and Opportunities

Violence All Around Us: Public and Domestic Violence Re-Appraised

Returning to Rania, the third-grader in Amari and her perception that “violence” is all around us, how do we understand the multiple forms of violence and gender-based violence that are reviewed in this chapter? It is clear that the greatest source of violence is the Israeli occupation – and it is the reality of that occupation that is the largest obstacle to access to justice. However, it is equally clear that each form of violence – from child abuse and “honor” killings to street harassment and family feuds to Israeli air assaults and checkpoints – needs specific forms of protection, prosecution, and redress to address the harm done to women, men and children and to society as whole. But our analysis of forms of violence also needs to take into account the complex operations of translation and linkage to understand how public violence, insecurity and trauma are enacted and engaged in homes and families across Palestine.

Addressing Israeli Violence: The Goldstone Report Opportunity

The groundbreaking 2009 Goldstone report found “actions amounting to war crimes and possibly, in some respects crimes against humanity were committed by the Israeli Defence Forces” during its assault on Gaza. Also citing grave breaches by Israel of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the report cited the “direct targeting and arbitrary killing of Palestinian civilians” as a violation of the

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right to life. The report opened new and important opportunities to address Israeli violence and to provide international protection for Palestinian women, men and children – at the same time, the controversies and actions by states following its release showed the political constraints on these opportunities. While it is beyond our scope to explore this important topic at length, positive actors include Palestinian and international human rights organizations and Palestinian civil society, which erupted in protest when the Palestinian Authority stalled voting at the United Nations Human Rights Commission on the report. Palestinian women’s organizations need to join vigorously in all campaigns to bring Israel and Israeli violators to account for war crimes, and to bring into these campaigns women’s organizations from around the world.

Addressing Legal Reform, Courts, and Policing

The paralysis of the Palestinian parliament is a major constraint to legal reform: executive law-making, as noted above, is unsuitable in creating legislation that addresses social and gender issues in Palestinian society. The sole “opportunity” here is a period of preparation for draft legislation (such as a new penal code) that directly addresses gender-based violence. The introduction of “moral policing” in Gaza through police directives also requires careful monitoring to ensure women’s rights to public space and mobility are not infringed. This issue highlights that there are dual systems of Palestinian civil policing (and security services) that are harmful to the development of the rule of law. At the same time, civil policing systems’ emphasis on public and citizen’s safety and protection offer an avenue for advocacy for better protection against gender-based violence.

On the positive side, there exists an interesting opportunity through an initiative to increase women’s access to justice and security – with the police and civil society in partnership – through the October 2009 establishment of a new unit in the Palestinian civil police for family and child protection, headquartered in Bethlehem. Though severely under-resourced, the unit works on both criminal and social issues, including offering counseling and protection in partnership with NGOs and Palestine’s first shelter for victims of domestic violence, Mahwar. Demanding such units in every governorate and giving them adequate resources is important.

Addressing Honor Killings: Community-Based Strategies

As noted above, “honor” killings have particular characteristics, including that these killings are often the result of a collective decision by male family members, a striking difference from other forms of family violence. Honor codes are about “community norms, social policing and collective decisions, and acts of punishment” (Sen in Welchman and Hossain, 2005: 48). In the Palestinian context, findings through interviews in communities where these crimes had occurred that members of the community (particularly women) expressed unease that the punishment did not fit the crime is highly salient (Abu Nahleh, 2006; Johnson, 2007)

This suggests that community members may well search for alternatives and that community-based strategies must be central to combatting honor killings, as well as legal reform (the law at present allows reduced sentences in some cases) and more vigorous prosecution and protection. The Palestinian NGO Forum Against Violence Against Women has advocated new legislation that unequivocally treats honor killings as murder. Community initiatives can also address the wider context of what Kervokian calls “femicide” to denote “all violent acts that instill a perpetual fear in women or girls of being killed under the justification of honor” (Kervokian, 2004, 10). Further debate and research is also needed to develop a clear strategy and to identify risk and protection factors and to develop community-based responses.

Addressing Domestic Violence

Data from the 2005 PCBS domestic violence survey offers an opportunity to begin an identification of factors contributing to partner and family violence, although trends cannot be identified with a single survey. Indeed, the widespread use of a single statistic from the survey – commonly cited as 23 percent of Palestinian women experiencing domestic violence – to represent gender oppression is problematic and more research and a closer look at frequency and severity is important. For example, our analysis found that three married women in a hundred suffered “life threatening” violence at least once in 2005 – targeting this level of violence and assisting victims is a priority.

PCBS data suggests that increased education of women reduces domestic violence, that younger married women are more vulnerable than older, and that women in the southern West Bank experience visibly higher levels of abuse. Campaigns in that region are thus particularly important, as are initiatives for women's education.

Changing aggressive and angry male behavior – found particularly among the young, educated and jobless – is a crucial element. Young men try to avoid anger in the home and may cooperate with initiatives that provide them with hope for the future. Partnership and solidarity within the family (as well as the community) are key resources.

Whether women's and girl's economic participation brings greater personal security is contingent on a number of factors. Some are near universal factors of whether the work itself is safe, secure and dignified and whether it increases women's double or triple loads to a breaking point. When women move out of the home for labor that is poorly-paid and considered demeaning, violence can increase, instead of decrease. This can only be solved by investing in job creation or income-generating projects for women that meet requirements for decent and secure work.

PCBS data also shows an elevation of domestic abuse of all types (not solely life-threatening) in households where husbands lost their jobs in 2005 "because of the occupation." Initiatives to increase household livelihoods for both women and men can lower domestic violence. Focus groups strongly suggest that family violence – and violence against women and girls in the family – is on the rise and that public violence and insecurity the drivers of this increase.

Palestine has endured a dangerous decade in which violence continues to be a structuring element of daily life for most Palestinian women, men and children, and with more years of insecurity, crisis and Israeli repression on the horizon. In this complex situation, addressing violence and gender-based violence must mobilize all existing resources – including the "traditional" avenues of legal and policing reform – but also the moral and social resources of Palestinian communities to bring issues of violence to public discussion, awareness and action.

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