Politics drives human functioning, dignity, and quality of life

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ABSTRACT

Too little is known about human functioning amidst chronic adversity. We addressed that need by studying adult Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt), a population that has experienced longstanding economic and political hardships. Fourteen group interviews were conducted in February, 2010 in Arabic by local fieldworkers with 68 participants representing the main stratifications of Palestinian society: gender, region, refugee status, and political affiliation. Interview tasks included each participant: describing someone doing well and not well, free listing domains of functioning, and prioritizing domains to the three most important. Thematic analyses highlighted the dominating role of the political domain of functioning (e.g., political structures, constraints, effects, identity, and activism) and the degree to which political conditions impacted all other realms of functioning (economic, education, family, psychological, etc.). The discussion links the findings to relevant theory and empirical work that has called attention to the need to include the political in frameworks of quality of life. It also emphasized that values, such as justice, rights, dignity and self-determination, that underlie political structures and policies, are key elements of human functioning. This is the case not only in the oPt, but in any society where power imbalances marginalize segments of the population.

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1. Introduction

Although social and medical sciences have much to say about human wellbeing and quality of life generally, little is known about how human functioning can be conceived for persons living under chronic constraint. This is especially true for populations for whom such constraints extend beyond economic disadvantage to include persistent political conflict and control. While some conflicts are relatively short-lived, there are many regions of the world where conflict is endemic and people live for decades—even generations—with the combined impact of severe economic and political constraints. Examples include: Afghanistan (Eggerman and Panter-Brick, 2010); northern Kenya (Pike et al., 2010); Palestine (Giacaman et al., 2010a); and Sierra Leone (Betancourt et al., 2011), among others. Both research and practice with populations

undergoing chronic conflict and control would be meaningfully enhanced if a more precise and comprehensive understanding of their lives could be achieved.

Residents of the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) are an apt population for study in this regard because they have lived under shifting forms of political subjugation and related economic hardship for at least three generations. Much has been written about this history. For one comprehensive overview, see Tessler (2009). In brief, relations between the Arab residents of Palestine and waves of in-migrating Jews from Russia and Eastern Europe at the turn of the 20th Century were initially relatively peaceful. Over the ensuing decades, however, tensions—including increasingly severe outbreaks of violence—began to grow over issues of land control and nationalism for both peoples. Great Britain assumed a mandate to govern the region in 1917 at the end of World War I, but resigned that authority in 1947 after failing to achieve a peaceful structure and under increasing hostility from Arabs and Jews alike.

By 1948, Jewish forces, with significant Western backing, defeated Arab forces and the State of Israel was created on

approximately three-quarters of the region that was at that time known as Palestine. The large majority of Arabs fled and/or were forced to relocate elsewhere in neighboring countries—Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt—and beyond. Through another military victory in 1967, Israeli forces took control of several additional territories: the Sinai and the Gaza Strip (from Egypt), the West Bank, including Eastern Jerusalem (from Jordan), and the Golan Heights (from Syria). The Sinai was ceded back to Egypt in 1978 by way of the Camp David Accords, but the other territories remain under Israeli control.

By late 1987, tensions between Palestinian Arabs and Israeli military forces in the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank (the three regions currently referred to as the oPt) exploded into the first Palestinian intifada (Arabic for "shaking off"), a six-year long popular movement that focused world attention on the situation of Palestinians in the oPt and culminated in formal efforts to facilitate self-determination for them (via the 1993 and 1995 Oslo Declaration of Principles). All such efforts over the ensuing 15 years failed to improve conditions for Palestinians and to stop hostilities, and the second intifada broke out in 2000. While no formal end of that struggle can be identified, many suggest that it stopped in 2005.

Generally, economic and political conditions have worsened since, and particularly so for Gazans, exacerbated by the very violent 2007 civil war between the Fatah and Hamas political factions (see Shachar, 2010 for one of the more recent of many overviews of Gaza). This has been followed by three wars between Israeli forces and Gazan (primarily Hamas) forces (2008–9, 2012, 2014) that have resulted in the deaths of more than 3500 Gazans and up to 100 Israelis.

In this study, we focused on the cohort of Palestinians currently aged 30 to 40. This generation of Palestinians are of particular interest because, as youth, they engaged to historically unprecedented levels in the political conflict of the first intifada (1987–1993) (Barber and Olsen, 2009). Thus, beyond living their whole lives under political occupation (i.e., born after 1967), their formative years were steeped in intense political conflict, and, subsequently, they have lived under declining economic opportunity, episodic resurgences in violent conflict, hardened political constraints, and internal political schisms.

Consistent with the World Health Organization's (WHO; WHO, 2001) classification system, we use functioning as an umbrella term that broadly encompasses activities, participation, tasks, actions, body functions, etc. For WHO, functioning is distinct from disability in that the former allows for non-problematic aspects of health. This breadth of concept importantly meets one driving principle of this analysis: achieving a holistic appreciation of life under occupation. Bolton and Tang (2002) have used the term (function) similarly in their attempt to discover culturally relevant indicators (albeit with a specific focus on mental health). Assuring that the data gleaned in our effort was culturally driven was the second main principle guiding this analysis.

1.1. Local understanding of functioning

A valid approach to understanding how humans function in conditions of chronic constraint must explore the "felt 'nature of reality'" that participants experience (Summerfield, 2013: 346). Given the predominant focus on problems and suffering (particularly mental health) in research on populations experiencing political conflict (Barber, 2013, 2014), it is not surprising that recent work has targeted suffering or problems when investigating local definitions of functioning. Following are some exemplars of constructs that have been investigated, typically via interviews: *distress* (Afghanistan: Miller et al., 2006); *main and most distressing*

problems and their solutions (Afghanistan; Eggerman and Panter-Brick, 2010; Panter-Brick et al., 2009); local idioms for *political violence-related stress* (Peru; Pedersen et al., 2008); *functional impairment* (Indonesia; Tol et al., 2011); *challenges* (Vindevogel et al., 2013) and spirit *possession* (Neuner et al., 2012) in Northern Uganda; *impact of severe exposure to traumatic events* (Palestine; Giacaman et al., 2007a); *reintegration and adjustment for girls formerly associated with armed groups* (Sierra Leone; Stark et al., 2009); and *problems* stemming from ethnic cleansing (Rwanda; Betancourt et al., 2012).

In the current study, instead of explicitly exploring political violence-related suffering, we were interested in gleaning an unstructured elucidation of how such a population conceives of functioning generally. The strength of such an approach is the ability to situate and contextualize local conceptions of suffering and wellbeing amidst the terrain of broader functioning that participants themselves chart.

1.2. Holistic conceptualization of functioning

Although there are not specific past findings from such unstructured, holistic approaches to guide this effort, there is certainly much information available that is relevant to contemplating what one would expect to be emphasized by participants such as those from the oPt when asked to elaborate on how they conceive their lives. Specifically, there appears to be good reason to expect that issues of economy and politics would surface as central in any such investigation.

Relative to the economic domain, an example of a rather narrow, but basic focus is the dense literature on the construct of wellbeing. Much of the wellbeing literature has wrestled with the association between economic conditions (e.g., wealth, both personal and national) and wellbeing (specifically, happiness) (Veenhoven, 2007; Diener and Diener, 1995; Schimmack et al., 2002; Suh and Oishi, 2002). There is disagreement in the literature as to how effective a predictor of wellbeing wealth actually is, but those who have defended it have done so with the explanation that wealth enables individuals to meet the most basic of needs (Veenhoven and Hagerty, 2006). Further, Sen (1999) tied wellbeing and happiness to the amount of freedom a person enjoys, explaining that economic wealth (however it is measured) is a critical determinant of whether an individual's life is one of possibility and or limitation. Notably, he specified that such freedoms include political liberties, such as free speech and participation.

Other examples of approaches that invoke economics and politics are Krieger's (2001) ecosocial model, that, in addition to emphasizing psychosocial resources, alerts to the reality of economic and political determinants (e.g., the relative democracy of political structures; Mackenbach, 2014) of health and disease. And, the emphasis on "social suffering" in anthropology (Das et al., 2001; Eggerman and Panter-Brick, 2010; Giacaman et al., 2010b; Panter-Brick, 2010), which implicate a web of social, economic, legal and political barriers that people in some contexts endure. Further, the human security framework (Leaning, 2010) is relevant through its emphasis on basic human freedoms and rights, including political and civil liberties and economic, social, and cultural abilities (Alkire, 2003).

Research specifically on Palestinians has focused largely on identifying any psychosocial problems of youth associated with exposure to political violence (see Barber, 2014 for a recent review). However, directly relevant to the current study is work by Rita Giacaman and colleagues that has systematically pursued the refinement of the World Health Organization's (WHO) four-fold framework (WHOQOL Group, 1998) of physical, psychological, social, and environmental to add a political domain (Abu-Rmeileh

et al., 2012; Giacaman et al., 2007a; Mataria et al., 2009). Their conception of the political centers on freedom, participation, self-determination, and, in particular, human security (i.e., ranging from food insecurity to movement constraints; Batniji et al., 2009; Giacaman et al., 2007a; Mataria et al., 2009). This identification of the central role of political concerns for Palestinians is consistent with previous work, including: public opinion polls (Shikaki, 2007) and social psychological interview studies of Palestinian youth (e.g., Barber, 1999, 2002), the same generation under study here as adults.

In sum, little is known about the nature of functioning in populations experiencing substantial challenge and adversity. The primary research goal of this study was to contribute to that need. Most generally, we were concerned with knowing how broadly this population conceived functioning, and then to discern the degree to which participants linked and/or prioritized the domains of functioning they identified. The variety of relevant frameworks discussed above made it sensible to expect that, among others, the economic and political domains would surface as particularly salient to this population.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

In February 2010, trained fieldworkers from the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) in Ramallah, West Bank conducted group interviews with 68 adults (33 men, mean age 34.8 years, range 21–53; 35 women, mean age 32.2 years, range 20–49) in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. The study and the consent form that the participants individually signed were approved by the Institutional Review Boards of PSR and the University of Tennessee. Fourteen groups were comprised of 5 same-sex individuals each. (Two Jerusalem men were absent from their interview because of transportation constraints, resulting in a total sample of 68). PSR field work supervisors in the three territories purposively selected participants to assure representation of gender, region, refugee status, and (in the Gaza Strip) the two main political factions of Fatah and Hamas. Thus, the 14 groups were comprised of: 4 in the West Bank (refugee and non-refugee males; refugee and non-refugee females); 2 in East Jerusalem (females, males); and 8 in the Gaza Strip (refugee and non-refugee Fatah males; refugee and non-refugee Fatah females; refugee and non-refugee Hamas females; refugee and non-refugee Hamas males).

The majority of participants were married (71% of women; 85% of men) and approximately half of the sample was employed (55% of men [45% of men in Gaza]; 44% of women). Occupations for employed men included janitor, building guard, taxi driver, accountant, legal field worker, security/police authority, etc. Occupations for employed women included housekeeper, teacher assistant, accountant, researcher, psychologist, etc. See Table 1.

Each group interview lasted from 60 to 90 min and was conducted and audio recorded by PSR field-work supervisors in Arabic in rented rooms of office buildings. The first two authors observed and made notes of all of the group interviews from a corner of the interview rooms accompanied by an interpreter. Each group interview (in Arabic) and the simultaneous interpretation (in English) was audio recorded. PSR staff transcribed the Arabic audio tapes and translated them into English. Sections of the transcripts were translated a second time by other native Arabic speakers to verify the quality of the translation. The translated transcripts of the interviews were used for data analysis.

2.2. Interview protocol

Participants were asked to do three main tasks during the interview to discern how they conceptualize and elaborate functioning in contemporary Palestinian society. The initial and primary task was: "Think of two people you know well; one who you think is doing relatively well in life and the other who you think is not doing well in life. Please describe both of these people." (See Miller et al., 2006 for use of a similar method when targeting distress). Interview leaders clarified the question when asked by participants by using Arabic versions of words/phrases such as: "life is good (Arabic: الحياة منيحة) or not good (Arabic: الحياة مش منيحة);" "happy (Arabic: سعيدة) or unhappy (Arabic: مش سعيدة);" "succeeding (Arabic: ناجحة) or not succeeding (Arabic: مش ناجحة);" etc.

Participants were encouraged to consider both males and females and were asked to reveal no identifying details about the individuals they were describing. Further, they were asked to provide a first name or pseudonym for each individual to assure that specific persons were being described rather than general or ideal types. Next, after each participant described the two persons, they were asked to free list characteristics or domains of functioning (Arabic: مواصفات). They were then asked to prioritize the top three domains of those free lists.

2.3. Data analysis

Content analyses of the English transcripts were done with Atlas.ti (version 6.2.27) individually and jointly by the first three authors, all from the United States. At the start of the project, the first author had substantial experience living with and studying Palestinians in the oPt over the past two decades, the second author had some experience reading literature about Palestinians, and the third author had no previous exposure to Palestinian society. The last five authors—all Palestinian professionals in public health, psychology, and psychiatry—were consulted throughout the project. In addition, other Palestinian experts (e.g., from political science) served as key informants as various stages of the project.

Coding of the interview transcripts proceeded systematically. First, immediately after the group interviews were completed, the first two authors separately and then jointly established an a posteriori provisional list of main domains of functioning that were apparent in their recollections and notes of the interview sessions. This list included: economic, education, employment, family, health (mental and physical), personal characteristics, political, religious, and social (i.e., relations).

Next, the first three authors independently open-coded selected sections from eight of the 14 group interviews, seeking to confirm or adjust the preliminary list of domains. Between one and 22 sub-codes were identified for each domain and each sub-code was used between two and 103 times. In a series of interpretive sessions (Stake, 1994), the authors refined the set of main domains and the set of sub-codes in each domain. They then independently coded a subset of the interviews, with each coding at least one interview from every main sector of the sample: gender, region, refugee status, and political affiliation. In a further set of interpretive

Table 1
Sample characteristics of participants ($N = 68$).

Characteristics	Range		Average/Percentage	
	Females	Males	Females	Males
Age (years)	20–49	21–53	32.2	34.8
Marital status				
Married			71%	85%
Single			23%	15%
Divorced			6%	0%
Employed			49%	55% (45% Gaza)

sessions, the team continued to refine the sub-domain coding structure. Sub-codes that were used fewer than 15 times throughout the group interviews or were primarily used in only one or two interviews were removed during this step. This resulted in excluding the main domains of physical health and social relations. Only one sub-code was subsumed under physical health and it was associated with only 13 pieces of coded text. Social relations had two sub-codes, good social relations (associated with 14 pieces of coded text) and assisting others (associated with 30 pieces of coded text). Since aspects of social relations were otherwise coded in narrower domains (e.g., family relations), we removed the general domain of social relations (leaving the assisting others sub-code in the personal characteristics domain).

The coding structure with accompanying quotations from the interviews (both in English and Arabic) was shared regularly throughout the coding process with the Palestinian key informants in face-to-face meetings in the oPt and through email to verify the validity of the coding scheme. In order to determine inter-rater reliability, all three team members coded one interview in common. Seventy-three percent of the quotations that were coded by any one coder were also coded by all three team members. When there was a discrepancy among the coders, most often (68%) it occurred with two raters coding a quotation similarly and the third rater failing to code that particular quotation. Only 2% of quotations that were coded had been given different codes by two or more research team members.

3. Results

We pursued two strategies to interpret the interview data. First, in order to provide a quantitative view to the relative salience of the functioning domains, we calculated the proportion of the 68 participants in the group interviews who had referred to each domain when responding to the three main interview tasks. Second, we constructed a conceptual framework to represent the relative salience of the domains as well as their interlinkages, and then illustrated the domains and their interlinkages with excerpts from the interview narratives.

3.1. Prevalence of nomination of domains of functioning

There was some consistency and variability across the research tasks as to the proportion of the respondents that nominated specific domains. For some domains, like *economic* and *political*, there was a fair amount of consistency. Specifically, majorities of males and females mentioned both economic and political issues when responding to all three interview tasks. For other domains, however, proportions varied substantially by interview task. One example is the *family* domain. Specifically, while majorities of females and males mentioned family issues when responding to the two-person task, many fewer included family in the two free listing tasks, with only 20% of females and 18% of males including it in the prioritized free list.

Given this variability in responses to the specific interview tasks, we have centered our interpretation of the salience of domains on the data for the third task, which, by instruction, required the participants to prioritize domains down to the most important three. Those data are especially valid in revealing salience because these short lists were compiled after approximately an hour of group discussion about quality of life and wellbeing. In other words, prior to asserting the three most important domains, all respondents had given extended consideration to the nature of functioning, including articulating their own ideas and hearing the perceptions of the others in their interview group.

These proportions are reported in Table 2. The findings are straightforward in highlighting the primary salience of two domains to both males' and females' conceptualization of functioning: the *political* and the *economic*. These were the only two of the 8 domains that were included by half or more of the participants in the priority list of domains. Specifically, 64% of the men and 67% of the women included the *political* as one of the top three domains; and 63% of females and 50% of males included the *economic* as one of the top three domains. In contrast, with the exception of *education* for females (40%), no domain was included by more than 25% of men or women in the prioritized free list; and, for some of the domains, less than 10% of the participants included them in the prioritized free list.

Beyond the prominence of the *political* and the *economic*, other patterns in the data deserve mention. First, consistent with gender norms, the third domain that was prioritized (after the *political* and the *economic*) varied by gender: *education* for women and *employment* for men. Second, the lack of salience of *physical health* issues is noteworthy. Specifically, no females and only one male included physical health in the prioritized free list, with only a small minority of either males or females referring to physical health in response to any of the interview questions.

References to *mental health* were somewhat higher than for physical health; but still, only 10% of women and 7% of men prioritized it, and less than 40% of either men or women mentioned mental health as a domain of functioning at any time during the interviews. While these findings reveal that mental health was not nominally prioritized among the top three domains, its relevance becomes clear within the interview narratives themselves, particularly as a consequence of the political conditions (see below).

3.2. Configuring the multiple domains of functioning

In Fig. 1 we present a conceptual model of the multiple domains of functioning that were discernible in the interviews. The intent of the model is to communicate salience while at the same time illustrating how the multiple domains of functioning are interlinked.

Basically, the model conveys that life for adults in the oPt is driven largely by *political* conditions. While at one level this should be self-evident—to be occupied, by definition, means to be controlled politically—it is nevertheless only very recently that a political domain of quality of life has been seriously articulated and studied (Giacaman et al., 2007a,b; Mataria et al., 2009). The next band of the model contains *safety—security—stability*. Each of these is actually a separate sub-code of the *political* domain. They are isolated partially from the rest of the *political* core (via the broken line) in order to highlight the unique centrality of these conditions (see also Giacaman et al., 2007a,b; Williamson and Robinson, 2006). As will be illustrated below, issues of *safety, security* and

Table 2
Percent of males and females who included each domain of functioning in the prioritized free list of three domains ($N = 58$).

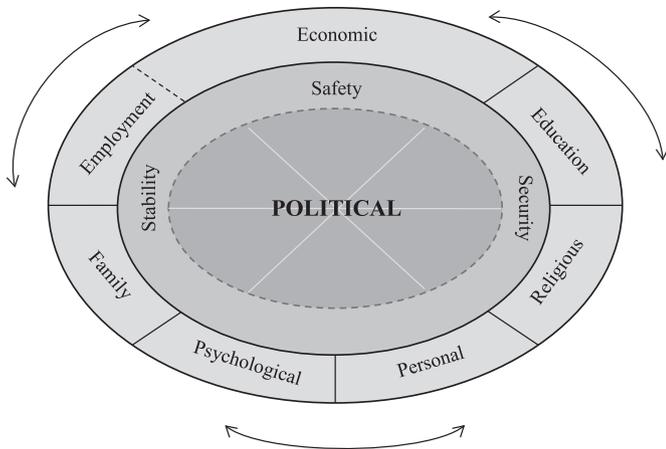| Domain	Prioritized free list	
	Male	Female
Political	64	67
Economic	50	73
Employment	21	23
Personal	18	13
Family	18	20
Religious	18	27
Health (Mental)	7	10
Education	4	40

Fig. 1. Data-driven model of multiple domains of Palestinian adult functioning.

stability were prominent in the narratives and were often characterized in such a way as to suggest that they transmitted the other political conditions and concerns to the other domains of functioning that the participants identified. These other domains are situated in the outer band of the model. Their interlinkages are illustrated by the curved arrows.

By interpreting the "flow" of the model from the core to the periphery—political conditions drive elements of quality of life often through senses of safety–security–stability—we make no claim that that is the only direction in which these elements are linked. As one example, it would certainly be accurate in some circumstances to interpret the reverse, e.g., that dire economic conditions produce insecurity and instability, which in turn impact political behaviors. But it would be inconsistent with our data to not render the political as the essential core of Palestinian functioning given how fundamentally and elaborately it was articulated in the interview narratives: from abstract principles of justice to concrete realities of day-to-day movement restrictions.

We move now to elaborating the model, first with a summary of the core domain. Then, the other domains are presented, with particular attention to how they are informed by the *political*. When quoting directly from the interview narratives, we use the following identifiers: F (Female), M (Male), WB (West Bank), EJ (East Jerusalem), GS (Gaza Strip), R (Refugee), nR (Non-refugee), Fh (Fatah), and H (Hamas).

3.3. The political domain

"I think the political situation is the most important thing to make you comfortable or not from all aspects of life … for example if you send your son to study in Hebron, because of the checkpoints he'll not come every month, but if there is no checkpoints, he'll come every day."

(F/WB/nR)

The designation of the *political* as a domain of functioning was made explicitly by the participants themselves. They did so by using various forms of the Arabic word for politics السياسة (as-sīāsah) or the word for political السياسي (as-sīāsi). Here, we provide a brief overview of the ways in which the term political was explicitly invoked in the narratives in order to illustrate how it was defined by the participants. Following the overview, we present the coding structure that we developed to capture the essence of the hundreds of portions of the narratives that were coded as representing the political domain of functioning.

In describing someone not doing well, or in free-listing domains of functioning, participants often referred to the *political situation* (Arabic: الوضع السياسية) or *political circumstances* (Arabic: الظروف السياسية), two, seemingly interchangeable, and broad characterizations. Their own elaborations of these conditions invoked different levels or components of political functioning. For example, some referred to the systems or structures of governance, both Israeli (i.e., the occupation) and Palestinian (i.e., political factions, primarily Fatah or Hamas). When identifying political conditions as one of the top three domains of functioning, a West Bank woman, for example, referred both to needing independence (i.e., from Israel) and reconciliation (i.e., between the Palestinian factions).

In identifying political conditions as the most important of all domains of functioning, a West Bank man added *political environment* (Arabic: البيئة السياسية) to his reference to political conditions, and said that a satisfying life could be had neither under occupation nor under a [presumably Palestinian] government that doesn't have authority over its lands. Neither political system provided what he further called *political stability* (Arabic: الاستقرار السياسي), a term used by many as a requisite to good functioning and to (a stable) *political life* (Arabic: حياة سياسية). Some elaborated political stability with *political security* (Arabic: أمن سياسي), with some linking either or both political stability and political security with safety (Arabic: الامان).

Such governing systems, according to the narratives, seem driven by power and self-interest. The occupation was cited repeatedly as depriving *political rights* (Arabic: حقوق سياسية) and *political identity* (Arabic: الهوية السياسية); that Palestinians need *political independence* (Arabic: الاستقلال السياسي); and that equality should be a legal right, not a feature of a *political settlement* (Arabic: تسوية سياسية) with Israel. As illustrated below, the political situation or circumstances were regularly elaborated with examples of Israeli-imposed constraints on various freedoms. The power-centered arbitrariness of politics was characterized by one West Bank man who cited an instance in which an Israeli court gave a home to a Jewish settler, because—despite the fact that the Palestinian claimant had official title to the home—the court reasoned that it was a *political matter* (Arabic: أمر سياسي), not a legal (Arabic: القانوني) one.

The Palestinian political structure was seen to be made up of *political parties, factions or movements* (Arabic: الحركات والأحزاب السياسية). These were frequently characterized as having *political problems* (Arabic: المشاكل السياسية) and *political rivalries and infighting* (Arabic: الاختلافات السياسية والتناحرات السياسية).

At the individual level, people were described to vary in the quality of their life due in part to degrees or types of their *political knowledge* (Arabic: الإلمام السياسي), *political opinions* (Arabic: الإلمام السياسي), or being *political* (Arabic: سياسي). Being political ranged from reaching people on the *political level* (Arabic: الصعيد السياسي) or for individuals to have engaged in various forms of activism (i.e., resistance to the occupation) and its consequences (e.g., imprisonment).

The many such instances in which participants used the literal Arabic word for politics or political were so well-elaborated that it was straightforward as to what to code as political. Thus, in addition to the excerpts that explicitly used the word political, all excerpts were coded as political that contained elements of the elaborations made in these explicit references to the political, including: political structures (e.g., government, the occupation, political parties), orientations within them (e.g., infighting among Palestinian parties and its undermining of solidarity), consequences of them (e.g., the lack of independence and identity of Palestinians, denying opportunities for participation in political systems), and responsibilities of them (e.g., providing services). Segments coded as political also included the values that political structures impacted (e.g., justice, rights, freedom, dignity) and specific actions engaged in by Israeli forces (e.g., restrictions on movement, arrests,

detentions, imprisonment) or by Palestinians (e.g., having participated in the intifadas).

Over 400 excerpts from the narratives were coded for *political*. This is twice as many coded excerpts as for any other domain. For the current study, we have distilled the political domain to six subdomains which fairly represent the prominence and the spread of politically related, coded information: the *Occupation* (including 3 sub-types), *Freedom and Rights, Government Responsibilities, Identity, Solidarity,* and *Safety-Security-Stability.* In addition to excerpts that identified these elements of political functioning, many expressions seemed intent on identifying what the specific effects of political conditions were elsewhere in individuals' lives. We include exemplars of those in the sections that follow that link political functioning with other domains.

> *"The word 'occupation,' the word itself, causes us a terrible psychological situation … The amount of destruction is huge. The suffocation we live in is awful."*
>
> (M/GS/R/H)

3.3.1. The occupation

Over half of the 400 excerpts coded as *political* referred in some way to life under occupation. Participants' characterizations of how the occupation has defined their wellbeing and quality of life can be further organized as follows:

1. Actions and effects of the occupation, such as:
   a. Violation of justice and equality (*"Our lives are deteriorating because of occupation; no one is getting their rights."* [F/GS/R/Fh]);
   b. Economic dependence (*"All of our children turn to Israeli businesses to work."* [F/WB/R]);
   c. Perceived intent of Israel to divide Palestinians (displacement, identity control) (e.g., *"Restrictions of the occupation that aim at displacing and fragmenting Palestinians"* [M/GS/R/H]; *"I am working these days, but after a while they may tell me: 'you live in Jerusalem, tomorrow you should leave. You no longer work in Ramallah.' … They can take my identity card."*[M/EJ]);
   d. Territorial fragmentation (e.g., *"West Bank areas were disconnected from each other; there was no chance to find a job."* [M/WB/nR]; *"We were obliged to leave our house that we own and to rent another one in Jerusalem because of the blockade and the Separation Wall."* [M/EJ]);
   e. Property control (land and home confiscations, demolitions) (e.g., *"There are many people who lost their lands, in which they used to plant crops; the occupation confiscated their lands and hence now they are staying home jobless."* [F/WB/nR]; *"But now they demolish an entire house."* [F/GS/R/Fh]);
   f. Building restrictions, fines, taxes, etc. (e.g., *"… after he was kicked out of his house, he has to pay fines for old building violations … and a very high property tax although the house is no longer with them."* [M/EJ])
   g. Movement restrictions: checkpoints, border controls, the separation wall, spontaneous closures, travels bans, etc.. (e.g., *"Now, we have the siege and the wall … there are no permits nowadays so we cannot reach Israel to work."* [M/WB/nR]; *"When the crossings closed, he failed to travel abroad to renew his residency right. He is totally confused now between choosing to stay with his wife and child or to be with his family."*[M/GS/R/H]; *"If you send your son to study in Hebron, because of the checkpoints, he'll not come every month, but if there is no checkpoints, he'll come every day."* [F/WB/nR]).

2. *Specific actions of Israeli military or security forces,* such as: specific tactics (e.g., "special force operations," "incursions," bombings, detentions, arrests, imprisonment), with frequent references to the characteristic might that Israeli forces apply in conducting them (e.g., *"The occupation used to interfere and execute operations using Special Forces."* [F/GS/R/Fh]; *"A few months after her marriage, the occupation planes shelled the car of her husband who was hit and injured and they had to cut off both his legs. So, at home, she became a physician, a wife and a maid."* [F/GS/R/H]; *"… constant fear that no one would come at 3a.m. to arrest one of your kids or your husband."* [F/WB/nR] *"He was brought up in a broken house, the father spent so many years in prison."* [F/WB/R]).

3. *Political activism/resistance to the occupation* was invoked by some as a positive feature (e.g., a right and duty) and by others as severely hampering their lives via its consequences of imprisonment, deportation, and in distracting attention from developing their livelihoods. (e.g., *"To live a decent life under occupation requires resistance … in order for us to feel that we are living human beings."* [M/GS/R/H]; *"He went through another path, which was the Intifada and politics that he even went to jail for nearly 4 or 5 years … he didn't benefit anything from prison … This person is living very bad and hard conditions."* [M/WB/nR]).

3.3.2. Freedom, rights, and participation

Freedom—particularly of expression and movement—was central to many participants' characterizations of a good life, as a basic right deserved by all. So also was the right to participate in social and political processes (i.e., self-determination). Participants sourced the constraint of freedom and rights both in the occupation (as above) but also in the internal Palestinian conflict.

Revealing the severity of concern with the lack of freedom in Palestine, several participants chose individuals living outside of Palestine to illustrate the value of freedom.

> *"He [person outside of Palestine doing well] enjoys freedom and freedom of expression and freedom of movement … [same aged person in Gaza not doing well] [lives in] he cannot express his own political opinion … We live in a big prison, we can't move, we can't talk or say anything …"* (F/GS/nR/Fh)

> *"… to have freedom to get education, to decision making, freedom of expression, freedom to social participation, to participate in marches, in demonstrations, freedom to object to issues that I don't like or don't approve in my society, freedom to work wherever I want, or to participate in anything I would like to participate in."* (F/GS/nR/Fh)

> *"those people in political factions, Fatah, Hamas and I don't know what else … not allowing to participate in the system of this country."* (F/GS/nR/Fh)

Both men and women discussed how the situation is especially bad for women, who, for cultural reasons, face particular restrictions on movement, expression, and education.

> [woman not doing well] [is] *"facing all kinds of concerns and restrictions like any young woman who lives in Gaza and studies …*

particularly in her freedom of movement and in expressing her opinion" (M/GS/R/Fh)

3.3.3. Governmental responsibilities

In describing the characteristics of a "good" or "normal" life many expressed the expectation that government should provide for its people's needs. Expectations of specific provisions included: education, health care and insurance, employment, a legal structure, and social services. Some used Israel as an illustration of a system that provides for its people.

"Even if I don't have money the government should provide us with opportunities to education equal for everyone, for each one according to their needs" (F/WB/R)

"What does normal life mean? It means we have to remove all the abnormal conditions. The occupation is an abnormal condition. When I want go get a building permission, they should give me. When I apply for a job, they have to accept me because I have good qualities … there should be a system or an entity, which creates a sort of normal and dignified life and equality … a social affairs ministry … state that takes care of these poor people." (M/EJ)

3.3.4. Political identity

Some individuals talked specifically about a Palestinian identity. Some talked of establishing a "Palestinian society," the ability to identify oneself as a Palestinian, and to be recognized as such by the outside world. Palestinian identity appeared to be defined both by the rigors of living under occupation and by religious beliefs about the inevitability of struggle and the sacredness of land.

"We need to have civil rights, where I can make a family and have a cultural, economic and political identity inside of my country, as well as the health rights." (M/WB/R)

"We [the Palestinian people] are not recognized by the outside or by the Arab countries because of the occupation." (M/GS/R/Fh)

With reference to the exceptionally complex Israeli-issued identity permit system in the West Bank and Jerusalem (green West Bank ID holders are not allowed on the Jerusalem side of the separation wall; blue Jerusalem ID holders are allowed on both sides of the wall), one East Jerusalem woman said:

"The first thing a mother asks if a suitor comes to her daughter is if he has a blue ID or a green one. This has led to a lack of harmony in Palestinian cities. They have removed ties between Palestinian families. Right now people are not ready to give their daughters away to men who are mentally compatible with their daughters because of IDs [color/type] … This has led to lack of harmony."

3.3.5. Political solidarity

Many participants, particularly in Gaza, referenced the need for internal unity when discussing political functioning. Some members of the two political factions blamed the other faction for the lack of solidarity; others attributed the split to perceived Israeli intentions to divide Palestinians. Some talked of the impact of the lack of solidarity on general wellbeing and national identity and how it interferes with the ability to fight the occupation and achieve a state.

"Most important thing currently: reconciliation between the Palestinians themselves in order for us to feel safe, secure and have stability." (F/WB/R)

"Therefore, the Palestinian schism is the biggest threat to the Palestinian entity as an institution, and it has subsequently weakened the Palestinian political stance." (M/GS/R/H)

3.3.6. Safety–Security–Stability

As noted above, issues of safety, security, and/or stability were prominent in the narratives. Some participants equated the three conditions; others expressed some nuanced differences among them. Some illustrated the severity of the concern by citing examples of fear that they would be killed or have their homes demolished. The reach of the concerns about safety, security and/or stability was broad, including their presence in economic, political, family, and personal realms. Many saw issues of safety, security and/or stability as the most important concerns they face. This breadth and salience led us to partition safety, security, and stability from the other elements of the political core to communicate that these emotions or sensibilities often transmit the influence of the political core to the more peripheral domains of functioning.

"The components of any country where a normal person can live in are security and safety. If safety and security are provided in the country, all other requirements become easier to have access to. When I feel secure in the country where I live, I can then start the next phase of my life. I then start thinking about settling down; I feel secure. I do not fear what tomorrow will bring. When the country is peaceful, I won't face any kinds of pressure. Then, I start looking for housing. If I have housing, I will live a dignified life." (M/GS/R/Fh)

Participants sourced their concerns with these conditions in the occupation, internal conflict, or the failure of government to provide them safety, security, and stability.

"… the political situation: so that you will not live under constant fear that no one would come at 3 a.m. to arrest one of your kids or your husband; those things will make you restless and uncomfortable, and will cause you fear and lack of feeling safe and secure."

(F/WB/nR)

3.4. Multiple domains of functioning and their linkages to the political

A main contribution of this study is to illustrate the tight interlinkages among domains of functioning. In order to capture this, below we elucidate additional domains in the model and highlight their interconnections and, in particular, the linkages made by participants to the *political* domain.

3.4.1. The economic domain

Respondents described economic wellbeing broadly. Specific exemplars included: the urgency of adequate housing as invoked by one Gazan refugee man (Fatah): *"not houses made of asbestos where rainfall will leak from the roof or where you cannot sit in your home during hot weather; "* educational opportunity by a West Bank refugee woman: *"I can't afford paying a thousand dinars for one semester in college; "* simple recreation opportunity by a West Bank refugee man: the *"ability to take my family out to lunch"*; and job

stability and quality by a non-refugee Gazan woman (Fatah): *"I want my husband to get a job … [he] has been jobless for seven years now."*

In describing a man not doing well, a West Bank non-refugee woman said:

"He is not married till now, he has some issues. His mother is dead, and he is the only one who provides for his family. [He] doesn't have a stable constant job. Till now he can't start a family or even provide housing or any of life's needs. He can't afford anything."

The narratives linked *economic* well-being integrally with other domains of functioning, including: the *family* (e.g., inherited wealth; timing of marriage) and *education*, as in having to forgo the education that would provide a better life, or, the inability to find work in one's specialty area if educated.

3.4.1.1. Links between the political and economic domains. By far the most common linkage made in the narratives invoking economic issues was to the political situation, including the occupation, the Fatah-Hamas split, and the corruption of Palestinian governance. The occupation was implicated in devastating the economies of the West Bank and Gaza, restricting travel both within the oPt and abroad, confiscating homes and land, restricting housing construction, imprisonment, restricting access to jobs in Israel, and lack of political stability for investors, who *"run away because of occupation and security loss."* An East Jerusalem man chose Saleh to describe as an illustration of poor functioning:

"Saleh was kicked out of his house, and settlers took it and lived in it … He grew up in a hard environment where he lived with seven or eight brothers in a 70-m square house, because the Israeli authorities do not allow building new houses in Jerusalem … they had no gardens or any place for playing even, because it is forbidden. He went to government schools because his father could not pay his tuition fees … Tuition fees in Jerusalem private schools are very expensive, and his father's salary was low. His father's money problem is related to the occupation, since they do not allow Palestinians to live normally or to have a good job with a good salary to get their needs."

Several respondents also talked about how the Palestinian government does not provide jobs, education or the social safety net that people need and deserve. According to one East Jerusalem woman: *"If our degrees are not recognized inside Israel, for us to get a better life our own government should provide us with jobs. It should also remove using one's own connections to reach high positions."*

3.4.2. The employment domain

Although employment can be understood as an element of the economic, we have highlighted it separately because of its prominence in the interview narratives. There were several ways that respondents viewed employment as an element of wellbeing or quality of life: unemployment leads to poverty and basic human suffering; unemployment results in psychological problems and divorce; not having a job results in reliance on charity; and, for men, having a job allows for having and taking care of children. As for securing stable employment (with professional employment more desirable than low-skill work), respondents' illustrations of the role of employment in the quality of life of individuals suggested that stable employment is facilitated by: education, connections (Arabic: *wasta*), and ambition and resourcefulness.

The role of employment appeared to be gendered in these narratives. For men, it seemed essential to wellbeing to have access to a stable job. Several illustrations of someone functioning poorly in life were of women—particularly those with young children—whose spouses were not employed, doubly burdening women to *"work outside, but also inside of the house."* Worse still were women whose spouses were neither working nor present because the husband had died, been imprisoned, or had abandoned the family. However, if a woman chose to work for fulfillment rather than necessity, some participants thought that could contribute to wellbeing.

3.4.2.1. Links between the political and employment domains. Two elements of the *political* were consistently identified as impeding access to secure employment: the occupation and government responsibilities. As to the occupation, respondents, like one non-refugee woman in Gaza affiliated with Fatah, pointed to specific features, such as the siege of Gaza, e.g., *"if they open the border crossings, our young men would have jobs, and we'll have a better income."* As for government responsibilities, one West Bank refugee woman said: *"the government should eliminate unemployment, and provide us with jobs, to decrease unemployment and numbers of jobless young men sitting in cafés."*

3.4.3. The education domain

Often education was equated with attaining a masters' or PhD degree. As one woman from East Jerusalem said: *"Even if the family does not have money, they need to help him educate himself because this will help him as well as help their future."*

In their illustrations of people doing well and less well, participants also revealed the interrelationships between education and other realms of functioning, including: access to quality employment, opportunity to migrate for work, improving one's social standing within the community, and the ability to provide financially for children. Some of the consequences of being uneducated included: job insecurity and instability, lower self-esteem, and the inability to teach children. Siblings also figured in the discourse around education (e.g., older siblings financially supporting younger siblings in their studies), as did family cohesion or solidarity to enhance continuation of education.

Finally, when discussing education in Palestinian society, participants described the benefits of education specifically for women, including emotional and relational stability, opportunity for self-development, and freedom. Two main barriers were family members preventing daughters/wives from continuing with their education and getting married at an early age.

3.4.3.1. Links between the political and education domains. Constraints on education were linked directly throughout the narratives to various elements of the *political*, particularly the occupation and government responsibilities. Experiences during the first intifada were often cited as contributors to poor functioning in the economic realm, with young people not receiving *"good education or social comfort"* because of canceled or severely limited schooling (due to closures, blockages and arrests). This prevented many high school students from preparing for the college qualifying exam (Arabic: *tawjihi*) or from completing university. A West Bank non-refugee man implicated the economic in describing the effect of both intifadas on education: *"There was no chance for us to improve the quality of education and health services or the investment projects without economy, especially that we don't have productive sector in our society"*— a predicament that another said *"broke our morale and character and we still suffer from this until now."*

Otherwise, imprisonment was identified as a real obstacle to educational achievement, as a Gazan refugee man affiliated with Fatah said in describing the individual he chose to illustrate poor functioning: "*he lives under bad conditions because he was arrested by the occupation at an age when he was supposed to study … he was put in prison for several years … So, his life became a mess and he got older and this made his chances to pursue studying more difficult.*"

Though some families apparently were able to provide education for their children, many participants discussed the need for the state to provide educational opportunities at little or no cost. When including education in her free list, a West Bank refugee woman said, for example: "*if I don't have money, the government should provide us with opportunities for education, equal for everyone, for each one according to their needs.*"

3.4.4. The family domain

References in the interview narratives to *family* as a domain of functioning included: family solidarity or cohesion, the marital relationship, and providing for children. (See Spellings, 2014 for elaboration). As for family solidarity and cohesion, respondents often described individuals who were doing well as part of a close family that has "strong ties," "respect," "mutual understanding and love," and "good relations" between husbands and wives, between parents and children, and among siblings. Such families were described otherwise as: "coherent," "cohesive," "united," "integrated," or "stable."

Participants also described well-functioning individuals as having marital relationships that: were mutually supportive, shared decision making authority, settled disagreements with open communication, and were loving and respectful of the other. There were specific benefits of a well-functioning marriage for wives, including the ability and support to continue with their education and freedom within the house.

Finally, participants included providing for children as reflective of well-functioning families, including: mattresses for sleeping, clothing, healthy food, health insurance, adequate housing, and money for leisure activities or vacation. Particularly important was the "responsibility" to provide children with a "good education" (ideally a university education).

3.4.4.1. Links between the political and family domains.

Political conditions were regularly invoked as impacting the effectiveness of parents and the cohesiveness of families—which, in turn, impacted "*good, successful relationships in the society.*" Examples included: family separations caused by a member not being allowed to return home after travel, the need for a family member to live abroad to find work, deaths of family members, imprisonment, and checkpoints.

> "*The Israeli checkpoints forbid us from visiting and socializing … my parents live in Jerusalem but I can't reach them the way my friends reach their parents. I might see them only once a month … I feel that the checkpoints have cut family ties and connections.*"
>
> (F/WB/R)

The impact of the occupation specifically on children was characterized variously as: being affected by the violence they witnessed at checkpoints or on TV, living under "constant fear and trauma," inadequate provision of health care, and being injured or disabled.

Referring to those "living outside," one Gaza woman said: "*They have their freedoms, their comfort. Their children are living the best lives, having the best education, eating the best food. Not like the way we live as our children are not comfortable and cannot live like the rest of the children around the world.*"

3.4.5. The psychological and the political domains

As noted previously, there were very few references to mental health that did not also invoke the political context.

> "*There is no people in the world who can think or have ambitions while there is a force controlling them because this force is controlling everything and there is no way to have a happy or prosperous life under such a force.*"
>
> (M/GS/R/Fh)

> "*When a young man goes out of his home to go to work and being stopped by a checkpoint, this might ruin all his day. Also the mother will be worried all the time. If he got stopped in the morning, will he be stopped in his way back? Or will be arrested? She'll be under constant fear.*"
>
> (F/WB/nR)

Participants characterized the psychological impact of the political situation, particularly the occupation, with a variety of expressions. As evident in the concerns about safety and security, *fear* was expressed — whether "*constant fear of arrest*" or from the raids, shelling, and shooting that "*we fear and that terrify us.*" Some described feeling psychological *stress* and *tension* from life under occupation, with many, as above, invoking feelings of being *controlled* or *trapped*. Others expressed a sense of *impotence or defenselessness*, as in the Gazan non-refugee woman affiliated Fatah who said: "*We are weak; we have nothing to defend ourselves, they have everything.*"

Others described a rather unique type of suffering that included, among others, being or feeling: *broken, crushed* (محطمة), *shaken up* (مهزوزة), *destroyed*, (مدمرة), and *exhausted, tired* (تعبانة), that we have elsewhere labeled *feeling broken or destroyed* (Barber et al., 2014; McNeely et al., 2014). Referring to a man and his siblings whose father was in prison, for example, a West Bank refugee woman said "*… they looked like broken spirits, as if they have emotional and psychological problems …*" In Gaza, some described *violation of dignity* (e.g., "*not living like humans*") and a *lack of fulfillment*. A few respondents talked about how people who lived outside of Palestine were "*relaxed psychologically*" because they had freedom of movement and freedom to develop themselves. As one woman from East Jerusalem—who enjoys some financial benefits compared to Palestinians outside of Jerusalem—said:

> "*I always try to think positively and have determination and hope, but day after day I feel that I am losing that. I feel as if I am a different person. I feel that my character has changed. It's true that the Israelis give us good money, but they break our souls and determination.*"

A glimpse into the pervasive impact of the occupation's barriers was offered by a mother describing her son. After enjoying somewhat unrestricted movement during university in the West Bank, the son moved back to live with his parents in Jerusalem, and became "depressed." She said that he "can't cope" with the checkpoints, particularly that it takes more than half an hour to visit a friend, as they have to spend an hour just to pass through two checkpoints. "*Sometimes [he] argues with the soldiers about putting loud music on in the car, they ask about his ID, and fight about small things like why his ID is torn from the side. They search and empty his bag and make him stand off to the side. If he passes through the electric gates and they beep he needs to take off his belt and his stuff, and so if*

this continues to happen daily, what will happen to the mental and psychological state of our kids?"

3.4.6. The personal domain

Descriptions of functioning well often included identification of individual character traits. These included being: ambitious, loyal to the Palestinian people, religious, responsible, a hard worker, resilient in the face of adversity, contentment with self, respectful of others, independent, and helping others. In contrast, qualities attributed to people who were not doing well included: unforgiving, jealous, selfish, conceited, aggressive, immature, impulsive, and betraying one's people. Ambition, a common theme, was fleshed out as hard-working, having strong will, and setting and achieving goals—in particular, finding employment in order to continue education. In general, providing both financial and instrumental assistance was considered a characteristic of someone who was doing well, although a few respondents described the negative effect of neglecting one's own needs in the process.

3.4.6.1. Links between the political and the personal domains.
Participants linked personal characteristics to the political in both negative and positive ways. Some in Gaza, for example, cited nepotism among Palestinian political parties as hindering men from gaining employment and fulfilling their ambition. On the positive side, others attributed resilience to disparities and "hits" they have faced in the struggle against the occupation. Although many participants described the importance of continuing to fight for the Palestinian cause, a few suggested that sacrificing oneself for the homeland, while taking precedence over pursuing individual dreams, would not necessarily create individual well-being.

3.4.7. The religious domain

Participants' narratives that invoked religion can be organized according to three main themes. First, a focus on religion leads to a good life by individuals, being committed to their religion or having "God in their heart." Several participants stated that if people are religiously committed, they will be "comfortable, happy and safe," have "stability and comfort," "a good life," and "tranquility." Second, some participants stated that one has well-being when one believes that everything that happens is God's will. For example, a Jerusalem woman offered this description of a woman doing well: "*She is faithful from the inside and believes … She leaves everything in the hands of Allah. I believe if someone were in her situation, they would be broken by now …*" Third, several articulated that following certain aspects of religion made one a good person. Some invoked giving to others and socializing children, as this Gazan refugee woman affiliated with Fatah said: "*There is a woman that I consider an ideal and a role model for me … She teaches* [her children] *to preserve and memorize the Quran at the mosque.*"

3.4.7.1. Links between the political and religious domains.
Various linkages were made by the participants between religion and political conditions. The West Bank refugee man cited earlier who called for forgiveness, love, and acceptance among political factions in Palestine, elaborated that a method of achieving that would be to "*go back to the prophet's words that say that Muslims are brothers and that Muslims are a whole nation.*" A Gazan non-refugee man affiliated with Hamas said: "*No matter how hard the occupation that is pointed at us gets, we are holding on, because we believe in God and because we are the "people that hold on" … because we are Muslim and we have the right.*" Beyond this steadfastness, some articulated that the forbidding political conditions have served to strengthen their religion. "*Today, after the [2008–9] war in the Gaza Strip, in general the percentage of the people who have learned the Book of God by heart has increased hugely. And this is what makes the Palestinian people stronger,*" said a non-refugee man in Gaza affiliated with Hamas.

4. Summary

By way of summary, the extended excerpt below is one of numerous illustrations of the interrelatedness of domains of functioning; in this case, the cascade of impacts of political conditions, implicating: economics, education, employment, family formation, self- and national identity, and psychological wellbeing. A man from East Jerusalem chose to describe himself when asked to illustrate someone not doing well in life. In part, he said:

"*I was a small kid during the first intifada, yet I was arrested several times, and I spent four years in jail … You go out of jail to meet troubles in education, academics and then overcome them to study and to obtain the certificate you want. In this case, you become an open person who witnessed a lot in his life, and recognized yourself. However, what I actually feel nowadays is: 'For what self of my selves am I going to live for?' Do I live for myself as Murad? Do I live for myself as a Palestinian? Or do I live for myself as a human being?' My Palestinian self is always stronger than the other two. I have not been married. In fact, I am afraid to get married or to have a child in this country … There is a conflict between you and the life you dream of … This is the challenge and that is why I have fears. If you want to make your son live a dignified life, you need to have a good salary, but a good salary does not exist … This is our dilemma … I do not have the ability to say: 'I don't care about whatever happens in Palestine and leave the country, like the Jordanian, American, Haitian and African say.' It is not easy to emigrate. You commit a slow suicide operation when you emigrate. As a result, you will stay here.*"

5. Discussion

The goal of this study was to learn how a population long-exposed to economic and political constraint conceives of functioning. We pursued that effort in a manner that allowed adult participants—selected to represent key diversity within the occupied Palestinian territories—to articulate the expanse and contours of functioning as freely and as holistically as possible. The findings revealed that the majority of both male and female participants prioritized the role of the political and economic domains of functioning. Analysis of the narratives revealed further how tightly intertwined domains of functioning are. In particular, they reinforced the prominence of political conditions as the core domain, which, often through fear and insecurity, spills over into the other, interrelated domains of life.

At one level, the findings of the study reveal how common human experience is, even under extreme conditions. In other words, the range of domains of functioning that the participants identified is not surprising, including basic elements that might be endorsed by any population: economic, education, social (family), personal, cultural (religious), and psychological. This broad conception of functioning is also evident in other regions of hardship and instability. For example, most of these same domains were identified in recent work in Afghanistan (Eggerman and Panter-Brick, 2010). Thus, in many ways the quality of life or individual wellbeing of Palestinians in the oPt is not uniquely composed. The uniqueness of their experiences is realized, rather, in the relative salience of these domains, and, most particularly, in the elevation to prominence of the neglected political domain.

Accordingly, the conceptual model derived from these interview data differs from other attempts to map the complexity of functioning among Palestinians (Giacaman et al., 2007a,b; Williamson

and Robinson, 2006). Unlike those mostly linear renderings, our concentric model represents functioning as a whole. Further, it highlights political functioning as the driving core, while at the same time illustrating the overlap and interlinkages among the many domains of functioning. As to the political domain itself, although organized somewhat differently, the subdomains we identified in the interview data are highly consistent with those discerned in earlier interviews of Palestinians by Giacaman and colleague's (Giacaman et al., 2007a,b).

The high salience that both males and females ascribed to the economic domain validates the priority that much of the wellbeing literature has placed on the economic. It also accords well with recent work in Afghanistan that spotlighted the crucial salience of economic issues (Eggerman and Panter-Brick, 2010; Panter-Brick et al., 2009).

5.1. The political domain of functioning

The driving role of the political in local conceptions of quality of life in the oPt that was evidenced in the results of this study is important for two reasons. First, the results validate recent efforts to document the salience of the political in the Palestinian experience. Second, the breadth with which the political was conceptualized in this study encourages the integration of several theoretical approaches that have invoked the political—however more narrowly than here—in discussions of wellbeing, quality of life, suffering, and mental health. This integration across varied approaches also facilitates the appreciation of the relevance of the present study's findings beyond the Palestinian experience.

5.1.1. The political core of Palestinian functioning

The first level of contribution of the findings of this study is the validation of the political as a key domain of functioning amongst Palestinians in the oPt. To that end, the first compelling evidence was that participants themselves identified it using the actual Arabic words for political. Thus, it is clear that when contemplating individual and collective wellbeing and quality of life, adults in the oPt both conceptualize and express a commanding role of political conditions in their experiences. This, when combined with the sheer frequency with which it was invoked or referenced in the narratives, and that, further, it was prioritized among the top three domains of functioning by virtually two-thirds of both men and women, provides foundational, validating evidence of the centrality of political conditions to the quality of life in this society.

These findings of the prominence of the political in the oPt are consistent with recent work by Giacaman (e.g., Giacaman et al., 2007a,b). They validate them particularly via several methodological features, including: not focusing the interviews around the stress of the political conditions; convening small, sex- and faction-segregated groups to maximize free expression; selecting individuals who explicitly represented key sectors of diversity (and were mostly from a specific and unique cohort); and using interview narratives themselves as data (i.e., instead of fieldworker notes).

Further, we were able to provide for the first time a quantification of the salience of the political relative to other key domains of functioning (see Table 2). Moreover, the elaborated narratives were useful at documenting the complex interplay among domains of functioning and how they are universally impacted by the political.

The core role of politics evident in the findings of this study has otherwise been documented in a variety of ways among Palestinians. For example, Israeli policy designed explicitly to delimit economic growth, particularly in the Gaza Strip, has been carefully documented since the first intifada (Roy, 1995, 1999). Public opinion

polls have also demonstrated that political (and economic) concerns are most central to Palestinian experience (Shikaki, 2007). Finally, and most directly relevant to the specific population investigated in the current study, the driving role of political conditions in their lives was explicitly spotlighted in interviews of the same cohort when they were young adults during the mid-to late-1990s—arguably one of the calmest and most hopeful periods since the occupation began in 1967 (Barber, 1999, 2002).

5.2. The broader salience of the political as a key domain of functioning

The breadth with which the participants of this study defined the political domain of functioning also validates numerous, albeit typically more narrow or undeveloped, treatments of a political component to life. Since such past references to the political come from diverse theoretical orientations, this study's findings usefully collects them into a more coherent and elaborated, multi-disciplinary whole.

Consistent with findings presented here, for example, some approaches have focused broadly on structures or systems of governance. One illustration are the references in the public health literatures to political determinants of health, defined as the relative amount of democracy that characterizes a government (Mackenbach, 2013, 2014), or the political (and economic) institutions that reinforce inequality (Krieger, 2001). Compatible with these would be the focus in anthropology on structures of governance that create or maintain inequalities (e.g., structural violence; Farmer, 2004; Galtung, 1969).

Consistent also with the findings of this study, other approaches have referenced the qualities of governing systems. One example is the emphasis on the risks of political (in) security or inefficiency in literatures from public health (e.g., Abu-Rmeileh et al., 2011, 2012; Batniji et al., 2009; Giacaman et al., 2007a,b; Mataria et al., 2009; McNeely et al., 2014), psychology (subjective wellbeing, happiness; e.g., Schimmel, 2009), and anthropology (Panter-Brick et al., 2008). Another example from community psychology is attention to political oppression as a determinant of wellbeing (e.g., Prilleltensky, 2008).

Further, numerous approaches have emphasized freedoms when discussing the essence of the political, whether in public health studies of quality of life (i.e., self-determination, participation; e.g., Giacaman et al., 2007a,b) or studies of subjective wellbeing (i.e., happiness; e.g., Ouweneel and Veenhoven, 1991, 2007). Most classically, economist Sen (1999) has elaborated at length on political freedoms (free speech, elections, participation, entitlements, dialog, dissent, etc.). Beyond providing a strong validation for those notions, our findings seem also to support his position against the arguments of some that political liberties are somehow "Western" priorities, and that economic hardship supersedes them in salience amongst poor populations. In line with him, our findings illustrate, rather, that while economic and political issues are tightly interlinked, the political was preeminent (and likely determinative in part of the economic) in a non-Western population that endures significant economic hardship.

Finally, yet a different window into the political may help reveal why it appears so crucial. Specifically, as evident throughout the narratives examined in this study, political systems, policies, and actions appear so consequential—beyond the fundamental fear and insecurity they can evoke—because they explicitly violate core levels of humanity: such as rights, justice, identity, and dignity (Batniji, 2012; Giacaman et al., 2007a,b; Prilleltensky, 2012). Prohibitions on basic rights and freedoms, devaluing of identity and humiliating personal treatment (Barber et al., 2013; Giacaman et al., 2007a,b; Longo et al., 2014) are perceived as affronts, individually

and collectively. As such, it is sensible that they evoke an indignation that could lead to protest and resistance, a critical element of political functioning evident in the findings of this study that has not been well attended to in previous treatments of the political. The political may predominate, therefore, because, while economic hardships surely have sources in politics, that connection may feel more distant and less intentional than the overt and deliberate domination of the more powerful over the less powerful that occurs explicitly in the political domain—whether at the broad level of the structure of government or in demeaning interpersonal interactions with its agents (see Prilleltensky, 2008).

6. Conclusion

Human functioning and wellbeing are multi-faceted and include a political domain. While referred to increasingly in diverse literatures, this study's findings revealed a more comprehensive appreciation of this crucial domain of life. It appears to consist of systems of governance that can—in part via policies and actions of its representatives—instill fear, instability, and insecurity, and constrain multiple freedoms in a manner and to a degree that can severely violate basic human rights, justice, identity, and dignity. These conditions appear further to spill over into all other domains of functioning.

The Palestinian case may illuminate the power of the political especially well because of the longevity, breadth, and severity of the political control they have experienced, but these processes are relevant to any society with substantial power imbalances. In attempting to capture the quality of life of individuals and groups, researchers would do well to continue to elaborate this critical domain of influence and to measure it more fully. This is particularly important for researchers interested in mental health because by ignoring the driving force of political conditions the risk persists that suffering is attributed to individuals rather than their constraining contexts.

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