



ROLE OF WOMEN IN RESISTANCE MOVEMENT IN PALESTINE

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Occupation of the Palestinian lands is an ongoing process. The creeping annexation has led to the continuous disruptions of the Palestinian social fabric. Hence, the Palestinian society in all its aspect is in turbulence affecting its social, economic, political and cultural life. This disruption has led the Palestinian women to forge a resistance movement not only against the patriarchal tyranny or ecclesiastical tyranny but also against the protracted tyranny of Occupation since the last 100 years. Intense uncertainty of volatile subjugation has strengthened the resolve of the Palestinian women to resist this diabolical Occupation. Nevertheless, the Palestinian women have found a section of Israeli women and their moral support which is a ray of hope, that this land would be eventually liberated on account of the struggle waged by them.

Throughout the history of Palestine in the twentieth century, women have played a much more active part than conventional European images of submissive Arab women would attribute to them. They experienced much suffering and were often helpless victims, and many were no doubt trapped in the silence and domestic preoccupation characteristic of their subordinate social position. On the other hand, many individuals gave active support to men in their struggles. Some took up arms themselves. Many groups of women organised to press for social change and political progress and to help victims survive; many women emerged as leaders with new ideas and ambitions for the Palestinian people. In the following chapters, women tell how they experienced and contributed to this history. They have dealt with wars and upheavals, personal losses and exile, and with social, educational and economic changes that would have spanned several generations in Europe. My oldest informant was married at the age of seven to protect her from Turkish soldiers during the First World War. As a refugee, she took part in demonstrations against the Jordanian government in the 1950s and is now proud of her grandchildren, some of whom are in and out of prison for their student political activities, while others are working as doctors and engineers in Eastern Europe and waiting for their opportunity to come home. The youngest woman who appears here is a seventeen-year-old student at a vocational training college, who has chosen Islam as her framework and support in her campaign to liberate the thinking and the social life of women in her village. They

are very different women, whose lives and interests hardly overlap, but they represent some of the currents and developments in Palestinian life of the mid-1980s - currents that they hope will be fulfilled in a very different future.¹

The role of women in the struggle of Palestine started after the formation of first women's associations in Jerusalem in 1919. The first remarkable female political activity was in the town of Afula in 1893 when women demonstrated against the construction of a new Jewish settlement. Violent conflict broke out in Palestine between Arabs and Jews during the Zionist onslaught. It was an important step towards a more organized movement that adopted resolutions demanding the withdrawal of the Balfour Declaration and the prohibition of Zionist immigration into Palestine. The birth of the first Palestinian women's organization was simultaneous with the beginning of the resistance to Zionist immigration in Palestine. It was as early as 1920 (27 February), when a considerable number of women came out on the street of Jerusalem and joined protests and denunciations with their counterparts to show their anger against the British mandate and Jewish expansionist aims in Palestine. In 1920, before the official onset of the Mandate, 29 women from northern Palestine protested the Balfour Declaration in a letter to the chief administrator of the region, writing that 'we Moslem and Christian ladies who represent other ladies of Palestine protest vigorously.' In 1921, when the first Palestinian women's union was created in Jerusalem. The birth of the first Palestinian women's organization was simultaneous with the beginning of the resistance to Zionist Immigration Occupation in Palestine.

The first Arab Women's Congress, initiated in Palestine was held in Jerusalem in 1929, in which 300 women participated. Women also participated in other political activities, namely the Wailing Wall incidents of 1929 also known as Al Buraq Battle. In these incidents, nine women were killed by the British army, which prompted women to increase their political participation to change the terrible situation they suffered. As a result, in 1929 Palestinian women deliberately launched a movement and the inaugural event was the convening in Jerusalem of the Palestine Arab Women's Congress. More than 200 women from all over Palestine attended the

¹ Kitty Warnock. *Land before honour*. 1990: 18.

Congress, which passed resolutions addressing the national problem and pledged to “support all resolutions, decisions, and demands of the Arab Executive.

A remarkable participation in the revolution of 1936 against the British. Women traded her jewellery for a rifle and contributed in supplying food, arms and information to fighters. Some women fought fiercely side by side with their men, others dressed in military outfits and received military training to resist, such as Fatima Ghazal, who was killed in ‘Azzun Battle’ and ‘Sisters of Qassan’ of old Haifa, who fought strongly by their husbands.

Since 1948, Palestinian women were denied their basic rights by Israeli viciousness. They are surviving harder pressure, aggressiveness and suffering. This is a general Palestinian calamity for the whole society under Israeli Occupation. Despite various factors for the weak female political participation, one could say that the Occupation had a major impact on women’s political and social role. Israeli policy of isolating villages and towns from each other is what made Palestinian women get out from their homes and indulge in public life and political activities.

Moreover, severe poverty and unemployment, which are mostly due to Israeli measures, have compelled Palestinian women to work, when this was normally rejected in her society. This development doubled the physical duties of women, added on their psychological and social responsibilities, and confined her political participation.

Notwithstanding their suffering, Palestinian women demonstrated their increasing persistence to hold on to their rights and to stand firm in the face of Israeli aggression. Their sacrifices were amplified, as well as their role in politics and resistance. They held on to their daily perseverance as the Occupation caused a surge of assassinations, arrests, and movement-restrictions against men. Consequently, many additional responsibilities laid upon women’s shoulders, yet they were up to them. Anyone who looks at the life of Palestinian women observes their suffering. The eyes and the ears of the world and women’s rights associations included are witnesses, too. However, no one has offered protection to Palestinian women from daily Israeli violations. No one has contributed to saving their lives from the Israeli death plot which aims at the destruction of Palestinian people as a whole. No one

helps them in keeping their dignity when they were under daily Israeli assaults, nor anyone provides them with their basic rights of education and medical care.

In view of all this, some people are still surprised by Palestinian women sacrificing their children for their cause or fighting beside their men. During the period between 1948 and 1967, Palestinian society witnessed the Nakba (Catastrophe) and its terrible effects on political, economic and social aspects. During the same period some of the prominent women like Shadia Abu Ghazalah, Leila Khaled she was first Women Plan Hijacker, Fatima Mohammed Bernawi she was first Female Palestinian Militant Jailed and Rasmea Yousef Odeh participated in the armed struggle.

It can be concluded from the literature increasing exploitation, night raids and inhuman practices exercised by the Israeli army against Palestinians in general and Palestinian women, in particular, compelled many women to participate in the armed struggle. Further gender discrimination, sexism, and thirst of gender equality motivated these women to participate against Israeli occupation.

Women's organizations played a huge role in enhancing social life by providing social care services at orphan centers and delivering humanitarian and aid relief efforts, such as food, water, housing and clothing, to afflicted families. Since the beginning of the Occupation in 1967, approximately 10,000 Palestinian women have been arrested and detained by Israeli forces.

In 1964, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was formed where Palestinian women obtained a quota in the National Assembly, ranging from 2% in 1964 to 7.5% in the Council Session held in Gaza in 1996. In 1965 the General Union of Palestinian Women in Jerusalem and Nablus was founded as the official representative of Palestinian women within the Palestine Liberation Organization. The Women's Union aimed to establish a democratic platform for all Palestinian women by summarizing several goals that it sought to achieve: involving women in all spheres of political, social and judicial life; equality of women in all rights and duties; in addition to raising women's awareness of their legitimate rights gained at the First and Second Palestinian National Conference.

In 1964, the Union of Palestinian Women was founded and Its main goals were to improve the economic, social, and health status of women, take care of working women, and providing care for mothers and children. This shows that the political awareness of the women's movement grew within Palestinian national-oriented and community-based organizations. Also, at that time women participated in military operations and were trained to take up arms, which meant that their role was no longer limited to social work, but expanded to national and militant action.

Until the end of 1967, nearly 68 women's associations were working in philanthropy and women's aid relief. The qualitative change of women was in 1978, when Palestinian political parties decided to frame women's political participation and involve women from rural, urban areas and refugee camps into political parties. Women have been active in various spheres of life: political, social, cultural, health and national. Women joined the resistance and struggle not because they wanted to live in heaven, but because they wanted to live on their land with freedom and without Occupation and oppression.

Palestinian women were not excluded in any of the forms of the Israeli Occupation violence and brutality against the Palestinian people in general. Israeli army arrests women and treated them inhumanly. They face physical, psychological torture and sexual harassment. In detention, women constituted a significant percentage of arrests during the 40 years of Israeli Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strips since 1967. The Census Department in the Palestinian Ministry of Detainees indicates that the Israeli occupation forces have arrested more than 10 thousand Palestinian women from 1967 till the end of 2008, of whom 800 were arrested during *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, and 75 were still in custody by the end of 2008.

These women are held under very bad conditions, without consideration for their gender, basic rights, or certain special needs; nine of them were arrested when they were minors (under the age of 18). A prominent Palestinian woman who was imprisoned Dr. Mariam Saleh, the first Palestinian women member of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). She was detained on 12/11/2007 and released on 15/6/2008.

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and the International Labor Organization (ILO) report that Israeli closure measures are a major obstacle to the

Palestinians from reaching medical services. A poll showed that the main obstacles for 52.5% of families are Israeli closure measures. 53.6% of the families, it is Israeli military checkpoints and for 16% of the families in the West Bank, it is the Separation Wall. These obstacles hinder Palestinian families from health services. The United Nation Commission on Human Rights reported that 35 newborn babies had died at checkpoints as their mothers did not receive the urgent care required by their condition and five cases of women who died while giving birth at Israeli checkpoints. Moreover, six cases were reported in which pregnant Palestinian women had been injured at checkpoints as a result of the beating, shooting, and use of toxic gas by Israeli soldiers.

Like health other life aspects, like education has been influenced by Israeli measures and closures. Young women, young men, boys and girls continue to face distinct and gender-specific challenges in accessing education throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. The risk for young men and boys of confrontations and involvement in clashes with security forces or demonstrations and social and cultural norms within families and communities continue to have a negative impact and sometimes make safe and accessible education unavailable for young people and children. Young women and girls often have limited access to educational opportunities that are available or provided as a priority to young men and boys. Many young women and girls are often kept at home owing to a lack of safe public spaces, as well as to socio-cultural norms.

Focus has been laid on charitable societies as the basis of the modern Palestinian women's movement. Through these societies, elite Palestinian women were able to work outside of the home and provide services, typically to poor, rural Palestinian women. The other public sphere involvement of Palestinian women was confined to national emergencies, where women were not only "allowed" but encouraged to participate in the public sphere. Paradoxically, at a time when Palestinian women were noted for having the most freedom in the public sphere, the Islamist movement, which ultimately sought to restrict women's public sphere activities, gained the most popularity. Although the women's participation in the public sphere was no longer restricted to the charity work of the upper echelon, it was still classist in that middle- and upper-class women dominated the decision making infrastructure of the women's movement.

The survey of the rise of Hamas, has emphasized women's contributions to the Intifada in the early years and posited explanations for why women were ultimately ousted from the public sphere. As the Intifada waged on and the women's leadership fragmented, large masses of rural women, who already faced limited mobility because of the conservative nature of rural Palestine, realized that the urban women leaders would not be able to lead them to victory in either of their struggles feminist or nationalist.

May Nassar said, "Because our society is male-dominated, one can't expect women to go down into the streets in the same numbers as men. When this society becomes less patriarchal, we will see more women in the streets."² Despite Palestinian women's persistence, strength, and organized efforts, the public sphere, opened to them for a brief moment, was once again shut. The development of the public and private sphere dichotomy was not new to Palestinian society. Fleischmann showed that during this same time, Palestinian women were gaining greater autonomy from Palestinian men, that is, until the arrival of the British in 1920. British educational policies encouraged the return of Palestinian women to the private sphere.

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

By highlighting the rich past of Palestinian women's political involvement, it is little surprise that Palestinian women became so vocal and active in the uprising. The Intifada changed women's perceptions of themselves, and men's perceptions of women. Women saw themselves as capable and as equal participants, and men often welcomed their presence in the public sphere. As the Intifada progressed, however, men's perceptions of women changed again. This time, men created resistance for women to get involved publicly. As a result, women also began to question their place in the public sphere.

² Sahar, Khalifeh.. "Comments by Five Women Activists: Siham Abdullah, Amal Kharisha Barghouti, Rita Giacaman, May Mistakmel Nassar, Amal Wahdan." in *Palestinian Women of Gaza and the West Bank*, edited by Suha Sabbagh, translated by Nagla El- Bassiouni, 192-215. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998:210.

While women were active in the public sphere, they engaged in a variety of activities. This thesis focused on the contributions of women's committees and cooperatives. Both case-studies exemplified the extent to which women were politically involved and the motivation and spirit with which they were involved. The committees and co-operatives also typified the ways in which Palestinian women actualized feminist nationalism, by serving both women's liberation and national liberation simultaneously. In the final section, this thesis showed that women's activism itself was not the issue that many Palestinian men opposed. Rather, it was women's strong presence in the public sphere. Had women worked to redefine the space as gender-neutral, in addition to redefining their roles as women, I contend that women would not have been pushed out of the public sphere. However, the elasticity of public and private sphere definitions provides a glimmer of hope for Palestinian women. Their ability to act politically and publicly from within the domestic sphere showed they will not be quiet. But many questions remain unanswered.

Are Palestinian women's lives today better or worse as a result of the Intifada? Are Palestinian women still fighting for women's liberation? Based on a 2000 women's conference in Ramallah, it is clear that at least some Palestinian women are still looking for the balance between feminist and national liberation.³ But, if the second Intifada revealed anything about women, it is that they are still fighting for recognition in the public sphere. In direct contrast to women's participation in the First Intifada, the Second Intifada saw little public participation from women. Some have argued that this is tied to the absence of any civil society activity during the second Intifada, noting that there is a direct correlation between occurrences of civil society in the public sphere and the participation of women in the public sphere.⁴

The rise of NGO's in the West Bank offers more insight into the role of women today. The "NGO-ization" of the West Bank has co-opted the women's movement, taking issues of "collective concern" and transforming them "into projects in isolation from the general context in which they arise, without consideration of the economic, social and political factors affecting them."

³ Penny Johnson, and Eileen Kuttab. "Where have all the women (and men) gone? Reflections on gender and the second Palestinian intifada." *Feminist Review* 69, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 39. The title of the conference was "The Women's Movement and the Current Situation: Towards Integrating Nationalism and Feminist Agendas."

⁴ Penny Johnson, and Eileen Kuttab, "Where have all the women (and men) gone?" (2001): 24.

Further, the process has changed causes for social change into “project[s]” with a plan, timetable, and a limited budget, which is ‘owned’ and used by a small professional elite for the purpose of accountability vis-à-vis foreign donors.”⁵ In other words, foreign donors, who may or may not be concerned with the best interests of Palestinian women, dictate change for Palestinian women. The future of the Palestinian women’s movement is uncertain at this time, but this thesis has shown that until women can first and foremost unite themselves, in particular with regards to the urban-rural divide, they will not be able to liberate themselves from the chains of patriarchy, or the Israeli occupation. In addition to uniting themselves, women in Palestine also face the challenge of redefining political space so they may be welcome in the political sphere at all times.

Palestinian women have been quite prominent in the Palestinian national struggle, especially since the outbreak of the First Intifada (1987-92), and then the second in 2000. They participated in demonstrations, took part in popular committees, and appeared as heroines dispatching their sons to the Jihad front against Israel. More than 500 women were arrested during that first Intifada.

They were socio-political movements that physically expressed Palestinian frustration and anger at the oppressive and colonialist policies of the Occupation, from a grassroots level. The first Intifada in Palestine begins in the Gaza Strip and later spread in West Bank on December 9th, 1987. The first Intifada and second Al-Aqsa Intifada were though similar in their root causes, but they differ enormously in their characteristics. In 1987, Palestinian women emerged clearly in their struggle through demonstrations, imprisonment, and participation in some armed operation. Women’s leaders appeared in a number of left-wing parties, and because as members of other parties.

In 1991, the United Nations Development Plan (UNDP) Women’s Task Force established a coalition of four women’s committees, four research and advocacy centres, two legal aid concerns, and tens of grassroots organizations and voluntary associations. In addition, the Task Force organized three workshops in which

⁵ Islah Jad, “The Demobilization of Women’s Movements: The Case of Palestine.” Women’s UN Report Network. (2008). Retrieved from, https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/changing_their_world_-demobilization_of_womens_movements_-palestine.pdf. (Accessed on September 12, 2019).

hundreds of Palestinian women discussed and produced the Women's Agenda as a strategic vision document for Palestinian women's empowerment. Yet, the activities of those organizations were restricted only to social services. It is to be noted that those women's committees, created by the need to provide social work, drew the attention of the political parties that used them to mobilize women for political action.

In 1993, after the Oslo agreement, the Palestinian National Authority was formed as the official representative of Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The importance of the role played by women through associations and unions, and notwithstanding the sacrifices by Palestinian women, the success indicators of women's political participation and representation in political life have remained weak. The active participation in Palestinian struggle resulted in raising women's status: for example, various women's committee's organization union are formed and active role in politics for the enhancement of women's status.

During the First Intifada, the Palestinian women had a great effect on the national activities, and they are often sent to jail. It went to such an extent that a new jail was opened by the Israelis for Palestinian women political prisoners in Abu Kabeer, near Jaffa. Palestinian women were subjected to all form of punishments and harassments, but this couldn't stop them from fighting for National Liberation. Although these punishments were not the main obstacles which the women faced rather the biggest obstacle that questioned women's participation was the involvement of Hamas. Hamas emerged as a political power in the street that was against women participation during the Uprising.

Women in Palestine, however, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, have been attempting to make their collective voice heard, and reduce the division within their societies. The seed of feminist movement had begun to develop gradually, but it was the outbreak of the Intifada, and its accompanying demands, that greatly accelerated the development of women's roles, and brought about social changes also. This made it possible, and even desirable, for women to be drawn out of their homes and sent them into the social and political affairs. Although, it is often asserted that women's traditional role in the family is an obstacle to public political action. These barriers seem to have become permeable for Palestinian women during the Uprising.

Towards the end of the first Intifada, as Hamas and the Islamic Jihad expanded, an event shocked the leadership of women's organisations and caused the eventual shift from political activism to social welfare. After the first intifada it was apparent that the national movement would not safeguard women's liberties and many in the women's organisations realised they could no longer ignore the gender inequalities within their society.

'The mass activism that marked the women's movements' experience in the [first] intifada has largely been replaced by an NGO model of lobbying, advocacy and workshop-style educational and developmental activities...' The academic secular approach of the fourth generation is appealing to international organisations. Alienation from the PLO led many in the fourth generation to turn to NGOs for funding.

The Second Intifada 2000 can be noted for some important outcomes which have shaped and are still shaping the overall Israeli-Palestinian efforts in achieving peace. For one, the Uprising brought about unprecedented human losses on both sides. According to the summary of data by the Israeli Information Center for Human rights, a total of 6371 Palestinians, of whom 1317 minors, were killed by the Israeli forces. Almost half of this total figure did not participate in the Uprising. The Palestinian suicide bombs and rockets have also killed 1083 Israelis inside Israel and in the Occupied Territories, of whom 741 of the fatalities were civilians, of whom 124 were minors, and 342 were members of the security forces. Palestinians suffered major losses in their leadership, particularly in their senior leadership, during the second *Intifada*.

Since the turn of the 20th century, Palestinians have been resisting the Occupation first, against the British Mandate, then the Jewish settlement, and the subsequent establishment of the State of Israel. Asking whether, after such immense resistance, the Palestinians have made any progress in their cause, or whether they have a long way to go in achieving their goal is just anyone's guess.

After years of struggle, two major *intifadas*, several negotiations, agreements, United Nation resolutions, etc, Palestinians still do not have a state of their own, and millions still remain in exile in refugee camps. Seventeen years after the Oslo Accord, (the only legal framework of negotiations), they still are engaged in resistance

activities against Israeli force. They are also fighting against their own authorities to make them think beyond the long-term results of the struggle and to address the immediate needs that the society faces on a day to day bases, i.e., joblessness, poverty, education, healthcare, etc. Today, although the main issue confronting the Palestinian people, both men and women, remain Occupation, but the question of survival keep on lingering in the minds of many Palestinians.

Palestinian politics have a long way to go before women and women's interests are adequately represented in the political sphere. Electoral quotas are a start, but they are not always translated into actual political influence and decision-making power. From the outside, it seems that the situation is at a stalemate, with neither Israel nor Palestine willing to abandon grievances or give in to the other's demands. The foremost issue faced by women who want to mobilize politically is the Occupation, and the Occupation can only be ended by effective negotiation. This negotiation would reasonably have a greater chance of success if it includes more input from Palestinian women, because they represent a fundamental part of Palestinian society and could be instrumental in negotiating a solution that is tailored to the needs of the Palestinian people.

Palestinian women indulging in militant activities like ambush or suicide bombings may be considered more news-worthy than a woman winning a seat on a local council by popular election, but it is these small political victories that may over time build into a high level of influence and visibility for women involved in peacebuilding. However, Palestinian women's achievements in politics so far should not be discounted. From before the first Intifada to the present, these women have found ways to build up their nation and work toward realizing a Palestinian state.

What is the logic behind using women as suicide bombers by the different groups in Palestine? The answer is multiple. First, it is the patent need of expanding the numerical size of the fighting force against the enemy occupier that is Israel. Second, using women as human bombs has a dramatic effect, for women are perceived as symbols of utter despair. The media coverage and the sense of empathy by the public give such groups that utilize these tactics a tremendous strategic gain. Male fighters have faced more severe restraints due to Israel's inflexible, tough and aggressive measures that have disabled their ability to infiltrate into the enemy

territory and accomplish the desired attack. Here comes the necessity of having women bombers who very often successfully blend in and unleash their suicide missions. The detection of women by the enemy is less compared to their male counterparts. Thus, women provide a tactical venue in accomplishing the desired mission. Third, Palestinian women have long suffered because of both national oppression and social repression. Making themselves available for martyrdom while fighting Israeli occupiers is doubly liberating, for it propels them to the powerful sense of fighting both enemies ‘social repression and Israeli occupation’ at the same time. As a result, their dispatchers take advantage of this reality.

Why are women willing to engage in such a mission considering the very patriarchal nature of the Palestinian society? The answer is multi-levelled: Women are willing to engage in suicide missions because it is partly their own fight in their pursuit of emancipation from Israeli Occupation and military rule as well as from their own traditional life of gender discrimination and social repression. Perhaps, women may desire to be suicide bombers for the practical reason of getting recognition and prestige since suicide bombers are seen as dear heroines and respected martyrs.

As women in the Palestinian society, the burden of family, the despondent life in perpetual war zones, the social obligations of women for not only their immediate family but also the community and society are immense. What had made their lives even more despondent is their lack of power in decision making in the political arena which would have opened up a venue to address their gender-specific issues. The fact is Palestinian women were voiceless for much of the half-century that the movement for Palestinian liberation has gotten solidified. What is striking is the fact that Palestinian women carry the brunt of the consequences of the actions and inactions of their male leaders. For instance, Palestinian women and children often became first victims when military and nonmilitary decisions were made by their leaders resulting in Israeli political reprisals such as: extending new settlements, imposing restrictions on cross border human and commodity movements, military retaliation, etc., even in bloody urban warfare between the Israeli military and Palestinian fighters, the adult male population runs or fights back with some degree of preparedness while Palestinian women generally die or remain captive in the battle zones with immense

risks to their lives and physical safety and security. In this respect, their willingness to fight and die as suicide bombers has various liberating results.

Fighting for these women repairs the psychological damage and the perpetual vulnerability. Certainly, while giving women some firm sense of unique identity, Palestinian women suicide bombers represent a big leap forward to the military and strategic fighting objective of the overall national policy of fighting the occupationist enemy.

But, are these motives really any different than the motives of their male counterparts? The simple answer to this question is twofold. The motives of Palestinian female suicide bombers are similar to the overall motives of their male counterparts. In this sense, the two have similar goals in terms of sharing a profound and inseparable unity of purpose in pursuing the national agenda of independence, freedom, liberation and statehood.

It was worth maintaining the continuous support of Israeli women to their Palestinian counterparts, their coming together for a cause and staying one in solidarity.

However, Israeli feminist peace activists stand at the crossroads. The women's peace movement in Israel now faces the challenge of establishing an ambitious political stance which will connect the status of women to militarism in Israeli society. The link between the personal and the political is essential to free women from the bonds of the internalized values of militarism: first and foremost, Israeli women need to free themselves from the role of 'protected women' who cooperate with men who act as if they protect them. Finally, in the contemporary Middle East, breaking patriarchal bonds is especially difficult. The reality of the Occupation and the fundamental national conflict focuses on Jewish and Palestinian women's attention on aspects of national identity. In the existing tension between national and gender identities, national identity tends to assume the greater importance. Although it is well known that during national struggles women's movements flourish, it is equally well known that these movements are usually short-lived. The importance of national women's movements tends to erode over time, especially when women's contributions to the national struggle are no longer needed, as in the case of Algeria;

when women's activism becomes a threat to the male leadership, as in the Palestinian case; or when women's issues become marginalized.

Hope is still alive, for an apolitical solution, in the wake of the joint Israeli-PLO recognition; the women's peace movement still has a dual role. First, women must make sure that painful political topics which have existential implications for the relationship between Palestinians and Jews, such as the fate of Jerusalem and Palestinians' right of return, remain on the agenda of public debate. Only a public confrontation of the meaning of these differences between the two societies will bring about reconciliation between the two peoples. Second, in order to create a feminist political peace culture, women must create political and social transformation, based on the unique yet diverse life experience of women and on the inner, whispered world of women which has not yet achieved public expression. If women indeed wish to achieve meaningful change, only joint work among women of all states in the Middle East and in the world can mount a credible challenge to existing patriarchal priorities.

The Women and Peace Coalition stands on its principle position calling for peace and dialogue between the Israeli and Palestinian people, for ending the Israeli occupation and for establishing an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

While concluding we can say that Palestine at present is in transition after the announcement of its new unity government and the planned elections within the next six months. This is a chance for Palestine to choose to make women an integral part of its administration, just as they are an integral part of society. International support such as Resolution 1325 and CEDAW can serve as a base for a political and social environment that is inclusive and supportive of female leaders, but the true impetus for change needs to come from within Palestine itself. This impetus must come from all segments of society and all religion but it may be up to women to start the process themselves. I believe that if all sectors of the female political sphere from voters to NGOs to the PNC could find a way to connect and work together, they would create a formidable force for peace: an Army of Roses focused not on destruction but on the creation of a present and a future that will benefit the generations to come.

The struggle of Palestinian women is incessant more so when they are under 'occupation' and have faced patriarchal as well as ecclesiastical tyranny. The resolve to fight oppression along with their menfolk is commendable and with the hope that there is light at the end of the tunnel I purpose to conclude:

“The future belongs to those who love nor hate
not to the timid but to the brave.”

Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University