

**GENDER AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION IN PALESTINE
WOMEN'S POLITICAL ACTIVISM BETWEEN LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL
AGENDAS**

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis takes a gender-sensitive approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and asks whether and how Palestinian women's different formal and informal political activism in 'peacebuilding' and 'resistance' can make a contribution to positive sustainable social and political change. Taking a bottom-up qualitative approach to conflict research, and deriving data mainly from in-depth interviews, participant observation and textual analyses, I problematise mainstream international conflict resolution and gender development approaches, revealing their mismatch with the Palestinian reality of prolonged occupation and settler colonialism on the ground.

I critique in particular two aspects of mainstream gender and conflict approaches: Firstly, the essentialist feminist assertion that women are better 'peacemakers' than men due to their (alleged) more peaceful nature, and, secondly, the 'liberal' peace argument that dialogue is the best (and only) way to resolve conflict. These two claims are hardly applicable to the Palestinian context, and their implementation through policy programmes can even block genuine political and social change. Through their tendency to trace the roots of conflict in social gender relations and at the level of identity, they tend to give a distorted depoliticised picture of the conflict. Doing so, they risk alienating local constituencies and might even exacerbate social and political fragmentation.

My analysis counters such (mostly western-originated) mainstream gender and conflict initiatives by starting from the local. Proposing a contextualised gender-sensitive approach to conflict transformation, which pays attention to intra-party dynamics such as 'indigenous' gender constructions and the political culture of resistance, I trace those forms of female political agency that are able to gain societal support and are conducive to sustainable social and political change. Bridging theoretical insights from the fields of conflict resolution and gender theory and questioning some of their widely held assumptions, I hope to contribute to knowledge in both fields.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

The system of transliteration used in this dissertation is that of the Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic (1979) with the following alterations:

ث = th

خ = kh

ذ = dh

ش = sh

غ = gh

LIST OF ARABIC TERMS

<i>'amal</i>	<i>hope</i>
<i>'arḍ</i>	<i>land</i>
<i>barāmij al-ḥiwār</i>	<i>people-to-people / dialogue programmes</i>
<i>°amal</i>	<i>work, effort</i>
<i>°eib</i>	<i>shame(ful)</i>
<i>°irḍ</i>	<i>honour</i>
<i>fidā'īyya</i>	<i>freedom fighter</i>
<i>ḥal aṣ-ṣira°</i>	<i>conflict resolution</i>
<i>ḥarām</i>	<i>forbidden</i>
<i>istislām</i>	<i>surrender</i>
<i>jam°īyya</i>	<i>small cooperatives</i>
<i>jīl al-thawra</i>	<i>the revolutionary generation</i>
<i>kifāḥ</i>	<i>struggle</i>
<i>lā °unf</i>	<i>nonviolence</i>
<i>muqāwma</i>	<i>resistance</i>
<i>muqāwma lā °unfīyya</i>	<i>(principled) nonviolent resistance</i>
<i>muqāwma sha°bīyya</i>	<i>civil (nonviolent) resistance</i>
<i>muqāwma silmīyya</i>	<i>(pragmatic) nonviolent resistance</i>
<i>niḍāl</i>	<i>struggle</i>
<i>salām</i>	<i>peace</i>
<i>ṣāmida</i>	<i>steadfast woman</i>
<i>ṣumūd</i>	<i>steadfastness</i>
<i>ṣumūd muqāwam</i>	<i>resistance steadfastness</i>
<i>taghyīr al-jaww</i>	<i>change of scenery</i>
<i>taṭbī°</i>	<i>normalisation</i>
<i>thawra</i>	<i>revolution</i>
<i>waṭan</i>	<i>nation</i>

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There is no shortage of views on women's involvement in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Media, academia and popular portrayal has reproduced predominantly the following three main images: Palestinian women as 1) passive victims of war, mourning the loss of their loved ones; 2) armed resisters ('freedom fighters' or 'terrorists'); or 3) 'natural peacemakers,' coming together with Israeli women in joint peace initiatives. These accounts, by focussing on macro-level and conventional mainstream political practices, tend to ignore the different (gendered) facets of Palestinian political culture and the widely diverging forms of agency that women find in this normative framework.¹

My study takes a bottom-up gender-sensitive approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Surveying and comparing Palestinian women's different types of formal and informal political activism in 'peacebuilding' and 'resistance' after 2000, I ask whether and how these different forms of female political agency can make a contribution to positive sustainable social and political transformation. More specifically, I ask whether 'peacebuilding' or 'resistance' is more effective in advancing national and gender emancipatory struggles. While mainstream international actors, such as international organisations or NGOs, through their 'liberal'² gender and conflict resolution discourse claim that peacebuilding (particularly dialogical conflict resolution) is most empowering for women, I argue that in the Palestinian context of settler colonialism and prolonged occupation resistance activism mobilises women more broadly and can potentially be socially and politically empowering. Mainstream gender and conflict resolution approaches, through their tendency to trace the roots of conflict in social gender relations and at the level of identity, tend to give a distorted depoliticised picture of the conflict. Doing so, they risk alienating and fragmenting local Palestinian constituencies.

¹ Not only literature on Palestinian politics is characterised by this focus on the macro-level. Middle Eastern scholarship in general has neglected to study subaltern politics in depth through ethnographic methods for reasons that can be traced back to Orientalist legacies as well as newly arising political agendas (see e.g. Cronin, ed., 2007; Bayat, 2010).

² I use the term 'liberal' not in its classic sense of denoting a system organised around the principles of free market, civil liberties and equal rights. Rather by 'liberal' I refer to the mainstream (predominantly western-originated) gender and conflict resolution agendas, that – as will be discussed in detail throughout the thesis – tend to emphasise *access to* rather than *transformation of* existing (discriminatory) systems as a pathway to social and political change (see e.g. Goodhand and Walton, 2009; Mac Ginty, 2008; Mac Ginty and Richmond, ed., 2007; Richmond, 2009a&b).

My analysis counters such (mostly western-originated) mainstream gender and conflict initiatives by starting from the local. I focus on ordinary women's practices, understandings and framings of political action, aiming at recovering those voices that have been marginalised in the mainly elite- and PA-led 'peace process,' as well as in the academic and media portrayal thereof. When comparing Palestinian women's different forms of peace and resistance activism, I am not concerned with judging their respective rationales (by, for example, condemning resistance as an obstacle to a formal peace deal), but rather do I aim at understanding how these rationales came about and function – both discursively and practically - in their own social, political and cultural context. I study not only practices, but also meanings and framings of women's politics to shed light upon intra-Palestinian dynamics. My gendered analysis of contemporary Palestinian political culture of resistance thus helps to trace those forms of female political agency that are able to gain societal support and might be conducive to sustainable social and political change. It is, I hope, a first step towards formulating more gender- and culture-sensitive approaches to conflict transformation.

1. Gender and Conflict Resolution

Mainstream scholarly literature dealing with conflict and conflict resolution, however, has rightly been criticised for being "gender-blind" (e.g. Reimann, 2004: 4). This is despite the fact that conflict resolution theory and praxis has recently considered the role of women in conflict more strongly, particularly since the UNSC Resolution 1325, which calls for increased participation of women in prevention, management and resolution of conflict, was adopted in 2000 (UNSC, 2000).³ The focus of most of these mainstream liberal accounts, however, is on women, not on gender dynamics, believing that women per se provide the key to conflict resolution. Women are understood to perceive security differently from men and approach peace from a relational, humanist perspective, rather than aggressive confrontational war-waging.

Studies on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are no exception. They have mainly focused on the relationship between the two conflict parties, assuming that war and peace equally affect, and are affected by, the whole of the occupied society. Most accounts neglect the varying impact

³ See chapter III for a theoretical analysis of UNSCR 1325 and Chapter V for a discussion of its content, interpretations and applicability in the context of the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

that conflict, peace- and state-building have on different constituencies of Palestinian society, and vice versa: the impact that different actors can have on conflict transformation and peace-building. My study seeks to overcome this gap. By employing a gender focus while defying essentialist views about women's alleged peaceful nature, I show that conflict not only influences different actors differently, empowering some, while disempowering others, but also provokes different reactions from different actors, resulting in a wide variety of female political agencies, including supposedly 'male' violent or radical ones, and a large set of (constantly changing) gender constructions and roles.

Political (/conflict) and social (/gender) transformations thus are closely interlinked. Conflict can strengthen conservative gender ideologies, restricting women's freedom; but the extreme and 'exceptional' situation of conflict can also offer 'opportunities' for women to enter spheres usually reserved to men. In the Palestinian case, as this thesis will show, the prolonged occupation and the resulting culture of resistance did enable some women to temporarily overcome patriarchal restrictions. This broadening of space for women's public political action, although sometimes accompanied by newly constructed femininities and gender norms, did, however, not permanently transform conservative gender ideologies. Studying gendered politics in the Occupied Palestinian Territories thus requires close observation of (and differentiation between) *practices* and *discourses* of female politics, and, furthermore, must trace how gendered cultural norms are produced and changed.

2. Culture and Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution praxis and theory, however, is seldom based on such a contextualised understanding of culture, i.e. of the specific conflict situation, its history, roots and the political cultures that develop in it. Just as gender, culture has been neglected in most studies of war and peace. If, however, we understand violence to be socially and culturally defined, then peacebuilding, i.e. the counteraction to this violence, must build on local resources. It cannot be merely based on the knowledge and forms of governmentality produced in the West, but must build on local practices and understandings of conflict and peace(-building) (see e.g. Goodhand, 2006: 39; Richmond, 2009a&b; Lederach, 1995; Avruch, 1998).

Conflict resolution studies dealing with Palestine/Israel rarely pay attention to, let alone integrate, the changing and multiple political cultures in their established peacebuilding analysis and programmes. Particularly, there is little thorough engagement with the dominant political culture of the resistance: Palestinian resistance is often considered a homogenous discourse uniformly promoting violent and militant actions. Stigmatised as (predominantly male) violent radicalism, resistance is considered by many conflict resolution scholars and practitioners a phenomenon they wish to avoid, not one which they consider they might be able to learn from.

Resistance does, however, constitute the main meta-frame for political action in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. A better (and gendered) understanding of the resistance groups' different discourses, that is, the identity constructions, perceived needs and realities of their male and female supporters, is needed to fine-tune conflict analysis and transformation. Particularly, a closer study of the different and constantly evolving gender constructions used in and for the resistance promises to provide useful insights for peacebuilding theory and praxis. The many pragmatic nonviolent types of resistance that women engage in can, as this thesis will show, provide first starting points for formulating more gender- and culture-sensitive and thus contextualised and sustainable conflict transformation approaches. Without doubt, development strategies aiming at bolstering Palestinian women's participation in peacebuilding must be rooted in the local social, political and cultural context, if they are to enjoy legitimacy and constituency. If the suggested form of activism does not relate to predominant ideational structures (i.e. existing gender norms and the political culture of resistance) and material realities on the ground (i.e. the occupation and dynamics of settler colonialism), it is likely to have little, or even detrimental, effects on both political (conflict) and social (/gender) transformation processes.

This study, by looking at the political culture of resistance in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, and, more specifically, at the different gender and identity constructions within the different resistance discourses, aims to unsettle (predominantly) western-normed liberal conceptualisations of women's political (particularly peace) activism. My ethnographic study of Palestinian women's formal and informal political agency provides a critique to mainstream gender development and conflict resolution approaches. By listening to and better understanding the 'other,' i.e. non-liberal, non-secular and non-professionalised, but first of all *political* constructions of femininity and masculinity as they evolve in the Palestinian

situation of prolonged occupation, settler colonialism and violence, I question and deconstruct the often self-referential and self-assertive logic of mainstream gender and peace politics (see also Väyrynen, 2004: 140).

3. The Palestinian Case Study

The Palestinian case study is particularly well-suited to offer such a critique. It provides an excellent example to trace the heterogeneity, evolving dynamics and potentials of non-conventional grassroots female political activism. While, of course, not representative of other women's movements in conflict areas, the Palestinian case, nevertheless, constitutes a critical and very interesting example, displaying a wide range of gender and conflict dynamics that could also offer alternative perspectives and bring up new questions relevant for other conflict contexts.

The long-time conflict and occupation have given rise to many different (and often conflicting) practices, discourses and framings of female political activism in the Palestinian Occupied Territories. Women's politics have been influenced by different macro-political arrangements, by changing internal political cultures evolving from, for example, the First to Second Intifada (Andoni, 2001; Johnson and Kuttab, 2001), by donor priorities (Jad, 2004a&b; Hanafi and Tabar, 2005) or by the domestic power-plays between, for example, Islamic and secular political forces (Sh'hada, 1999; Jad, 2005; Hammami, 1990). The specificity of the Palestinian women's movement, which makes it a significant and critical case study, is that women have over a period of more than 60 years had to find strategies to manoeuvre through internal and external political and social oppressions. Women did not expand their agency on an ad hoc basis in temporarily suspended, exceptional times of outbreaks of war, but rather this situation has become normal for Palestinian women and men.

In this reversed situation, where the 'exceptional' of violence, conflict and militarism constitutes the norm and the everyday, all women, not only the elites, have been and continue to be involved in politics in one way or another. Some are engaged in direct oppositional politics against the occupation regime (or against the PA), others have chosen the way of negotiation, involving themselves in dialogue groups with Israeli peace activists, and yet

others – the majority – try to find ways to get by and around the imprints of decades-long settler colonial policies in hidden, less spectacular and informal, yet still political, ways.

Palestinian women engage in a wide range of political actions and produce very different gender constructions when framing and making sense of their activism. When constructing different models of political femininities they selectively borrow from and merge internationally championed femininities (such as the professional ‘femocrat’ or the ‘peacewoman’), nationalist gender constructions (the female struggler/freedom fighter ‘*fidā’īyya*’ or the steadfast [peasant] woman ‘*ṣāmida*’), or even local models (the ‘professionalised/depoliticised’ city resident, the ‘politically-active’ camp dweller, or the ‘traditionalist’ rural woman). When making use of these local, national and international normative gender repertoires women are, however, not really free to ‘choose:’ how they frame their activism determines whether society supports or rejects their public political practices. Through their activism and its specific framing women activists thus align themselves with certain social and political powers, while (willingly or not) falling into opposition to others.

International gender and conflict interventions, transnational feminisms and women’s solidarity initiatives have had strong – but contradictory - impacts on the Palestinian women’s movement. Studying the differences and similarities apparent within this local movement thus addresses one of the fundamental questions of feminist politics and theory: how can the differences between individual local women, their identities and agendas for activism, be reconciled with (and in) a more collective, united, transnational women’s and/or feminist movement? What should be the basis of women’s transnational solidarity movements: a shared gender, feminist or political identity/agenda? Studying the impact that international agendas have in this local setting reveals the power structures that exist not only *between* but also *within* the different international and local feminist agendas and women’s strategies.

Palestinian local forms of political agency and feminisms are decidedly different from and often explicitly defined in opposition to western feminist movements, thus supporting non-Western feminist critiques (e.g. Mohanty, 1991) of the universalising and homogenising tendencies displayed by those western feminist schools that attempt to forge bonds between women around the globe along the lines of gender only. In the Palestinian context many non-secular, non-liberal forms of women’s activism have arisen. Although not entirely different, but rather in conversation with other feminisms, these alternative political engagements

highlight the importance to de-homogenise and de-essentialise ‘women’ and trace the ways in which gender oppressions (and feminist struggles against that) intersect with class, race, religious, and other affiliations to produce new political subjectivities.

The Palestinian women’s movement has been considered one of strongest grassroots movements and most visible agents for possible political and social change (Barron, 2002). Yet, it has also undergone fragmentation over the last decades, often as a result of local women’s leaders’ alignment with different international feminist and political agendas. Splits within the movement exist not only along the lines of socio-economic, religious or political backgrounds, but, within the recent years, became particularly strong between the older and younger generation of activists. The older generation of female political leaders, often as a result of their active involvement in the grassroots movements of the First Intifada, have traditionally entertained strong political party affiliations, but since the Oslo Accords, many of their leaders have become ‘professionalised,’ aligning themselves more strongly with liberal gender mainstreaming and empowerment agendas as promoted by the international community. As a result, the older generation of Palestinian women leaders have received strong criticisms from younger, from non-liberal, from more religious-based and/or from other local women activists who challenge not only the older generation’s agenda of professionalised feminist politics, but also their grip on social and political power.

These critical local women activists perceive mainstream international gender agendas to be part of rather than a solution to the conflict. In their view, liberal feminist agendas of gender mainstreaming or the UNSCR 1325’s ‘peacewomen’ agenda merely instrumentalise the ‘woman question.’ Issues pertaining to women’s struggles are often used in such mainstream agendas to provide a distorted analysis of political oppression which traces the roots of conflict at the micro-level of social (/gender) relations, rather than at the macro-level of political dynamics. Such an identity-focused gender analysis of conflict not only does little to advance women’s struggles on the ground, but can also be used as a pretext to legitimise international interventions into local politics.

In the Palestinian context, discrepancies between different feminist and political agendas, between the varying women’s activisms proposed by, and the often opposed gender constructions related to such agendas, is particularly played out in the field of peacebuilding. On the one hand, international donors and some local NGOs support women’s participation in

joint Palestinian-Israeli peace projects often advancing a liberal feminist and mainstream women's rights agenda which aims for reconciliation between the two sides. On the other hand, the majority of Palestinians reject such dialogical conflict resolution initiatives, considering them foreign-imposed and elitist policies that, at best, affect 'cosmetic' personal changes only, while leaving the political root causes of the conflict and people's everyday needs unaddressed. Instead of considering themselves 'peacewomen' who bridge national divides in dialogue groups, the great majority of Palestinian women rather see themselves as 'resisters.' Supporting and participating in various forms of nonviolent collective and everyday resistance, they find that such pragmatic action-oriented political activism has more potential to bring about and sustain social and political change.

Tracing these different practices, meanings and discourses of gendered peacebuilding and their potentials for change, can, I hope, make empirical, analytical and theoretical contributions to the fields of gender and conflict studies.

4. Empirical, Analytical and Conceptual Contributions

4.1. Empirical Contributions

Empirically this thesis continues a rich vein of scholarship on the Palestinian women's movement.⁴ With its focus on the post-Oslo era, and more specifically the post-2000 developments, it promises to give new insights on the changing nature of women's practices, understandings and framings of political action in a situation of prolonged conflict, occupation and settler colonialism. Situating these changing discourses and acts of peacebuilding and resistance within the wider framework of domestic and international agendas for women's empowerment and conflict resolution, I aim to give insights not only on women's activism, but also on the changing macro-level structural and discursive context to which women respond and through which they are negotiating.

⁴ For major works on the Palestinian women's movement see the following writings by Abdo (1994); Abdo and Lentin (eds.) (2002); Barron (2002); Fleischmann (2003); Galvanis-Grantham (1996); Hammami (1990); Hasso (2005); Giacaman, Jad and Johnson (2000); Jad (1990, 2004a&b, 2005); Johnson (2007); Johnson and Kuttab (2001); Kuttab (1993); Peteet (1991); al-Rawi (1994); Sabbagh (ed.) (1998); Taraki (eds) (2006).

Major changes in the social and political landscape have taken place in Palestine. At the macro-level the nature of international interventions, Palestinian-Israeli relations, and, most importantly, Israeli occupation policies in the Palestinian Territories have undergone profound changes, resulting in a more intricate matrix of control over Palestinian everyday life. Global and joint Palestinian-Israeli women's solidarity activism and feminist politics also transformed as a result of political developments, but also due to new directions set by mainstream international gender agendas (such as the UNSCR 1325) and more oppositional transnational feminist anti-war politics. These changes at the macro level have had influences on local Palestinian political and social activism. Israeli politics of spatial fragmentation have not only geographically divided Palestinians, but also broken up political and social organisation. The Palestinian community today is characterised by strong divisions between different political and social (including gender) agendas. The lack of a unified political (/conflict resolution) and social (/gender empowerment) agenda has shifted Palestinian women's practices and understandings of political action, enforcing a tendency towards more individual, covert struggles which often aim first of all at survival and stability, rather than radical long-term change of the status quo.

4.2. Analytical Contributions

On an analytical level the thesis provides a critique of both universalist liberal feminist, and postmodern (gender) identity-centred approaches to gender, conflict and women's political activism.

The Palestinian case studies shows that the essentialist liberal feminist assertion that women are better peacemakers than men due to their (alleged) more peaceful nature does not apply in a situation of prolonged conflict, occupation and settler colonialism. Instead of peacebuilding, the political culture of resistance provides a framework for women to perform public political actions. Given this preference of resistance over peacebuilding, Palestinian contemporary political culture contradicts the liberal peace argument that dialogue is the best and only way to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. By analysing – within their own context – the gender constructions used by Palestinian women to support their own indigenous conflict transformation (i.e. resistance) discourses and practices, I show that both a gender-essentialist approach that views women as naturally more peaceful, and a culture-essentialist perspective that sees resistance as necessarily gender-discriminatory, violent and without transformative

potential, not only are unable to grasp the complex web of intersecting forms of oppression that Palestinian women face, but might even be detrimental to their struggles for social and political change.

Instead, I follow a contextualised gender-sensitive approach to conflict analysis and transformation, paying attention to intra-party dynamics such as ‘indigenous’ gender norms and the political culture of resistance. Analysing the groups’ own discourses on gender constructions, i.e. how the activists themselves see their role as women in the conflict transformation process, I am interested to find out how these different discourses are perceived by Palestinian society more broadly. In particular, I aim to gain a deeper understanding of newly emerging gender notions (which tend to be a hybrid mix of local, national regional and international, secular and religious gendered political agendas) with a view to identifying those stances of female political agency that are able to gain legitimacy in contemporary Palestinian society and are conducive to sustainable conflict transformation.

4.3. Conceptual Contributions

The thesis bridges theoretical insights from the fields of conflict studies and gender theory. By questioning some widely held assumptions in both disciplines, I aim at assessing their potential for conceptualising the complexities of the Palestinian context and, in doing so, hope to contribute to knowledge in both fields.

At the level of gender theory, my study, by conceptualising gender identities as firmly political, yet not restricted to conventional, western-normed political subjectivities, contributes to a rising literature that portrays and theorises non-secular non-liberal political femininities and normativities in Middle Eastern and/or Muslim contexts (e.g. Mahmood, 2005; Moors and Salih eds., 2009). My analysis of Palestinian women’s unconventional ways of doing politics highlights the need to conceptualise political publics, which constitute and are constituted by such agency, not merely as uniform and secular, but rather as multiple, shifting, and combining secular and religious normativities as well as social and political agendas.

At the level of conflict resolution theory, the thesis enquires about the contribution that gender, as an analytical category, could make to theory and praxis of conflict transformation. A gender lens sheds light upon gender-specific ways of political expression which, often quite

different from male-dominated conventional politics, offer new insights not only on what we imagine as ‘the political,’ but also, more specifically, on the forms, cultural spaces and (counter-) publics (Fraser, 1992) for political agency.

Contrary to mainstream representations, resistance practices and discourses in Palestine take a variety of different shapes, ranging from nonviolent to armed resistance, from individual survival methods to collective political action, and from organised or ad hoc events to covert and quietly sustained everyday resistance struggles. A study of how particularly Palestinian women, in their gender-specific ways, devise survival tactics and resistance strategies, how they cope and create normality in the abnormal situation of conflict, violence and discrimination, reveals not only specific female (counter-)publics, but also the close interrelation that exists between social (/gender) and political dynamics, as well as between intra-party and inter-party developments.

The gendered analysis of conflict and conflict transformation, as adopted in my thesis, therefore does not foreground gender identity as cause of conflict, but rather uses a gender lens to gain a better understanding of domestic and micro-level social and political dynamics and - most importantly for conflict transformation praxis - their impact (or not) on broader macro-level change. I hope that my introducing of gender, as an analytical category, combined with the in-depth ethnographic study of Palestinian women’s activism, can make a contribution not only to conflict transformation theories, but also to studies on resistance and the interrelation between political and social agency and change, more broadly.

5. Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is structured into eight chapters, with chapter V, VI and VII presenting, analysing and theorising the main empirical data collected in the Palestinian Occupied Territories between 2007 and 2010.

In chapter II, I outline my research methods and methodology. I discuss the difficulties faced during the collection of empirical data itself, i.e. during the ethnographic encounter between researcher and researched, as well as during the process of writing up, i.e. when trying to represent ‘the other.’ One of the main underpinnings of the methodology I chose, which is

grounded in my own research experience in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, is the need to tackle the question of self and other (both in encounter and representation) through an historically-grounded and politically-contextualised approach in order to deconstruct culturally-essentialist binaries between researcher/researched, insider/outsider or indigenous/foreign.

Moving from research praxis to theory, chapter III takes UNSCR 1325 as a starting point to analyse the major theoretical underpinnings that the mainstream liberal approach to women and war is built on. Questioning both identity-based analyses that see gender as cause of conflict as well as universalist conceptualisations that consider women to be ‘naturally’ more peaceful than men, my theoretical conclusions in this chapter point to the importance of avoiding the prioritising of the discursive over the material. Instead I find that, in a context of long-term occupation and settler colonialism, a theoretical framework for research needs to bring to light the intersecting material forms of discrimination, and the impact they have on people’s lives, their scope for agency and norm constructions. I suggest that an intersectional approach to gender and conflict transformation, which views agency and (intersecting) material and ideational structures as mutually constitutive, offers more a promising starting point than the mainstream liberal approach to understanding the gendered aspects of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Chapter IV gives a brief historical overview of the Palestinian women’s movement. Situating the transformations that have taken place in discourse and practice of female political agency in Palestine within wider domestic and international political and social developments, I aim to identify the identity variables that, at particular moments in history and in interaction with macro-level structures, have had particularly strong influences on women’s ‘choice’ of political activism and construction of political femininities. I will show that socio-economic background, legal status and political party affiliation have affected the ways in which Palestinian women proposed and combined different nationalisms, feminisms and Islamisms. Although the Palestinian women’s movement has always been highly heterogeneous and even fragmented, its specificity, in contrast to feminist and women’s movements in established nation-states, remains that Palestinian women activists have always been united in never completely separating their social (/gender) from their political (/national) liberation struggle.

Chapter V, the first main analytical chapter, traces Palestinian women's different forms and framings of peace activism after 2000, the outbreak of the Second Intifada and the adoption of the UNSCR 1325. Analysing the recent attempts by different local and international actors to implement UNSCR 1325 in Palestine, I argue that the currently dominant interpretation of UNSCR 1325 continues a problematic trend of feminisation of peacebuilding. This interpretation derives from and reinforces the mainstream liberal feminist argument that women's participation in peacebuilding constitutes a win-win solution, in which women not only 'make peace better than men', but also, by gaining access to peace-and decision-making, 'become empowered.' Contrasting this liberal feminist stance, which is mainly operationalised in dialogical conflict resolution projects, with local women's approaches and their indigenous understandings of peace and peacebuilding, I argue that only a rights-based approach to UNSCR 1325 and other international gender and conflict interventions could further Palestinian women's national and gender struggles.

Moving from predominantly internationally-set agendas on women's peacebuilding to more locally-based approaches to political transformation, chapter VI traces and analyses Palestinian women's engagements in and framings of collective nonviolent resistance since 2000. Identifying that female nonviolent resistance has undergone a process of localisation, professionalisation and internationalisation, I provide a critical outlook on recent celebratory literature which views Palestinian collective nonviolent resistance as unquestionably emancipatory in intent and outcome. While not wanting to minimise Palestinian nonviolent resisters' courage and their 'heroic potential,' I prefer not to romanticise them as the 'new Palestinian revolutionaries.' Rather, I think the more interesting insights which a gendered and/or feminist critical analysis of particularly women's participation in nonviolent collective political action can offer, pertain to conceptualisations of political spaces, actions and expressions. Women's nonviolent resistance activism constitutes a political practice and form of engagement alternative and radically challenging to not only the mainstream liberal agenda of dialogical conflict resolution, but interestingly also to conventional male-dominated Palestinian social and political culture. Without a unified leadership, the social and political transformative potentials of such practices, however, remain limited.

Chapter VII continues the analysis of local conflict transformation discourses and practices, but shifts focus from public, collective nonviolent resistance acts to more hidden, individual everyday strategies and tactics of survival, coping and resistance. Using Palestinian women's

everyday forms of resistance as a diagnostic of changing power relations (Abu-Lughod, 1990b) I identify major changes in external power constellations of Israeli occupation policies, as well as in internal dynamics of political and social forms of male domination. Distinguishing between women's material and ideational everyday resistance, I argue that their acts should not be romanticised as necessarily being transformative, but rather should be understood as ambiguous acts which might be framed as targeting one level of oppression (e.g. the Israeli occupation), while at the same time seizing an opportunity to covertly challenge and trespass other forms of domination (e.g. internal patriarchal restrictions). Although my analysis cautions against viewing women's everyday strategies and tactics of survival uniformly and uncritically as forms of resistance, I nevertheless maintain that their everyday acts must be conceptualised as political expressions, even if they often remain unrecognised.

The concluding chapter VIII evaluates the different practices, discourses and framings of post-2000 Palestinian women's political activism, aiming at identifying empirical, analytical and theoretical contributions for gender and conflict transformation. I hope that my study not only brings to light the many and often very different female political subjectivities, but also offers focused guidance for formulating proposals towards strengthening women's struggles for potentially constructive social and political change in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

CHAPTER II

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

“IftaKH! IftaKH!!” – The loud aggressive voices of a group of young men, banging on the main metal door of our house ordering us in Arabic with a strong Israeli accent to open the door woke me up with a start. This must be a bad joke, I thought, maybe some friends trying to play a silly trick on me and my housemates. But when suddenly floodlights lit up my room brightly, it started to dawn on me that this might really be the Israeli army raiding our house at 4am in the morning. I froze and all sorts of questions ran through my mind: “Who are they looking for? Should I go and open the door? What if they start shooting?” But my dominant concern was to locate my passport. Just when I was trying to get out of bed in an attempt to reach it, my housemate, Mahmoud, whispered through the door: “Sophie, this is the Israeli army. They are downstairs arresting the son of our neighbours. They have been around the house for the last two hours. Did you not hear them? Come and join me and Liana for a tea in my room. But don’t make loud noise! We don’t want to attract their attention.”

I followed Mahmoud, having taken my passport first, and joined their nightly tea circle. There we sat the next two hours whispering, sipping tea and listening to what was going on outside. We heard how the Israeli soldiers ordered the whole family to line up on the wall outside the house, how they took their details, how they forced the family’s son into their jeep and how, once they had driven away with him, his mother was weeping in pain. We felt ‘besieged;’ we were caught up inside, silently witnessing what was going on outside. At times I felt guilty and thought whether as a German passport holder I should do more than just passively witness, whether I should perhaps make use of my privilege and interfere. Although we felt a strong sense of unity sitting there inside the ‘besieged’ and ‘occupied’ room together, I think, in the end, we experienced the raid very differently. It was clear that were we really to face the soldiers it would entail drastically different consequences for each of us. When the next day a friend responded to my story about the nightly raid by mocking me: “so now, Sophie, you think this raid has turned you into a real filastīnīyya, he?” I remained certain that it hadn’t.

The experience of the raid made me reflect on my role as researcher in a war-torn country both during fieldwork and when writing up ‘back home.’ Since I am not a ‘filastīnīyya I

experience things very differently from those I research - how then can I know that my interpretations of Palestinian women's actions would match or even come close to theirs? How can I make sure that my written (interpretive) representation does not pose obstacles but rather can contribute to positive change? What should be my role researching Palestinian women's lived experiences under occupation – should I act as silent bystander, a witness or even interfere in situations of Israeli infringements of Palestinian human rights? Should I take and make public my political judgements on Israel's policies in the Occupied Territories and on internal Palestinian politics? How would such public political declarations influence the relationship with my interviewees?

My goal to describe *practices*; understand, analyse and explain *meanings* and *framings*; and offer a critical-transformative outlook for possible *change* requires close attention to questions of *interpretation*, *positionality/reflexivity* and *representation*. In this chapter I aim to reflect on these issues. I will firstly discuss my choice of research methods and provide an overview of my sample. Sections 2 and 3 will problematise my research methods and methodology by offering a critical discussion of two (interrelated) issues which most significantly shaped my fieldwork and writing experience:

- (1) The 'crisis of objectivity' and related questions of self/other
- (2) The 'crisis of representation' and related questions of political positioning.

I will illustrate my views and problematise these debates with two encounters from my fieldwork when I employed my two main research methods: qualitative semi-structured interviews and participant observation.

The questions of how best to interpret, represent and critique are not easily resolved and continue to be debated by anthropologists, sociologists and other scholars whose work depends on intensive fieldwork. I therefore do not provide final conclusions, but rather will offer my thoughts on two points which I (in line with other scholars such as Abu-Lughod, 1986/2000, 1989, 1990a, 1993/2008; Said, 1978, 1989, 1993; Scheper-Hughes, 1993, 1995; Sharoni, 2006; Swedenburg, 1989; Narayan, 1993) consider crucial to bear in mind when doing and writing research in countries whose histories or presents are dominated by colonialism and/or occupation. Firstly, it is crucial to avoid reifying dichotomies of self/other through psychologist or culturalist explanations, but instead recognise similarities and trace

how historical and political structures shape(d) real material differences which in turn contribute to forging socially-constructed dichotomies between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Secondly, while recognising difference, research in highly asymmetric political conflicts cannot afford to fall into the traps of moral relativism and postmodern self-paralysis, but rather should be committed to some form of political positioning towards, moral engagement with, and positive transformation for the research community.

1. Research Design: Choice of Research Methods and Sample

1.1. Research Methods

At the heart of my study is an interest in the practices and meanings of Palestinian women’s political activism. I am interested to find out what forms of conflict resolution, peacemaking and resistance they engage in and what these practices, as well as broader concepts such as peace, nonviolence, resistance, peacemaking, conflict resolution, etc., mean to them. In my fieldwork I wanted to not only see what women *do*, but also understand what their actions *mean* (to them and others) and how they *come about*, i.e. how women’s agency is negotiated within a web of intersecting material realities and constructed social and political discourses. Additionally to my focus on *practices* and *meanings* of women’s different forms of political agency in conflict, I felt that my research should eventually also provide insights into possibilities for *change*.

I chose a combination of multiple research methods (participant observation, qualitative in-depth interviews, informal conversations, focus groups, and textual analysis) in order to gain multi-layered insights into practices, meanings and frames of Palestinian women’s political agency. My interest in not only their worlds (practices and material realities), but also their worldviews (meanings and normative structures) stems from the belief that any gender development and conflict transformation strategy must, if it is to yield long-term sustainable social and political change, relate to the observable situation on the ground, but also to the meanings, understandings and perceptions that exist within the conflict community.

1.1.1. Participant Observation

I spent a total of eleven months in mainly the West Bank. With my base in Ramallah, and later Bethlehem, I travelled regularly and widely in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and also spent a short visit (2 days) in Gaza. During my stay I tried to ‘immerse’ myself as much as possible into the Palestinian community and experience life as lived there. I often stayed for prolonged periods with families, particularly in towns and villages in the provinces of Tulkarm, Hebron, Ramallah and Jerusalem. I attended several dozen public political events (political in the widest sense) and tried to become a participant observer particularly in those community, NGO, protest, solidarity or joint Palestinian-Israeli meetings which focused on women’s issues and/or peacebuilding/resistance.

This immersion, sharing everyday routines and activities with my informants, provided me with intriguing insights into the material realities that dominate their lives as well as the practices they devise to resist these. Participant observation is particularly important in the Palestinian context, where there exist strong controversies on what people do and what the situation on the ground looks like. Seeing the material consequences of the occupation, the facts on the ground, is necessary to grasp the substantial power asymmetry that exists between occupier and occupied and understand the strong formative impact that the occupation has on Palestinian political culture.

1.1.2. Interviews, Informal Conversations and Focus Groups⁵

Yet, while this method allows observing Palestinian women’s agency directly, it gives little insights into the meanings and motivations that women attach to their specific activities. Their practices might even be misinterpreted due to insufficient knowledge about individual perceptions and social norms that structure Palestinian society. It might result in a ‘thin interpretation’ which fails to situate knowledge and meaning in the social, cultural and political context. I therefore complemented participant observation with in-depth interviewing, informal conversations and focus groups.

⁵ See Annex I and II for a complete list of interviews and focus groups. All interviewees’ names are, unless otherwise indicated, anonymised.

I conducted 84 qualitative semi-structured interviews⁶ with open-ended questions and pursued topics in depth as seemed relevant and appropriate with each person. Interviews were conducted in Arabic and English, depending on the interviewee's English language skills.⁷ Approximately half of my interviews were with official women leaders (of NGOs, political parties, joint Palestinian-Israeli women's groups etc). 26 out of these more formal interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and, if necessary, translated into English. The majority of these more official interviews lasted between one and three hours and could either take a more classic interview/respondent style or flow more naturally in the form of a guided conversation.

In the informal and sometimes spontaneous interviews with ordinary women, I generally preferred to take notes. These were more familiar, more like conversations and varied in length: they could be short 1-hour interviews (and then mostly focused on the interviewee's specific experience and situation) or take the form of extended conversations over several days (covering a wider range of topics). I also conducted five focus groups with usually between 10 and 20 women from different socio-economic, religious, gender, age in Bethlehem (Focus Group A & C), Ramallah (Focus Group B), Hebron (Focus Group D), and Jerusalem (Focus Group E). In three of the focus groups, I taped the conversation, in the other two I took notes.

All my focus groups and interviews, although different in length and style, dealt with similar topics and usually developed along similar lines. After a brief introduction in which I presented myself, my research topic and the information on consent and confidentiality,⁸ I started with a few standardised 'factual' questions asking about basic data on my interview partner and, in the more official interviews, about the organisation they were leading or working in. Then I moved to questions inquiring into the different forms of women's political practice. Towards the end of the interview, I usually discussed more personal and political topics relating to the various meanings of women's political practices, i.e. the individual and collective perceptions and discourses on the roles that Palestinian women play and are

⁶ During my last two research trips I conducted ca. 30 additional interviews on the topic of Palestinian refugees' political cultures. Although I do not consider these interviews part of my PhD research on women's political activism, the discussions with refugee women and men, of course, also inform my overall findings.

⁷ See the discussion below on how language usage impacted upon knowledge construction during the interview process.

⁸ See below for a detailed discussion on the issue of informed consent.

expected to play in conflict transformation and resistance. Although I had several predefined sub-topics with a few guiding and prompting questions, I did not seek to work down the list. I always left time and space to discuss other issues that participants considered more relevant and which promised to give the most interesting insights. By identifying topics and questions beforehand I aimed at guiding but not dictating the direction of the interviews.

Interviews and focus groups gave women the opportunity to voice their interpretations of and motivations for their actions. It helped me to better understand how women themselves perceive the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; what it means to them, and how, in their view, they could best contribute to positively transforming it. Particularly in the focus groups when women got engaged in (sometimes heated) discussions, I learned a lot about collective understandings and the discursive practices that determine how women *should* perceive and understand the conflict and how they *should* contribute to transforming it. Qualitative interviews and focus groups thus helped me to ‘thicken my description’ (Geertz, 1973) of women’s practices by situating them within the web of *individually perceived* and *collectively expected* roles of Palestinian women in conflict transformation.

1.1.3. Friends/Key informants

In the case of several informal interviews I decided to return to my interviewees to clarify certain points or carry on our conversations. Particularly with six of my initial interviewees I was able to establish more reciprocal relationships and they also became friends. I spent extended periods with them and their families, often staying over and/or travelled with them to see their friends and extended families. To protect them, I have chosen to anonymise their names and use the pseudonyms Najla, Amal, Karima, Lama, Adnan and Mahmoud. More details about their understandings and practices of political activism, as well as their quotes, perceptions, insights, explanations and life stories will be provided throughout the thesis. For now I only introduce them very briefly to highlight their very widely diverging backgrounds:⁹

Najla is an unmarried employee in the Ministry of Women’ Affairs in Ramallah, a practicing Muslim and originally from a village near Bethlehem. Amal is a midwife in East Jerusalem, mother of four, and used to be active in the communist party during the First Intifada, but has

⁹ I am not claiming here that my key informants ‘represent’ Palestinian society, but merely want to highlight their diverse backgrounds, life stories and outlooks. I will discuss the issue of representativeness in more detail below.

now become disillusioned with and retreated from politics. Karima is a Christian woman and peace activist from Bethlehem in her sixties. Lama used to be (at the time of my field studies) an employee in a Palestinian NGO in Ramallah that works in joint Palestinian-Israeli civil society projects, has five boys and, originally from Al-Askeri refugee camp in Nablus, was very involved in the First Intifada. Adnan is a father of four and a local leader of nonviolent resistance demonstrations against the wall in a village near to Ramallah. Mahmoud, who is originally from a refugee camp near Ramallah, is an unmarried employee in a Palestinian human rights organisation and very critical of the ‘people-to-people’ peace business.

Establishing close relationships, even friendships, in the field brings with it advantages and disadvantages; it is both “pleasurable” and “problematic” (Al-Ali in El-Kholi and Al-Ali, 1999: 35). On the one hand, taking part in my key informants’ daily life gave me insights into informal and more hidden forms of political agency, their everyday resistance strategies and tactics. Furthermore, the trust and reciprocity that characterised our relationship allowed me to discuss several issues in real depth, hear more controversial views and – most importantly – understand better how women’s individual life stories relate, of course, to broader macro-political developments, but also to their very personal and individual situation and decisions. “By focussing closely on particular individuals and their changing relationships,” as Lila Abu-Lughod (1993/2008: 14) has noted, “one could also subvert the most problematic connotations of “culture”: homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness.” Seeing and relating to my key informants’ different ways of being embedded in and manoeuvring within wider material and ideational structures thus helped me to deconstruct and overcome artificial dichotomies between insider/outsider or foreign/native.

However, on the other hand, blurring the lines of friend and researcher also brings problems. Sometimes when I met with my friends/key informants, I felt uncomfortable to ask questions related to my research. At times it was difficult to take on my role as researcher again without appearing to simply use the friendship opportunistically for my own research (see Al-Ali in El-Kholi and Al-Ali, 1999: 35). Although I had informed all of them about my research, the formal side of our relationship and the fact that I would go back to many of our conversations and write about them later on, often slipped into the background when we were together. I usually did not take notes during our meetings, but tried to listen thoroughly (see e.g. Anderson and Jack, 1991) and write our conversations down in the evening. From most conversations I remembered the details very well, from others I could recollect merely the gist

of it, and sometimes I would go back and ask for clarifications or exact wordings. With Karima, Amal and Lama I conducted a taped interview towards the end of my stay. Whichever way, it is clear that what was said in these conversations and the recorded interviews is influenced by our friendship and filtered through my own perspective.

1.1.4. Primary Textual Material

To get further insights into the socially constructed norms that provide possibilities and limits for Palestinian women's agency I collected various textual materials. I used both documents from women's and conflict resolution organisations, e.g. their promotion and representational material, but also documents portraying wider discourses in Palestinian society, such as speeches, popular slogans, newspaper articles or op-eds, particularly from the Palestinian daily newspaper Al-Quds and Al-Ayyam, but also web-based news portals, such as [www.maannews](http://www.maannews.com), www.alternativenews.org, www.electronicintifada.org or <http://www.imemc.org>. To shed light upon those notions of femininity which are considered legitimate and the ways in which women negotiate with these to broaden their spaces, I found the women's magazines "*Saut al-Nissā*" (published by the Women's Affairs Technical Committee), "*Banābir*" (published by the Working Women's Society) and the magazine "*Nūr*" very helpful. My analysis of textual material aimed at understanding the various meanings (i.e. the gender constructions) themselves, not - as is often the case in strict discourse analysis - the methods, techniques and processes through which institutions construct meaning.

1.2. Research Sample Overview

1.2.1. Access

During my first field trip, I started with a few interviews, mainly with officially registered women's or conflict resolution NGOs which I had selected on the basis of recent research or their web presence. I then proceeded by word of mouth, being guided from one interlocutor to the next. This technique of "snowball sampling" (Atkinson and Flint, 2001) helped me to locate potential interview partners, and to secure access to them, because the person who initially recommended the contact could act as my gatekeeper. In the Middle East, as elsewhere, such social networking is a common and effective way of establishing trust and

rapport. In the Palestinian conflict-torn and internally fractured society it is, furthermore, crucial to gain safe and secure access to interview partners.

While interview partners in formally registered organisations were relatively easy to locate, it took longer to arrange interviews with day-to-day activists, i.e. with ordinary women who organise loosely and informally in their local communities. Often such contacts were made through my key informants/friends or through other local contacts and networks. Generally, both Palestinian women and men had no objections to speaking to me. Wood, who undertook long-term field studies in El Salvador, asserts that “[t]his willingness of many residents of contested areas to talk about their personal and community histories at length with researcher (given the right introduction and setting) is common to many other ethnographies of civil wars” (Wood, 2006: 378).¹⁰ This comment applies to the Palestinian context as well. For many Palestinian women and men speaking to a researcher, telling their stories and voicing their interpretations and opinions constitutes part of their political activism (see Peteet, 1991).

1.2.2. Sampling

Sampling was not only probabilistic through ‘snowballing.’ I tried to diversify my sample of Palestinian women (and men) according to my informants’ age, residence, socio-economic environment, religion, and also gender (although, given my topic, I interviewed more women than men). My sample of Palestinian interviewees was composed as follows:¹¹

Age:

- *Nakba* generation (Born before 48): ca. 20%
- First Intifada generation (Born after 48): ca. 60%
- Second Intifada generation (Born in 80s): ca. 20%

Current Residence (by province):

- Ramallah: ca. 30%
- Bethlehem: ca. 20%
- Jerusalem: ca. 10%
- Nablus: ca. 9%
- Tulkarm : ca. 9%
- Hebron: ca. 9%

¹⁰ Wood (2006) cites studies by Nordstrom (1997), Green (1999) and Das (1992) to support the generality assumed in her statement.

¹¹ With my research focusing on *Palestinian* women’s activism, the great majority of my informants were Palestinian, but I also interviewed few Israeli and international activists involved in joint peacebuilding or nonviolent resistance activism.

- Salfit : ca. 5%
- Jenin: ca. 5%
- Gaza : ca. 3%

Current Residence (by socio-economic environment):

- Town: ca. 70%
- Camp: ca. 10%
- Village: ca. 20%

Religion (practicing and non-practicing):

- Muslim ca. 70%
- Christian: ca. 30%

Gender:

- Female: 80%
- Male: 20%

Although my sample covers a wide range of different actors, I do not claim that it is representative of Palestinian society or Palestinian women.¹² My research does not attempt to cover all Palestinian women, all forms of activism they engage in, let alone all forms of meaning they possibly attach to their practices. I merely chose the above criteria as identity markers when trying to diversify my sample and interview as wide a range of actors possible. I was particularly interested in finding out how certain macro-level developments impact upon the micro-level; how broader systemic structures impact on Palestinian women's lives and might thus influence their choices of resistance strategies (and vice versa). By diversifying my sample and speaking to as many different women and men as possible I was able to gain a more detailed understanding of collective patterns; it helped me to identify certain practices and meanings as more typical (or more exceptional) than others.

1.2.3. "Politically-Active Women"

One criterion common to all of my interview partners was their involvement in some form of political activism. It turned out that in the Palestinian context 'politically active' covers a very wide range of often informal activities. 'Official' political activism in, for example, political parties, is only entertained by very few women. Peteeet observed similar tendencies when researching Palestinian women's activism in refugee camps in Lebanon: "The distinction

¹² Although not representative of wider Palestinian society my sample corresponds in most respects to the actual distribution of the Palestinian population. For most recent census data see the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics at www.pcbs.gov.ps.

between ordinary and activist women that I had assumed existed was ambiguous and untenable as a device for planning research strategies. [...] vast numbers of camp women are active in the political arena without being official members of any organisation” (Petee, 1991: 10). A neat distinction between ‘politically active’ and other ordinary Palestinian women thus is not possible; boundaries between public/political and private are blurred and the ongoing conflict situation has politicised all.

1.2.4. Protection

Working in a conflict situation and politically charged environment increases the critical importance of reciprocity with and protection of informants. In Palestine the need to protect interviewees and their data is particularly important, given that there are various actors who could be interested in politically sensitive information. Israeli officials do not miss a chance to investigate and interrogate researchers about their planned or already undertaken activities. Fortunately, I never was questioned about my research topic by Israeli officials. In conversations with ordinary Israelis (for example in joint Palestinian-Israeli meetings), presenting my research with a focus on ‘peace’ or ‘gender’, rather than ‘political activism’ or ‘resistance’ usually kept scepticism low. Within Palestinian society, it was often the opposite: introducing my research as being concerned with women’s involvement in the ‘resistance’ would gain me more trust than framing it with the – for many Palestinians – hollow words of ‘peace’, ‘gender’ or ‘conflict resolution.’ Given the authoritarian political climate, internal factionalism and related suspicions that overshadow Palestinian political culture, I also had to make sure to keep information obtained from one source confidential from others. Particularly, in interviews with official women’s NGOs I often had to circumvent questions inquiring into other organisations’ funding sources, future projects, target groups, etc.

I decided to take informants’ oral rather than written consent, as for many of my interviewees signing a piece of paper might have made them feel uncomfortable (many of the older women I interviewed were illiterate) or even suspicious, given that once an informant’s name is on a piece of paper he or she can be more easily traced. Written consent, in a conflict context like the Palestinian-Israeli might alienate informants and can potentially even compromise their safety (see Woods, 2006: 380). When writing and publishing, it is equally important to pay attention to politically sensitive issues. I have decided to use pseudonyms for all of my interviewees, unless they specifically requested their names to be published. I will, however,

always provide some information on the informant's background to enable the reader to contextualise the statements. If I consider an interviewee's affiliation with or representative status of a particular organisation impacting on his or her argument, I mention the name of the organisation (rather than the individual).

Often the interpretations of events, discourses and practices proposed by my interviewees and by me diverge. Such tensions cannot be resolved in any analysis. While I do not on purpose withhold any of my findings or interpretations, I feel compelled to ensure that my critical interpretations will not endanger my informants. So, for example, while being critical of aspects of the mainstream liberal 'feminist peace project', I neither want to de-legitimise or brand as 'normalisers' particular Palestinian NGOs involved in joint women's people-to-people projects, nor do I want to endanger their funding from European and North American donors. I do, however, hope to provide critical insights which could contribute to making international gender and conflict resolution agendas more sensitive to the specific Palestinian context. Paying attention to politically and socially sensitive issues in my data gathering, interpretation and publishing has, at times, meant a delicate balancing act between the agendas of various competing positions. I have followed an ethical imperative of doing no harm to my informants and have given priority to the protection and emancipatory projects of my informants both during fieldwork and when producing written representations.

2. Fieldwork in Palestine

2.1. The Crisis of Objectivity

Scholars have long debated whether ethnographic encounters give direct access to events, perceptions and experiences, or whether knowledge derived from and in fieldwork is embedded and constructed in the specific context of the interview and research situation (see Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Mason, 2002). Several factors influence the intersubjective process of knowledge construction both during interviews as well as during subsequent interpretation and writing-up. A positivist claim to objective knowledge and truth is therefore rejected in this study; knowledge is never objective, but partial (Clifford, 1986) and situated (Haraway, 1988).

This section will deal with ‘the crisis of objectivity’ and the related question of self/other constructions. The interview extract below serves to introduce issues which I consider of importance to my fieldwork experience. I will argue that particularly research in non-‘Western’ contexts needs to avoid reifying dichotomies of self/other through psychologist or culturalist explanations. Instead it should strive to recognise similarities and trace how historical and political structures shape(d) real material differences and the construction of artificially opposed dichotomies between ‘us’ and ‘them.’

2.2. *In the Field: Did Mustafa Barghouthi Attend the Anti-Wall Demonstrations?*

It was the third time that I got on the small minibus which would take me on little winding roads through valleys, past olive groves, sheep herds and fortress-like Israeli settlements to one of the little villages outside of Ramallah that had been essential in initiating and sustaining the nonviolent resistance struggles against the wall. Women in this village had been particularly active in the anti-wall struggles, often leading the demonstrations and engaging in direct face-to-face confrontations with the Israeli soldiers. But before I went to speak with them, I first met with Adnan, one of the leaders of the village’s local popular committee which organised the demonstrations. He invited me to his house, meeting the family and kids, participating in Ramadan festivities and long discussions, in which he too emphasised the women’s role in the demonstrations: ‘Our women, you know, are stronger than in other places. Our village has a special history of struggle and women have always taken part,’ he had told me.

Now, on my third visit and after long hours of discussions, he called his daughter, Asma, to take me to speak with Ilham. Ilham is a single woman in her forties who lives a simple peasant life and whom Adnan had characterised as ‘one of the strongest (qawīyya) women here’. Indeed, Ilham was strong! When I asked her whether she minds if I use the recorder, she just waved the question away and told me in her strong rural dialect ‘I tell everything to anyone, there’s nothing secret about what the Israelis do to us!’

This interview didn’t need much warming up. Ilham immediately moved to the topic of the wall and her participation in the demonstrations. She spoke very quick, raising several significant, but not always connected issues. So Asma started to interfere contesting Ilham’s reconstructions of past events (and their meanings) and trying to translate her dialect into an

Arabic more easily understandable for me. Below is a short extract of our (recorded) conversation:

Ilham: *They [the Israeli army] uprooted the trees. So we went out [to protest]. But the second day they imposed a curfew. They said that whoever leaves the house will die. So me and my female paternal cousins we left the house. We walked here through the back [pointing to the way they went]. We said: ‘Let them shoot at us! We want to go down there.’ All the women came with us. There was the guard and the soldier who was driving the bulldozer. They were uprooting the olive trees, that of our neighbours, and ours. When I saw them doing this I went crazy. So I started fighting with them. All women were confronting them and then it happened what happened (sār ilī sār): The whole village came down, even from Ni’lin and from Kibiyya [other nearby villages]. All of them came. Mustafa Barghouthi even came from Ramallah...*

Asma: *No! Mustafa Barghouthi came at the very end, not at that time.*

Ilham: *Yes, Allah yakramho – he came last.*

Asma: *Indeed, he came last! Just when the resistance was over and when the Israeli army had left, then he started talking [to the public] about what happened in the demonstrations. Great! You didn’t even come here! How do you want to know what happened?*

Me: *He just came in the end so that he could say he also was there?*

Ilham: *Yes. You know from us, the whole village was here and we were resisting them [the Israeli army]. But those from far [meaning those from the city], they would just come and watch and then they would go again... We went everyday and we fought with them [the Israelis]. So many people of the village got injured! How much we suffered from the tear gas! Everyday we had new confrontations and problems with them! Everyday! Then they stopped for a bit, and then they took our land. A lot was lost. All the harvest and wheat - all went. We lost it...*

Asma’s and Ilham’s contestations on whether and when Mustafa Barghouthi came to the protests offers an intriguing example to shed light upon the intersubjective knowledge construction process during the ethnographic encounter. Looking at Ilham’s narrative illustrates that memory does not provide direct access to given facts. Rather, her (re-)constructions of past events are sporadic and intuitive, not factual. How she recollects events is less about what actually happened, but rather how she perceived it and what she considers

of importance both for herself and for me, the researcher. Additionally, Asma, being the daughter of one of the powerful village leaders, of course, also impacted on what Ilham would say or not say to me.

Mustafa Barghouthi is a prominent internationally well-known Palestinian community leader, who, with his recently founded political initiative *al-Mubādara*, has publicly supported nonviolent civil resistance. For an ordinary peasant woman like Ilham, Barghouthi is one of the ‘big guys’ from Ramallah with little relevance or concern for her daily struggles. Among the events and consequences related to the construction of the wall in her village, it was clearly not Barghouthi’s visit, but rather, as the rest of the abstract shows, the loss of her farmland and livelihood which left the deepest and most devastating imprint on her. Nevertheless, she considered the story of Barghouthi’s attendance a good way to communicate the significance, impact and size of her village’s demonstrations to me. I was perceived by her as a foreign researcher from Ramallah and she used the point of Barghouthi’s attendance - although neither contextually nor chronologically fitting into her narrative at that point - to make the link between her and my ‘worlds.’

Asma, whom her father had instructed to ensure that the women I was to interview would not lecture me, on the other hand, wanted to make sure that I could follow Ilham’s narrative and that I would not be misinformed about the organisation and power constellations in the Palestinian popular nonviolent resistance scene in her village and beyond. That is why she felt compelled to intervene and make sure that I understood that Mustafa Barghouthi was ‘just a guest’ and not a leader of nonviolent resistance against the wall. I knew from discussions with her father, that there existed a fierce power struggle between the village community leaders who predominantly had initiated, sustained and themselves participated in the struggles and the urban NGO or political party leaders who – according to Adnan – tried to hijack and proclaim themselves as leaders of the anti-wall struggles in an attempt to boost their national and international standing. Once Asma had raised this issue, Ilham thus shifted from celebrating Barghouthi’s visit (and using it as a link to what she perceived to be ‘my world’) to joining Asma in her critical stance on urban NGO leaders. Speaking from her more powerful position as daughter of one of the village leaders, Asma ‘corrected’ Ilham’s statement on Barghouthi’s visit and thus impacted on the ways in which ‘facts’ were reconstructed. Ilham, however, quickly returned to the most significant meaning and impact that the construction of the wall in the village had on her life: the loss of her farmland.

2.3. Positionality and Intersubjectivity

The extract highlights that knowledge derived from interviews, informal conversations, focus groups, participant observation and other ethnographic methods is constructed intersubjectively, power-laden and influenced by a multitude of issues, such as location of interview, timing, other people's presence, (the interviewees perception of) the interviewer's identity (such as language skills, gender, age, socio-economic background, nationality, religious or political affiliation, etc.) and various other possible dynamics (see e.g. Clifford, 1986). Without denying the complexity, fluidity and contextuality of my identity in the field, I try to pinpoint below the most significant identity markers - whether ascribed or self-perceived - from which I understand, speak and represent.

2.3.1. Language

I conducted ca. one third of my interviews in English (mainly those with the urban women leaders of political parties or NGOs) and two thirds in Arabic (mainly with day-to-day activists in rural areas and camps, including my key informants). In some interviews I spoke predominantly Arabic, but, from time to time, switched to English, either if I was unable to express a specific point adequately in Arabic or because my informants wanted to practice their English. Arabic also was the language used in the focus groups, as this helped to make participants feel more comfortable and reduce power differentials stemming from their different English language skills. One of my focus groups was initially packaged as an English language class for the participants, but after the first ten minutes in which only those women who mastered English well had spoken, I preferred to continue the discussion in Arabic to make it more inclusive and lively. At few occasions third persons offered to act (or in fact imposed themselves) as interpreter. I normally tried to avoid ad hoc translations during the interviews, as I felt that this not only disturbed the interview flow and the relationship and trust between me and the interviewee, but also could result in yet another (the interpreter's) twist to original answers.

Most of my interviewees appreciated that I could speak to them in their language and, particularly (but not exclusively) women from rural or camp areas, preferred to explain their understandings and practices of resistance in their own mother tongue. Many of my interviewees asked me where I had learned Arabic. My explanations that I lived in Damascus

for a year would often develop into a brief chat about the differences between the Palestinian and Syrian dialect (or food, or music, or people, or landscape, etc...), thus creating a more familiar atmosphere. Several of my interview partners commented on this, saying that they didn't feel much distance between us – as when, after a two-hour interview in Arabic, one of my interviewees commented to her friends and colleagues: 'Sophie, she is like one of us (*zaynā*)'.

On the other hand, not being a native Arabic speaker meant that on occasions there remained some glitches in communication, particularly if highly conceptual or abstract topics were discussed. For example, when I wanted to establish the exact meaning of specific Arabic terms and compare them to their English equivalent, such as 'nonviolent resistance' (*muqāwma sha^cbīyya / lā^cunfīyya*), 'conflict resolution' (*ḥal aṣ-ṣira^c*) or 'dialogue/people-to-people projects' (*barāmiḥ al-ḥiwār*), I often had to re-visit, discuss and clarify my interviewees' answers. In cases where I was not sure whether I fully understood my interviewee's explanations, I made a note for myself and later sought explanatory help from them or one of my key informants/friends.

A great majority of the interviews with NGO or political party leaders in Bethlehem, Ramallah and East Jerusalem were conducted in English. Most of my interviewees from this group spoke good English and were experienced in giving interviews to foreign researchers and journalists. While my explanations of the interview procedures including issues such as informed consent, anonymity or recording, were often received with amazement by many of the ordinary women who had never been interviewed before, they seemed well-known to the 'professional' urban leaders. It was also relatively easy to relate more abstract questions about social norms, conflict resolution or gender dynamics to these 'professional' English-speaking informants, since many of them were educated in the West and used to concepts and analytical frameworks established in the Anglo-Saxon and North American academic tradition. Often, when trying to illustrate their points to me, informants from this group would use terms such as 'gender' or 'conflict resolution' or make references to internationally known political, academic or media figures and literature.

On the other hand, I often felt that their adoption of western-originated and/or -dominated conceptual frameworks, a language not their own, and a more professional communication style also kept them at a distance from me. Some of the interviews conducted in English were

very formal and politically correct in style and content. It was clear that many interviewees had heard my questions, particularly if relating to joint activities with Israeli women, before. Their answers sometimes seemed trained and somewhat superficial. This might, of course, be a result of institutional politics and allegiances, but I think it also stems – at least in some cases – from limited vocabulary and flexibility in English. Nearly all of the women involved in dialogue projects with Israeli women, for example used the phrase “to break down barriers” or “to break the ice.” I felt that in interviews conducted in English, some of my informants would, by speaking in English rather than their native Arabic, put on their ‘professional hat,’ speak less from their heart and instead use professional, but often empty English phrases. In that sense, English could constitute a problematic extra filter in mediating their direct experiences perceptions and opinions to me.

2.3.2. Third Party Presence

In several of my interviews, particularly the less formal ones, I was not alone with the women I spoke to. Interviews took place not at a desk with notebook, pen and recorder ready in front of me, but mostly were conducted in the kitchen, while cooking dinner, feeding children, cleaning dishes or taking a break from work over a cup of coffee. Children were around most of the time in such informal settings and very often I was happy to benefit from the familiar and unofficial atmosphere that they created by telling me jokes, doing some *dabka* improvisations or practicing their English homework. Staying in family houses, participating in women’s everyday life and sharing their daily work proved to be among the most fruitful occasions to gain insights into the practices and meanings of women’s more informal ‘hidden’ resistance strategies.

Another – more complicated – instance of third party presence was constituted by male ‘gatekeepers’, that is male community leaders who facilitated my access to women in the community. One of my ‘gatekeepers’, for example, was Adnan, whose daughter Asma took me to interview Ilham. While Asma’s presence at the interview clearly did influence the power dynamics and course of this interview, those interviews where a male community leaders was present often proved to be even more power-laden. In one town in the North, for example, I was fortunate to know Muhammad, a former Fatah fighter turned nonviolent resistance activist. Muhammad welcomed me into his home for many days and weeks and I became particularly close to his wife and daughter. He also arranged several interviews with

women activists and former political prisoners who resided in the town's refugee camp. In those interviews Muhammad stayed in the room and sometimes translated or added his comments and explanations. I appreciated his help, but, in comparison to women-only interviews, I felt that his presence influenced the interview process significantly, often adding a more official tone to it. This was particularly so, because the women, sharing their political party affiliation with Muhammad and – in the case of some, I think – depending on his support and goodwill in party politics, were constrained in what they could and could not say to me. I discuss both the issue of gender and political positioning below.

2.3.3. *Gender or Women's Methodology?*

Much has been written on the issue of whether and how gender affects the ethnographic encounter and, in particular, the interview situation.¹³ Some contend that gender influences, firstly, the internal dynamics of an interview, arguing that women respond differently to male interviewers (Williams and Heikes, 1993), secondly, the methodology used during interviews assuming, for example, that women interviewers are more likely to lead non-hierarchical, open-ended, subjective and thus non-positivist interviews (Oakley, 1981), and, finally, the quality of interview data interpretation, claiming that female scholars are more likely to correctly interpret women's words, since women use language differently from men (see Gilligan, 1982).

Gender without doubt did play a role in my field research; nevertheless I would not want to essentialise women's voice or nature. In line with other female scholars carrying out fieldwork in Middle Eastern countries, I found that as a female researcher I could gain dual access to both men and women and thus “actually enjoy *more* access than male researchers” (Schwedler, 2006: 425; see also Abu-Lughod, 1986/2000: 23). Many of my interviewees, as explained above, became friends, whom I met on a regular basis, who invited me for festivities, food or to stay over the night. It would have been more difficult, if not impossible, for a male researcher to establish such a close relationship with female informants. Furthermore, just as Abu-Lughod noticed during her research with Bedouin women in Egypt, I also found that “[b]ecause relations in the women's world are more informal than in the

¹³ See Herod (1993) for a concise and clear overview of gender issues in interviewing and Ribbens and Edwards (1997); Maynard and Purvis (1994); Ramazanoglu (2002); Fonow and Cook (1991) for more detailed discussions on gender and qualitative research. See Visweswaran (1997) for a historical overview of feminist ethnography and Strathern (1987); Stanley (1988); Abu-Lughod (1990a) and Visweswaran (1988, 1994) for discussions of the possibilities, potentials and pitfalls of such a project.

men's, I was able to get beyond polite conversations more quickly" (Abu-Lughod, 1986/2000: 16; see also Abu-Lughod, 1985). Contrary to Western stereotypical assumptions which claim that female researchers face additional problems during their field studies in Arab countries, I thus found that I enjoyed privileges.

To argue, however, that there is something specific about women's methodology or about ethnographies written by women "in a woman's voice" ignores women's different standpoints, experiences and voices across cultures and other intersecting lines of division such as class, age, nationality, ethnicity, sexuality etc. Such a position, as Abu-Lughod has pointed out, is increasingly untenable: "However attractive the prospect of associating certain positive qualities such as sensitivity, care, attention, embodiment, or egalitarianism with women and their projects, one finally had to confront the fact that these "feminine virtues" belonged strictly to a contemporary Euro-American subculture" (Abu-Lughod, 1993/2008: 4, see also Abu-Lughod, 1990a). Gender only constitutes one – and not necessarily the most significant – variable among many which influenced my fieldwork. There were other identity features (intersecting with gender), which gain importance in the Palestinian situation of heightened conflict and political polarisation.

2.3.4. Class

Class emerged as a crucial marker of identity impacting upon my field studies in various ways. Firstly, the topic and style of interviews with middle-class, mainly urban-based women leaders differed from those conducted with women from lower socio-economic classes. Such differences were not only due to the language used in interviews,¹⁴ but also stemmed from women's different life experiences and forms of activism. NGO and political party leaders, being concerned mainly with mobilising, organising and funding women's activism, often preferred to speak about strategies for and meanings of women's activism. Interviews with women from lower classes, on the other hand, tended to be less abstract and more focused on practice. They predominantly told practical life stories of when and how they confronted the Israeli army, how they struggled to maintain a livelihood for themselves and their family, or of the great efforts and time they spent with Israeli bureaucracy trying to arrange permits and licenses. When interviewing ordinary women, I always tried to link my questions to their

¹⁴ In the Occupied Territories class and socio-economic background often intersect with language skills. As discussed above, Arabic was mainly used in rural areas and camps while English was the primary language in interviews with urban leaders.

everyday life and, rather than asking, for example, about gendered norms and discourses, enquired about their own experiences, practices and concerns.

Secondly, class differences also played a role in my interaction and relationship-building with my interviewees. I did not feel much difference in terms of socio-economic and educational background with the middle-class women leaders, many of whom were educated in European or North American academic institutions. I noticed that most of the more experienced interviewees (who often had long-standing involvement in, particularly joint, peace activism) expected me to be interested in and supportive of the idea of women's joint peacebuilding - a tendency that, I think, was due to the strong, mainly uncritical, academia and media interest that such joint women's projects have received, particularly from Israeli, North American and European feminist researchers. Some informants spoke in flattering terms about women's joint activism, clearly tailoring their answers to what they thought a non-Palestinian researcher would expect and want to hear. It was often only after I had voiced doubts about certain aspects of women's dialogue groups and their underlying assumptions and had inquired very specifically into the limits and problems of such projects, that they would open up and voice their concerns with joint peace-building more frankly.¹⁵

I never felt much distance with women from lower classes, although, of course there were certain issues, such as educational or socio-economic background in which I was privileged. Some of the ordinary women in villages or camp would associate me at first sight with the urban (Palestinian and international) NGO elite, such as Ilham when she referred to Mustafa Barghouthi to make a link to 'my world'. Such ascribed identity traits however, usually did not persist and I did not find them to be significantly impacting on my relations with my informants. Most of the time women from poorer backgrounds, particularly those involved in struggles to sustain their own smaller women's cooperative organisations in the villages or camps (*jam'īyyā*), were not shy to voice their criticism of urban women leaders and the NGO elites. They saw our encounter as 'a window to the world' and an opportunity to inform me about the elites' monopolising of donor money, future development agendas and media/academia representation. Usually my efforts to go beyond the major urban

¹⁵ I am aware that voicing my critical position (on for example women's dialogue groups) could direct responses of my informants. In order to avoid driving them into self-censorship or fake support, I tried, whenever possible, to give examples of certain events I witnessed or discussions I had to highlight contradictions inherent in, for example, the feminist peace project and then ask the interviewees for their opinion and explanation on the matter.

conglomerates were welcomed and used by ordinary women to get their voice and criticism heard.

With women from lower classes my privileged position thus never constituted an obstacle for establishing a trustful relationship. To the contrary: at times particularly my privilege of being more mobile, proved to be a way through which I could ‘give something back’ to my informants by, for example, delivering presents or bureaucratic paperwork (such as visa applications) to other parts of Palestine which for many were impossible to reach. Being perceived and acting as support or resource person for my informants thus did not conflict with my role as a researcher, but rather strengthened reciprocal relations between us. Nevertheless, the unequal power dynamics between us, of course, never vanished completely. Sometimes, particularly when I was asked to do things out of my reach – such as arranging visas or finding jobs or scholarships in Europe – I felt uncomfortable and worried that whatever I could give back would not meet their expectations or match the help and generosity with which they had supported me.¹⁶

2.3.5. East/West Divisions: Culture or Geopolitics?

The dichotomous understanding of ‘East’ vs. ‘West’ still continues to be perceived as one of the main dividing lines distinguishing an ‘insider’ from an ‘outsider’ researcher. Those who are attempting to study social, political, economic or cultural institutions and phenomena of the ‘others,’ this narrative goes, will find it much more difficult to make sense of what they see and hear during their fieldwork than so-called ‘insiders’ or native researchers. Such culturalist arguments often falsely seek refuge and support from two major anthropological concepts: Geertz’ (1973) Interpretive Theory of Culture and Said’s (1978) Orientalism.

Geertz, in his conceptualisation of “cultures as texts” has proposed that researchers, if they want to understand and ‘decode’ people’s practices, need to give a “thick description” of the context, i.e. the “systems of construable [publically shared] signs” (1973: 14) which shape people’s actions. Although Geertz in fact emphasises that culture is learned (1973: 44) and therefore fluid and heterogeneous, he nevertheless retains his focus on culture and thus might invite narrow culturally-essentialist analyses of social action. Abu-Lughod in her attempt to “write against culture” has criticised such a culture-centric approach which reifies artificial

¹⁶ Al-Ali and El-Kholy (1999) when discussing their fieldwork experience in Egypt voice similar concerns.

dichotomies between ‘us’ and ‘them’: “Despite its anti-essentialist intent [...] the culture concept, retains the tendency to make difference seem self-evident and people seem “other”” (Abu-Lughod, 1993/2008: 10, see also Abu-Lughod, 1989). One of the commonly drawn borders in such culturalist approaches is that between ‘East’ and ‘West’.

Said’s (1978) critique of western Orientalist scholarship for (mis-)representing the East has often been misunderstood by culture-centric approaches as emphasising difference and dichotomies between ‘East’ and ‘West.’ Just as Geertz’ writing it has been appropriated as a refuge for those wishing to reinforce artificially opposed and homogenised binaries between ‘us’/‘them,’ researcher/researched, ‘East’/‘West;’ ‘insider’/‘outsider,’ ‘indigenous’/‘foreign,’ etc. in scholarly as well as popular accounts. Essentialising, constructing and knowing the other as different from the self, as Said originally argued in *Orientalism* (1978) however has less to do with actual differences, but is a political act, a project of imperial domination aiming at establishing hierarchies and epistemic power over the (constructed) other. In line with several other postcolonial writers (such as Abu-Lughod, 1989; Lazreg, 1988; Hall, 1996; Spivak, 1988) Said has emphasised that such constructed binaries between self and other have their roots in real material and geopolitical differences between the North and South, East and West.

If we no longer think of the relationship between cultures and their adherents as perfectly contiguous, totally synchronous, wholly correspondent, and if we think of cultures as permeable and, on the whole, defensive boundaries between polities, a more promising situation appears. Thus to see Others not as ontologically given but as *historically constituted* would be to erode the exclusivist biases we so often ascribe to cultures, our own not least (Said, 1989: 225, emphasis added; see also Said, 1993).

Paying attention to the impact that historical and political processes as well as current geopolitical constellations have on understandings of self and other thus unmasks cultural essentialism as a political project. Nevertheless culturalist arguments and dichotomous thinking which essentialises people and communities into ‘East’ and ‘West’ still hold sway (Al-Ali, 2000: 19-50). Such processes of othering are not unidirectional: Orientalist constructions of the ‘East’ are countered by Occidentalist understandings of the ‘West’ - ideas

of incompatibility of 'East' and 'West' are thus upheld on both sides. In my conversations and interviews with Palestinian activists such dichotomous interpretations were also voiced. Answers such as 'this is our culture, you know, it is difficult for you to understand' brought home to me the message that while essentialist binaries might have been deconstructed theoretically, this does not mean that they also have vanished from the popular, let alone political scene (see also Al-Ali, 2000: 19-50; Hall, 1996).

Yet, my interviewees, although often initially packaging their understandings of 'East' and 'West' in terms of culture, also never missed to stress the historical and current political role of Europe and the US in perpetuating the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Constructions of 'East' vs. 'West' thus have political roots and my informants' occidentalist and self-orientalising answers should be seen as reaction to geopolitical power constellations rather than springing from cultural differences. The fact that constructions of the other always are political projects, but particularly so in politically-heated and conflict-torn countries with a colonial history and present such as Palestine, becomes clear if one looks at the range of various 'others' that are constructed. Usually my informants identified not only 'Westerners' as others, but also shored up their own identities against constructions of internal political opponents. Often the divide between 'real' grassroots and 'elitist' NGO leaders was stressed (as in Ilham's and Asma's accounts above), but more often the identified internal other was chosen along political party lines.

2.3.6. Political Positioning

In the field I was regularly grilled by Palestinians, Israeli and internationals about my political views of Israeli and Palestinian politics. Generally I tried to avoid heated political discussions, particularly as regards Palestinian domestic politics. This also proved to be a way to gain legitimacy and credibility as researcher. Of course, in order to gain a more detailed understanding of people's political views, it was necessary to engage in in-depth political discussions with 'locals,' but I generally preferred to limit conversations on domestic politics (e.g. Hamas/Fatah factionalism) to people I had known for long and trusted, like my key informants/friends.

Disclosing my critical viewpoints of Israeli policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territories was unproblematic with most Palestinians I spoke to. Many of my interviewees drew up

differentiations between the ‘good foreigners’ (who are in solidarity with Palestinian resistance to the occupation) and the ‘bad foreigners’ (who support superficial peace and dialogue projects). My work, being a critical enquiry into the effectiveness of the mainstream liberal peace and dialogue agenda was usually associated with the former. In interviews with my Palestinian informants, disclosing my political positioning towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (and at times correcting wrongly ascribed identity markers, opinions or political standpoints) was thus often a necessary step towards establishing trust and a frank atmosphere.

In joint Palestinian-Israeli meetings, particularly if without much critical political depth, I often felt uncomfortable to reveal my views on Israeli politics or the fact that I resided in the West Bank. Particularly the Israeli participants wanted to know why I arrived together with the Palestinians, what my reasons of being there or my institutional affiliations were. I was often dragged into political discussions about current political events or asked to comment on particular incidents, Israeli political decisions or the nature of a particular joint Palestinian-Israeli projects. In general I tried to stay an observer during the joint meeting and neutral in such cross-questioning, but this was not always possible. Depending on my conversation partner, I sometimes shifted between ‘impartially researching’ and ‘politically committed’ (to ending the occupation).¹⁷ What these shifting positionings show is that my role and identity as fieldworker was never fixed. I was constantly “shuttling between two or more worlds” (Visweswaran, 1994: 119) and the different degrees to which I would reveal and feel ready to discuss and defend my political viewpoints reflected the uncertainties that fieldwork in this specific context of long-term military occupation entails.

2.4. Towards a Historically-Grounded Feminist-Deconstructive Approach to Self/Other

It is impossible to identify and evaluate all variables that influenced my field research and my interpretations of women’s political practices; the significance of each depends on the specific context of the encounter. While reflexive attention to difference and positioning is necessary to give an honest portrayal of the (inter-)subjective nature of my analysis, I consider it similarly crucial not to reify difference by falling into the traps of individualistic-psychological or essentialist-culturalistic approaches. Abu-Lughod has convincingly criticised

¹⁷ My detailed reflections on how to best combine or tread the line between academia and solidarity activism will be discussed in the next session.

the limited focus on (how to overcome) difference, as put forward particularly in reflexive ethnographical approaches of the 1980s (e.g. Clifford, 1986):

What worries ethnographers now is not the history of the creation of the distinction between self and other, but how possibly to communicate across the divide, how to dialogue with the other. That there is an “other,” with the corollary that there is a self which is unproblematically distinct from it, is still assumed. To question that assumption would be to look at the relationship between anthropology, colonialism, and the racism in the construction of the Western self (Abu-Lughod, 1990a: 24-25).¹⁸

By constantly being concerned with how to overcome difference, reflexive scholarship might thus risk reifying and essentialising difference, rather than tracing roots and processes through which they came about. Acknowledging that differences have roots in real material, political and historical processes are mostly constructed and not a natural stemming from ‘culture,’ helps to situate and contextualise people’s actions and the meanings they attach to them. It helps to understand their practices as meaningful, as human and not something that needs to be ‘decoded’ through overly complicated (and false) processes of becoming an ‘insider.’

It is at this point that feminist methodologists, who have long debated and struggled with the difficulties of maintaining political force and unity while acknowledging difference, can contribute to qualitative research by highlighting that selves are partial, multiple, shifting and situated. As a researcher I was situated towards my informant both as ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ through various selves, some of which are more ‘real,’ more perceived or more constructed than others. Among the many ascribed and self-perceived identities, I was relating to the people I interacted with as a researcher, a friend, a woman, as someone with a German passport, from the ‘West’ or who supports Palestinian emancipatory aspirations. Rather than focussing on one of these – and particularly not the over-belaboured East/West divide – I prefer to follow Narayan’s feminist deconstructive approach:

¹⁸ See also Said (1989: 213-214) and Abu-Lughod (1986/2000: 17-19) for a similar account.

Instead of the paradigm emphasizing a dichotomy between outsider /insider or observer/observed, I propose that at this historical moment we might more profitably view each anthropologist in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations. The loci along which we are aligned or set apart from those whom we study are multiple and in flux. Factors such as education, gender, sexual orientation, class, race, or sheer durations of contacts may at different times outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider or outsider status (Narayan, 1993: 671-2).

A historically-grounded feminist deconstructive approach thus identifies aspects of the researcher's identity other than the East/West divide as crucial for the ethnographic encounter. During my encounters with interviewees, friends and informants in Palestine the intersecting features discussed here of gender, class, language, geopolitical constellations (and derived constructions of East vs. West), as well as political positioning all to various degrees defined my ethnographic encounter, my own as well as my interviewees conceptualisations of self and other and the intersubjective knowledge production. Given the Palestinian historical and political context, the most important issue that defined not only my fieldwork but also the process of textual production, however was my political positioning – a point discussed in more detail in the next section when dealing with the issue of representation.

3. Writing about Palestine

3.1. The Crisis of Representation

Questions of power exist not only during the ethnographic encounter, but remain equally crucial during the process of data interpretation and textual representation. The ways in which intersecting real and constructed power structures, particularly in a highly political setting such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, are interpreted depend on the researcher's political-emancipatory agenda, i.e. how he or she envisages transforming them.

This section will deal with such questions related to the 'crisis of representations' and legitimacy of the researcher's authorial voice. I will, firstly, present an extract from my field

notes at a joint women's meeting in Haifa to which I was invited by one of my close key informants, Karima, to highlight my difficulties to stay impartial as "outsider" third party researcher in a politically polarised setting. I will then reflect on my own political positioning towards my informants and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by critically discussing several suggestions proposed in the literature to overcome the crisis of representation. In my conclusion I argue that research, particularly in highly asymmetric unjust political contexts such as the Palestinian-Israeli, should be committed to some form of political positioning towards, moral engagement with, and positive transformation for the research community.

3.2. "You Should not Have any Moral Judgements..."

At a joint Palestinian-Israeli women's meeting in Haifa, some of the participants, including Karima, Rachel (the Israeli instructor) and me started a conversation about the boat of international activists that went to Gaza to break the siege in 2007. The Palestinian women generally supported the action, but they thought it would not change anything. Rachel did not like their pessimism and reminded them that the Israeli army had allowed the boat to enter without problems. This was a promising sign, according to her. I asked: 'Had there been Palestinians on the boat, what do you think would have been the reaction of the army?' This provoked ironic reactions from the Palestinians: 'Of course, they would have just shot them!' and an angry monologue – which I paraphrase and summarise below - against me from Rachel:

You should not have any moral judgements or say what is right or wrong. Look, the situation is very difficult. Now with all of the things going on around us I cannot just say anymore what is right or what is wrong, nor what I think will happen or what will not happen. I don't know – so I prefer to say and do nothing. This is much more difficult than what you do – you judge. You have to stay neutral and open-minded. You cannot just come here as an outsider and judge things.

You talk, but you take no responsibility for what you say. You are from the outside. This conflict is between me and Karima, between the Israelis and the Palestinians. And by making this judgement, you influence the whole group. You destroy the whole relationship between us, everything that we have built over the past four years. You should shut your mouth – that would be to act responsible.

You pity the Palestinians and you feel sympathy for them and their stories – what does that help? Nothing! It even makes things worse because you keep them in this self-perpetuating cycle of pitying themselves rather than trying to get self-empowered. There is no point for us here to talk about helicopters, tanks and the army. We will not change anything anyway. We have to empower the individual so that she sees her own strength and that she is strong enough to believe in herself when her house is demolished or when the tanks are shooting. We have to teach the Palestinian woman how to empower herself.

I did not agree with Rachel's depoliticised understanding of self-empowerment, but her remarks about my role and responsibilities as researcher and 'outsider' raised a whole set of questions on my political position: As a (so-called) 'outsider' to the conflict, should I refrain from taking moral and political judgements and stay silent? Should I try to remain impartial, as Rachel suggested, and attempt to 'objectively' write down what I had observed and witnessed, or should I write with and for my Palestinian informants?

3.3. *Writing about, with, or for Palestinian Women Activists?*

Representing the 'other' always entails a form of subjugation and brings up the question with whom to locate epistemological privilege: the researcher or the researched. While some scholars (engaged in, for example, feminist participatory action research) prefer the interpretations of the researched and advocate a strong co-operation between researcher and researched during the interpretation process, others locate epistemological privilege with the 'expert scholar'. My data interpretation and analysis is supported by my close cooperation and reciprocity with (particularly my key) informants; it is not only *on*, but rather *with* (and to a certain extent also *for*) Palestinian female activists. While I want to portray their marginalised voices, I remain wary to neither 'pity' (as Rachel put it), nor to naively 'romanticise' (Spivak, 1988) them as necessarily being the only emancipatory, or the only 'indigenous' accounts.

Scholars have suggested several ways through which risks of epistemic violence in representation might be reduced. I discuss three answers relating to 1) content; 2) style/form, and 3) politics below.

3.3.1. *Content*

One response to the crisis of representation has been a focus on practice countering Geertz's (1973) hermeneutic focus on meaning. If we take serious the argument that the meaning of people's action is subjectively constructed through different interpretive frames, people's action might mean very different things to themselves and to those who are doing the reading. How close (if at all) we might come to the meaning that people themselves attach to their practices is thus difficult to establish. Bourdieu (1977) has cautioned not to fall into the trap of over-interpreting every single action of those we study. Not all practices always carry specific meanings, they might not always be a form of communication that needs to be 'decoded,' interpreted or read, but they might be mere practicalities (see Abu-Lughod, 1989; Ortner, 1984).

I found that Bourdieu's (1977) assertion also applies to Palestinian women's political activism (particularly their everyday resistance strategies). Often women would embark on certain activities out of mere necessity (e.g. coping systems at times under curfew or siege). On the other hand their actions also *do* carry meanings. These meanings, since they target several intersecting structures of oppression, often simultaneously, can be multiple, ambiguous and even contradictory. They are thus hard to disentangle. I attempt to understand them nevertheless, realising, of course, that my claims concerning the meanings of Palestinian women's practices are limited and fallible.

3.3.2. *Form*

Experimental reflexive anthropologists, in their criticism of the anthropologist-expert who, by writing about others, always engages in a process of subjugation through rhetorical means, have called for experimentation with representation through dialogical or polyvocal ethnography. Informants should, in this view, "begin to be considered as co-authors, and the ethnographer as scribe and archivist as well as interpreting observer" (Clifford, 1986: 17). This co-production, according to Clifford, should not only be recognized and reflected upon but it should also determine the form of the text. Through a precise dialogical and polyphonic rendering of the interview situation (as for example the discussion with Ilham and Asma above) experimental anthropologists hope to reduce the researcher's power over his/her subjects. Experimentations with texts, forms and styles strive to portray the ethnographic

encounter more precisely, more ‘realistically,’¹⁹ and thus are an attempt to ‘rescue representation.’

Dialogical and polyphonic ethnography, however, has been severely criticised for failing to solve the fundamental problem of power inherent in every act of representation: no matter which textual style the representation takes, power differences between researcher and researched always remain and the authoritative and final interpretive power still lies with the researcher. Abu-Lughod, for example, asserts that “refiguring informants as consultants or “letting the other speak” in dialogic [...] or polyvocal texts - decolonizations on the level of the text – leaves intact the basic configurations of global power on which anthropology is based” (Abu-Lughod, 1993/2008: 26; see also Abu-Lughod, 1990a: 11; Rabinow, 1986). Geopolitical power configurations that structure and dominate the institution of research by mainly western-based scholars on mainly non-western ‘subjects’ are thus ignored and left intact. Said has identified reasons for the trend to focus on style and form rather than (geo)politics: “[T]here has been a considerable amount of borrowing [in anthropological writing] from adjacent domains, from literary theory, history and so on, in some measure because much of this has skirted over the political issues for understandable reasons, *poetics being a good deal easier to talk about than politics*” (Said, 1989: 220-221, emphasis added).

By trying to solve the problem of power asymmetries between researcher and researched through textual experimentation merely, experimental ethnography might not only fail to curb the risk of epistemic violence, but it might also risk adopting a depoliticised stance. This criticism should not be understood as an outright rejection of textual experimentation, but it highlights that an overemphasis on style might sidestep the most crucial issue: that representation is first and foremost a political issue.

3.3.2. *Politics of Representation*

Traditional understandings of academic research (such as Rachel’s cited above) expect the researcher to remain an impartial outside observer: only by *not* interfering would I act responsibly. Impartiality, however, just as objectivity, is impossible in the field as well as when writing the text. When Clifford asserted that “[e]thnographic truths are [...] inherently *partial* – committed and incomplete” (1986: 7, emphasis in original) he not only stressed the

¹⁹ The move to experimentation with modes of ethnographic writing is generally attributed to the postmodern turn. By attempting to portray the ethnographic encounter more precisely and ‘realistically,’ this move in fact contradicts the post-modern anti-realist understanding of there being no reality out there.

fact that knowledge production is subjective (and thus incomplete), but also that it is positioned (and thus committed). The researcher always is politically positioned towards his/her research subject and the context studied. This political positioning influences the research situation and is reflected in the analyses and arguments proposed. Acknowledging that academic research necessarily *is* partial, however, does not provide answers to the fundamental question on whether it *should* be political.

This question becomes, as demonstrated in the field note extract above, particularly complex and pertinent in a politically heated setting, such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Anthropologists have long debated the role and responsibilities of researchers in conflict zones. Scheper-Hughes (1995), for instance, has argued that post-modern approaches might fall into the traps of moral relativism and self-censorship when trying to avoid exercising epistemic violence by refraining from political and normative judgements. Particularly, one needs to inquire into the timing and political implications of such a self-paralysing approach: “Why is it that just when subject or marginalised peoples like blacks, the colonised and women have begin to have and demand a voice, they are told by the white boys that there can be no authoritative speaker or subject?” (Hartsock, 1987: 196 quoted in Abu-Lughod, 1990a: 17). Academic debates on the crisis of representation might have been motivated by an urge to protect the powerless from their voices being appropriated by the more powerful, but it might also be part of a political power play to silence them.

In order to avoid such damaging acts of moral relativism, and if anthropology is “to be worth anything at all” in our times, it should, according to Scheper-Hughes (1995: 409), be “ethically grounded,” “morally engaged” and “politically committed”. Research in politically charged settings thus not only inevitably *is* partial and politically positioned, it also *should* be. But how can interpretive critique, political positioning and/or partiality be justified? After all politically-engaged and/or activist positions in academic writing are easily accused of being – and can indeed be – biased with critical political implications. Material realities on the ground and one’s own relation and involvement in geopolitical forces of domination are two starting points from which political judgment can be formed.

The postmodern argument that ‘reality’ is subjective and constructed risks to undermine the fact that material realities *do* exist: for some people in some parts of the world some things are really quite real. House demolitions, checkpoints, curfews, the wall and military

aggression are not discursively constructed, they are real and they have real material consequences for Palestinians on the ground. Not to address these or deflecting attention from them by arguing that all things and all knowledges are constructed can be more violent, more hostile, more damaging than making a political judgment and taking a moral stance to balance out material injustices. Scheper-Hughes compares the role of the anthropologist to that of a witness:

In the act of writing culture what emerges is always a highly subjective, partial, and fragmentary but also deeply personal record of human lives based on eye-witness accounts and testimonies. If “observation” links anthropology to the natural sciences, “witnessing” links anthropology to moral philosophy. Observation, the anthropologist as “fearless spectator,” is a passive act which positions the anthropologist above and outside human events as a “neutral” and “objective” (i.e., uncommitted) seeing I/eye. Witnessing, the anthropologist as *companheira*, is in the active voice, and it positions the anthropologist inside human events as a responsive, reflexive, and morally committed being, one who will “take sides” and make judgments (Scheper-Hughes, 1995: 419, emphasis in original).

Interpretive critique and normative judgment thus need to be checked against the political, historical and material realities in which they are formed, and consequences they entail. In a strongly asymmetric context, such as the Palestinian-Israeli or the above women’s group encounter in Haifa, saying nothing, not revealing my anti-occupation stance, and writing about it in an alleged ‘impartial,’ ‘outsider’s’ voice would be a form of self-censorship and could contribute to maintaining the status quo of unequal power relations at the level of the joint Palestinian-Israeli group meeting, at the political level of the conflict itself, as well as at the level of researcher and researched. Taking a stance against the occupation and against illegal and unjust Israeli settler-colonial policies thus, in fact, is not a pro-Palestinian (or anti-Israeli stance), it is a pro-humanist position that responds to and aims to positively change (geo-)political realities.

3.4. Towards a Politically-Engaged Humanist Scholarship

Lila Abu-Lughod has called for a humanist scholarship noting that:

the outsider self never simply stands outside; he or she always stands in a definite relations with the “other” of the study, not just as Westerner or even halfie, but as Frenchman in Algeria during the war of independence, and American in Morocco during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, or and Englishwoman in postcolonial India. What we call the outside, or even partial outside, is always a position *within* a larger political-historical complex (Abu-Lughod, 1993/2008: 40, emphasis in original).

I am not an ‘outsider’ to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as Rachel stated. I am politically and historically positioned towards this conflict and its people. I am travelling to Palestine with a German passport and am writing from the privileged position of a UK-based scholar at a time when Israeli policies of siege, fragmentation and occupation are intensifying. I have ‘witnessed’ the material and geopolitical configurations that control the lives of the people that I study and write about. My fieldwork presence and, more importantly, my writing about what I ‘witnessed’ can either work to sustain these injustices or work towards emancipatory social and political change.

Tracing my historical and political entanglement has unmasked culturalist dichotomies between ‘East’ and ‘West’ as political projects which contribute to sustaining this conflict. Taking political judgement, rather than hiding under the cloak of impartiality, objectivity or cultural (read: moral) relativism, thus becomes an imperative. Being myself part of these geopolitical power configurations and having ‘witnessed’ its devastating material consequences on the ground requires me to respond with ethical engagement and political commitment along humanist values. Rather than leaving the locus for change solely with the local, I hope to use my privileged position to contribute, however small in scale, towards positive transformation.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter I have reflected upon my experience of doing fieldwork on and writing about Palestinian women's political activism. My discussion of the 'crisis of objectivity' and the 'crisis of representation' at the example of how data was collected, knowledge and interpretation constructed, and critique and judgement formed has drawn attention to two interrelated arguments: the need for 1) a historically- and politically-grounded approach to reflecting upon (perceived and real) differences between self and other, and 2) a politically-committed and morally-engaged scholarship.

Discussing her fieldwork on Palestinian refugee women in Lebanon Julie Peteet has noted that the conflict situation "heightens the sense of empathy" and "entails the experience of oneness and separation simultaneously" (Peteet, 1991: 14-15). When Mahmoud, Liana and I sat 'besieged' in our house while the Israeli soldiers were raiding the flat below we felt a strong sense of unity ('us inside' vs. 'those outside'), but, at the same time, it was clear that there was at least one issue that separated us and our experiences of this raid: our passports. The incident did not, as my friend mockingly remarked the next day, make me a real *filastīniyya*. To the contrary: it made me understand where the real difference between me and my Palestinian friends and informants lies. It has helped me to better imagine how it might be without a passport and legal protection. The defining difference between me and my Palestinian informants thus has little to do with culture, gender or age. It is not even so much about class or socio-economic background, as a Marxist economic analysis would argue. The issue that really separates us and that makes us experience things very differently is our different legal status in the international nation-state-based system, the historical and political reasons of which can and must be traced.

Such a historically- and politically-grounded approach to the question of self and other offers ways to deconstruct culturally-essentialist binaries between researcher/researched insider/outsider or indigenous/foreign. Following Nancy Fraser in her critique of narrow identity politics and her call for "conceptualizing struggles for recognition so that they can be integrated with struggles for redistribution, rather than displacing and undermining them" (Fraser, 2000: 109) I consider it important to recognise difference, but avoid treating constructed, ideational structures in an essentialist and isolated way. Such (perceived) cultural and identity differences, of course, do exist, and they do strongly influence what women (can)

do and how they (and I) make sense and give meaning to their practices. It is, however, crucial to recognise that identity differences are not natural, but rather, since culture is learned (Geertz, 1973), are the product of processes of othering, often related to struggles for redistribution (Fraser, 2000) and thus rooted in real material structures of domination (which can be changed). Those that narrowly confine their study to identity issues and neglect tracing how and why identity differences came about might – whether intentionally or not - contribute to reinforcing established hierarchies and thus the geopolitical status quo.

Once culturally-essentialist arguments are deconstructed, revealed as political projects and its material, historical and political roots and applications traced, overcoming difference no longer seems such a difficult project. Particularly in the strongly asymmetric Palestinian-Israeli conflict non-involvement, passive waiting and the refusal to take stands under the pretext of objectivity or cultural relativism can reinforce existing unequal power relations. Following an “engaged, accountable positioning” (Haraway, 1988: 590) by making visible my own entanglement in social, institutional and geopolitical relations of domination, I reject such a post-modern self-paralysis and moral relativism, and instead propose a morally engaged and politically committed judgement aimed at targeting and changing oppressive structures.

Feminist solidarity in and for Palestine, whether academic or activist, rather than building on essentialist assumptions of sameness between all women, needs to look into history and politics and its material affects to propose a joint political agenda of opposing and resisting the occupation. Whether I was an ‘outsider’ or ‘insider’ and whether my encounters with people (both Palestinians and Israelis) were distant or close had little to do with me being neither Palestinian nor Israeli or with the fact that I am a woman. Rather, what determined whether I felt and was perceived as an ‘outsider’ or ‘insider’ was my political positioning. Of course, I will always remain ‘outside’ of certain experiences. But if I see the ethnographic encounter between me and my Palestinian informants as an ethical one between equals (who deserve equal, but who might not have or be equal), then artificially formed boundaries between self and other can be deconstructed and our common anti-discrimination politics (not our nationality, class, ethnicity or gender) makes us both an insider. Based on this joint political agenda a form of feminist solidarity and closeness becomes possible. I have attempted to follow such a historically-grounded feminist politics, which recognises difference and is based on humanist values, in my writings.

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF THEORETICAL LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK²⁰

1. The UNSCR 1325 and Questions it Provokes

Mainstream approaches to gender and conflict resolution are dominated by a liberal feminist theoretical framework which also serves as the basis for the UNSCR 1325. The United Nations Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security on 31 October 2000, calling for women's increased participation in conflict prevention and resolution initiatives, their protection and empowerment during conflict. Since the adoption of the Resolution wide-reaching efforts towards its implementation have been made at international, governmental and non-governmental level all over the world (see e.g. Cockburn, 2007; Hill et. al., 2003; UN Secretary General, 2008; UNIFEM, 2004).

With 1325 the UN Security Council dealt for the first time exclusively with gender issues and women's experience in conflict and post-conflict situations.²¹ It is thus not surprising that the Resolution has been praised by many. Feminist scholars and activists have lauded it as path-breaking and highly significant for women's anti-war and peace activism (e.g. Anderlini, 2007; Cohn, 2004; Cohn, Kinsella and Gibbings, 2004; Cockburn, 2007; Hill, 2002; Hill et. al. 2003; Whitworth 2004) and the UN heralds it as a landmark document that promises to protect women's rights and guarantee their equal participation in peace processes (e.g. UNSG, 2002, 2004).

The Resolution establishes the crucial link between social (gender) change and political (conflict) transformation. It does so, however, from a questionable theoretical positioning. Although the Resolution is path-breaking in taking up gender and women's issues in times of war, conflict and peacebuilding, it nevertheless remains firmly embedded in the mainstream liberal tradition of conflict resolution. It adds gender and women, but does not question

²⁰ Parts of this chapter draw on Richter-Devroe (2008).

²¹ The Council had condemned violations of women's rights under conflict and called for their protection from rape and other forms of gender-based violence before, but such calls were made in the framework of other resolutions.

underlying assumptions concerning the relationships of gender constructions and roles to established institutions, such as family, state, military or the international system. As such, the UNSCR 1325 and its mainstream liberal approach to gender and conflict do not offer a suitable theoretical frame for studying women's activism and gender dynamics in the Palestinian context of settler colonialism and statelessness.

In this chapter I firstly provide an introductory overview of the UNSCR 1325's liberal underpinnings and their shortcomings to illustrate how I developed my main research questions. I then compare this mainstream theory on women's activism and gender in conflict to various alternative approaches as proposed by critical international relations and feminist scholars. I conclude by presenting my own theoretical framework of critical intersectional approach to gender and conflict transformation.

1.1. Contexts of Women's Political Activism

UNSCR 1325 is a global declaration. It prescribes, universally, a liberal form of political agency and related femininity model. The discourses, meanings and forms of Palestinian women's political activism, however, depend on the wider political, social, cultural and economic context in which women operate. By asking:

- “What are major material and ideational factors (and their evolvments) at local, national and international level that have influenced Palestinian women's political activism since 2000?,”

I hope to better understand the *context* in which Palestinian women are carving out spaces for political agency. Clearly, one of the major factors that determine their activism is the (changing) nature of Israeli settler colonialism and occupation. Additionally, however, changes in how the PA operates, how public and private forms of male domination function at local, national and international level, or how international agendas, such as the UNSCR 1325 and its liberal peace approach develop, influence local women's politics.

I adopt a critical realist stance acknowledging the strong formative impact that the material side of the occupation and Israeli settler-colonial policies have on Palestinian worlds *and* worldviews.

1.2. Practices of Women's Political Activism

The UNSCR 1325 calls for women's increased participation at all levels of conflict management, prevention and resolution. It prescribes formal political engagement, particularly in dialogical conflict resolution initiatives, as normative ideal female political practice. The majority of Palestinian women, however, organise more informally in everyday politics. Formal political activism, especially foreign-funded women's dialogue projects, does not receive strong support.²² Instead of dialogical conflict resolution initiatives, Palestinian women formulate and practise a variety of alternative political practices. By asking:

- “What forms of political activism do Palestinian women engage in?”

and

- “How do these compare to mainstream liberal feminist conflict resolution practices?”

I aim to trace and compare Palestinian women's different local and mostly informal political practices and contrast these to the more formal ways of political engagement as prescribed by national and international actors. By shedding further light upon (so far understudied) non-liberal, non-mainstream gendered political actions and femininity constructions, I hope to broaden narrow mainstream conceptualisations of ‘the political.’

1.3. Meanings of Women's Political Activism

Meanings of political practices, women's in particular, are multiple and ambiguous. Different actors give different meanings to their actions in different contexts. The mainstream liberal agenda on women, peace and security, as promoted through the UNSCR 1325, understands women's participation in conflict resolution initiatives, particularly dialogical ones, to advance not only peace, but also gender development. As such, this liberal peace discourse renders certain forms of agency as normative and desirable (formal and preferably cross-border peace initiatives), while branding others as deviant or irrelevant (informal locally-specific practices and particularly resistance activism).

²² The reasons for the lack of local support for mainstream liberal dialogical conflict resolution initiatives will be discussed in more depth in chapter V.

I attempt to detect the multiple (and often ambiguous or even contradictory) meanings of women's political practices by asking:

- “What do Palestinian women's different forms of political activism mean to them (and other local, national and international actors)?”
- “Are they seen as political acts with transformative social and/or political potential or are they viewed as mere survival strategies?”
- “Are they understood to be acts of ‘peacebuilding,’ ‘resistance,’ or ‘accommodation’/ ‘normalisation’?”

Hoping to give a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) of their actions I place these different meanings within a wider framework of material and ideational power struggles between the occupier and occupied, between different nationalist discourses and/or between local Palestinian and mainstream development agendas.

1.4. Discourses and Framings of Women's Political Activism

Given the multitude of female political practices and meanings, the ways in which women's political agency is framed discursively becomes crucial. The liberal feminist approach and UNSCR 1325 put forward a gender construction of women as pacifists and/or peacemakers. This femininity model, however, receives little support from Palestinian activists who tend to prefer more proactive gender constructions pertaining to locally and nationally-promoted notions of resistance. By constructing and adhering to alternative (hybrid) gender models women negotiate through different local, national and international normative frameworks, seeking material and ideational support. By asking:

- “Which notions of femininity do Palestinian women construct to represent and frame their political activism?”

and

- “How are these hybrid gender constructions perceived in local, national and international circles?”

I hope to not only trace how women construct framings for their actions by borrowing from different normative repertoires, but also how their different representations of political selves

- as ‘peacemakers,’ as ‘freedom fighters,’ as political or feminist activists, as mothers, daughters or wives, as being responsible for public or private matters - are perceived. Exploring this gender dimension in Palestinian political culture can reveal the strong discrepancies that exist between the mainstream liberal gendered conflict resolution discourse (with its focus on dialogue and women as pacifists/peacemakers) and local Palestinian norms (with their focus on resistance and different locally-specific proactive political femininity constructions).

1.5. Proposals for Change

Agendas for social and political change in Palestine need to be domestically supported, if to affect lasting change. Having critically evaluated the mainstream liberal feminist peace agenda, I explore alternative proposals for change at the empirical praxis-oriented and theoretical conceptual level by asking:

- “Which forms of female political agency and which gender constructions are supported in Palestinian society and conducive to positive gender and conflict transformation?,”

and

- “Which theoretical gender and conflict development approaches/conceptualisation are able to capture and provide ways forward for the Palestinian context?”

By identifying and studying those female political practices that lie inbetween the two extremes of what is often regarded by parts of Palestinian society as ‘false superficial peacemaking’ and what is often denounced by some international actors as ‘militant terrorism’ I wish to draw attention to often neglected alternative and largely informal political practices. I hope to provide both praxis-oriented proposals aimed at strengthening their transformative potential and draw contingent theoretical conclusions to amend and sharpen concepts and generate guiding questions for the broader study of conflict and gender dynamics.

Studying women’s political activism in a context of settler colonialism, occupation and statelessness necessitates moving beyond the liberal feminist peace framework in which UNSCR 1325 and mainstream approaches to gender and conflict are embedded. By using an

interdisciplinary approach (combining international relations, feminist and anthropological methods and theories) and pragmatically bringing together various philosophical insights in an eclectic but coherent, rather than theoretically purist manner, my theoretical framework can best be accommodated within the contemporary critical research tradition of social science. Predominantly informed by critical realism, I borrow insights from interpretive and social constructivist accounts, but, in contrast to more ‘purist’ postmodern or constructivist positions, I prioritise the material over the discursive. Although the discursive level of gender norms determines what women can or cannot do, the constitutive power that material structures exercise on social norms and women’s agency, particularly in the Palestinian context of long-term occupation, cannot be ignored. Finally, the conceptualisation of agency as able to circumvent and transform ideational and material structures reflects the critical transformative stance taken in my study.

2. Peacebuilding in a Context of Settler Colonialism and Occupation

Conflict and peace has been theorised widely throughout different IR schools. Orthodox realist IR theory considers the state and its elites as main political actors who ensure conflict *management* and the maintenance of negative peace, i.e. the absence of war and direct violence. Liberalism also tends to provide a universalist top-down approach proposing elite good governance, democratic institutions and dialogue/negotiations between conflicting parties as main pillars for conflict *resolution*. Structuralist (Marxist) political economy approaches identify structural violence stemming from (international and national) class and economic domination as sources of conflict and suggest revolutionary politics, i.e. resistance by the disempowered classes as a path to *transform* conflict into peace, justice and equality.²³ I will use the term *conflict management* when referring to a realist power-political theoretical framework, the term *conflict resolution* when speaking of the mainstream liberal approach and *conflict transformation* when denoting a structural, social transformation and empowerment approach. The term *peacebuilding* will be used for any bottom-up political practice aimed at positive social and political change.

Both liberal and structural accounts have recently shifted attention to the micro-level. While structuralist accounts put the loci for transformative ‘revolutionary’ agency with ‘the people,’

²³ See e.g. Richmond (2008), Barash, ed. (1999) or Fetherstone (2000) for a more comprehensive overview of how peace has been conceptualised in IR theory.

liberal accounts see ‘emancipatory’ potential with ‘the grassroots.’ Yet, both accounts tend to pay little attention to the mutually constitutive interplay between agency and structure: while structuralist accounts overemphasise discriminatory structures (demanding that they should be broken through revolutionary outbreaks), liberal accounts often tend to adhere to a ‘problem-solving approach,’ uncritically attributing transformative agency to individual actors while leaving unproblematised and unchallenged underlying, and often discriminatory, material and normative social and political structures (Jabri, 2006; Shepherd, 2008; Väyrynen, 2004). Critical poststructural IR theory not only shifts the subject of enquiry to the local, highlighting the significance of peripheries and grassroots actors for change, but also to the discursive level, stressing the impact that normative structures have on political practices and cultures.

In the following section I provide a critical reading of mainstream liberal conflict resolution theory and practice using insights from critical (post-)structural IR accounts.²⁴ In line with recent developments in IR and conflict transformation literature, I will propose a post-liberal conceptualisation of peace and conflict and a critical to conflict transformation.

2.1. Liberal Conflict Resolution Theories

The liberal peace paradigm, based on the notion of dialogue and consensus, proposes facilitative methods, such as dialogue groups and problem-solving workshops to resolve conflict. Facilitative conflict resolution²⁵ thus adopts a post-positivist analysis. It replaces the realist power-political paradigm with a subjective interpretive approach, putting stronger focus on the actor’s constructed identities and perceived grievances. Giving voice to constituencies of both conflict sides and allowing them to present their different perspectives on the conflict is seen as key for building trust and a shared future and thus for genuine conflict resolution. Jay Rothman, a renowned conflict resolution scholar on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, for example, attributes the ‘success’ of the historic handshake between Arafat and Rabin on the Washington lawns in 1993 not only to official diplomacy, but also to the secretly held track-two negotiations between academics, leaders of community groups in

²⁴ See e.g. Richmond (2008, 2009a, 2009b), Mac Ginty (2008); Mac Ginty and Richmond, eds. (2007); Jabri (1996) for such critical poststructural accounts.

²⁵ Beside Kelman (1976), Rothman (1992) and Burton (1969), who can be seen as the founding figures of facilitative conflict resolution approaches, many other scholars adhere to this approach, often using slightly different definitions and terminology. These are, for example: Fisher, Patton and Ury’s (1991) principled negotiations or Fisher’s (1997) interactive conflict resolution. For a detailed discussion on the differences between these facilitative approaches see Ramsbotham, Miall and Woodhouse (2006) or Azar (1990: 21-27).

which, according to him, identity-related frictions between the two conflict parties were overcome (e.g. Rothman, 1997).

Facilitative conflict resolution approaches, particularly their Track II dialogue projects, have, however, been severely criticised.²⁶ Lloyd Jones (2000) has argued that such approaches, by viewing the roots of conflict in the breakdown of a shared reality and diverging perceptions, have provided a simplified understanding of conflict as resulting from a “tragic misunderstanding” (Lloyd Jones, 2000: 657), which then through dialogue is sought to be overcome. The roots of Palestinian-Israeli conflict, however, cannot be reduced to a misunderstanding and, consequently, cannot be tackled through communication, understanding and empathy alone. Although perceived grievances, misunderstandings and representations unquestionably do play a role, the historical and political root causes of a settler-colonial conflict, such as the Palestinian-Israeli, stem first of all from systemic (real material) oppressions, as well as hegemonic discursive power structures.

Critical IR scholar Jabri provides an insightful analysis of facilitative conflict resolution:

While reducing the complexity of international conflict to the dynamics of the inter-personal may have its attractions, it nevertheless has the effect of de-historicizing conflict, dislocating it from its specificities in time and place, the differential ways in which institutional practices enable some while constraining others (Jabri, 2006: 70-71).

Prior and additionally to an interpretive facilitative lens, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict thus needs to be analysed through a contextualised structuralist/critical-transformative theoretical frame. Without this level of analysis facilitative conflict resolution remains unable to tackle the issue of power asymmetries and radical disagreement and thus has little to say about how power functions in real world politics.

²⁶ See, for example, Ramsbotham, Miall and Woodhouse (2006: 293-295), Jabri (2006) or Jones (2000) for a more theoretical discussion. For a discussion of the theory’s applicability in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, see Kuttub (1988), Waage (2006), Said, (1996), and Naser-Najjab (2004).

2.2. *Critical (Post-)Structural Conflict Transformation Theories*

Structural approaches to conflict transformation, in contrast to liberal agendas, take on aspects of critical theory when prioritising the principles of justice, socio-economic equality, resistance and liberation over dialogue and attitudinal change. Liberal conflict resolution and peace initiatives, by favouring institutions and governance, see the liberal state and its elites as main actors of change; they do not target, let alone abolish deeper (gendered) structural inequalities which give rise to war and violence. Conflict transformation, on the other hand, with its focus on structural change initiated and sustained by local communities, shifts attention to intra-party dynamics and political cultures (e.g. Galtung, 1996; Lederach, 1995). In recent years scholars have increasingly proposed culturally-sensitive conflict transformation approaches (e.g. Salem 1993; Lederach 1995; Abu-Nimer 1996, 2004). They have criticised mainstream liberal conflict resolution theory and practice for stemming from the “North American, male, white and middle class world” (Avruch, 1998: 78) and largely neglecting the role of culture and intra-group dynamics.

Scholars and practitioners have wondered how to find ways to engage with the other and construct accounts of peacebuilding without falling into the traps of universalist, Orientalist and/or (neo-) colonialist coercive practices which disregard local specificities. Richmond, for example, has pointed out an inherent contradiction in the concept of ‘peace’ (and ‘peacemaking’):

‘[P]eace’ as a concept offers a contradiction – it requires a method, ontology, and epistemology which is negotiated locally, but prompted externally by agents who must engage with the other, but cannot know one another a priori (at least in a short time and at the depth of detail required for such ambitious relationships). *Indeed, it may well be that the Enlightenment derived discourse of liberal peace is not sophisticated enough for contemporary ethical requirements for a sustainable peace* (Richmond, 2009b: 566, emphasis added).

Critics reveal liberal peace(-building) agendas to be largely foreign-imposed and with little (or even destructive) impact on the ground. Instead they call for locally-driven, grassroots bottom-up and culture- (and gender-) sensitive approaches to conflict transformation, often

claiming that such ‘indigenous’ approaches are able to ensure stronger community support and consequently a wider-reaching comprehensive peace. In such an approach internationally-normed definitions and terminology are problematised and local understanding, framings and practices of peace brought to the fore.

2.3. *Local vs. International Definitions of Peace and Peacebuilding?*²⁷

Definitions of and paths to peace are context-dependent and highly value-laden. By establishing ‘their’ peace the more powerful conflict party, but also international and local actors, can normalise certain ways of thinking and practicing peace to strengthen their own power base (see e.g. Fetherston, 2000; Goodhand and Walton, 2009; Sharoni, 1997). Dialogical conflict resolution, as shown above, is particular prone to favouring the peace of the powerful. One of my informants provided the following telling metaphor for the Palestinian-Israeli case:

Every slave master wants some form of peace and harmony. He doesn’t want his slaves to be rebellious and causing troubles. It is the same here. Israel does want some form of peace, but it wants to keep the power imbalance. It wants things to be calm and superficially happy - but it is careful to maintain its superiority. *Real peace, however, is made between equals.* The Israelis say they want peace, but it is their decision which peace to choose. *They want to impose on us their peace* and we have no choice. We [the Palestinians] cannot decide which form of peace (Adnan, 2008).

When discussing diverging meanings of peace several of my local informants distinguished between *salām* (peace) and *istislām* (surrender). Generally they considered the current official liberal peace approach with its preference of dialogical conflict resolution and its technocratic aims of institution-building, good governance and democratisation a form of *istislām*, i.e. surrender to and prolongation of the status quo, rather than real peace (*salām*). This mainstream “peace-as-surrender”, as one of my interviewees remarked, “is not really accepted

²⁷ In this theoretical discussion, I do not rehearse the complex definitional debates on war, violence, power and peace, but rather provide short introductory insights into some of the differences between local and international definitions. I also outline my own usage of these terms. For a comprehensive overview on definitions of peace see e.g. Richmond (2008), Barash, ed. (1999) or Fetherstone (2000).

in the community. [The word] ‘peace’ became very dull, very empty and shallow. It doesn’t really have any meaning, because of the failure of the peace process. ‘Peace’ is not giving people anything good” (Ghassan, 2008).

As a counter to such ‘empty’ liberal peace Palestinian local discourses tend to speak of ‘just peace’ and refer to peacebuilding practices as ‘resistance’ (*muqāwma*) rather than ‘dialogue’ (*barāmiy al-ḥiwār*) or ‘conflict resolution’ (*ḥal aṣ-ṣira*^c). For Karima, for example, it is clear that: “[The Israelis] stole our land, our water and our freedom. We cannot accept that. Give us our rights first. We want peace, but peace with justice. Peace is the fruit of justice” (Karima, 2008). Palestinians stress that both equality between the two conflicting parties and recognition (and implementation) of rights are a central part of a just peace; they are a precondition for, not a result of reconciliation (see e.g. Naser-Najjab, 2004; Kuttab and Kaufman, 1988; Said, 1996).

Said summarised the general Palestinian understanding of just peace well when in the mid 1990s, highly disillusioned with the leadership’s institutionalisation of dialogue, negotiation and reconciliation in the Oslo ‘peace process,’ he wrote that “real principle and real justice have to be implemented before there can be true dialogue. Real dialogue is between equals, not between subordinate and dominant partners” (Said, 1996: 38). Countering the mainstream liberal dialogical peace(-building) focus on reconciliation, Palestinians’ call for just peace prioritises the end of structural discrimination imposed through settler colonialism, ethno-religious nationalism and occupation. The method proposed to end this structural discrimination is not dialogue-for-understanding, but resistance, i.e. direct action and struggle for justice and rights which can also involve open confrontation and violence.

Resistance, however, is understood and practised in various ways, ranging from individual everyday survival tactics and different methods of nonviolent collective resistance to armed resistance. Resistance is socially constructed: what some see as resistance to the occupation is seen as normalisation (*taṭbī*^c), passivity, accommodation or even submission (*istislām*) by others. Local peace practices and understandings are multiple and hybrid; they emerge in dialogue with and in reaction to international and national agendas. International agendas are not necessarily unilaterally imposed; they are also adopted and adapted by local activists.

Rather than uncritically adopting normative international and/or local/national categorisations of certain practices as ‘culturally-authentic’ and others as ‘foreign-imposed’, as ‘terrorism’ or as ‘normalisation,’ one needs to trace how so-called ‘foreign’ agendas become ‘indigenised.’ Asking *who* adopts and adapts *which* agendas and why, i.e. in *whose* interests, can reveal internal power rivalries and unmask the language of ‘cultural authenticity’ vs. ‘westernisation’ as a political project aimed at maintaining material and political power.

Local peace actors are thus not necessarily ‘indigenous’ and their micro agency not necessarily ‘transformative;’ bottom-up approaches are no panacea for peace. Involving the local through culturally-sensitive peacebuilding approaches requires more than adding a number of selected local actors to fixed liberal framework of mainstream peace programmes aimed at developing the liberal state, its institution and neoliberal economy (see e.g. Richmond, 2009b; Goodhand and Walton, 2009; Richter-Devroe, 2009). A deeper contextualisation of peace and peacemaking entails a move from “an institutional peace-as-governance agenda to an alternative or at least additional everyday agenda” (Richmond, 2009b: 579). It means tracing local understandings of concepts such as ‘peace,’ ‘normalisation’ or ‘resistance’ and investigating the multitude of hybrid local-international peace practices and discourses ranging from more conventional liberal dialogical *conflict resolution* (chapter V), to more structuralist collective nonviolent *resistance and protest* activism (chapter VI), to often individualised forms of daily economic and mental *survival and coping* struggles (chapter VII).

3. Gender Activism in a Context of Occupation and Statelessness

Liberal conflict resolution theories have, just as orthodox IR theory, traditionally shown little concern for gendered dynamics in conflict. More recently, and particularly after the adoption of the UNSCR 1325 in 2000, several attempts have been made to ‘merge the feminist and peace project’ (Sylvester 2000: 207-223). This section will present some theoretical developments underlying this ‘project,’ distinguishing between (1) liberal approaches focussing on ‘women,’ and (2) feminist approaches focussing on ‘gender’ and intersectionality.

3.1. *Liberal Approaches to Women and War*

A majority of the theoretical literature on women, gender and conflict has not succeeded in capturing women's widely varying subjectivities, roles and forms of agency in conflict. Often studies (e.g. UNIFEM, 2002) concentrate on women's specific suffering in conflict, giving a picture of women as passive victims of war. Doing so, they tend to reinforce stereotypical binaries of women/victim/private and men/protector/public, robbing women of their agency in the public political sphere and upholding artificial public/private divides. Viewing women merely as victims of war not only conceals their nonviolent, but also violent agency (see e.g. Sjøberg and Gentry, 2007). Moreover, as a way forward, such an approach would merely suggest humanitarian aid and relief, depoliticising conflict and missing out on making use of the potential that women's political activism could play in processes of positive gender and conflict transformation.

A related major shortcoming of mainstream women and war literature is its focus on women's *access* to established political structures and institutions. Women's involvement in macro-level peace negotiations is seen to contribute to engendering post-conflict reconstructions and state-building. Mainstream documents (e.g. UNSC, 2000; UNSG, 2002; UNIFEM, 2002) tend to put forward a liberal agenda supporting technocratic 'good governance' gender mainstreaming, attaining to a belief that 'bringing women to the negotiation table,' i.e. establishing women quotas for governmental position and peace negotiations etc., would help drafting and installing more gender-friendly post-conflict agreements and legal structures.

Such mainstream liberal literature on women and war has traditionally tended to adopt a position of difference or essentialist feminism asserting that women are essentially different from men and, as concerns peace studies, are more tolerant and peaceful and thus more suited to enacting peace. These essentialist 'peacewomen' arguments have been upheld by a variety of feminist positions, ranging from biological, 'maternalist' to social-constructivist (e.g. Ruddick, 1995; Gilligan, 1982; Brock-Utne, 1989, Reardon, 1988 & 1993; Strange, 1989) accounts. They have also found their entrance, although often more implicitly, into mainstream conflict resolution and development literature (e.g. UNIFEM, 2002). In particular, the claim that women deal differently, more peacefully with conflict situations and more relationally with the other side, has been used to support women's participation in

facilitative dialogical conflict resolution models.²⁸ While the equal representation of women in the decision-making process is without doubt a first desirable step towards greater gender equality, these accounts fail to acknowledge that there is no guarantee that women, if included in peace negotiations, would actually stand up for gender equality (nor for peace). The actual impact that the inclusion of women in peace negotiations has on bringing about more gender-friendly agreements is something yet to be shown (Sørensen, 1998).

By simply adding women to existing programmes and projects (and justifying this technocratic move by essentialising women as ‘natural’ peacemakers) liberal approaches to women and war fail to consider discriminatory gender systems that these very projects are often based on. If dealing with micro-level activism, mainstream international development, as a result of its ‘apolitical’ mandate, has preferred to focus on women’s depoliticised NGO activism, refraining from studying political and social movement activism at the grassroots. Consequently, in these accounts political activism and views of day-to-day activists have been marginalised in favour of individual, often elitist and western-educated professional feminist voices. In sum, mainstream liberal approaches to women and war have tended to adhere to, what Cox (1981) or Väyrynen (2004) describe as ‘problem-solving approaches’, that is, technical approaches that work on the surface of and do not consider, let alone challenge, the underlying, often discriminatory social and political structures. As such, they do not provide convincing starting point for a gendered conflict transformation approach.

3.2. Feminist Intersectional Approaches to Gender and War

More recently, feminist scholars, particularly those with (post-)structuralist theoretical leanings (e.g. Cockburn, 2004&2007; Enloe, 1989; Tickner, 1992; Shepherd, 2008), have proposed intersectional approaches to the study of women, gender and war. They have criticised that realist IR theory, while claiming to be objective and scientific, in fact fails to take into account women’s voices and experiences. Highlighting the inherent subjectivity of IR theory (e.g. Elshtain, 1987), they have drawn attention to the important, but concealed, role that women play in the political arena (e.g. Enloe, 1989), and have insisted that feminist perspective can make IR concepts, such as for example human security, more comprehensive (e.g. Tickner, 1992).

²⁸ See chapter V on women’s peace activism for a detailed discussion of the different positions upheld in essentialist feminist peace approaches.

Structural intersectional feminist analysis of war and conflict has particularly relied on peace scholar Galtung's (1996) conflict analysis. Galtung finds a relation between inequality and discriminatory structures within a given society, and this society's intractability in war with another society. In other words, he establishes a link between social and political change. He finds that "[c]onflict is much more than what meets the naked eye as 'trouble,' direct violence. There is also the violence frozen into structures, and the culture that legitimises violence" (Galtung, 1996: viii). Galtung defines *structural* violence as any constraint on human potential due to economic and political structures, such as unequal access to resources, to political power, to education, to health care, or to legal support. *Cultural* violence, on the other hand, refers to any aspect of 'culture' (religion, ideology, 'tradition,' customs) that can be used to legitimise violence in its direct or structural form. Cultural violence also includes gendered norms that sustain and inform material forms of patriarchal control over women. In order to achieve comprehensive 'positive peace,' Galtung argues that all types of violence, direct, cultural and structural (i.e. visible and invisible) must be eradicated. In his view only a society characterised by egalitarian and inclusive political and social structure (which would include gender equality), can maintain sustainable positive peace.

Galtung does not deal specifically with gender, but there are several feminist scholars who have taken up his framework. Caprioli (2000, 2005)²⁹ or Regan (2003), for example, try to show statistically in quantitative studies that states characterised by gender inequality are more likely to engage in intra- and interstate conflict. These scholars can, unquestionably, be credited for having drawn wider academic attention to gender and conflict dynamics. The quantitative methodological approach and particularly the direct *causal* (rather than correlative) link they establish between gender equality and conflict, however, is not convincing; it neglects other variables which, intersecting with gender, play a part in stirring and sustaining conflict dynamics.

Much more promising feminist amendments of Galtung's positive peace model are provided by Anne Tickner (1992) and Cynthia Cockburn (2004, 2007) and Cynthia Enloe (1989) who work with the feminist concept of intersectionality.³⁰

²⁹ Caprioli's (2000) study covers women's political representation from 1960-1992, covering 2187 armed conflicts in 151 countries.

³⁰ Intersectionality was originally theorised by Crenshaw (1991), but has since been used in various fields and disciplines (e.g. Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Collins, 1991; Hancock, 2007). It describes how oppressive categories such as gender, class, race, sexuality, and other identity levels interact in producing *systemic* inequality.

Anne Tickner (1992) takes a bottom-up perspective and starts from the different security needs and experiences of individual men and women with the aim of providing a gendered conceptualisation of human security.³¹ She finds that the various dynamics of violence at different levels of society are intersecting and mutually reinforcing. Consequently, “[t]he achievement of peace, economic justice, and ecological sustainability is inseparable from overcoming social relations of domination and subordination; genuine security requires not only the absence of war, but also the elimination of unjust social relations, including unequal gender relations” (Tickner, 1992: 128). Although her argument might seem close to Caprioli’s (2000) assertion that gender inequality is a *cause* of war, Tickner, in fact, argues more carefully for a more *comprehensive* analysis that would *also* include looking at gender issues and their intersection with other forms of oppression. Her interpretation of Galtung’s positive peace model wants to make human security more comprehensive and inclusive.

Cockburn (2007) argues that additionally to considering economic interests and ethnic identity, we need to study gender (relations and constructions) and the ways in which they intersect with class and race in producing the material and ideational foundations of war, conflict and militarism (Cockburn, 2007: 7-8). Speaking of a ‘gendered continuum of violence,’ Cockburn finds that violence is linked at various *levels* (from household to international, from gender-based to political), through different times (meaning that there is no specific time when war ends and peace starts), and stretches over several fields (economic, social and political) with gender relations penetrating all of these (Cockburn, 2004: 43). Her gendered analysis, by highlighting the continuum of violence and the intersectionality of class, ethnic and gender oppressions, reveals the hidden and taken-for-granted power relations that perpetuate violence at various levels, times and fields.

Constructivist, particularly post-structuralist, insights have contributed to feminist intersectionality studies by studying more closely the femininity and masculinity discourses that underpin structures of violence, militarism and conflict. These accounts (e.g. Enloe, 1989; Jabri, 1996; Seifert, 2004; Shepherd, 2008) inquire into the processes of how gender constructions interact with power and political structures. They want to find out how gender identities and notions of femininities and masculinities form the basis of the international militarised system and are used and instrumentalised by what could be called ‘identity-

³¹ For a comprehensive review article on theoretical feminist literature on human security see Blanchard (2003), for an interesting discussion showing the different angles that ‘gendering’ human security can take see the journal *Peace Review* (2004, Vol. 16. No.1), particularly Basch’s introductory article (2004).

entrepreneurs' to promote and instigate violent dynamics in conflicts. These scholars thus aim at extending the focus of much recent IR literature on the role that identity plays in stirring 'ethnopolitical' conflict (e.g. Kaldor, 1999) to also specifically include *gender* identities.

Enloe (1989), by showing how normative constructions of femininity underpin the international system, has argued that the personal is not only political, but also international. Women, although seemingly absent, are in fact at the heart of the international political and economic system. Militarised settings rely on certain types of masculinities and femininities as well as corresponding economic and social roles prescribed to women. Peace, as defined by Enloe, would require not just the absence of violence on all levels and fields of the violence continuum (and she emphasizes particularly the need for overcoming structural conditions that create, for example, female poverty), but also more specifically of the masculinities and femininities that perpetuate a culture of violence.

Elshtain (1987) has shown how women are reified as *biological* reproducers and *cultural* signifiers of the nation and/or ethnic, religious and other collectivities (see e.g. Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989). In particular in times of war militarised masculinities are glorified as 'just (citizen) warrior,' while women are seen to embody pure 'beautiful souls.' Gender constructions are juxtaposed in stereotypical binaries of women/beautiful soul/victim vs. men/just warrior/protector, serving to reinforce patriarchal power relations which infuse not only institutions like the military or the state but are also present at subnational, community or family level. Gendered ethnic and religious identities are essentialised, politicised and instrumentalised by political actors to solidify the construction of ethno-, or religio-political divides (see e.g. Al-Ali, 2005). Additionally, particularly in contexts dominated by histories of colonialism and foreign interventions, increased anti-western sentiments are often coupled with rising social conservatism: Women's rights are seen as western invention and associated with occupying powers to demarcate boundaries between 'us' and 'them'³² (Al-Ali, 2005; Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009). Although times of conflict are generally characterised by women increasing their economic, political and social practices and forms of activism (often to replace absent men), they are, at the same time, subjected to more restrictive gender ideologies. Seen as vessels not only of men's but also the community' and the nation's

³² Following from such a better understandings of how gender serves to construct group identities, rape during war time is not merely an act of gendered and sexual violence, but also, as the recent classification through UN resolution 1820 confirms even in mainstream conflict resolutions approaches, a weapon of war, an instrument in the contest between different groups. Rape becomes a booty principle to humiliate men as they are not able to 'protect their women'.

honour, women are faced with increased patriarchal control during times of conflict (e.g. Al-Ali, 2005; Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009; Cockburn, 2004).³³

Gender identity constructions thus are closely linked to, intersect with and can be instrumentalised for strengthening national, ethnic and class discourses. Acknowledging that ‘gender makes the world go round’ (Enloe, 1989) however does not mean tracing the roots of war in gender identities as quantitative studies (e.g. Caprioli, 2004) or recent psychosocial approaches have propagated (e.g. Blagojevic, 1999; Dolan, 2002). Rather, it means tracing locally-specific contexts and the ways in which material and ideational gender power structures intersect with other oppressive forces in producing war and conflict system (e.g. Al-Ali and Pratt, eds. 2009). Providing such context-sensitive gendered approaches to conflict transformation entails an investigation not only of the various political practices that women exercise, but also the various gendered meanings and identity constructions attached to these.

3.3. Local vs. International Definitions: Gender, Women’s, Female or Feminist Movements?

Women’s social and political activism is context-dependent and its representation and analysis not neutral. Although this section problematises the applicability of (mainly western-originated) definitions and terminology on gender and feminisms to local understanding, framings and practices of women’s politics, I remain cautious not to reproduce false dichotomies between ‘cultural authenticity’ and ‘westernisation.’

The use of the term “feminism” in the Palestinian context requires some scrutiny. Peteet’s differentiation between “female and feminist consciousness” (1991: 94) offers first valuable analytical insights. Peteet found that Palestinian refugee women’s motivation for participating in the Resistance in Lebanon at first stemmed from their *female* consciousness of defending their community. During their participation, however, some women encountered social barriers to their individual self-fulfilment as women - these women developed a *feminist* consciousness, struggling for more pronounced gender liberation and advocating “transformations in gender relations and meanings as ways to achieve autonomy and equality” (Peteet, 1991: 97). Additionally to Peteet’s conceptualisations of *female* and *feminist*

³³ Schmeidl and Piza-Lopez (2002) identify gender indicators as a crucial element for early conflict warning systems. They find that changes in gender constructions and relations, as well as women’s economic, social and political roles can provide signs through which violent conflict escalation might be anticipated.

consciousness, Molineux's (1985: 232–3) distinction between “*practical* gender interests,” such as access to childcare, healthcare, food, etc., and “*strategic* gender interests” for social gender change, strongly inform my analytical approach. Molineux's and Peteet's analyses point to two important issues.

Firstly, on a policy-oriented level, they draw attention to the fact that addressing *practical* gender interests is crucial not only because it provides women with security and a basic livelihood, but also because the satisfaction of basic material needs is itself a first step toward women's empowerment (Kabeer, 1994), that is, their increased *feminist*-conscious struggle for *strategic* gender interests. Secondly, on an analytical level, they show that normative gender structures are not fixed, but result from human agency and are open to actors' bargaining. Women devise different ‘bargaining’ strategies aimed at gradually transforming rather than provocatively challenging restrictive gender notions to open up spaces for activism. While *female*-conscious women stay within normative boundaries and attribute women's subordination in Palestinian society first and foremost to the occupation, *feminist*-conscious women, by prioritising patriarchy over political oppression, tend to find less support from society. Gendered peacebuilding programs need to take these differentiations into account. If they focus their work only or primarily on strategic gender interests, and dismiss women's *female*-conscious practical community-oriented political resistance activism as not truly feminist, they might easily be dismissed by local constituencies as ‘foreign’ and ‘western’ impositions.

Given local opposition to the term, I do not describe Palestinian women's activism as ‘feminist’ and instead prefer the term women's or gender activism (see e.g. Badran, 1993). This is not to deny that Palestinian women's political practices are not *also* feminist (because they target and reject different forms of intersecting oppressions), but rather highlights that feminism does not constitute an identity per se for the majority of Palestinian women. In the Palestinian context, as an intersectional approach reveals, class, ethnic and gender oppression are interlinked and in their intersections produce female political subjectivities and forms of activism.

4. Conclusion

The following points have been established as major underpinnings of my theoretical framework:

1. a *critical realist* approach, understanding conflict (and peace) to stem mainly from (intersecting) real political and material power asymmetries
2. a *social-constructivist* approach, recognising that (intersecting) discursively constructed gender norms are politicised to influence conflict dynamics (but they are not their roots)
3. a *critical-transformative* approach, stressing the need for balancing power asymmetries and making proposals for bringing about empirical (social and political) as well as conceptual (theoretical) change.

Informed by the social scientific paradigms of critical realism and social constructivism and geared towards emancipatory transformation my research can best be placed within conflict *transformation* theories and feminist *intersectional* approaches.

In using the term ‘conflict transformation’ I identify the main (but not only) roots of conflict in material structural inequalities, rather than individual grievances or misunderstandings. I analyse the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a settler-colonial conflict, stemming originally and mainly from (1) real material power asymmetries between occupier and occupied, but also from related (2) (mis)perceptions of the conflict (for example the Zionist narrative on a ‘land without people for a people without land’), as well as (3) discursively constructed ideational structures and norms that prescribe certain forms of agency (e.g. ‘dialogue-for-peace’ or ‘resistance-for-liberation’) as normative, thus rendering others as deviant.

A critical feminist intersectional approach adds to this structural analysis a focus on the ways in which multiple forms of oppression intersect in producing systems of domination. Social oppression through different forms of male domination in the public and private sphere; economic oppression through market forces, aid dependency and de-development; and political oppression through the occupation, settler colonialism and ethno-nationalism are intersecting and mutually constitutive sources of Palestinian women’s subordination.

Acknowledging the need to place different female political subjectivities and agencies within the wider context of intersecting material and ideational power structures in which they operate, I reject the narrow agency-based approach put forward in mainstream liberal theories on women and war which views women's participation in dialogue projects as only and best way towards peace and gender development. I also reject the postmodern trend of prioritising discursive/ideational over material structures. Particularly in situations of conflict and ongoing violence, women's spaces for political subjectivities and agencies are limited by concrete (i.e. materialised) political, social and cultural restrictions. Gender identities in conflict become political tools; they are essentialised, homogenised and exclusionist in nature. As such they allow neither for the prioritisation of gender over other identity variables such as nationality, ethnicity or class, as some essentialist feminist accounts propose, nor do they leave space for multiple fluid femininities, as some postmodern accounts seek to emphasise.

Although aware of the limitations that the structural context might place on female political subjectivities and agencies, I nevertheless believe in the possibilities of change through women's (and men's) agency. By introducing a critical-transformative aspect to peacebuilding theory and scholarship I hope to replace *process*-focused facilitation with *progress*-oriented normative proposals for change. Facilitation and mediation in Oslo failed, because it focused mainly on *process*, i.e. interim agreements, not *progress*, i.e. final status issues (Lloyd Jones, 2000). This lack of critical normativity resulted in the weakness, the 'floating' and eventually the collapse of the process. Instead, my research is guided by a critical emancipatory approach, viewing actors as capable of affecting change. It is firmly based on a *political* understanding of gender: the personal is not only political, but also international (Enloe, 1989) and all intersecting levels of oppression and discrimination need to be targeted simultaneously if 'positive peace' (which would include gender equality) is to be achieved.

Considering locally-specific gender roles is crucial for proposing such a progress-oriented intersectional conflict transformation approach. In the Palestinian case it means considering the impact that the occupation and settler colonialism, but also dynamics of capitalism, globalisation, aid dependency, de-development, public and private patriarchy, religious revivalism, factionalism etc., have had on changing Palestinian (political) culture and gender roles. Particularly a study of the gendered political practices and notions of femininities as existent in the political culture of the resistance is promising. It is a field that has been

neglected in mainstream liberal peacebuilding theory and praxis, despite the fact that women's activism in the resistance has empirically and historically shown to have affected conflict and gender transformations. I hope to detect those gender notions and female political agencies which bargain and challenge norms prescribed by domestic and international agendas in a way acceptable to Palestinian society. My aim is thus also to provide guidance on how actors *should* bargain within existing structures to initiate positive and sustainable social and political change.

Such a post-liberal culturally and gender-sensitive conflict transformation approach, which provides a gendered analysis of Palestinian political culture (particularly of the resistance) and evaluates the transformative potential of different forms of female political agency, has not been proposed. I hope my study can contribute to closing this gap.

CHAPTER IV

A HISTORY OF WOMEN'S ACTIVISM IN PALESTINE

The great majority of literature dealing with the Palestinian women's movement has studied the ways in which women's social and political struggles are interlinked. Many articles that have appeared in academic and journalistic writing since the mid-80s refer already in their titles to Palestinian women "fighting on two fronts" (e.g. Antonius, 1983; Kuttab, 1993), "fighting two battles" (e.g. Darraj, 2004), struggling for "national and social liberation" (e.g. Dajanai, 1994) or to the two concepts of nationalism and feminism (e.g. Abdo, 1994; Galvanis-Grantham, 1996; Jad, 1995). Additionally to these two concepts, and more recently with the rise of the Islamic movement, Islamism has entered into the debate on Palestinian women's activism (e.g. Jad, 2004a & 2005; Hammer, 2000; Al-Labadi, 2008).

This chapter aims to build on the wide array of empirical and conceptual literature that traces the history of the Palestinian women's movement, and particularly on discussions which assert that Palestinian women, when confronting the occupation, also challenge patriarchal norms and practices which hinder their more personal liberation as women. By giving a chronological overview of the development of Palestinian women's political activism in the 20th Century along the lines of key organisations and events I hope to achieve two aims.

Firstly, I hope to present a contextualised critical discussion of the different standpoints and conceptions which scholars, but also my interviewees, have taken towards Palestinian women's evolving role and position in the national and gender struggle. I do not seek to give yet another historical overview or reinterpretation of the Palestinian women's movement.³⁴ Rather, I want to present the personal (and subjective) accounts, perceptions and understandings of history as they were told to me by women activists from various backgrounds. I then aim to weave their accounts together with the existing literature, revisiting and shedding new light upon the main debates upheld in activist and scholarly circles.³⁵ Contrasting scholarly literature with activists' and ordinary women's own accounts

³⁴ See Abdo (1994), Barron (2002), Jad (1990), Galvanis-Grantham (1996), Kuttab (1993), al-Rawi (1994), Hammami (1990); Johnson and Kuttab (2001) for such a more comprehensive overview.

³⁵ For a similar approach see Al-Ali (2000: 51-85).

will bring to light alternative 'subaltern' gendered national discourses and forms of political agency.

Studies of institutionalised nationalism as well as of national liberation movements tend to focus on the voices and practices of the elite (see Chatterjee, 1993). The Palestinian case is no exception: most literature has focused on Palestinian women's elite involvement in the national struggle and peace process. My study aims at recovering ordinary women's understandings of history and portraying particularly their informal political activism. By recuperating and entering into the discussion the viewpoints and narratives of history as perceived by ordinary women, I want to give a more comprehensive (if perhaps more ambiguous) account of gendered political culture, including the different forms of political activism and the widely diverging meanings that Palestinians from different strata of society give to these. Doing so will highlight the contribution that, for example, refugee and peasant women have made to everyday Palestinian nationalism (see Jad, 2004a).

Secondly, I aim to discuss the historical shifts that have taken place in Palestinian women's political activism, on both the practical and conceptual level. Preparing the analysis presented in the main analytical chapters V, VI, and VII, I will focus on how meanings and practices of (1) joint Palestinian-Israeli peace work, (2) nonviolent protest activism, and (3) everyday forms of resistance have changed. Palestinian women have engaged in different forms of resistance and peace activism and have given different meanings, framings and interpretations to their acts. By giving a genealogy of these terms, I seek to question the universalist and fixed understandings of concepts and forms of political activism as suggested in often exclusivist homogenising nationalist discourses. Instead, I will show how gendered practices, discourses and institutions of Palestinian political culture have undergone transformations, stemming from women's individual circumstances (e.g. age, party affiliations, socio-economic background, secular or religious leanings, legal status, place of residence and other variable), but also from wider macro-level political developments.

Revealing the traces of power on history (and history writing) will establish the context, and thus partial causes, for why practices and meanings of women's political activism have changed at particular times in Palestine. It will also enrich understandings of concepts related to Palestinian women's political and gender activism. Although local definitions of terms such as peace-building, resistance, gender or feminism often differ starkly from those of

mainstream international organisations, Palestinian women borrow not only from the normative repertoire of Palestinian nationalism, but also from other local, transnational, gender or religious discourses to justify and frame their activism. The chapter is divided into five historical periods (pre-48; 48-67, 67-87, 87-93, 93-2000).

1. Women's Activism pre-48: Charitable Organisations and the Great Revolt

Women's activism in Palestine started long before the founding of the Israeli state in 1948. Already in late Ottoman times women's social associations (mainly sectarian) existed. The first political, cross-sectarian women's organisations were founded in Jerusalem and Haifa in 1921 (Sayigh, 1992: 4; see also Darraj, 2004; Jad, 1990). These early organisations were mainly engaged in charitable work, and joined only by a small minority of urban middle- and upper-class women, mainly Christian and often the wives of prominent Palestinian leaders. Their activism pursued practical gender interests; it was community-oriented and not overtly subversive to existing gender norms. The elite women leaders advanced a nationalist-modernist framework aiming at 'modernising' Palestinian society by providing women from peasant or lower socio-economic status, with, e.g. sewing classes, orphan children societies, literacy classes, etc. (Fleischmann, 2003: 99-102). It seems however, that rural women, in comparison to the urban women leaders whose lives were dominated by gender segregation and financial dependency on their male relatives, enjoyed in fact more spaces to manoeuvre, since farming often required them to work alongside men. Yet, the important economic role of peasant women did not result in their equal social status (Jad, 1990: 250).

During the British mandate period (1922-1948) Palestinian women's political activism, although still mainly restricted to upper-class women from the cities, started to move from charitable and humanitarian work to active political participation in demonstrations and protests against the British occupation. Women leaders were writing letters in protest to the British administration, gave support to the early revolts, such as the Jaffa 1921 riots or the Wailing Wall Riots of 1929 in Jerusalem (King, 2007: 97-8; Fleischmann, 2003; Jad, 1990). The women's movement at the time was encouraged, but not directed by the national leadership (Fleischmann, 2003: 142-149).

1.1. The First Arab Women's Congress

In October 1929 more than 200 women gathered for the First Arab Women's Congress conference rejecting the Balfour Declaration and Jewish immigration. The women participating in the Congress held the first women's march, a procession of ca. 80 cars through Jerusalem. During the delegation's visit to the British High Commissioner they caused a stir in national and international circles, when, in their symbolic gesture of protest and disrespect, they threw back their veils and refused the coffee offered by the Chancellor (King, 2007: 89). Lifting their veils, they stated that "to serve our homeland we shall take off our veils" (Nahla Abu-Zu'bi, 1987: 21, quoted in Jad, 1990: 252). In such symbolic gendered nonviolent protest action women put the tensions between the personal and political to use. By contrasting the honour and shame framework prominent in Palestinian culture with the national modernisation and liberation project women certainly did not propose a coherent national gender agenda, but they did draw attention to the tensions of and interrelations between their social and political struggle.

At the same Congress the Arab Women's Executive Committee (AWE), a 14 member delegation "entrusted with the execution of its [the congress's] resolutions and the administration of the Arab Women's Movement" (Mogannam, 1937: 76 quoted in Fleischmann, 2003: 142) was formed. AWE was involved in demonstration, wrote protest letters to the British administration and in the latter half of the century expanded its political activism, acting as strike enforcers, demonstrators and logistical coordinators. While it is agreed that AWE was made up predominantly of elite women (Fleischmann, 2003: 142—175), scholars are divided over the question of whether the Committee through the formation of sub-branches managed to reach out to village and less privileged sectors of society (King, 2007: 92) or whether their activism remained restricted to elite circles (Abdo, 1994; Jad, 2004a: 39). Without doubt, women's political work increased. Yet it was mostly still framed as a help to men's, providing "a convenient pretext for political mobilization" (Fleischmann, 2003: 144), rather than being accepted as legitimate political practice in its own rights.

1.2. The Great Revolt

Women played an important role in the Great Revolt (1936-39). The leader of the Revolt, the Islamic Reformer Shaykh Izzel Din Al-Qassam, encouraged women's participation and

women for the first time received training in the use of weapons (Sayigh, 1987: 26-27). Women's main contribution in the Revolt was nonviolent though. Already in the preceding 6-months general strikes "women were in the foreground of urging the boycotting of the government and refraining from entering negotiations with it until Arab demands had been conceded" (King, 2007: 92). While upper and middle-class women took the leadership in organising and mobilising women for demonstrations and conferences, peasant women were more pro-actively involved in the armed rebellion (Swedenburg, 2003: 178-9). Rural women, in their functions as food producers, conveyors, messengers or weapon carriers provided essential supplies and acted as the backbone of the Revolt (Jad, 1990: 252; Jad, 2004a: 53).

The British administration tried to quell women's activism directly and was particularly concerned about women's prominence at the demonstrations, which could not be crushed as violently as men-only demonstrations (Fleischmann, 2003: 162). They also attempted to engage in acts of "patriarchal collusion" (Fleischmann, 2003: 171) by encouraging internal rivalry over social gender norm. During the revolt the urban women leaders were attacked and accused of westernisation and immoral behaviour. Their 'western' behaviour and dress was frequently contrasted to that of 'authentic' Palestinian peasant women. Nuh Ibrahim, a popular poet and singer, for example, wrote:

And you, the Arab woman, march in step with your sisters the warriors [*mujahidat*] of the villages. Stop using your make-up, stop going to the cinema and other kinds of entertainment. Rise to the level of your sisters who carry water jugs on their heads, joining the warriors [*mujahidin*], singing and cheering them and so easing their deaths (Nuh Ibrahim quoted in Swedenburg, 2003: 182).

The conservative backlash against women in the Great Revolt, however, should not be seen as a result of traditionalism only, but rather the impact of class antagonism in a context of political occupation needs to be traced. Male peasants, who constituted the backbone of the revolt, found in such attacks on upper-class women a way to assert their newly won powerful position vis-à-vis the urban elite. In response to the peasants' attack on 'their' women, the male urban elite politicised the meaning of domesticity and thus further restricted women's spaces for public political activism. The combination of various repressive forces – from the British and Zionist forces as well as from the male peasant and urban elite - eventually led the

women activists to withdraw from public activism and to focus their efforts on social and developmental issues (Jad, 2004a: 78; see also Fleischmann 2003: 178). Acts of gender discrimination and more precisely the narrowing down of women's freedom for public political activism should thus not be understood through an isolated prism of gender. In the case of the Great Revolt, the restrictions placed on women's activism stemmed from a web of oppressive forces that intersect with gender: colonialism, patriarchy and class.

Although women were united across social classes through their couching of women's activism in nationalist terms (Fleischmann, 2003: 137), the upper-class women's leadership failed to mobilise peasant women in a truly inclusive way. Peasant women's lives were dominated by practical gender interests, while female elite activists, particularly within AWE, were concerned with (and divided over) the role that their charitable and feminist-political role should play in the national struggle.³⁶ As in other colonial and post-colonial settings, the early urban elite women's movement in Palestine took on the modernisation discourse and projected their traditional/modern binary on the rural/urban Palestinian divide.³⁷ For them, 'uplifting' peasant women from their 'backwardness' was an act of charity. Such patronising attitudes, however, not only provoked splits among the women's movement, but also led to the conservative forces' backlash against the upper and middle class women leaders (Jad, 2004a; Fleischmann, 2003).

Palestinian resistance against the British mandate was predominantly nonviolent. There were even inclusionary democratic political projects voiced at the time by the Palestine Communist Party (PCP), which consisted of both female and male Jewish and Palestinian members.³⁸ The urban upper-class women leaders have rightly been credited for sustaining the nonviolent protest actions and strikes. It remains, however questionable whether all Palestinian women

³⁶ In the late 1940 AWA split over precisely this question of whether to set the priorities on political, social or feminist issues: while the Arab Women's Association (AWA) engaged mainly in social work advancing a community-based framework concerned with practical gender interests and only indirectly challenging reactionary gender norms, the Arab Women's Union (AWU) was concerned with feminist and political issues (Daraj, 2004: 29).

³⁷ For studies that trace the impact of the modernisation project in nation-state building projects on women, see Najmabadi (1998) for Iran, Abu-Lughod (1998) for Egypt, and Kandiyoti (1991a) for Turkey.

³⁸ Despite some internal divisions, the PCP advanced the idea of coexistence in a binational state in which power and land would be shared. Jewish and Palestinian women joined the PCP, but they were not separately organised in women's branches before 1948. The PCP supported the Palestinian peasant revolt and praised specifically the role that peasant women and children played by joining in the struggle (Rubenstein, 1985: 151). See Budeiri (1979) or Offenbergl (1975) for a detailed study on PCP and Katz (2003: 166-179) or Young (1992) for accounts which elaborate on joint contacts between Palestinian and Jewish women before 1948. The majority of these contacts were, however, on an individual friendship, rather than collective political basis.

have been “at the forefront of Nonviolent Strategies” (King, 2007: 87). The imagery of a pacifist woman who supports her male relatives in the national struggle through nonviolent actions was a luxury that not all women could afford. While urban elite women with their emphasis on domesticity and their supportive, charitable role might indeed have had a more pacifist leaning, peasant women often had no choice but to participate also in more violent confrontations. In their daily struggles for survival, they supported their husbands in confronting the occupation and were more actively engaged than their urban sisters. It has even been suggested that women, alongside with students, urged the leadership to take more militant action (Kayali, 1979, referenced in Sayigh, 1992: 5). The peasant women’s more bold participation in the Great Revolt can thus be better accommodated within the gender construction of women warriors (Jad, 2004a: 78). More research on particularly rural women’s pre-48 political practices promises to unsettle - or at least complicate - the elite’s homogenised nationalist discourses about this period of Palestinian history.³⁹

2. The 1948 Expulsion: The *Nakba*, Land and Women’s Honour

In 1948 the Israeli state was established on Palestinian land. Ca. three-quarters of a million Palestinians, i.e. almost 90% of those living in what was designated as the Jewish state, became refugees (Pappé, 2004: 139). The *Nakba* had a profound impact on Palestinian political, social and economic organisation and as such constitutes a cornerstone in Palestinian identity formation (Khalidi, 1998). Women and gender norms were affected in specific ways: “uprooting, exile, schooling, employment opportunities, and national movement mobilization have changed life conditions for women in particular, partially creating a “new” Palestinian woman and disrupting gender boundaries” (Sayigh, 2007: 137). The period of 1948-67, as will be shown, displays a set of contradictory tendencies as far as gendered political practices and discourses are concerned.

The loss of their farmland meant for peasant women not only the loss of their livelihoods, but also of their everyday life routines and identity. Rural women were used to actively contributing to the family economy; in the camps they became relegated to maintaining the household and, trapped in the home, often were overcome by feelings of worthlessness

³⁹ Sayigh (1987, 1992, 2007), Khalili and Humphries (2007), Swedenburg (2003) and Jad (1990, 2004a) recuperate Palestinian women’s narratives of early Palestinian history.

(Khalili and Humphries, 2007: 217-218). Thrown into a state of extreme poverty and often as single providers of their families (since most men were involved in fighting, in prison or had migrated to the Gulf for work), refugee women, however, had little choice but to adapt, join the work force (where possible) and devise new survival and coping strategies. Women's economic involvement (although in ways very different to farming) became necessary and incontestable in the state of extreme poverty. Women must thus be seen as main supporters of post-48 refugee camp life (Jad, 1990: 253).

Women's relief and humanitarian aid work through setting up soup kitchens, first-aid clinics, orphanages, etc. was crucial in filling the gaps caused by the lack of state services (Giacaman and Odeh, 1988). Women from different social backgrounds took part in rebuilding the destroyed infrastructure in the fields of health, education and other social services. This trend is demonstrated in the sharp rise of charitable organisation and new social associations between 1948 and 1967 (Sayigh, 1992: 5-7). While during the Mandate Period peasant women had been actively contributing to the family economy and the Great Revolt, and urban elite women had established a platform for formal female political activism through their nonviolent anti-British protests, the destruction and poverty caused by the *Nakba* institutionalised charitable work as the main form of women's activism after 1948.

2.1. *Women's Informal Political Activism*

The shift to charitable, relief and social work in the post-*Nakba* decade might be viewed as a step back for the Palestinian women's movement. While it is true that women's *formal* political organising and nonviolent activism deteriorated, women's capacities to replace and rebuild destroyed community structures should, however, not be dismissed as apolitical. A narrow focus on women's organised official political action, would miss out on a wide terrain of informal political agency that the great majority of Palestinian women have historically (and continue to be) engaged in on a daily basis (see e.g. Sayigh, 1992).⁴⁰

The decade after the *Nakba* thus cannot merely be described as a decline in women's political activism. Rather the new modes of informal political activities and the ways in which they are practiced and framed need to be better understood. Motherhood, survival and the reproduction

⁴⁰ See chapter VII for a detailed theoretical, analytical and empirical study of contemporary everyday resistance as carried out by Palestinian women.

of the family are crucial framers of the steadfastness (*ṣumūd*) discourses and practices that characterise this post-*Nakba* informal female political agency. Nationalist forces and the (often affiliated) women's charitable organisation (such as *In'āsh al-'Usra*) reified women, and particularly peasant mothers, as protectors and nurturers of the nation, glorifying their informal resistance and relief work. But even in their own narratives *Nakba* women today still "foreground those stories which best showcase their maternal and feminine virtues; thus, women most proudly recount their ability to protect their own children as their singular accomplishment during the catastrophe" (Khalili and Humphries, 2007: 224).

Ṣumūd, although offering women with an opportunity to define new spaces for their activism by engaging in a process of politicising the domestic sphere and domesticating the public sphere (see Petee, 1991), thus might also, if associated with the post-*Nakba* peasant-turned-refugee mother and chiefly concerned with holding onto the land, self-sufficiency and survival, reduce women's political contributions to their reproductive capacities and thus to 'traditional' forms and spaces. As a somewhat passive statist form of resistance, it has been denounced as reinforcing conservative traditionalism and romanticising a peasant society that might never actually have existed as such (Tamari, 1991).

2.2. Women's Formal Political Party Activism

Besides this increase in informal activism, women's participation in formal politics also continued. Although "[o]nly a small minority of women were politically active during the 1948-67 period", Sayigh (1992: 6) finds that "[t]heir importance as a vanguard went far beyond their numbers." Several branches of AWE survived, mainly in the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem, but few also continued operating from the diaspora. They carried on their political lobbying and played an essential role in the founding of the PLO (Sayigh, 1992: 6-7). From the 1960s onwards, and in particular with the arrival of the PLO in 1964 and its promotion of a revolutionary atmosphere of national liberation, political culture took a radical departure from the Mandate period. This change, of course, was gendered. Now women started to join political parties, such as the Jordanian Communist party, the Ba'th party or the Arab Nationalist Movement (Sayigh, 1992: 6). They were, as Leila, one of my interviewees from the older generation of established women leaders, remembered, particularly active in the communist party and established first contacts and dialogue with Israeli communists:

Before [1967] mainly the leftist, active communist women in Palestine had relations with the communists in Israel. [They called for] a democratic state in Palestine that could include all people who are living in it, and the right for all Palestinian to come back. All would be equal citizens in that state of historical Palestine. [The communists] are the only political party that recognised the Partition Resolution 181 so they recognised Israel to be formed on the land alongside with Palestine (Leila, 2008).

Specific women-only alliances were established through the Democratic Women's Movement (TANDI) which was founded in 1948 by Arab and Jewish female members of the Communist Party. TANDI worked for women's and worker's rights and advanced a joint solidarity agenda for peace calling for a democratic binational state (Sharoni, 1995: 134). In addition to their adherence to dialogue and co-existence, members of the Communist Party continued their pre-48 activities of nonviolent struggle;⁴¹ on International Women's Day, for example, TANDI organised peaceful marches, public protests and events (ibid).

Most followers of the communist party and followers of the paradigms of coexistence and nonviolence were from the educated urban classes. In refugee camps political practice and ideology was decidedly different. Here, political Islam, with its emphasis on *jihad*, self-reliance and military action to liberate the homeland attracted particularly former villagers and lower income groups because it built upon their religious attachments and more conservative social attitudes (Sayigh, 1997: 50). Additionally to political Islam, the Arab Nationalist Movement (which would later become PFLP and PDFLP), a secular, radical-leftist anti-colonial political movement, which advocated the liberation of Palestine through armed struggle and emphasised Arab unity, was strongly supported in refugee camps (Sayigh, 1997: 71-94).

This dichotomy between the Islamic movement, which mobilised mainly through social networks, and the leftist-secular groups which worked from a political-intellectual platform contributed, as Adnan (a long-term political activist and one of today's leaders of nonviolent resistance) stated to the rise of Fatah:

⁴¹ When in 1955/6 the Jordanian government outlawed political parties, singling out particularly the Jordanian Communist Party, they organised peaceful nonviolent demonstrations (King, 2007: 70; see also Budeiri, 1979).

Before Fatah came there were the leftist and the rightist parties. Leftist were the communist [he means the radical-leftist ANM, not the communists who called for binational state] and the Rightist were the Muslim Brotherhood and others. The leftists had a national agenda; they were with the armed struggle [*niḍāl*], while the rightists had more of a social and religious agenda. There was no one in between who combined the national struggle with a social agenda and who was able to mobilise people by dealing with their everyday life and linking this to the national struggle. When Fatah came they were able to make this link and they grew very quickly to be the strongest (Adnan, 2008).

Fatah was founded in 1959 as guerrilla group. It gained popularity after the foundation of the PLO in 1964 (Sayigh, 1997: 71-112), when the liberationist political strategy of revolution (*thawra*) and armed struggle (*niḍāl*, *kifāḥ* embodied by the *fidā'ī*) firmly replaced the earlier ideology of (predominantly) nonviolent protest. “Armed struggle”, as Sayigh (1997: 57) has noted, “eventually turned the Palestinian ‘idea’ into an organized, mass phenomenon, by offering a powerful symbol of the ‘imagined community’ and providing the impetus to focus it on a common structure.”

In 1965 the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) was founded by women in exile as a body within the PLO, and as the official representative body for Palestinian women. The Union focused its work on raising women’s political consciousness, integrating them into political structures and improving their social, cultural, and economic living standards. Being led by “privileged, socially liberated women” (Jad, 1990: 253) the GUPW’s agenda has always been dominated by nationalist, rather than feminist or even social gender transformation aims. As a branch of the PLO and like other political parties of the pre-67 period the GUPW was subjected to Arab state suppression. It was banned in 1966 by Jordanian authorities and consequently moved its headquarters to Cairo, and then later to Lebanon.

In the pre-67 period gendered political discourse and practice provided the battlefield for internal political competition and was polarised between the PLO’s newly emerging political culture of revolution (*thawra*) and *niḍāl* (armed struggle) which started to construct a new militant femininity around the notion of female freedom fighter (*fidā'īyya*) and the discourses

of *ṣumūd* which reified women and particularly mothers as protectors and reproducers of the nation, glorifying their informal resistance and relief work. Women's choices of political practice, ideological inclinations and social programmes were influenced mainly by their socio-economic background, legal status and age. Many of the middle- or upper-class women who had led the pre-48 women's movement migrated and became active in the PLO and GUPW leadership in exile. Those from poorer and peasant background who became refugees were less likely to be formally politically active, but rather sought out ways to accommodate the host state authority and to pursue economic opportunities. Non-refugees, given their often more privileged socio-economic status, were more likely to join political parties with a formal social and political agenda and engage in ideological debates, particularly through their periodicals that appeared in the 60s (Sayigh, 1997: 56-7). Intersecting with class and legal status, age emerged as crucial variable impacting upon women's choices of political agency during. While the younger educated and mostly non-married women started to join political activism through the PLO factions supporting their call for armed struggle (*kifāh, niḍāl*),⁴² the women of the older generation continued their engagement in mainly charitable and relief work (*ṣumūd*).

The time from 1948-66 thus saw a diversification and increase of women's political activism. While it is true that the extremity of the situation in Palestine after 1948 necessitated women's participation in the public sphere as economic providers and political activists, it would be wrong to view feminist motivations behind these developments. The national cause superseded all other issues and women, it was assumed, would be liberated once the nation was. The traumatic and humiliating events of the *Nakba* even led to a reinforcement of conservative gender roles. Faced with the threat of sexual harassment or rape, the concept of 'women's honour'⁴³ was revived during the post 48 decades. Physical insults on women's bodies were (and continue to be) seen as a symbolical insult on men's and the nation's honour (Khalili, 2007: 212). For many men, defending women against rape was (or at least was later on justified as having been) "more important than defending their homes or showing personal bravery and defiance" (Warnock, 1990: 23). Particularly for the older upper-class leadership

⁴² At this time only few women became supporters of clandestine resistance organisation; open recruitment of women only started after Battle of Karameh in 1968.

⁴³ The concept of 'women's honour' refers to a woman's absolute sexual purity and to her self-restraint and modesty in speech and dressing. See Abu-Lughod (1986/2000) for an extensive discussion of the concept in the context of the Awlad Ali Bedouins in Egypt.

the slogan '*al-ʿird qabl al-ard*' ('Honour before Land') "became a powerful cultural tool in responding to their expulsion" (Abdo, 1994: 154).⁴⁴

Although women's activism, whether formal or informal, grew in the period from 48-67 and alternative gender constructions were introduced, gender ideologies thus remained wedded to conservative notions of the honour and shame complex and reified women as cultural and biological reproducers of the nation. Even Suad, who was an active member in the early leftist women's movement, described the period of the *Nakba* through such more statist gender imagery: "[i]n the history since the *Nakba* women always acted as the guards and preserved our national identity. Women [in comparison to men] tend more towards stability, a life in dignity, a life in peace. Women in their nature feel that they are more the guardians of peace and stability" (Suad, 2008). The fact, however, that women could now become members of mixed-gender organisations constituted a step forward for the movement and provided a challenge to prevailing gender norms (Sayigh, 1992). Gradually more experienced female cadres started to emerge, "who were to play significant role in confronting the Israeli occupation as of 1967" (Jad, 1990: 252).

3. The 1967 Defeat: *Thawra*, Institutionalised *Ṣumūd* and the Popular Committees

The 1967 defeat and the resulting Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights and Sinai led to the politicisation of the entire society. The Palestinian community became subject to profound social, economic and political transformations. Palestinian political culture and its gendered underpinnings remained divided and in flux. After the defeat, the Occupied Territories were quickly subjugated to the Israeli economy; they served as a consumer market for Israeli products and provided cheap labour force. The Palestinian economy was drawn into near-complete dependency on the Israeli system. A large proportion (ca. 40%) of Palestinians now became workers, others stayed unemployed, and some managed to join the newly emerging class of urban entrepreneurs, i.e. subcontractors to the Israeli economy (see Tamari, 1991: 61). Palestinian working women received the worst share of Israeli labour exploitation; they were denied their rights as Palestinians, as workers and as women (Hajj, 1992; Rosenfeld, 2004).

⁴⁴ This recourse to the honour and shame complex was not only adopted by men; women's *Nakba* memories also are influenced by such traditionalist nationalist gender discourses (Khalili and Humphries, 2007: 208-9).

Several practical and discursive political responses to the 1967 defeat and Israel's subsequent economic and logistic control over the Occupied Territories were proposed. Firstly, the 67 defeat proved to the Palestinians that the Arab states and their regular armies are not capable of liberating Palestine; in the early years after 1967 the PLO thus promoted its political discourse of armed struggle. Secondly, similarly influenced by the lack of trust in their Arab neighbours, but more so by the growing dependency on Israeli economy, the principle of self-reliance and steadfastness (*ṣumūd*) was proposed and solidified. These two strands of the nationalist agenda were countered by the (continued) communist proposal of a binational state and the practice of populist mass nonviolent struggle, which started to rise in the early 80s and gained momentum in the First Intifada (see Tamari, 1991). Each of these four (overlapping) political projects (armed struggle, *ṣumūd*, binationalism and nonviolent resistance) was enmeshed with gendered assumptions and influenced women's political practices.

3.1. The Nationalist Modernist Agenda: Armed Struggle and the Female Militant (Fidā'iyya)

After the 1967 defeat the new revolutionary leadership (*jīl al-thawra*) had firmly replaced the old leadership and, in the revised PLO Charter of 1968, proclaimed its nationalist-liberationist strategy of armed struggle (*niḍāl, kifāh*). In their attempt to solidify their newly gained power vis-à-vis the old urban elite leadership, the new *jīl al-thawra* promoted a modernist discourse encouraging (at least in theory and speech) women to participate alongside men in all aspects of the national struggle, including military action. Palestinian women's activities thus no longer were limited to charitable work, humanitarian relief or supportive work in political parties. The fact that women were increasingly participating in political and militant activism is reflected in the sharp rise of women prisoners from 100 in 1968 to 3000 in 1979 (Jad, 1990: 254).

The new leadership attempted to de-legitimise the old elite by denouncing their prioritising of women's honour over land as backwards, identifying what they considered a traditionalist gendered outlook as one of the cause for the defeat. Instead they promoted what in their view amounted to a more modern secular gender construction of the 'new Palestinian woman' who, as an equal to men, actively stands up to defend Palestine. Frances Hasso, who has provided a gendered analysis of the *Nakba* and 1967 defeat, in this respect finds that "[a]ccording to this

nationalist discursive reworking, men could succeed individually in “protecting” women (*ird*) and still not possess honor (*sharaf*) if they did not protect national land claims—thus, the development of the slogan “land before honor” (*al-ard qabl al-‘ird*)” (Hasso, 2000: 495). The modernists’ reversing of the slogan thus might at first be understood as a severe challenge to social gender structures. But, taking a closer look, it becomes evident that – as is usual to nationalist-modernist discourses - this shift was both opening up new spaces for female agency while restricting others through reinforcing patriarchal control in new forms.

The nationalist-modernists promoted women’s participation in the struggle by replacing the image of women as the weaker part of society that needed to be protected before the land with one of the female fighter, the *fidā’īyya*. The *fidā’īyya* was to accompany the male warrior hero, the *fidā’ī* in armed struggle and was celebrated as a symbol of liberation and modernity. The now iconographic depictions of the typical *fidā’īyya* (e.g. Leila Khaled)⁴⁵ are strikingly similar to that of her male companion, the *fidā’ī*: “The feday (lit.: “one who sacrifices himself”) was a modern metamorphosis of the holy warrior. Sacrificing himself in the battle against Zionism, he was portrayed with head wrapped in the distinctive checkered Palestinian kafiya, gripping a Kalishnokov” (Kimmerling and Migdal, 2003: 243). Presented as an equal to men the *fidā’īyya* was purposely constructed as a counter model to ‘traditionalist’ gender constructions of peasant women as bearers of cultural authenticity.

The *fidā’īyya* unquestionably introduced radical redefinitions of gender imageries and women’s political practices. The fact that new gendered political discourses were promoted by the nationalist-modernist, however, should not be understood as socially progressive or transformative per se. Additionally to the *fidā’īyya*, which was usually associated with younger women, the nationalists, despite their claims to progress and modernity, also incorporated and reworked older, more ‘traditionalist’ roles. The mother of the *fidā’ī* or martyr who not only gives birth to the male fighter but also supports and protects him, became an equally prominent image and was socially even more accepted than the female militant.⁴⁶ While the *fidā’īyyāt* and mothers of the *fidā’ī* were both elevated discursively to national heroine status, in actual practice it was usually only the latter who were empowered

⁴⁵ Leila Khaled remains the most famous female Palestinian *fidā’īyya*. She led a group of men to hijack a plane in 1969.

⁴⁶ Ghassan Kanafani in his famous novel *Um Sa‘d* depicts the stereotypical mother of the *fidā’ī* whom her husband – in line with popular nationalist discourse – praises with the following words: “This woman gives birth to children who then become *fidā’īyūn*; she provides the children for Palestine!” (Kanafani, 1973/2006: 29, my translation).

and gained in social status, while young female militants tended to find it hard to reintegrate back into society, particularly if they had been imprisoned (Hammami, 1997: 164; Interview Najla, 2008). As far as social gender discourses and practices were concerned, the new political culture of the revolution (*thawra*) was thus not so revolutionary after all: at the time none of the liberationist groups proposed a clearly defined gender agenda.

3.2. *The Nationalist-Traditionalist Agenda: Institutionalised Şumūd and the Steadfast Peasant Mother (Aş-Şāmida)*

From the early 70s onwards there was a shift away from underground armed resistance and instead *şumūd* ('steadfastness') became the main political strategy and ideology pursued. The term *şumūd*, as Tamari notes has a

murky genealogy in the idiom of the Palestinian national movement. It began as a form of passive resistance to Israeli rule in the early seventies and ended as a form of passive nonresistance (some would say as aggressive nonresistance) following the decision by the Arab states in Baghdad (1978) to aid the "steadfastness" of the West Bank and Gaza to the tune of \$150 million annually (Tamari, 1991: 61).

As detailed in the previous section *şumūd*, until the mid-70s, denoted a strategy closely related to the land and agriculture, often associated with the peasant mother, and one that, in contrast to armed struggle, could be practiced by every individual. At the Arab Summit Conference in Baghdad the term *şāmīd* (the steadfast) and *şumūd* entered the official discourse of the PLO and thus shifted from denoting an individual survival strategy to constituting an institutionalised policy (Lindholm Schulz, 1999: 55). *Şumūd* was suggested as a political strategy to halt the mass exodus of Palestinians from the occupied land and the Israeli expropriation of and control over the land. Raja Shehadeh, analysing the strategy of *şumūd*, explains:

Sāmīd means 'the steadfast', 'the persevering'. [...] We, who had been living under occupation for ten years, were now called on to be *samidīn* and urged to adopt the stance of *sumūd*: to stay put, to cling to our homes and land by all means available. A special pan-Arab fund,

Amwal es-sumūd, was set up to help us combat the collapse of our social and economic fabric, caused by the Israeli colonization of our land (Shehadah, 1982: vii).

The majority of the *ṣumūd* funds, which were administered and transferred by the Steadfastness Aid Fund of the Jordanian-Palestinian Joint Committee, were invested in infrastructural activities, mainly agriculture, housing, education and municipal activities. Women were active in building networks and infrastructure and were particularly engaged in building institutions for income generation, kindergardens, schools as well as clinics. In 1969 activist women from Fatah founded *Ṣāmid* an income generating project to provide jobs and services for the needy. Their journal called *ṣāmid al-iqtiṣādī* (economic steadfastness) dealt with economic survival and self-reliance strategies (Jad, 2004a: 83).

In the institutionalised PLO discourse *ṣumūd* was not aimed at replacing armed struggle, but rather the *ṣāmid* was seen as necessarily complementing and assisting the *fidā'ī*. Although possible to be practiced at the individual level, *ṣumūd*, in the words of Arafat, should be a political strategy followed on a collective basis:

The most important element in the Palestinian program is holding on to the land. Holding on to the land and not warfare alone. Warfare comes at a different level. If you only fight - that is a tragedy. If you fight and emigrate - that is a tragedy. The basis is that you hold on and fight. The important thing is that you hold on to the land and afterward - combat (Arafat, *Al-Fikr*, Paris, June 1985: 29 quoted in Mishal and Aharoni, 1994: 13).

Yet, *ṣumūd* lost credibility within Palestinian society from the late 1970s onwards, because “[t]he *sumud* funds were readily manipulated by the traditional elites now equipped with the nationalist ideology of steadfastness, often with the connivance and active support of the Israeli military government under the guise of backing “moderate elements” (Tamari, 1991: 63). The *ṣumūd* funds mainly served the feudal lords and nationalist elite, while the landless peasants, workers and refugees, who were proclaimed to be the beneficiaries, were not supported. After its institutionalisation through the Arab funds, the ideology of *ṣumūd*, with its focus on survival rather than change, thus not only tended towards social conservatism and

peasant romanticism, but also reinforced class divides and even the political status quo of the occupation.

3.3. *The Lead-Up to the First Intifada: Popular Committees and Mass Populism*

In response to the failure of both the nationalist strategies of (institutionalised) *ṣumūd* and armed resistance (*niḍāl*) to effectively combat Israeli occupation an alternative, more progressive and radical grassroots movement started to form inside the Occupied Territories after the 1976 municipal elections. The new inside leadership distinguished itself from the PLO through its more inclusive, even populist agenda. It was dominated by the leftist groups and started to found mass organisations and popular committees (Tamari, 1991). As a new popular movement and ideology, it offered alternative channels for women to redefine practices and discourses of their political activism. It proposed a shift from passive institutionalised *ṣumūd* to a more proactive *ṣumūd muqawam* (*resistance ṣumūd*) and from elitist armed struggle (*niḍāl*) to mass-based nonviolent civil resistance (*muqāwma sha^cbīyya* or *muqāwma silmīyya*).

On March 8th 1978, the International Women's Day, the Union of Palestinian Women's Working Committees (UPWWC) was founded by politically active women, mainly from the leftist factions (DFLP, PFLP, Communist Party and some independent women activists). The UPWWC later branched into four committees. Although each of these was established as the women's wing of the four major political parties within the PLO, they united around a joint agenda (Jad, 1990), which differed drastically from that of the nationalist elitist GUPW (to which they had originally been denied access because of their alleged 'militant' background), as well as from the older charitable organisations (e.g. *In^cāsh al-'Usra*). They were motivated by and mobilising other women on the basis of their political platform and, to a certain extent, also incorporated social and women's issues, rather than philanthropic charitable or purely nationalist-liberationist considerations.

Through their more decentralised and flexible organisational structure the female activists in the committees were able to overcome the exclusivity of the charitable organisations and the GUPW, as Suad, who was a leading women activists in the committees, explained:

We [the DFLP] adopted new [organisational] forms and maybe we were even among the first of the political organisations to do that. In 1978 we invited all women's organisations and smaller associations (*jam^cīyyāt*) to a women's network [the UPWWC] which was related to the political parties. The aim was to see how we can work with women more broadly on their role, both from social and national aspects. So then every political party formed a popular women's branch. Consequently the leadership was able to reach out to a wider popular field, but it always remained within a political framework (Suad, 2008).

Although the number of formally politically-organised women activists remained limited (predominantly to those from higher socio-economic status), the committees managed to overcome the divides between rural, urban and camp women through informally and loosely affiliating ordinary and particularly rural and camp women's small associations (*jam^cīyyāt*) in their work. When women increasingly joined the workforce and when, in the mid- and late 70s, higher education institutions opened, the committee activists were able to establish first contacts at universities and work places. In that way the committees were able to build strong links with rural and camp women, expand their grassroots support and a growing number of younger, educated women became more politicised and socially aware (Abdo, 1994; Jad, 1990 and 2004a).

3.3.1. *Nonviolent Civil Resistance*

From the 1980s onwards, the new internal leadership within the Occupied Territories began discussing the use of civil nonviolent resistance (*muqāwma sha^cbīyya* or *muqāwma silmīyya*) as a strategy to replace *ṣumūd* and armed resistance (*niḍāl*). Path-breaking in the struggle to advance civil resistance as a political strategy against the occupation was Mubarak Awad's article entitled "Nonviolent Resistance: A Strategy for the Occupied Territories", published in 1984 in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*. In it nonviolent resistance is proposed as a comprehensive strategy to resist the occupation, the methods to apply it are discussed, and ways of how to overcome possible obstacles suggested. The methods that Awad proposes are those that would later appear on a mass scale in the First Intifada: civil disobedience, building alternative institutions to undermine the occupation system, acts of support and solidarity

among Palestinians, strikes, boycotts, harassment of and refusal to cooperate with soldiers, collaborators and Israeli authorities, and demonstration and protest actions (Awad, 1984).

Awad and his Palestinian Center for the Study of Nonviolence (founded in 1985) insisted that a commitment to nonviolence should be taken for practical, not spiritual/principled reasons. He believed that in a situation of stark power asymmetry nonviolent resistance provides the most effective strategy to morally and politically isolate and de-legitimise the occupier. Nonviolence thus was not an ideological position that morally denounced or aimed at de-legitimising armed resistance. At the same time, he also made sure to distinguish nonviolent struggle from passive resistance or static *ṣumūd*, clarifying that “[i]t is an active, affirmative operation, a form of mobile warfare. It will require the enlistment of all resources and capabilities. It requires special training and a high degree of organization and discipline” (Awad, 1984: 25). Feisal Hussein, who like Awad worked on establishing nonviolent struggle in the 1980s, summarised their balancing act well, when debating the name for their political strategy: “We rejected ‘passive resistance.’ It had a negative connotation. We tried ‘nonviolence.’ Too weak. We finally settled on ‘aggressive nonviolence’” (Hussein quoted in Williams, 2001). By choosing the term ‘aggressive nonviolence’ they hoped to find a balance between armed resistance and passive *ṣumūd* and thus pre-empt criticism of ‘terrorism,’ (armed struggle) from without and accusations of ‘passivity’ and ‘surrender’ (*ṣumūd*) from within.

Women’s involvement in nonviolent political activism, such as demonstrations, sit-ins, protest marches, boycotts, or re-planting of uprooted olive trees on annexed land, increased drastically in the 80s and only very few women were still involved in guerrilla acts. Women, through their wide-reaching committee work contributed to creating alternative, more plural and inclusive social, political and economic systems, which would be crucial in sustaining the First Intifada. In her study of Palestinian women writers and referring particularly to Sahar Khalifa’s post-67 novels, Cooke (1996: 217) argues that women’s cultural productions reflect an understanding that “the solutions are in the hands of women who have invented a new kind of fighting”, thus claiming that women were crucial in initiating also the conceptual, discursive shift to nonviolence in Palestinian political culture.

3.3.2. *Joint Palestinian-Israeli Activism*

Nonviolent protest actions was also joined by Israeli anti-occupation activists. Before, joint meetings or even just contacts between Palestinians and Israelis were limited to the elite level, to administrative contacts or to communist solidarity activists united on their idea of a binational state (Naser-Najjab, 2004). In the 1970s Israeli peace activism started to increase. In 1975 the Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace was formed by a group of Israeli Zionists (e.g. Uri Avneri) who called for the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. In 1978 the Israeli mainstream peace movement Peace Now followed. Joint conflict resolution workshops were also initiated in the late 1970s with Harvard Professor Herbert Kelman bringing together representatives from both sides in psycho-social track II meetings, based on the model of problem-solving workshops (see Kelman, 1979).

With the start of the Lebanon invasion in 1982 several solidarity activities were initiated and Israeli participation in protest actions widened. Leftist Israelis protested in the Committee for Solidarity with Bir Zeit University against the university's closure; Mubarak Awad involved Israelis in his work in the Center for Nonviolence, and in 1985 Feisal Hussein opened together with the Israeli political journalist Gideon Spiro the Committee Confronting the Iron Fist. According to King (2007: 165) this "small group formed by Israelis and Palestinians is significant, because it marks a formal beginning to organized contemporary nonviolent action against the Israeli military occupation." With their political strategy Awad and Hussein thus rejected the liberationist ideology of armed struggle and instead acknowledged Israel's permanence and the need for independence and coexistence.

Women's participation in joint solidarity activities also was no longer limited to communist activists. Israeli women (and men) now joined volunteer camps in the Occupied Territories, filling in the gaps caused by a lack of social welfare system, or participated in solidarity demonstrations, strikes and sit-ins (Interview Leila, 2008). In particular, links between Israeli human rights lawyers and Palestinian female political prisoners were strengthened. Israeli human rights lawyers, such as Leah Tsemel or Felicia Langer, defended Palestinian political prisoners, investigated and brought to light the fact that they were tortured in Israeli prisons, and staged joint protest actions (see e.g. Langer, 1975; Ashrawi, 1995: 32, 51; Naser-Najjab, 2004). Suad remembered from her time in the women's prison in Ramla that:

...there were many Israeli women's organisations in the beginning of the 80s who visited [us] when we held strikes inside the Israeli prison from 82-84. We were on strike to gain our rights as female political prisoners and the [Israeli] women's human rights organisations really supported our strike. A group of women used to come and stand in front of the prison in Ramla protesting against the treatment of the Palestinian political prisoners. [...] They used to always visit us, bring us books, and such things. They wanted to support and show solidarity with the Palestinian women. This was, I think, the beginning of [joint solidarity] work: those female lawyers who defended the cases of Palestinian political prisoners and this, of course, started to pave the way for thinking that we might work together as women (Suad, 2008; see also WATC, 2007).

Joint Palestinian Israeli activism, however, still remained a dangerous undertaking. On 5 August 86 the Knesset passed a law that meetings with Palestinians are illegal (Naser-Najjab, 2004: 63). On the Palestinian side not all forms of joint work were accepted, and risked to be denounced by reactionary forces as a form of collaboration or normalisation (*taṭbīʿ*):

[Joint activism] wasn't really accepted at that time in our society. But with the communists, it was different. Because most of the communists were Palestinians [including Palestinian-Israelis] and most of their activities were for the Palestinian people and they supported us, people didn't attack it so much. Even from the non-communist people, from the general public, it wasn't that much attacked (Interview Leila, 2008).

These accounts show that joint activism – as long as it was geared towards ending the occupation and based on a joint political agenda – was accepted by the Palestinian public. Before the First Intifada there were only few tentative steps from the Palestinian women's movement to establish links with Israeli women in particular (Interview Suad, 2008) and Palestinian women only participated in joint projects that aimed for political, not social gender change.

3.3.3. *Women's Activism for Social Change*

On an intra-Palestinian level, however, the new women's leadership from the committees challenged gender discrimination. Their strong grassroots basis and relative independence from the bourgeois and nationalist elite allowed them to cautiously open the debate on women's issues. The UPWC was dominated by leftist and Marxist thinking and it has been argued that this political leaning facilitated their articulation of a more nuanced gender agenda (Hasso, 2001 & 2005; Jad, 2004a; Kamal, 1998). The women activists in the committees wanted to find ways through which they could fight social and political oppression simultaneously, as Suad explained to me:

Palestinian women at that time [early 80s] wanted to show - and this was started off by the leftist factions - that women have a lot to give and that without using this capacity in the national struggle much work would simply get lost. The fact that women were participating in the national struggle and were bearing all the work of the struggle, also meant that their position in society and the views of society towards women's role could change, i.e. that society would no longer just look at women as fulfilling their traditional role or [minimise their contribution to] a decorative role. No - [we demanded that] women must get their education, go out to work and at the same time and in the interest of their nation and their people, participate in the liberation struggle. So we thought how can we link the two, how can women play an active role in their society and change their reality from that position? (Suad, 2008)

The new women's leadership that formed in the run-up to the First Intifada pressed for political *and* social change, and - for the first time - started to organise as women, calling for their rights as women - not as mothers or wives (Hammami, 1997). While it has rightly been claimed that this period should therefore be seen as "the golden era for women's activism in the West Bank and Gaza" (Jad, 2004a: 90), one must not forget, however, that the early 80s also saw the rise of the Islamic movement which started to assert control in public spaces over women, particularly in Gaza. Feryal, a women activist who used to be active in the

communist party in Gaza already before the Intifada and now is a local nonviolent resistance activist in the governorate of Salfit, told me about her experience:

In the 80s we were demonstrating in Gaza. I went to the Islamic associations to recruit girls there to join us in these demonstrations. But they stopped me and they hit me. They did not accept our activism. Later they even came to my house and also hit my sister. They wanted to scare us. But they cannot scare me (Feryal, 2008).

In their work to reach out to more conservative constituencies in villages and camps, the committees thus had to tone down their progressive social agenda and mainly focused on practical gender needs using the relational gender construction of mother to support their political initiatives. This seemed to be the most effective way of mobilising women not only because of the control of religious-political or other patriarchal elements, but also because rural and camp women's own concerns in their situation of hardship and deprivation centred first and foremost on issues of survival, protection and subsistence. As Hammami (1997: 166) notes "In trying to organize women in traditional contexts, motherhood was a major way to forge links. Thus, much of the work of the women's committees involved basic bread-and-butter issues." When lobbying for women's equal rights the committee activists as well had to find ways to negotiate their ways through existing normative restrictions. Although activist lobbied for women's equal labour and political rights, they refrained from openly addressing personal status law and did not criticise gender-discriminatory practices and attitudes in the private sphere.

4. The First Intifada

In 1987 the continued Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem combined with increasing politicisation of Palestinian society provoked the First Intifada, a highly decentralised, predominantly nonviolent grassroots movement led by local initiatives, particularly the women's and workers' movement (Andoni, 2001; Hiltermann, 1993). The Intifada started neither, as is often assumed, as a sudden unrest nor through instigations from the PLO. It was prepared internally by the new popular leadership who, from the early 80s onwards, had made important conceptual and practical changes to Palestinian political culture

and, with their strong networks of popular committees, had established a system alternative to both the external PLO leadership and the Israeli occupation authorities. Through their practice of nonviolent civil struggle (*muqāwma sha^cbīyya* or *muqāwma silmīyya*) and pro-active self-reliance (*ṣumūd muqawam*), the early Intifada leadership replaced both the liberationist ideology of *thawra* and the statist-traditionalist political strategy of the institutionalised *ṣumūd* funds.

4.1. *Different Forms of Women's Nonviolent Resistance*

Women played a crucial role in the Intifada's informal organisation system of popular committees (Jad, 1990 & 2004a; Abdo 1994). Through their building of strong informal networks, they sustained the uprising politically, socially and economically. Since many men were arrested, wounded or killed, the new women's leadership of the committees, started to replace men as spokesperson in political parties and, doing so, was able to slowly strengthen their position in political decision-making. The majority of women, however, did not enter official politics, but participated in various forms of informal ad hoc political action. Women's practices sometimes were violent, involving serious confrontations with the soldiers, but predominantly women engaged in nonviolent resistance, such as demonstrations, protests, sit-ins or visits to political prisoners.

Many of my interviewees told stories of how they defended Palestinian youth from Israeli soldiers by claiming the arrested youth to be their own child or other ways of tricking the occupation authorities. Leila, for example, recounts:

Women risked their lives smuggling things from one part of the city to another, such as leaflets or the statements of the United Leadership of the Intifada. Women would say they are pregnant and put all the statements inside and act in front of the soldiers...The soldiers never thought that women would do that. Many women went out on the street and they saved children from being arrested whether they were theirs or others. Women took part in so many heroic actions, simple daily life things. That really showed how women worked in the First Intifada (Leila, 2008).

Women's nonviolent resistance was also economic: women often had to act as single providers, their work in the committees or food co-operatives formed the basis for the boycott of Israeli imports and, as managers of the household, they were at the forefront of raising awareness and encouraging other women to stop buying Israeli products. On a social level, women's networking, which "was built on the traditional home visits by women, providing support for prisoners, their families, martyrs' families and all other sectors or individuals affected by Israeli oppression during the intifada" (Jad, 2004a: 90-91; see also Jean-Klein, 2003) was equally important. When, for example, the Israeli authorities closed education institutions, women were pivotal in setting up a clandestine education system:

All the schools were closed in the First Intifada. Women were the initiators of home schooling for children. That is a form of nonviolence because you are resisting the occupation and the Israelis by teaching the children. I was in the first grade when the Intifada started, so I remember the home schooling very well. I did two years of home schooling. I remember how we used to go from one house to the other with the teachers, and they were female teachers of course (Interview Ghaida, 2008).

Nonviolent action, as Ghaida (who now works as a civil society activist to promote nonviolence) captured it well "does not only mean to go to protest or take part in demonstration. Nonviolence can be exercised through painting, through writing, through people's activism even with social work" (Ghaida, 2008).

Interestingly, however, of the ordinary women I interviewed - i.e. those not part of the leadership, not involved in formal political activities and mostly from lower socio-economic rural or camp background - none was in favour of using the word 'nonviolence' (*lā ʿunf*) to describe their actions during the First Intifada. As Im Alaa, who is the wife of Adnan, one of the leaders of nonviolent protests against the wall, whom I introduced earlier, told me: "My girls grew up with their dad in prison or in hiding during the First Intifada. So it was normal for them that they would join the resistance. This is simply the way of life here... We as women never used the word nonviolence (*lā ʿunf*). We always used strength (*qūwa*) or resistance (*muqāwma*)" (Im Alaa, 2008).

On the discursive level the shift towards nonviolent resistance (*muqāwma sha^cbīyya* or *muqāwma silmīyya*), resistance *ṣumūd* (*ṣumūd muqawam*) or even nonviolence (*lā^cunf*) as a political strategy was initiated by the new internal male-dominated leadership in the 80s and solidified during the Intifada. While among ordinary women the discourse of resistance (*muqāwma*) overruled that of nonviolence (*lā^cunf*), they nevertheless – through their massive involvement in a wide variety of nonviolent actions – played a crucial role in sustaining the shift from armed resistance to civil (nonviolent) protest in actual political practice.

4.2. *Palestinian and Israeli Women's Joint Anti-Occupation Activism*

During the Intifada joint solidarity activities between Israeli and Palestinian activists, and also women specifically, grew:

Before the First Intifada there was no vision to approach or pay attention to Israeli society, maybe in some programmes of some [Palestinian] political parties, but no specific steps were taken from the women's movement. But when the slogan 'two states for two people' (*dawlataīn li-l-sha^cbaīn*) was raised and maybe a peace process was to start, [it was clear that] peace can only come from both sides. Of course, there was also the big role that women played in the First Intifada and the development of women's political leadership that opened a space to develop the relations between the Palestinian and Israeli women, especially if these were aimed at ending the occupation of the 1967 land...So when it became clear that we [the Palestinians] really believe in peace and in the establishment of two states, a Palestinian state next to an Israeli, a change of thinking was initiated in Israeli society and among the Israeli women (Interview Suad, 2008).

The slogan 'two states for two people' was officially promoted after the 1988 Palestinian National Council session in Algiers, when the PLO leadership confirmed its commitment to the 1967 borders and the principle of land for peace. This crucial shift in the PLO ideology, advanced already beforehand by the internal leadership, encouraged the Israeli peace movement, and particularly Israeli women's peace groups, to widen participation in joint

peace initiatives. Several Israeli women's peace groups were founded after the outbreak of the First Intifada, among them the Women's Organisation for Political Prisoners (WOFPP), a group of women defending Palestinian female political prisoners, or Women in Black, a group of anti-war activists who stage nonviolent silent vigils in various locations in Israel, often joint by Palestinian-Israeli women.⁴⁷ Joint initiatives between Israeli and Palestinian women groups could take various forms, such dialogue groups, local and international conferences and joint solidarity protests (Sharoni, 1995:134-5). Suad gives the following account of her involvement in joint women's groups:

The [joint women's] meetings included, for example, invitations to the Palestinian women leaders to come and hold awareness-raising campaigns in Israel. In these session we would explain to them what the concerns of Palestinians are, or that the Intifada is in fact all popular [*sha'abi*, i.e. civilian nonviolent] mass work, like strikes, demonstrations, sit ins, and that all this aims at ending the Israeli occupation of 1967 lands and establishing a Palestinian state next to the Israeli. So there started to be more joint work, in the form of solidarity with political prisoners, the human chain in Jerusalem [that was formed by Israeli and Palestinian activist in 1989 around the Old City], or when we called for Jerusalem to become two capitals for two states (Suad, 2008).

The first contacts were mainly through demonstrations or street actions. Such political solidarity activities, whether women-only or mixed, were received favourably by the Palestinian public. Ghassan Khatib, a member of the communist Palestinian People's Party and one of the early supporters of joint initiatives, in this regard finds that during the First Intifada "Palestinians accepted the idea of contact and dialogue collectively and dialogue became public. The reason for that was the fact that the core objective of such contact was solidarity and activities against the settlements and the Occupation" (Khatib quoted in Naser-Najjab, 2004: 66). At the time, women's joint solidarity initiatives, with their shared goal of ending the occupation were successful in building some bonding across the Israeli-Palestinian divide.

⁴⁷ For a detailed discussion of the development of the Israeli women's peace movement, see Pope (1993) or Emmet (2003).

In stark contrast to today, joint meetings between Palestinian, Israeli and international women activist during the First Intifada were not only facilitated by discursive and ideological shifts on both sides, but also by the material situation allowing more mobility, as Rima, a prominent leader of the women's movement, notes:

In the First Intifada there was more contact with the Israelis. There wasn't the wall. Israeli women could come to Ramallah, Nablus or Jenin and we could have some joint actions with Women in Black [such as, for example,] supporting women in refugee camps and during the closures and curfews. They could come, support people and give out food or other things for children. These were the activities that you could do during the curfews. So people could feel each other. The Israelis could better understand the difficult situation that we Palestinians are facing (Rima, 2008).

Once, however, the macro-political situation and the material realities on the ground worsened, joint projects started to face problems. The Gulf War posed the first severe challenge to joint Palestinian-Israeli initiatives. Israeli anti-war activists were increasingly silenced by patriotic nationalist discourses within Israel, and Palestinians felt abandoned by the Israeli activists' failure to take a clear standpoint against Israeli pro-war sentiments and against the six months curfew placed upon Palestinian society (Sharoni, 1995: 137-8). Given this ambiguity and inconsistency within the Israeli peace movements, it became increasingly difficult for Palestinians to justify to their own society their involvement in joint initiatives. Critics brought forward two major accusations against women activists who joined together with Israeli and/or international women: (1) that they engage in a process of normalising the abnormal, and (2) that – as part of this normalisation (*taṭbīʿ*) - they risk prioritising women's over national liberation.

Hanan Ashrawi reflects in her autobiography on the major difficulties which she faced in 1988 when participating in the first official public joint Palestinian-Israeli encounter - a TV debate. For her, the main problems was “to persuade the various factions that such an event could be carried out without conceding the “normalization” of relations between occupier and occupied” (Ashrawi, 1995: 48). Treading the fine line between normalisation (*taṭbīʿ*) and the quest for normality, mutual understanding and constructive dialogue (as a means to an end,

rather than an end in itself) remains the major challenge for activists participating in joint projects up until today. At the time of the Intifada, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) refused to participate or lend official support to public Palestinian-Israeli dialogue, while the Communist Party was its strongest supporter. Fatah and the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP)⁴⁸ remained ambiguous in their stance towards dialogue (ibid).

The women's committees, although mostly reflecting the position taken by their political parties, tended to, according to some of my interviewees, adopt a more pragmatic stance towards joint initiatives. Suad, for example, explained that

even some of the committees which did not support the call for two states for two people did not oppose the [joint] meetings. They [only] opposed that you would enter the stage of negotiations or the normalisation (*taṭbīʿ*) process. They were afraid of normalisation. But the message that we sent to the Israelis was [...] that all the women in the world have to unite in their efforts. In this we were of course influenced by the international conferences that had been taking place for women whether in Beijing or Nairobi. We were saying that we women, all of us who are struggling in conflict areas, we should come together, talk about this and discuss our cases. But, of course, those who participated most [in joint activities] were those who supported the call for 'two states for two people' (Suad, 2008).

Her quote demonstrates the impact that mainstream international feminist agendas exercise on local feminist politics. During the 3rd World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985, Palestinian women had insisted and succeeded in placing their case on the agenda, bringing the differences between First and Third World feminists to the fore. Third World feminist insisted that gender inequality stems not only from patriarchal oppression, but also from poverty and dependency, caused by imperialism, (neo-) colonialism, and other forms of political and economic exploitation or domination. They thus took issue with what they

⁴⁸ In 1991 Abed Rabbo split from the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP, then renamed from PDFLP) and formed the Palestinian Democratic Union (FIDA).

conceived to be the western feminist agenda's primary focus on individual and social gender empowerment (see e.g. Talhami, 2008).

This clash over the definition of women's issues in relation to nationalism also dominated joint Palestinian-Israeli and international women's peace conferences. In the summer of 1989 Women in Black held their first national conference, which was attended by ca. 250 women. It was followed by several women's peace conference, often bringing together women from different (mainly Israeli) peace groups and drawing on feminist methods such feminist consciousness-raising (Pope, 1993). In 1989 Simone Süsskind organised a major international women's peace conference in Brussels entitled "Give Peace a Chance: Women Speak Out" which was attended by over 150 women from around the Mediterranean. Palestinian women participated as committee representatives or as independent experts. Most of the conferences dealt with the linkages between women's liberation, nationalism and national liberation and called for an end to the occupation and the establishment of two states through the path of dialogue and negotiations. It has been claimed that "[t]he concern of Israeli and Palestinian women for nationalism, in the form of Zionism or self-determination, as a basis for co-existence ironically indicate[d] a growing recognition of mutual interests" (Pope, 1993: 183). Arguing that Palestinian and Israeli women were able to find common ground in their striving for nationalism, however, is not convincing. Such an argument ignores the fundamental difference between Israeli *established and institutionalised* nationalism, and Palestinian *quest for national liberation and the establishment of a recognised nation state*.

In fact, many Palestinian women refused to participate in joint and/or international meetings for precisely this reason. The PFLP-affiliated Union of Palestinian Women's Committees (UPWC), for example, boycotted the Brussels conference (Ashrawi, 1995:60-61; Sharoni, 1995: 143-44; Jad, 2004a: 193). In an interview in 1991 Maha Nassar, the Union's director, expressed her scepticism toward joint women's dialogue groups asking: "what kind of bridges you want to build, between whom and leading to what?" (Nassar quoted in Sharoni, 1995: 142). Joint encounters between Palestinian, Israeli and international women are dominated by this question until this day. They continue to struggle to define their agenda between women's and national liberation and the majority of Palestinians continue to denounce as normalisation (*taṭbīʿ*) those forms of joint initiatives that prioritise gender over political change without maintaining the crucial intersection between the two.

4.3. *Competing Gender Regimes and the Intifada's Long-Term Impact on Social Change*

Women's increased participation in political life during the Intifada, did, however, provoke debates about social gender change, but women activists preferred to restrict these debates to Palestinian society only, as they were aware of the fact that social change must take different paths in the occupier and occupied society. Opinions about the long-term gender impact of the Intifada vary. While Abdo argues that after the Intifada "[w]hat had been built on both the political-national front and the gender-social front cannot be reversed" (Abdo, 1994: 168), Jad maintains that the popular committees "were not new instruments through which the status of women was transformed. [...] Women's roles in the popular committees became an extension of what it traditionally had been in the society: teaching and rendering services" (Jad, 1990: 261). These contradictory evaluations stress the need to distinguish between changes in women's *practices* which might be temporary in 'exceptional' situation only, and long-term changes in gender *ideologies, discourses and regimes*.

By the time of the Intifada the dichotomy between the two main gender imageries, the mother figure and the young politicised female activist, had widened. Both images were used by women to carve out spaces for their public activism, but they were also instrumentalised by the national leadership to restrict women's activities. The male-dominated United Leadership of the Intifada (UNLU) for the first time acknowledged women's contribution to the national struggle officially by addressing them in their political communiqués (*bayānāt*) (Jad, 1990). The status of women and their activities were mentioned in 7 (no. 2, 10, 23, 28, 45, 48, 70) out of the 28 UNLU leaflets analysed by Mishal and Aharoni (1994). Leaflet No. 16, for example, mentions women calling upon them "to cooperate extensively in the popular education efforts." (quoted in Mishal and Aharoni, 1994: 96) and leaflet No. 23 urges women's groups to take part in solidarity activities for political prisoners (ibid: 117). Although the leaflets addressed women directly, they predominantly propagated women's roles as mothers, protectors and nurturer, rather than as independent political activist and thus reinforced traditional patriarchal attitudes.

In (similarly male-dominated) Palestinian cultural output related to the Intifada, such as folk-legends, literature, paintings and songs, the Palestinian mother often stands for the homeland itself: in a process in which mothers' reproductive capacities were politicised as a national

duty, women came to symbolise the land giving birth to the nation (see e.g. Abu-Ghazaleh, 1998; Bardenstein, 1997; Kanaana, 1998).⁴⁹ In addition to their fertility, the perseverance and moral superiority of mothers is emphasised: as ‘mothers to all sons of Palestine’ women (symbolically and practically) provide protection and act as guardians not only for their own sons but for the whole nation.⁵⁰ While it has been argued that the Palestinian mother through embodying the heroism of her sons and the moral superiority of the whole Palestinian community gained power during the First Intifada (Mabuchi, 2003) this nevertheless did not propel any serious changes in gender ideologies and regimes. Women might have gained space for public political practices, yet, their rights as women, particularly in the private sphere, were not addressed, let alone anchored in legal changes.

Gendered norms and practices were not only imposed from above through UNLU; other actors within the Palestinian community also played out their political and social competition on women’s bodies. Although most studies of the First Intifada have focused on the mass public nonviolent resistance, another form of more covert everyday resistance, what Jean-Klein (2001) has described as “suspension of life”, was crucial in sustaining the Intifada. In a process that Jean-Klein terms “self-nationalisation” people called upon themselves to live an ascetic life and suspend joyful everyday activities and events. Living normally was – just as meeting with the other side on an apolitical basis - seen as normalising the abnormal situation of the occupation. Time for normality and pleasure was to come only once independence had been gained. As one of Jean-Klein’s informants clearly put it: “When we have our state, then we will have one big wedding procession!” (quoted in Jean-Klein, 2001: 96).

Such social pressure was particularly restricting on women since it destroyed their informal networks which constitute an important source of women’s social and political power. It is thus crucial to bring to light women’s more critical views on the developments during the First Intifada in order to deconstruct the predominant nationalist narrative which tends to present the Intifada as a time of friction-free unity among all Palestinians. Many of my interviewees mentioned the Intifada spirit of strong solidarity, but some, particularly from

⁴⁹ One of Suleiman Mansour’s famous paintings, for example, portrays a pregnant woman, giving birth to masses of Palestinians and in Fadwa Tuqan’s poem “Hamza” the land gives birth to warriors (see e.g. Al-Botmeh and Richter-Devroe, 2010; Mabuchi, 2003).

⁵⁰ In Mahmoud Darwish’s poem “My Mother” (set to music by Marcel Khalife) the narrator longs for the protective embrace of his mother. In Kanafani’s novel “Um Sa’d” (1973), just as in Liana Badr’s “In the Eye of the Mirror” (1995), the main female characters exemplify the role played by the self-confident, steadfast Palestinian mother in sustaining the social fabric of family and community (see e.g. Al-Botmeh and Richter-Devroe, 2010; Mabuchi, 2003).

lower social classes, such as Lama, who lived in Askari camp in Nablus during the First Intifada, also described how ordinary people often were not able to conform to the pressures placed upon them by the resistance:

During and after the First Intifada there was a lot of unemployment and the majority of people depended on the workers union. Most used to have work inside Israel, but the leadership of the intifada didn't allow them to work inside. It wasn't easy. If [the men] didn't get a permit they went illegally to their work (*tahrīb*): either they sneaked around the Green Line or they went through the sewage pipes. Also women went illegally. Older women used to work as cleaners. They jumped over the blockades to enter Israel or Jerusalem to get money for their kids. It wasn't easy...Palestinian women were very ambitious to push their children [to participate in the resistance] to the utmost extent possible: "You mustn't put your head down! You mustn't give up! Keep your head up high! Participate in the Intifada so that our family is like this or that person's!" We couldn't afford to be different from them, because they were considered to represent all the grandeur, the glory of the nation (*watan*), the land, our blood, the martyrs and all that (Lama, 2008).

For those depending on their income from work inside Israel, or from selling Israeli products, the Intifada might have not only constituted the glorious and heroic mass mobilisation as which it is often portrayed. It seems that such controversial aspects were blocked out, not only in literature which uncritically glorifies the nonviolent and revolutionary nature of the uprising, but also by many Palestinians, particularly from the leadership. The fact that very little is written and spoken about social policing during the Intifada might be part of a process, that Swedenburg has termed "active forgetting." In his research on the Great Revolt he found that there were certain issues, such as, for example, women's forced veiling, which his informants preferred not to mention in their representations of the Revolt as a manifestation of national unity (Swedenburg, 1989: 270).

During the First Intifada, there were similar instances of social control when women's bodies and dress became battlefields for internal political competition. In late 1988 Hamas launched its *ḥijāb* campaign' and started to attack women who did not wear the Islamic headscarf (*ḥijāb*) (Hammami, 1990). Women's modesty and chastity was considered a proof of morality and not being a collaborator. Hammami (1990) suggests that UNLU's, and especially Fatah's late response to the campaign was due to its attempt to form an alliance with the religious side against both the occupying forces and the leftist parties which had strong women's branches. The 'women's issue' was thus instrumentalised during the crisis only to serve the power play between the Islamists, leftists and secular-nationalists.

The Intifada has been celebrated as a social revolution initiating dramatic changes in women's social and political position in Palestinian society. Such an assessment should be viewed with caution: women never shared significantly in the UNLU leadership and after two years, when conservative backlashes were launched against female activists, their participation in the Intifada declined. While alternative gender models did open up new spaces for political activism, women's conservative domestic, nurturing and caring roles as mothers were reinforced as a result of insecurity and the growing importance of the family in providing protection. Nevertheless, the Intifada marks a milestone in the Palestinian women's movement. Women's political participation took on new and more public forms, widely mobilising women from different religious, socio-economic and generational backgrounds and raising awareness of their political and social rights.

Gender issues were moved to the foreground, but they were still addressed through the secular discourse only and the rift between secular and Islamic women activists widened. For the secular women's activist, the *ḥijāb* campaign proved that only secular laws would guarantee their rights, as Leila, a secular women's activist, explains:

In the Intifada Hamas obliged women to put the *ḥijāb*...this was the moment when it started to click [among the leftist women leader and we realised that]: "But we are not achieving anything for women's rights!" When Oslo came and when the Authority and others started talking about building the basis of the state ... we said: "This is the moment, we need our rights!" So we started talking about being part of the decision making process. This was our chance to look at the laws

and legislations and see how they fit with our principles of equality between women and men (Leila, 2008).

In the lead-up to Madrid and Oslo, the secular women's leadership started to take decisive steps in this direction. Palestinian women activists, perhaps because of their movement's long tradition since the early 20th Century or perhaps because the Intifada, indeed, had created a strong "feminist generation" (Hasso, 2001: 1), knew that they had to find new strategies to combine their social and national struggle.

5. The Oslo Accords: Fragmentation and NGOisation of the Women's Movement

With the Oslo Accords the PLO moved from exile to the Occupied Territories and was established as an interim government, the Palestinian National Authority (PA) in January 1994. After some years most Palestinians were disillusioned with both Oslo and the PA.⁵¹ The so-called 'peace process' had neither brought them independence nor justice and the continued annexation was worsening the economic situation.⁵² The PA was dominated by the president who monopolised executive, legislative and judicative power and was able to appoint mainly returnees in high-ranking positions, With its highly centralised decision-making body that secured its hierarchical nature with a massive police apparatus the PA systematically attacked Palestinian civil society which had started to develop through wide-spread mobilisation and participation during the First Intifada. Both the secular right and the Islamists started to dominate the political and social sphere marginalising the left which had been most active in supporting women (Sh'hada, 1999).

Patriarchal structures in Palestinian society were first worsened by the conflict and then consolidated by the PA (Abdo, 1999; Amal, 2001; Sh'hada, 1999; Jad, 2004a). Many of my interviewees, both male and female, complained about the fact that women's participation in the Intifada was not sufficiently recognised and rewarded in actual political power for women after Oslo. Leila's account captures well the frustration that many women leaders felt at the time:

⁵¹ See Rabbani (2001) or Said (2000) for a critical in-depth study of the Oslo Accords, its reception by Palestinian society, its functioning and its inherent contradictions.

⁵² See Roy (1999) for a detailed study on the negative impact of Oslo on the Palestinian economy.

When Oslo came we found out that we are not sharing in the decision-making. There was only Hanan Ashrawi, and sometimes Zahira Kamal was mentioned. But that was all. We had a big number of women who were local and province leaders. They were well-known and they were very active. They were anti-occupation, they fought with the soldiers with their bare hands - and still they were not recognised. In the Legislative Council elections we had only five women in the first election, and as a minister we had only Hanan Ashrawi. We didn't become members of the Executive Committee of the PLO (Leila, 2008).

Such practices of political patronage and clientelism within the PA to prevent women's equal participation prove the danger of private patriarchy intruding the public sphere in the process of state-building (Amal, 2001). Nevertheless, women activists continued their work in the social and political sphere engaging in various informal and formal political practices. There was, however, split opinion on how to bring about such changes. Women could either opt for entering the PA and change it from within, or work independently on women's and feminist issues through (mainly) foreign-funded NGOs. While a detailed discussion of women's post-Oslo participation in joint peace activism, nonviolence resistance and everyday resistance will be offered in the three subsequent chapters, this section aims to chart general developments in women's political and feminist activism. There are four main players in the post-Oslo women's movements, which compete – with their different narratives on legitimate and normative practices and meanings of gendered political culture - for internal and external ideational and material support.

5.1. The Nationalist Agenda of the General Union of Palestinian Women

The General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW), dominated by middle and upper-class returnee women and closely affiliated with the PLO, opted for a strongly nationalist agenda and favoured initiating changes 'from inside' the institutional structure of the PA. As a nationalist political body, rather than the representative body – or even an integral part of - the Palestinian women's, let alone feminist, movement (Isotalo, 2005: 119), the GUPW continued to prioritise the national struggle over social gender change. Doing so, it was compliant (but not complicit) with the PA's patronage of public patriarchy (Jad, 2004a: 19).

In its gender imagery it clings to the image of the female militant (*fidā'īyya*), despite its support for the Oslo Accords. The GUPW up until today has not found a convincing way to combine its original focus on resistance with its new political project for state-building. Given that the 'peace process' has failed to materialise its promise of national independence, the GUPW's shift from militant to citizen (without citizenship rights) has reduced the its impact on women's political and social activism to symbolic value merely (see Jad, 2004a).

5.2. *The Feminist Agenda of the NGOs*

Many leftist women activists had established themselves as a "feminist generation" (Hasso, 2001: 1) and important social and political players through their committee work in the First Intifada. These women were wary of placing too much emphasis on nationalist goals fearing that this might eventually relegate women's issues to the background. Instead, many founded their own independent feminist NGOs and focused their work on strategic gender interests, lobbying the PA for women's equal political and civil rights, but addressing 'taboo' topics', such as domestic violence, 'honour killings' or the personal status law (PSL).

The feminist NGO's focus on the social domain has been blamed for depoliticising the Palestinian women's movement and splitting it into feminist and nationalist forces which then, acting independently from each other, lead a "type of 'schizophrenic existence'" (Makky, 2005). This criticism is not convincing. The international donor community's focus on gender clearly did influence agenda-setting in the NGO sector in Palestine. However, I would argue in line with Hanafi and Tabar (2005) that NGO actors do not blindly adopt the international community's often depoliticised gender approach, but rather aim to adapt it to their own society's context and bend it to their own gains. Palestinian women activists' struggle for social gender change is critical of both the international community's "fashionable discourse of [women's] 'empowerment'" (Johnson and Kuttab, 2001: 6) and the PA's often superficial tokenist "gender lingua" (Jad, 2004b: 8).

Yet, the danger of "NGO-isation" (Jad, 2004b) and "professionalisation" (Hammami, 1995) of the women's movement's leading to a loss of grassroots support is not to be dismissed. The centres are mainly led by western-educated feminist activists, often work with a gender imagery of the professionalised globalised femocrat (Jad, 2004a) and tend to promote political dialogue and participation in international feminist forums as normative political practices for

female activists. Some feminist NGOs thus have lost credibility within Palestinian society. They are accused of belonging to the “globalised elite” (Hanafi and Tabar, 2005), who, removed from grassroots needs and priorities, follow foreign ‘colonial feminist’ (Ahmed, 1992) agendas. Such accusations are, of course, brought forward by nationalist and religious-political actors who aim to strengthen their political and social power by claiming to represent the ‘authentic’ Palestinian women’s movement.

Many of my interviewees stressed that, as a result of this increasing fragmentation and factionalism, they are tired of and disillusioned with their political leadership and internal power plays. Amal, who used to be an activist in the communist party in the first Intifada and now has retreated from politics, blames both, the PLO/GUPW and NGOs for paralysing the women’s movement: “The local grassroots leadership was taken over by the returnees, the Tunisians [i.e. the GUPW/PLO]. They took all the money and started to control the movement. Then the movement fragmented it into NGOs that preferred to work on ‘gender’. Our work in the committees was very different” (Amal, 2008).

5.3. *The Religious-Political Agenda of the Islamic Women’s Movement*

The women activists in the Islamic movement have started to emerge as an important player in the Palestinian women’s movement after Oslo. The failure of the ‘peace process’ provided the Islamists with fertile ground to widen their political and social influence and resulted in further polarisation between the nationalist secular and Islamic forces. Although women activists in the Islamic movement often represent themselves in stark contrast to what they denounce as, “westernised” secular NGO feminist activists such a dichotomy does not represent women’s actual political and social practices on the ground. It is true that women in the Islamic movement adopt an ‘Islamic feminist’ approach and advocate *ijtihad*, i.e. the re-interpretation of the texts from a feminist or women’s perspective to reform PSL, but they do not act in complete isolation from other local and international women’s agendas. The Islamist women’s success stems also from their emulating the secular and leftist groups’ methods of mobilising grassroots women as practiced through the women’s committees during the First Intifada. Their gender agenda as well is formed in interaction with and reaction to the secular feminist movement (Jad, 2005).

By bringing back into Palestinian political culture a gendered discourse of resistance and juxtaposing it to what they claim to be a ('westernised') agenda of feminist emancipation and ('fake') state-building, women activists in the Islamic movement construct new political femininities by selectively borrowing from (and repudiating) secular nationalist as well as religious political and social discourses. They take up the socially accepted gender imagery of the sacrificing mother and wife (which also is promoted in Islamic discourse through figures such as Aisha and Khadijah) and combine it with the gender imagery of a politically committed female activist (as promoted in the resistance discourses). As such, Islamic women activists have found a way to construct an alternative modernity – that of the modern, yet modest, politically-committed (*multazima*) activist (Jad, 2005) – which finds strong resonance particularly among educated rural and camp women from lower socio-economic status.

5.4. *Attempts at Unifying the Movement: The Women's Affairs Technical Committee*

The 1991 founded Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC) functions as an umbrella organisation coordinating women's social and political struggle. In its early phase its main focus was to integrate gender issues in peace- and state-building. With its support for the 'peace' process and dialogue groups WATC failed in its early years to include those groups which continued to adhere to the principle of resistance, as Maha Nassar, head of the PFLP-affiliated UPWC, states:

WATC started as [an umbrella group of women's organisation calling for] women to be involved and accepted as part of the negotiation. They protested that all the committees were formed by men (those for land, water, borders, etc.). In none of these committees you could find any women. So the main idea of the WATC's work was to involve women in the political negotiation, [i.e. in] direct relationship with the Israelis. But at that time UPWC boycotted WATC and we refused to be members (Interview, Maha Nassar, 2008).

For Nassar, and other women opposed to the Oslo negotiations and grassroots dialogue groups, it was clear that gender cannot be a unifying factor over political disagreement, both between but also among national groups. The fact that WATC took a decidedly different political stance by supporting the Oslo Accords led the UPWC to boycott WATC. Towards

the late 90s, when it had become clear that the Oslo ‘peace process’ would not materialise, WATC changed its agenda and focused predominantly on gendering the state-building process. At this point, as Nassar explained to me, UPWC joined:

In 1997 WATC found that the problem is not whether women are part of the negotiation. [But rather it] is how to empower women in the political decision-making process. So they turned out to become an NGO which has no relationship to the negotiation and to the Israelis. That is how we joined them...Political activism means to change laws, to be empowered, to share in the decision-making process, etc. - but it has nothing to do with joint projects with Israeli women, because we will never be on an equal footing (Interview, Nassar, 2008)

WATC joined together with the GUPW and some of the independent women’s NGOs in campaigns on less controversial topics, such as, for example, women’s practical gender needs or their political and civil rights. Their campaign to amend the Palestinian Basic Law lasted over several years. In 2003 the Basic Law underwent major amendments, granting women the right to pass their ‘citizenship’ to their children. As regards women’s rights in the private sphere, the Basic Law however retains ambiguities, by referring to both women’s constitutional and *shari’a* rights (Giacaman, Jad and Johnson, 2000). In short, although WATC has managed to build strong grassroots support, they did not succeed in uniting the women’s movement; the Islamic women’s groups still do not form a genuine part of WATC (Interview WATC, 2009).

The post-Oslo Palestinian women’s movement thus is characterised by strong divisions, particularly around the issue of women’s rights in the private sphere. Divisions are not just between religious-political and secular women’s groups: The Islamic women activists and the WATC have the mass support, but differ on their social agenda, feminist NGOs enjoy foreign financial backing, but lack legitimacy within their own society, and the GUPW is maintained by the PA, but its actual functions and impact on the women’s movement is limited to symbolic representation.⁵³ Inherent in this split, are fragmentations along the lines of class (with NGO workers forming a new foreign-funded elite), residence (with the urban elite

⁵³ See Islah Jad’s PhD (2004a) for an in-depth study of the frictions, trends and developments in the post-Oslo Palestinian women’s movement.

exercising power over rural and camp women), legal status (with returnees and citizens being privileged over refugee women, and the camp emerging as a separate neglected entity), and religion (with the nationalist-secular activists denouncing and restricting Islamic women's work).

6. Conclusion

This chapter has charted a historical overview of Palestinian women's political activism since the beginning of the 20th Century, tracing how macro-level political developments, domestic social and political dynamics, and women's individual circumstances impinge upon gendered political practices and discourses. The beginnings of the Palestinian women's movement in the early 20th Century were marked by a strong split between the urban elitist women leaders, who engaged mainly in charitable work and have been cherished as vanguards of Palestinian nonviolent resistance (King, 2007) and peasant women, who participated more directly in the Great Revolt, including more violent confrontations. Class antagonism intersected with gender power structures: a modernist discourse claiming the need to uplift rural women from backwardness to modernity and a revolutionary narrative praising peasant women as backbones of the Revolt was employed by urban and rural actors to further their internal political and social power play.

The *Nakba* created the refugee as a new social category in the region. Additionally to class antagonism, legal status thus came to constitute an important variable impacting upon women's political practices. While through the creation of the PLO (and the GUPW) the revolutionary discourse of *thawra* started to promote the nationalist gender imagery of the female militant (*fidā'iyya*), those women who stayed put (often from poorer rural segments of society) tended to adopt the political narrative of *ṣumūd* to undergird their humanitarian and survival work. Although the harsh economic situation as well as the development of political party activism intensified women's formal and informal political activism, gender ideologies remained restrictive, reifying women as cultural and biological reproducers of the nation and framing the loss of the land within the honour and shame complex.

The 1967 defeat and the subsequent Israeli occupation forced many farmers into paid employment, with women receiving the worst share of Israeli labour exploitation. Politically,

the pre-Intifada period saw the emergence of four main strategies to combat Israeli occupation: (1) armed struggle (*niḍāl*), promoted mainly by the nationalist-modernists through the gender imagery of *fidā'īyya*, (2) self-reliance and steadfastness (*ṣumūd*), institutionalised through Arab *ṣumūd* funds and relying on the imagery of the peasant mother, (3) joint solidarity activism and (4) nonviolent resistance activism against the occupation calling either for the creation of a binational state (mainly promoted by the communists) or independence (promoted by various leftist factions). Women contributed to pluralising Palestinian political landscape through their committee work and also started to advance a more nuanced gender agenda calling for their rights as women, rather than daughters, wives or mothers.

With the Intifada, the new internal leadership solidified the replacement of the PLO's institutionalised *ṣumūd* and liberationist strategy with a popular mass movement engaging in pro-active developmental *ṣumūd* and nonviolent civil protest action. Once the PLO had officially endorsed the call for two states in 1988, joint peace initiatives through solidarity activism against the occupation, binational or international conferences and workshops, grew. For Palestinian women, although they increasingly joined up with the growing transnational feminist movement, it was pivotal that joint initiatives were based on a political, rather than gender agenda and that the intersections between occupation, class and patriarchy were not disregarded.

Women's narratives on particularly the later years of the Intifada reveal instances of social policing and the politicisation of women's activities and dress in internal power rivalries. Despite women's public heroified role during the Intifada, these counter-narratives confirm that predominant gender ideologies still framed women's political practices through gender constructions such as the self-sacrificing mother (reinforced through close community networks) or the religiously and politically committed sister or wife (promoted by the Islamic movement) and thus in relation to men rather than as independent activists in their own rights.

The post-Oslo era, and particularly the heavy impact of foreign donor money, deepened the rift and competition between Islamist and secular forces. This is reflected in gendered political discourses which are dominated by three main gender constructions, each promoted differently by and in interaction with local religious and secular as well as international actors. The gender construction of a professionalised femocrat, particularly as peacemaker

and bridge-builder, is upheld by many international organisations, the PA, and feminist NGOs who support what is left of the 'peace' process. Opposed to these two gendered political discourses of professionalization and peacebuilding stands the younger generation's, and particularly the refugees', clinging to the resistance discourse. It is advocated by both the leftist factions through their promotion of a gender imagery of the independent female political activist, and the Islamic movement's reformulation of this image as the modest, yet modern, new Islamic woman who combines piety with political activism. The post-Oslo women's movement thus is characterised by fragmentation in their political practices and ideologies along the lines of class, political party affiliation, political-religious attachments, legal status and generation.

The Palestinian political landscape always was made up of a variety of national projects, of women's movements and of combinations of the two. Often seeking normative repertoire in the (artificially) opposed discourses of modernity vs. authenticity, women have followed different strategies of patronage, resistance, opposition or compliance when negotiating through material and ideational power structures set by local, international and transnational actors.

Socio-economic and legal status, as well as political party affiliation have had a particular strong impact in defining the ways in which women have proposed and combined different nationalisms and femimisms (and Islamisms). Historically there has – except for moments of severe crisis, such as the Great Revolt or the First Intifada – never been a strong bonding between elitist and ordinary women. While the strong pro-active and often also violent role of the peasant women in the resistance has now been taken predominantly by refugee (but also some rural) women, the propagation of a more pacifist nonviolent discourse has historically been undertaken by urban women leaders through their charitable work, and is continued by the foreign-funded NGO feminist/peace elite. Women's informal everyday activism has been largely ignored in nationalistic accounts and disregarded as apolitical in mainstream literature, despite the fact that it has been – as ordinary women's accounts show – crucial and constant in sustaining Palestinian society, economy and politics. The specificity of the Palestinian women's movement, however, remains that, in contrast to feminist and women's movements in established nation-states and despite their diverging agendas and strategies, women activists have been united in never completely separating their social from their national struggle.

CHAPTER V

PALESTINIAN WOMEN'S PEACE ACTIVISM⁵⁴

Palestinian women's peace activism after 2000 is, if not determined, certainly strongly guided by the mainstream gender and conflict agenda formulated since the adoption of the UNSCR 1325. The Resolution has been added to the agendas of most organisations active in the field of conflict resolution and/or women's rights.⁵⁵ Women on the ground whose peace-building work the Resolution is supposed to strengthen, however, often prefer not to be associated with what either they themselves or their societies at large perceive "to be part of a Western plot to destroy [their] society's traditional culture and values" (Al-Ali, 2005: 743). Since women are often reified as bearers of cultural authenticity (Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989) interventions by the international community that press links between women's empowerment and conflict resolution are viewed sceptically, particularly in the Palestinian context of occupation.⁵⁶ Many Palestinians consider 1325 (and the mainstream liberal conflict and gender agenda to which it belongs) not only irresponsible to their real needs under occupation, but also a derivative of 'colonial feminism' (Ahmed, 1992): an attempt of "white men [and women] saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak, 1988: 297).

In this chapter I aim to take a closer look at the application and reception of the UNSCR 1325 in the Palestinian context. I investigate in particular three questions: "What impact do international mainstream gender and conflict interventions based on 1325 have on local women's peace activisms? More specifically, when and why do Palestinian women (and men) perceive international interventions such as UNSCR 1325 to be fuelling rather than halting conflict? What should a gender and conflict resolution agenda and feminist solidarity politics look like in the Palestinian context?"

⁵⁴ Parts of this chapter draw heavily on Richter-Devroe (2008, 2009).

⁵⁵ The Palestinian organisations which work with 1325 include, for example, the Ministry of Women's Affairs (www.mowa.gov.ps), the Jerusalem Center for Women (www.j-c-w.org), The Palestinian Conflict Resolution Centre Wi'am (<http://www.alaslah.org>) or the International Women's Commission (<http://www.iwc-peace.org>).

⁵⁶ See e.g. Al-Ali and Pratt (2009) and Al-Ali (2005) for a discussion of 1325 in the context of the US invasion of Iraq.

I will analyse women's involvement in the post-Oslo mainstream gender and conflict agenda by tracing the interplay between discourses and practices of female peace activism at the micro (i.e. local and national) and macro (i.e. international) level, paying particular attention to the gender constructions (i.e. the meso level) that actors use to frame their activism. By tracing the embeddedness of local female peace activism within wider domestic, regional and international structures, I aim to explore *why* women chose to be part of post-Oslo people-to-people projects and *how* they negotiate and legitimise their chosen form of agency to both local and international players. I analyse women's peace-building strategies and legitimisation discourses by firstly tracing the feminisation and NGOisation of peacebuilding in the post-Oslo and post-1325 professional (mainly dialogical) conflict resolution agenda. In the main part of the chapter I discuss the conceptual and practical shortcomings of this agenda in the Palestinian context, drawing in particular on the case study of the 2005-founded International Women's Commission (IWC). Analysing and comparing the ways in which Palestinian and Israeli women activists in the IWC (and other organisations) read the three main themes of 1325 - participation, protection and empowerment - will highlight that the Resolution with its currently dominant depoliticised liberal feminist focus on joint women-to-women initiatives is not conducive to and might even block social and political change in the Palestinian Occupied Territories.

1. Historical Overview of Palestinian Women's (Joint) Peace Activism

1.1. The Oslo Peace Process

After the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords joint Palestinian-Israeli civil society peace projects received increased financial support from international donors. Joint projects thus multiplied, and – more importantly - became institutionalised in the 1995 Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. More widely known as Oslo II, the Agreement stipulates in its Annex VI a specific “Protocol Concerning Israeli Palestinian Cooperation Program”, more widely known as the People-to-People Program. The fact that the Program is added almost as an afterthought in the Annex visualises the two theoretical traditions embedded in the Accords: a top-down approach of *peacemaking*, as manifest in the official ‘peace process’ at high political level, and a bottom-up approach of *peacebuilding*,

introduced to mainstream conflict resolution by Boutros-Ghali's Agenda for Peace in 1992 (UNSG, 1992).

The Program's bottom-up approach with its rationale of 'dialogue-for-reconciliation' and its focus on non-state actors is most clearly mirrored in Article VIII. Here both sides are called upon to "cooperate in enhancing dialogue and relations between their peoples" and to "take steps to foster public debate and involvement, to remove barriers to interaction, and to increase the people to people exchange and interaction" (Oslo II, 1995, Annex, XI, Article VIII). By bringing together constituencies from both sides of the conflict and establishing dialogue and cooperation between them, the People-to-People Program thus aimed at enhancing mutual relations, building stability, trust and cooperation and moving towards full reconciliation. Based within a facilitative conflict resolution approach, the Program aimed at affecting attitudinal and relational change while structural change was supposed to be implemented from above.⁵⁷

Norway and its Institute for Applied Social Science, Fafo, were the official administrators of the People-to-People Program, but other local, bi- and multilateral organisations such as USAID, CIDA, EU, SIDA and Belgium Aid quickly joined the post-Oslo peace market.⁵⁸ With its focus on civil society actors as peacebuilders, the People-to-People Program relied mainly on NGOs for implementation: on the Palestinian side the projects were administered by the Palestinian Center for Peace in Ramallah under Hassan Abu-Libdeh (Naser-Najjab, 2004: 90fn73; Endresen and Gilen, 2000: 30). It is estimated that between September 1993 and September 2000 ca. \$20-\$25 million were allocated to civil society organisations for joint Palestinian-Israeli peacebuilding (IPCRI, 2002:2) and by mid-2000 136 projects had been funded through the People-to-People Program alone (Endresen and Gilen, 2000: 31). The joint projects could take the form of one-time single events or long-term, continuous series of meetings. Often groups were assembled according to shared identities other than national, such as age, profession or gender. A special focus was put on marginalised groups; women thus became a specific target group for joint encounters (Naser-Najjab, 2004).

⁵⁷ See chapter III for an overview of different peacebuilding theories and terminology.

⁵⁸ For a detailed discussion of Norway's role in the peace process see Waage (2006); for a detailed study of Fafo's role see Endresen and Gilen (2000), for wider literature on post-Oslo joint Palestinian-Israeli peace projects see e.g. Maoz, (2000, 2004) Naser-Najjab,(2004); IPCRI (2002); Herzog and Hai (2005) Palestine – Israel Journal (2005, 2006) or Adwan and Bar-On (2000, 2004).

The Jerusalem Link, an alliance between the (Palestinian) Jerusalem Centre for Women (JCW) in East Jerusalem and the (Israeli) Bat Shalom in West Jerusalem is one such cooperative peacebuilding project that was established and sustained under the institutional support of the Oslo Process.⁵⁹ While often heralded at international level as a model for feminist and peace activism (e.g. Powers, 2006), women's joint peacebuilding was perceived more critically on the Palestinian side. The PFLP, the Islamic Resistance Movement and Hawatmeh's faction of the DFLP⁶⁰ openly opposed the peace process and its civil society dialogue groups, viewing the former as unjust and the latter as normalisation (*taṭbīʿ*) (see e.g. Ashrawi, 1995). Even within the pro-Oslo camp not all supported people-to-people projects. Particularly after the 1996 Netanjahu election with increased violence, settlement constructions and prospects for real peace waning, fewer and fewer Palestinians felt ready to engage in joint bottom-up peacebuilding and reconciliation processes with the Israeli side (Naser-Najjab, 2004).

1.2. *The Second Intifada*

Since the failure of Camp David and the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000 the majority of cooperative efforts for peace and coexistence at the grassroots level have stopped. On a material level the developments on the ground, i.e. closures, curfews, checkpoints and the construction of the wall fragmenting the West Bank into several isolated cantons and separating them from East Jerusalem and Gaza, make meetings almost impossible. Gazans, in any case, are forbidden to leave the Strip, but also for Palestinians in the West Bank, particularly for those who are believed to have links to the resistance, permits to enter Israel or even Jerusalem are very difficult to obtain. This reduces potential participants in dialogue groups to 'the converted,' i.e. those who support joint conflict resolution and what remains of the peace process.

Popular opposition to joint peace initiatives also grew. The aim of the people-to-people projects to influence attitudinal and behavioural changes might perhaps have worked at the level of individual activists, but certainly – without real positive changes on the ground – it

⁵⁹ For detailed studies on the Jerusalem Link, see e.g. Farhat-Naser (2005); Golan (2004); Golan and Kamal, 2005/6); Powers (2006); Kumpulainen (2008); Devaney (2006).

⁶⁰ In 1991 Abed Rabbo split from the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and formed the Palestinian Democratic Union (FIDA). While his faction supported the 1991 Madrid talks, Hawatmeh's faction opposed them. FIDA is now considered among the strongest supporters of joint political dialogue.

did not achieve changes within broader society. Naser-Najjab in her detailed study on the people-to-people projects, thus concludes that “Palestinian public opinion [...] was opposed to any form of dialogue that was for the purpose of cooperation and reconciliation” (Naser-Najjab, 2004: 211) and that there was “no significant impact on popular attitudes through P2P [people-to-people] activities” (Naser-Najjab, 2004: 239). The Norwegian-administered Program survived for a while on a very low profile, but was officially stopped in 2004 when the Likud election shattered all hopes for peace. The break-down of the talks, the rise-up of new violence in 2000, and radicalisation on both sides thus brought to the fore what Edward Said (like other critical observers) had warned against earlier when he wrote that “[t]he thought that by working out an arrangement whereby the occupation might continue while at the same time a few Palestinians and Israelis could nevertheless cooperate on a friendly basis, struck me as false and misleading” (Said 1995: 36).

In 2000 the Palestinian NGO Network called upon all Palestinian NGOs “to completely cease all joint projects with Israeli organizations, especially the projects covered under People to People program, Peres Center for Peace, the joint projects program funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), or any other normalization projects” (PNGO 2000: 27). The Jerusalem Link was among the joint projects that the PNGO blacklisted as normalisation (*taṭbīʿ*). It was, however, not just Palestinian public opinion and material restrictions on the ground, but also internal disagreements between the Palestinian and Israeli women that threatened the joint work of the Link during the early years of the Second Intifada. At a time when their society was suffering from continuous Israeli military aggressions, the Palestinian part of the Link, the JCW, considered it more urgent to work on intra-Palestinian issues. They thus temporarily froze all joint work with Bat Shalom and shifted their focus to more immediate concerns on the ground, such as for example the impact that the construction of the wall or house demolitions have on Palestinian women’s lives (Interview JCW, 2008).

Donor agendas, however, seemed to be inversely related to such attitudinal and material developments on the ground. For example in 1998, at a time when most Palestinians had already turned away from joint projects, the EU institutionalised substantive budget lines for joint Palestinian-Israeli peacebuilding, including specific programmes for women, through its Partnership for Peace Programme.⁶¹ Similarly the first US funds allocated specifically for

⁶¹ Before 1998 the EU had supported Palestinian-Israeli peace projects through already existing budget lines.

bottom-up peacebuilding through the Wye River Memorandum were only released after the Second Intifada began (Herzog and Hai, 2005: 30). The post-Oslo, and more particularly post-2000 (i.e. post-2nd Intifada and post-1325) mainstream agenda is thus dominated by the liberal discourse of ‘dialogue-for-peace/reconciliation’. Additionally (but of course related to this focus on dialogue), it demonstrates two major trends: the NGOisation and feminisation of peacebuilding.

1.3. NGOisation of Peacebuilding

Most joint Palestinian-Israeli women’s conflict resolution projects are carried out by foreign-funded NGOs. Joint conflict resolution projects are sometimes organised by Israeli-Palestinian or Palestinian NGOs, but the majority is directed by Israeli NGOs who collaborate for their joint projects with NGOs from the other side.

The boom in conflict resolution and women’s NGOs is not unique to Palestine. Their potentials and impact on peacebuilding have been fiercely debated. Conflict resolution scholars with a liberal perspective tend to support (at least parts of) Boutros Ghali’s Agenda for Peace (UNSG, 1992) and its call for bottom-up peacebuilding, finding that NGOs and non-state actors are often critical in expanding peace constituencies in local communities (e.g. Fitzduff, 2002; Ramsbotham, Miall and Woodhouse, 2006). More critical analyses, however, has shown that NGO involvement in peacebuilding (just as in development more broadly) often ignores the broader structural geopolitical context which sustains conflict (and/or underdevelopment) and, doing so, risks depoliticising and privatising social and political movements on the ground (e.g. Duffield, 1998; Carey and Richmond, 2003; Goodhand, 2006).

In the Israeli-Palestinian context some adopt the liberal perspective, supporting NGO involvement in peacebuilding (e.g. Adwan and Bar-On, 2000, 2004; IPCRI, 2002; Maoz, 2000, 2004), but most sociological, anthropological and political analyses stress that the rise of the non-governmental sector after Oslo has propelled a process of professionalisation and fragmentation of the grassroots social movement of the First Intifada (Hammami, 1995; Hanafi and Tabar, 2005; Jad, 2004b). They criticise NGOs for not having taken a leadership role in mobilising the grassroots for collective (nonviolent) resistance in the Second Intifada, thus bringing to light the strong “disconnection between NGOs and popular movements in

Palestine” (Hanafi and Tabar, 2005: 14). Many of the NGO leaders to whom I spoke agreed to such criticism. For example, one of my interviewees who leads a Palestinian women’s NGO, told me that “an NGO should mean working from the grassroots, but we should admit that we know nothing about the grassroots. We are not from our society. We are the elite, influenced and to a great extent directed by the donor agenda” (Interview Jumana, 2008).

In Palestine NGO involvement in peacebuilding and conflict resolution has not only failed to bring about tangible results (Hassassian, 2000: 29), but has also depoliticised and – at least partially – paralysed broad grassroots participation in the national movements. The NGOisation of Palestinian civil society has produced what has aptly been coined a “globalised elite”, characterised as supporters of the peace process, informed by global agendas, mainly urban-based and professionalized (Hanafi and Tabar, 2005: 247-251). The “globalised elite,” however, is not just globalised because its members participate in global events but also because it implements and interacts with global agendas such as Boutros-Ghali’s Agenda for Peace (UNSG, 1992), the Beijing Platform (UN, 1995) or the UNSCR 1325 (UNSC, 2000). It would be incorrect, however, to claim that donors dictate NGO agendas. As one of my interviewees, who works in a women’s NGO, explained: “[t]here is no funder who tells us what we need or don’t need, what is allowed and what not. But they propose certain interest issues - and then NGOs decide that this year they should work on that. This makes an organisation unprofessional; it makes it look like a supermarket” (Samira, 2007).⁶² ‘Conflict resolution’ (*hal aṣ-ṣiraʿ*), particularly joint Palestinian-Israeli dialogue projects) and ‘gender’ are increasingly displayed on the ‘supermarket shelves’ of NGOs; they seem to be among the main criteria to attract foreign funding.

1.4. *Feminisation of Peacebuilding*

Both the strong focus on dialogue and on non-state actors is often coupled conveniently in mainstream conflict resolution agendas with a call for increasing women’s participation in peacebuilding; essentialised as ‘natural peacemakers’ and romanticised as ‘subaltern’ marginal non-state actors, women are welcomed attributions to these two trends. In Palestine, since 2000, with the adoption of the UNSCR 1325 and after the outbreak of the Second Intifada, the focus on ‘peacewomen’ has increased. In light of the very violent and brutal nature of Israeli military oppression and increased militarisation on the Palestinian side (see

⁶² For a detailed discussion on donor-recipient relations in Palestine see Hanafi and Tabar (2005: 86-251).

Johnson and Kuttab, 2001; Andoni, 2001), women's alleged 'peaceful' natures is often showcased as a counter-model to such 'masculine' violence.

The recommendations from the 2005-founded, EU-funded Palestinian-Israeli Peace NGO Forum, an umbrella organisation that coordinates various peace initiatives, reflect this process of feminisation of peacebuilding when calling for the "[c]reation of new Israeli and Palestinian WOMEN's groups that would demonstrate together against violence and death, and work on outreach in Israeli & Palestinian societies" (EU, 2007: 8). Similar projects with a focus on women as peacemakers that were initiated after 2000 include, for example, the Women's Intellectual Forum, a part of the Geneva Initiative (Naser-Najjab, 2004), Machsom Watch, or the women's group of the Bereaved Families Forum. The most influential of the post-2000 women-to-women initiatives, however, is the International Women's Commission (IWC).

2. Mainstreaming Gender and Conflict: The International Women's Commission and Diverging Interpretations of UNSCR 1325

2.1. UNSCR 1325 and the International Women's Commission

In 2002 Palestinian and Israeli activists Maha Abu-Dayyeh-Shamas and Terry Greenblatt called upon the UN Security Council to establish the IWC. It was established in 2005 at an international conference in Turkey convened by UNIFEM. As a tripartite body comprising Palestinian, Israeli and international high-level female delegates it is tasked with monitoring the implementation of 1325 in Israel and Palestine. The Commission must be understood as an upshot of 1325. It constitutes a prominent example of the mainstream gender and conflict agenda's feminisation of (particularly joint) peacebuilding in Palestine.

1325 opens with ten pre-ambular paragraphs referring to broad normative standards embraced by the international community through legal principles, human rights and humanitarian law, as well as previous UN resolutions, declarations and documents, such as the Beijing Platform for Action, the United Nations Charter, the Windhoek Declaration and the Namibia Plan of Action. Its 18 operational paragraphs cover three main themes. Firstly, the resolution recognises women's peace and anti-war activism and calls for their increased *participation* at

all decision-making levels in national, regional and international conflict prevention and resolutions initiatives. Secondly, it highlights the gendered aspects of war and armed conflict demanding the *protection* of women's rights including shielding women and girls from gender-based violence and other violations of international law. Finally, the resolution calls upon local actors, member states, but also the UN itself, to adopt a *gender perspective* in peace operations, negotiations and agreements, including measures that *empower* local women.

In line with the aims of the Resolution, IWC strives to introduce a gender and feminist perspective to peace-building, lobby for increased participation of women in formal and informal negotiations and advocate the protection of women and their rights in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The IWC unquestionably is a progressive model lending high-level institutional support to Palestinian and Israeli women's joint peace building initiatives. It has received a lot of international attention, with the UN, for example, praising it as "the first-ever global commission working to guarantee women's full participation in formal and informal Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations [which] will ensure implementation of the groundbreaking 2000 Security Council resolution 1325" (UN, 2005). On the Palestinian side, however, few I spoke to were aware of the Commission and many doubted that joint Palestinian-Israeli women's peacebuilding and Resolution 1325 could offer ways forward to effectively resist Israeli occupation. Jumana, whose women's organisation as well works to implement 1325 in the Palestinian context, for example, asked herself (and me): "For women on the ground, why should 1325 be more important than any other Resolutions like 194, for example? How can it work without Israel ending the occupation? Israel doesn't obey by any UN resolution, why this one?" (Jumana, 2008).

Doubts about the potential of 1325 to fulfil its double promise of advancing Palestinian women's social and political struggle thus are not only raised by those who reject international law and UN Resolutions altogether, but also by those who use such a framework for their activism. The Palestinian members of the IWC struggle in their attempts to make use of 1325. As the following sections will show, they face difficulties in challenging the mainstream narrow liberal feminist reading of 1325 with its focus on dialogue-for-peace and struggle to establish their rights-based interpretations of the Resolution's three main themes: participation, protection and empowerment.

2.2. *Participation*

UNSCR 1325 “[u]rges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict” (UNSC, 2000). Following this call, several countries have established women quotas for governmental positions and peace negotiations in the hope that a more balanced representation of women would help in drafting and installing more gender-friendly post-conflict agreements and legal structures.

The participation of Palestinian women in the Oslo peace process has been limited,⁶³ but as far as their representation in government is concerned, women have succeeded in establishing a legally recognised women’s quota in the local and national legislative elections.⁶⁴ More recently the IWC has been tasked with strengthening women’s participation in peace negotiations. This task, however, is not as straight-forward as it might sound. With the so-called ‘peace’ process not having achieved any tangible results for Palestinians on the ground there is limited confidence among the Palestinian public in the format of negotiations as a path to independence (see e.g. JMCC, 2009). Negotiations are not only seen to be devoid of content, but their format also highly stylised. The ways in which the IWC, as a body comprising international, Israeli and Palestinian members could participate is not clear. After extended discussions on the format of their participation in the 2007 Annapolis conference, the IWC members eventually assumed a compromise position as a watchdog, thus falling short of 1325’s call for gender balance in formal and informal negotiations (Interview, Palestinian IWC member, 2009). The fact that the IWC makes no mention of either its involvement in or its position towards the most recent peace talks between Palestinian, Israeli and US leaders in Washington, demonstrates their marginal impact on high-level politics.

While the equal representation of Palestinian women in peace- and decision-making is beyond doubt a desirable first step; it is no guarantee for gender equality and more gender-friendly agreements. As outlined in chapter III such a technocratic “problem-solving” approach (Väyrynen, 2004: 126), by simply adding individual women to existing programs and

⁶³ The nomination of Hanan Ashrawi, Zahira Kamal, and Suad Amiry as female members of the Palestinian delegation should not be overestimated. Although they gained their place as a result of their persistent struggle for women’s rights during the First Intifada, their appointments could also be seen as a “strategy of using women to sell international politics” (Sharoni. 1995: 19).

⁶⁴ See Deif and Mair (2006: 28, footnote 70) for a detailed explanation of the functioning of the women’s quota in Palestinian elections.

projects, fails to consider, let alone challenge, the gender discriminatory structures upon which these very projects are often built. More recently academic research in peace and conflict studies, as well as more policy-oriented agendas of international organisations have started to move beyond the narrow focus of ‘adding women in’. Three main justifications are commonly given for why women should participate in peace initiatives referring to their (1) (alleged) more peaceful nurturing *nature*, (2) different *experiences* under conflict, or (3) their *feminist* demands calling for the erasure of all forms of discrimination. I present my discussions with the Palestinian members of the IWC and other women activists on these three arguments below.

2.2.2. *Women as ‘Natural Peacemakers’?*

The association of women’s *nature* and/or femininity with peace has been consistent in feminist and peace literature. Proponents of essentialist biological feminism claim that attitudes, behaviour and values of women are innately given. Women are naturally feminine and men masculine; there is no flexibility or contextuality to the notion of being a woman or a man. Prominent conflict resolution scholar Johan Galtung, for example, finds that women’s characters are horizontal and centripetal and their chemical programming of high levels of monoamino oxidase (the enzyme that controls violence) make them naturally more peaceful (Galtung 1996: 40-43).

A variation of the essentialist biological argument is offered by an essentialist maternalist approach which asserts that women’s experience of mothering (rather than their innate nature) has entrusted them with more peaceful, relational, nurturing - in short, maternal qualities. Speaking of “Maternal Thinking” (Ruddick, 1995) or women’s “Different Voice” (Gilligan, 1982) maternalist social scientific literature provide the basis for feminist peace activists, such as for example Reardon (1988, 1993) or Strange (1989), to claim that women’s contribution to peacemaking lies in their alleged perception of war in terms of shelter and protection, rather than aggression and warfare.

Both these positions on women’s peaceful nature are frequently used to support women’s participation in dialogical conflict resolution activities. It is claimed that women are less enthusiastic than men about war (Boulding, 1984), more likely to feel empathy and thus to build bridges with representatives of the other side (Weingarten and Douvan 1985), or to

engage as female mediators (Tickner, 1992). In the Palestinian/Israeli context too it is often argued that women are particularly suited for joint peacebuilding initiatives (e.g. d'Estrée and Babbitt, 1998, Powers, 2006). Galia Golan, an Israeli member of the IWC, for example, finds that “women tend to listen, rather than engage in monologues. They both listen and often are more willing than men to reveal emotions, fears or concerns, as well as to hear what others are saying.” (Golan, 2004: 94).

Some joint Palestinian-Israeli conflict resolution groups extend their focus on bonding between women to specifically mothers. One such organisation is the Bereaved Families Forum, an EU-funded NGO registered in Israel and the US that organises psychosocial workshops for parents from across the Palestinian-Israeli who have lost children in the conflict. Talking about her work in the Parents Circle, Peled-Elhanan, an Israeli peace activist whose 13 year-old daughter was killed in a suicide bombing attack, believes that “[m]otherhood, fatherhood and the wish to save the children who are still alive are only the common denominators that overcome nationality and race and religion” (Peled-Elhanan, 2003). Women are brought together in the Parents Circle as mothers, sisters or daughters to share their grief of having lost a loved one, jointly find ways to cope with their loss and initiate processes of reconciliation.

While the notion of motherhood as a basis for political activism is accepted and widely practiced in Palestinian society,⁶⁵ the essentialist notion of maternal care and bonding across the national divide is distrusted. Many of my interviewees considered motherhood or sisterhood alone an insufficient basis for joint activities, finding that their pain and experience as mother under occupation differs starkly from that of Israeli mothers. Tala, who is from a village near Ramallah and participated in a joint project between Palestinian and Israeli midwives which also used the notion of motherhood for cross-national bonding, for example, remarked that:

there is the political context and this influences how we are as mothers
[...] As [Palestinian and Israeli] mothers we can meet each other. We
are both mothers and we have sons. But then if we take into
consideration the political situation, then this doesn't work anymore. It

⁶⁵ See the subsequent two chapters, particularly chapter VI (section 5) and chapter VII (section 3) for a detailed discussion of mother politics and the pursuit of practical gender interests in Palestinian women's activism.

is the same within Palestinian society: if my neighbour kills my child, I cannot sit anymore with the neighbour's family or the mother in a normal way. (Tala, 2008)

Stressing the link between the political systemic injustices and their consequences for the individual experience of motherhood (which is seen as very different from that of Israeli mothers), an overwhelming majority of my interviewees agreed with Tala's rejection of a narrow psychosocial focus on reconciliation and maternal caring. Lama, in her explanation of her decision not to enter the Bereaved Family's Forum, cautioned against equating the individual pain of Palestinian and Israeli mothers:

I don't feel like entering the Forum, because I don't feel it is appropriate. I don't feel that really they are equals to me, that the Israeli woman felt the same pain that I did when I was seven years old and they brought my sister dead [she was killed by Israeli soldiers] and put her in the middle of the house. My mum was in Jordan, my father wasn't there and I was on my own. Never in my life will I forget that view. I cannot forget. I thought she wasn't dead. I uncovered her face and felt that her face was frozen. Who from the Israeli women lived this level [of pain]? If [an Israeli woman] wants to sit with me as equal in pain, then she must have lived this same pain...I do not really feel that because her son was killed when he was killing Palestinians that she is an equal to me. I cannot. I cannot feel that this is right. But at the same time I think that there should be a role for Israeli women. Not the way she wants, but according to the way I want, according to the present reality, the life and normal reality that we are living everyday (Lama, 2008).

Bettina Marta Prato (2005) finds that the Bereaved Families Forum, by emphasising people's individual experiences as victims not only equalises their victimhood, but more importantly pathologises conflict by treating victims on the psychological level only. All victims are viewed as equal, and it is believed that through recognising this equality and commonality in victimhood bridges and peace could be built. Enns (2007: 22) argues, that while "[p]ersonally, all victims are equal in the sense that they are equally reduced to suffering or grieving bodies;

politically, historically, they are not, and it is here, on the collective level, that we could argue the greater responsibility belongs to the Israelis, as it does to all those of us whose governments support the Israeli occupation of Palestine.”

By individualising and equating the experience of Palestinian and Israeli mothers’ suffering, trauma and pain, the Bereaved Families Forum risks decontextualising and depoliticising their experience. Similarly to other psychosocial conflict resolution initiatives, it risks pathologising the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by representing it as an identity-based conflict - a “tragic misunderstanding” between individuals (Lloyd Jones, 2000: 657). It also suggests a form of agency to solve this ‘big misunderstanding’ - dialogue, aimed at bringing about empathy and reconciliation – which holds little promise for macro-political change.

It was precisely this narrow focus on empathy and individual attitudinal change which made many of my interviewees doubt the potential of maternal care-based projects. For example, Taghreed, a renowned woman activist from Jerusalem, remarked:

Some say if we bring together women to see the joint element that they both suffer from...it might defrost the cold relationship that is between them. But that is not always the case! No matter how I will sympathise with Israeli women when, for example, they loose their children as soldiers, I cannot, at the end of the day, neglect the context of their suffering. That *I* am suffering from *their* soldiers. Because they have also a stake in ending the occupation...This feeling of sympathy should move towards something else...That is always my answer to any international organisation that tries to bridge the gap between both sides by just talking about women. No! It is not enough just because we are women. Yes, we have cross-cutting issues, because we are second class citizens in our communities...but that is not enough to mobilise me, as a woman, if there is no common understanding of how to move forward with these emotions towards a change (Taghreed, 2008).

Linking femininity or motherhood to emotional and affective forms of relationship building thus constitutes a form of feminisation of peacebuilding though which the Palestinian national

struggle is emotionalised and depoliticised. Taghreed, identifying the international community's emphasis on empathy and reconciliation as a way to deflect from the historical and political root causes of the conflict, provided the following metaphor:

I cannot do reconciliation with my next door neighbour - even forget being Israeli or Palestinian - if he doesn't come to admit: "I am sorry, I made a mistake". Then I will tell him: "Fine. Let's look forward" ...Without saying sorry or acknowledging your mistake how can I make reconciliation with you? Imagine your own husband: you live with him everyday, but if he beats you, you cannot go back to him unless he says sorry. So all these projects that are imposed from outside talk about reconciliation, building human relationship [but] how can I do that if the person who is beating me is not acknowledging or accepting that he is beating me? (Taghreed, 2008)

Reconciliation thus is considered by the great majority of Palestinians a post-conflict issue (Naser-Najjab, 2004), to be embarked on, once real changes on the ground have been made. Even those Palestinians who do not categorically oppose all joint projects, are careful to stress that dialogue must be seen as a means to an end, not an end in itself. Dialogue, they highlight, can serve as a way to mobilise people for collective political action, but reconciliation and healing are post-conflict issues, something that should better be left "as a consequence of concord [rather] than a condition for it" (Tamari, 2004: no page no.).

Both biological and maternal essentialist positions on women and peace are insufficient to capture the complexities of Palestinian women's lived experiences in a context of prolonged occupation, settler colonialism and violence. Such positions, by equating femininity and motherhood with reconciliation, empathy and affective ways of relationship-building, risk emotionalising and decontextualising political conflict. For most Palestinians, such a feminisation of peacebuilding through maternal care-based strategies constitutes a way of disregarding the historical and political root causes of occupation and settler colonialism. For them, changes at the material level have to happen first, before they feel ready to enter psychosocial processes of reconciliation and bonding.

2.2.3. *Women as 'Socialised Peacemakers'?*

A second reasoning often cited for the alleged success of women's bonding across national divides is the assumption that women share a similar *experience* and position in patriarchal societies. Golan and Kamal, both members of the IWC, for example, find that:

[b]arriers are also further overcome through women's "shared experience," of living in patriarchal societies. No matter how different the strata of society or the respective cultures, women, as women, have experienced some form of oppression, gender discrimination and sexist slights. Thus, women have been able to build on a mutual understanding of injustices experienced as women in either society (Golan and Kamal, 2005/6: 60).

Such a constructivist position understands peace-loving femininity not to be a natural given, but rather a result of women's socialisation and their confinement to the private sphere, often forced so by patriarchal structures in society (see e.g. Brock-Utne 1989). Gender identity, in this view, obtains different meanings to men and women according to their social and cultural background. Women are seen to be more peaceful because they are not exposed to the aggressive environment of the public sphere and war; because they are socialised in a subordinated social position where violence would not help them achieving their aims.

Palestinian women activists, when lobbying the PA for increasing women's representation in negotiations and decision-making, often adopt such a constructivist position arguing that – as a result of their different experiences in conflict - they might propose ways of solving the conflict different from men. Suad, a long-time Palestinian women activist and IWC member, for example, told me:

We [the IWC] think that there is a difference between the view of women and the view of men in negotiations. It is true that the national cause unifies [women's and men's positions], but I see for example a difference in how women and men talk about water, or the case of Jerusalem, where women might attach more significance to the issue of family reunification (Suad, 2008).

In their argumentation that, as women, they speak from different social standpoints than men and therefore can offer alternative viewpoints, Palestinian female activists derive insights from feminist standpoint theory. Classic standpoint theory claims that women, from their positioning as subordinated groups in male-dominated societies construct alternative knowledges which challenges positivist notions of the universality of (male-biased) objectivity and truth (e.g. Hartsock, 1983; Ruddick, 1995).

If women's standpoint, experience and perspective can usefully be contrasted to that of men, one must, however, also enquire about the difference in experiences *among* women: do Palestinian and Israeli women have a similar experience of the conflict, do they speak from one standpoint, and do they therefore bring a united single woman's perspective to negotiations? All the Palestinian women I interviewed were united in stressing that their everyday life under occupation differs enormously from that of Israeli women and that consequently they also hold diverging political ideas and positions. Feminist theorists have attempted to 'rescue' standpoint theory by incorporating the issue of difference and calling for the need to take into account the wide variety of women's stand- and view-points which are formed in interaction with and embedded in wider social and political discourses (see e.g. Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991). Based on such a revised feminist standpoint analytical framework, scholars have suggested "transversal politics" (Cockburn and Hunter, 1999; Cockburn, 2007; Yuval-Davis, 1999) as a feminist politics that would work from the basic acknowledgement of women's different situated knowledges. Yuval Davis (1999: 121) states:

In "transversal politics" perceived unity and homogeneity [between and among women] are replaced by dialogues that give recognition to the specific positioning of those who participate in them, as well as to the "unfinished knowledge" [...] that each such situated positioning can offer [...] The idea is that each participant in the dialogue brings with her the rooting in her own grouping and identity, but tries at the same time to shift in order to put herself in a situation of exchange with women who have different groupings and identities.

Transversal politics thus offers a corrective to both universalist "global sisterhood" politics and particularist identity politics. It stresses that although women can contribute new

perspectives to peacebuilding alternative to those of men, their viewpoints are not uniform, since they speak from multiple standpoints and have diverging experiences, perspectives and political positions.

In many of the post-Oslo women-to-women meetings - particularly those supported by and drawing on Italian feminist politicians, e.g. Luisa Morgantini and theoreticians, e.g. Rafaella Lambertini - feminist transversal politics was adopted as a method for dialogical conflict resolution. Engaging in a process of rooting (in one's own subjectivity) and shifting (to that of the 'other'), participants were encouraged to look for similarities rather than differences:

While their different positionings and backgrounds were recognized and respected – including the differential power relations inherent in their corresponding affiliations as members of Occupier and Occupied collectivities – all the women who were sought and invited to participate in the dialogue were committed to refusing “to participate unconsciously in the reproduction of existing power relations,” and “to finding a fair solution to the conflict” (Yuval-Davis, 1999: 122).⁶⁶

Feminist transversal politics thus put emphasis on the dialogical process, and, as such, falls within the facilitative conflict resolution practice of Track II dialogue or problem-solving workshops.⁶⁷ Similar to Track II initiatives, transversal politics encourage women to enter into dialogue, where they can be rooted in, but also shift from, their different positioning in order to establish joint agendas for feminist coalition and solidarity building. The philosophical underpinnings of both Track II and transversal politics derive from Habermas' theory of communicative action (1984). For Habermas emancipation is achieved by uncovering the relations of domination that distort ideal communication through critical self-reflection. In such a free and unconstrained communication, validity claims are recognised and formed inter-subjectively. According to Habermas, the intersubjective structure of discourse rather than a Kantian individual moral autonomy must be seen as the basis for establishing norms and validity claims.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ For more detailed discussions on transversal politics in the Palestinian Israeli context, see e.g. *Soundings* (1999), Cockburn (2007), Yuval-Davis (1994, 1997, 1999).

⁶⁷ See chapter III for more background on theories of Track II facilitative conflict resolution.

⁶⁸ See Fultner (2001) and Ramsbotham, Miall and Woodhouse (2006) for a more detailed discussion on the application of Habermas' communicative action to discursive conflict transformation approaches.

Habermas' ideal speech theory (1984), however, just as dialogical conflict resolution and feminist transversal politics, has problems in answering to the issue of radical political disagreement and difference existent in asymmetrical conflict situations, such as the Palestinian-Israeli. Mutual understanding and consensus, according to Habermas, is the fundamental telos of human interaction. It relies on his belief that 'deep down' actors share a common 'lifeworld', which can be understood as their background environment of shared presuppositions, attitudes and understandings (see Fultner, 2001). Postcolonial scholars, such as for example Said (1993: 336), however, have criticised critical theory, and Habermas in particular, for his Eurocentric vision and his insensitivity to context and difference. They have argued that Habermas' theory, claiming the existence of a shared 'lifeworld', has little to say about anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist or anti-occupation struggles.⁶⁹ With regard to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, this liberal discourse of dialogue is not able to capture the crucially different 'lifeworlds' of the occupier and the occupied, manifested, for example, in their strongly diverging narratives of historical events, but more so even in their everyday life experiences.⁷⁰

Assuming that dialogue, by drawing on a 'deep down' shared 'lifeworld', can yield norms valid and acceptable to both conflicting parties ignores the fact that real world material and political power structures have influences until 'deep down'. Palestinians and Israelis thus do not naturally adhere to different worldviews and belief systems, nor is this difference applicable to every single Palestinian and Israeli, but rather the conflict and the resulting material disparities and power asymmetries has reshaped and reinforced the two parties' beliefs in being distinctly different. The neat distinction that Habermas draws between his 'lifeworld' of common understanding and his 'system world' of structures of domination and power asymmetries thus is abstract and artificial. Fraser (1985) has convincingly demonstrated how material power structures of the 'system world' are discursively reconstructed in the 'lifeworld', i.e. how the two 'worlds' are closely intertwined. Habermas' ideal speech theory thus is unable to grasp the complexity of the real world where speech is

⁶⁹ Habermas himself, in an interview to the *New Left Review*, admitted that the fact that his philosophies do not capture dynamics of anti-imperialist and/or anti-capitalist struggles, marks them as clearly Eurocentric (quoted in Said, 1993: 336).

⁷⁰ While it is important to acknowledge the differences in perception and worldviews between people in 'developed' and 'developing' countries; in 'east' and 'west', between Israelis and Palestinians, etc. it is similarly crucial not to present them in two opposed and homogenised groups. While in Said's earlier writing *Orientalism* (1987) such a distinction might still be detected, his later writing *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) cautions against the consequences of establishing binaries and indirectly reinforcing stereotypes. On this point of representation see chapter II.

constraint by, mutually constitutive, real ('system') world and constructed ('lifeworld') power asymmetries.

Dialogical conflict resolution is hardly applicable as theory and praxis to a conflict situation like the Palestinian-Israeli which is characterised by stark material and discursive power asymmetries between occupier and occupied (see e.g. Kuttab and Kaufman, 1988). Habermasian ideal speech theory with its liberal focus on dialogue and consensus cannot theorise the radical disagreement and difference (even if constructed) that exist between the two parties; it thus has little to say about how power functions in actual politics. Even more problematic, Track II dialogical conflict resolution, by relying on Habermas' theory, might obstruct genuine recognition of difference, bracket inequalities, remove the justice principle and thus function only to perpetuate the status quo (Sabet, 1998; Said, 1996: 38).

Most Palestinians today, given that neither the post-Oslo Track I, nor the Track II negotiations brought them any real changes, consider the liberal conflict resolution model of dialogue-for-peace to be such a way to remove justice from peace. For them, engaging in a form of dialogue with the other side that never results in any structural transformation is a form of normalisation (*taṭbīʿ*) and a way to prolong the status quo of settler colonialism and occupation. Nida, a peace activist from East Jerusalem with long-term experience in various conflict resolution initiatives summarised the problem well when stating that: "We need a form of conflict resolution together with justice. Not this form of dialogue and superficial peacemaking" (Nida, 2008). Instead of (fake) dialogue and peace, the near total majority of my interviewees proposed resistance and justice as a framework to transform the conflict.⁷¹

Feminist transversal politics, similarly to other dialogical conflict resolution models, might be utopian and anti-political in a context of radical political (and politicised) difference. Scholars understand it to be "the practice of creatively crossing (and re-drawing) the borders that mark significant politicized differences. It means empathy without sameness, shifting without tearing up your roots" (Cockburn and Hunter, 1999: 88). It encourages participating women to refrain from acting as representatives of their nationalist groupings and instead build bridges and imagine a joint narrative of the past and future vision. Doing so, it, however ignores the normative impact that social and political forces have in shaping women's identities and knowledge constructions. Many of the Palestinian activists I interviewed, such

⁷¹ See also chapter III on Palestinian definitions and understanding of 'just peace' and 'resistance'.

as Leila, a member of the IWC, stressed that although their *experiences* (and resulting political perspectives) can differ from that of Palestinian men's, their overall political *position* remains (and should remain) a Palestinian national one:

Everywhere in conflict you see that women have more the tendency to listen, to understand, to talk about the details, to try to find solutions, etc. but this doesn't mean that a Palestinian women sitting with an Israeli woman would have a different position than a Palestinian man. Because the basics have to be solved, the rights have to be recognised...that is why always the political issue is the main issue. I cannot go and make an activity with you when you don't recognise my rights. It doesn't work. I cannot promote the IWC in my society when I see that somebody [of the members] doesn't recognise my rights... It is not a woman's or man's issue, it is always an interest issue (Leila, 2008).

When adopting a feminist standpoint position, Palestinian women activists, such as Leila, thus aim at establishing the *differences* in experiences, standpoints, and perspectives between men and women, not the *similarities* between Palestinian and Israeli women. In line with critical feminist scholars (e.g. Mohanty, 1991) they reject a fixed standpoint theoretical account which claims a single universal woman's experience and instead highlight the strong formative impact that Palestinian political cultures and their suppressed national identity has on gendered subjectivities.

The need to provide a *political* understanding of gender was stressed by most activists I interviewed. Such a political understanding would refrain from relying on the single, non-political variable of biological sex, and instead take into considerations the influences that additional political structures such as nationality or political party affiliation, have on women's identities and political practices. It would problematise the process of rooting and shifting, because the place and identity one is rooted in is never an individual choice, but it is socially organised. The way in which situatedness and positionalities are translated into knowledge and identity depends on social and political experiences, practices and norms (see Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002: 316). The great majority of Palestinian women cannot - and do not want to - disassociate themselves from their national narrative and grouping.

Abandoning the focus on Palestinian political and national identity and rights in favour of female dialogue, empathy and understanding is seen as a form of normalisation (*taṭbīʿ*) or even defeat and collaboration and thus a step only few would take.

2.2.4. *Feminists as Peacemakers?*

The third argumentation calling for women's participation in peacebuilding initiatives finds that a *feminist* anti-militarist and anti-discriminatory stance is needed to achieve positive (Galtung 1996) sustainable peace.⁷² Some of the Palestinian women activists, whom I interviewed, adopted such a structural feminist approach to war and peace, particularly in their criticism of the militarised Israeli political and social system. Mina, who is a founding member of the IWC, for example stated:

I think in a situation of war, the feminist agenda is to remove violence and militarisation. In Israel you have a state based on security and the army. It is very patriarchal [and] promotes violence against women. The same thing with the PA: now there is nothing for young women to work, except as security people...Militarisation destroys people, whether you are on the powerful side or on the receiving end...You can't just be an oppressor on one side of the border and then come back and be a nice peace-loving person on the other side of the border. Systems of oppressions oppress their own [people] eventually...Perpetuating the state concept of militarised security means empowering a few people on each side - unofficial military resisters on the Palestinian side and the army on the Israeli side - at the expense of other initiatives that are more civil society based and democratic (Mina, 2008).

Palestinian women activists have highlighted the interrelatedness between violence from outside (through the occupation) and inside (through public and private patriarchy) both in their feminist theory and politics (e.g. Shalhoub Kevorkian, 2004; Nashashibi, 2006). They have placed domestic violence within a wider framework of structural abuse of violence,

⁷² See chapter III for an introduction and discussion on structural intersectional feminist theories towards positive peace.

showing that patriarchy in the public and in the private sphere and the occupation are not independent sources of women's subordination, but that they are interlinked and, through discursive practices, become mutually reinforcing in their effect on women.

Yet, the overwhelming majority of my interviewees, and particularly those unfamiliar with western feminist theories, remained sceptical of feminist approaches to peace. They fear that such accounts by putting the focus on male domination (even if at various levels) could ignore other material and ideational identity-defining structures and thus pose a threat to a unified Palestinian national struggle against the occupation. Particularly the usefulness and applicability of a feminist anti-nationalist stance which deconstructs nationalism as patriarchal and andocentric (e.g. Lentin in Abdo and Lentin, 2002; Yuval-Davis, 1997) to the Palestinian situation of unrealised self-determination is questionable. Taghreed, for example, told me the following:

Nationalism is an important element in the political context here. Therefore, if I alienate myself from it, I loose ground in my community - so I become useless for any dialogue with the other side. [...] I do respect women in other countries who go forward this step [of criticising nationalist discourse], but that is different from the context in my country. Here, I need to respect the diversity and the different levels of resistance that people engage in. I cannot go beyond the national aspiration. Once I achieve my freedom and end the occupation, I can have the luxury of fighting for this next step (Taghreed, 2008).

Based on a similar critical view, the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), founded in 2004 by Palestinian academics and intellectuals has developed a toolkit for joint women's dialogue groups. It finds that a majority of the encounters initiated after the 1989 Brussels conference aimed to connect Palestinian and Israeli women on the basis of their shared criticism of male chauvinist nationalism and their feminist awareness that the national boundaries which separate them are to the benefit of men, not women. If a joint women's project is presented as apolitical, strives for feminist goals and to overcome psychological barriers per se (i.e. without linking them to the political situation), the brochure advises Palestinian women activists to boycott the project (PACBI, no date).

Given the disproportionate oppression on the political level and the resulting strength of the national unity discourse, a near-universal majority of my interviewees prioritised nationalism and practical gender needs over strategic gender issues and found it difficult to identify with the feminist rejection of nationalism as male-dominated. Even declared feminists with strong leftist leanings, such as Alia, a renowned feminist activist and member of the IWC, consider a no-border post-nationalist stance utopian at best, and a threat to national self-determination at worst:

I dream, you know, that in the future there will be no borders, not any kind of borders, between the people all over the world. But it is our basic right to exercise our national right which is guaranteed by the UN and international law...As a feminist I can see the deep connection between my sovereignty as a citizen and the nation's sovereignty. And this is why we talk about borders. *We need borders!* Ok, after exercising our basic right as a nation with self determination, we can maybe find other solutions to solve the conflict. Maybe then we can talk about some kind of different solution for Jerusalem, maybe some kind of confederation to manage it. But after! You can't deny my right and then propose a utopian itinerary! (Alia, 2008)

Deconstructing nationalism is viewed as an intellectual theoretical exercise and luxury of those women who live in established nation-states. In their context of statelessness, most Palestinians perceive the feminist anti-national stance of mainstream conflict resolution initiatives to be irrelevant at best, but more often they view it as a threat to national unity, as normalisation (*taṭbīr*^c), and thus something better not to be associated with. Instead most support Palestinian nationalism which they consider not inherently gender-discriminatory but rather “a liberatory movement with the potential for opening up a space for social justice and gender issues” (Abdo in Abdo and Lentin, 2002: 8).⁷³

Even if individual Palestinian women want to join the global feminist (peace) discourse, viewing patriarchy perhaps not as the most, but still as *a* strongly oppressive structure in their society, their feminist activism risks being curtailed by normative structures, i.e. by the

⁷³ Abdo (1994) and Jad (2004) propose a similar argument. For a detailed discussion of feminist anti-national stances in women's anti-war movements see Abdo and Lentin (2002) and Cockburn (2007: 192-202).

resistance discourse dominant in Palestinian society. The rationale of unity and not disclosing internal fractions was – and still is – a defining feature of Palestinian collective identity, where it is feared that displaying internal problems and differing opinions to the ‘outside’ might lead to a fragmentation of the united national struggle. So while patriarchal discriminatory structures *are* a topic of discussion, many men and women feel that “in present circumstances critique has to remain within their own community” (Cockburn, 2006: 49). Resistance to the occupation is the “overall guiding meta-frame for Palestinian politics” (Aggestam, 1999: 68). It is hegemonic not only in the political, but also in the social sphere, where any other – even if non-political – identity-defining variable tends to be submerged. Women in Palestine organise and construct their identity, first of all, in resistance to the occupation, not patriarchy – they consider themselves first of all oppressed Palestinians, before their status as oppressed women is discussed.

In sum, Palestinian women not only construct their identity and chose their agency in resistance to the occupation; they are also *expected* to do so. Drastically breaching these norms and expectations might not only be dangerous for them (because they risk being branded as normalisers or collaborators), but also detrimental to both, their national and gender struggle (because they will loose societal support and will have little impact on wider structures). Consequently the great majority of Palestinian women reject (and are expected to reject) (structural) anti-national, (standpoint, constructivist) anti-patriarchal as well as (essentialist) maternal care-based feminist approaches, all of which are often used in mainstream liberal gender and conflict resolution initiatives. Instead they use, as the following section will show, *rights-based* politics to further peace activism.

2.3. Protection of Rights

UNSCR 1325 calls upon all parties to the conflict to ensure the protection of women and girls in conflict from gender-based violence and rape, but also from all other violations of their rights under international law, particularly as set out in the 4th Geneva Convention. By calling for the protection of women in times of war 1325 continues a dominant trend in mainstream literature which emphasises that women are particularly hard-hit by the devastating impact of war and crisis.⁷⁴ Most aid agencies, particularly those focussing on

⁷⁴ See chapter III for a theoretical discussion of the humanitarian relief approaches to conflict which tend to stereotype and infantilise women as victims of war.

relief rather than development, deal with women as victims of war (often using the imagery of a mourning mother).

Such a reductionist conceptualisation of gender identities and women's roles in conflict, of course, risks robbing women of their social and political agency. Many feminist scholars have therefore criticised the narrow focus on protection finding that it might infantilise female agents by reducing and homogenising their wide-ranging experiences and forms of agency under the category of "womenandchildren" (Enloe, 1990). Reducing women to nothing but victims, it is argued, might assign women a passive, apolitical role and leave the domain of politics and decision-making reserved for men. Such reasoning has also been brought forward in the Palestinian-Israeli context, particularly by Israeli feminists. Knesset and IWC member Naomi Chazan, for example, argues that "the emphasis placed on protecting women in times of violence may contribute to the stereotypical image of women as victims and thus undermine their credibility as problem-solvers" (Chazan, 2004: 55). Palestinian activists, however, tend to mobilise 1325's call for the protection of their rights. The debate about whether (or not) a focus on women's protection in times of war necessarily infantilises women thus deserves revisiting.

A significant majority of my interviewees framed their political practices within the discourse of rights and protection thereof. They emphasised that although as women they have specific experiences, they struggle first and foremost (and just as the rest of their people) for their national and political rights. The language of rights offers for many Palestinians a way to make their voices heard and understood internationally. Particularly after the First Intifada "[t]he popularization of "human rights consciousness,"" as Hajjar (2001: 27) has argued, "was evident in the ways people were expressing their political demands and aspirations for peace." Many of my informants from lower socio-economic backgrounds framed their everyday resistance activism within the discourse of rights (see also Allen, 2009: 165), but it was predominantly 'professional,' 'globalised' female political activists, supporters of a two-state solution, who used a rights-based framework based on international law, human rights and UN resolutions to enhance and strengthen their struggle for an independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ The subsequent two chapters will provide an in-depth discussion of rights-based mother politics in nonviolent and everyday resistance. In this chapter I focus only on the rights discourse promoted by the urban professionalised elite, mostly supporters of two-state solution and part of the peace business.

The Palestinian members of the IWC whom I interviewed unanimously found that amongst the three themes dealt with in the Resolution its call to ensure the protection of women and their rights under international law offers most leverage for their peace and anti-occupation activism. Read from such a *rights*-based perspective, 1325, as one member clearly stated, “is not just [a way] to tackle the role of women in the negotiation process, pre-, during, and post-conflict. No! 1325 also talks about protection of women under conflict. It has many more components which advocate women’s *rights* under conflict” (Alia, 2008). It is for this reason that Palestinian members of the IWC found it imperative to anchor their joint Charter in international law, UN resolutions and past Israeli-Palestinian agreements. In their joint IWC Charter, members have set down their political agenda, calling for “an end of the Israeli occupation and a just peace based on international law [including relevant UN resolutions], human rights and equality” and the establishment of a “viable sovereign Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel on the June 4, 1967 borders” (IWC Charter, 2005).

2.3.1. *Diverging Interpretations of International Law*

The Charter and the legal frameworks it refers to, however, have been interpreted very differently by the Palestinian and Israeli IWC members, as Leila’s, a member of the IWC, account illustrates:

The Charter refers clearly to recognising our rights, international law, UN resolutions, and the two-state solution. We thought it was clear enough [but] after three years, now we are reviewing the Charter. We discovered that some of the Israelis, members [of IWC] who signed the Charter, are talking about Jewish neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem. If you agree to 67 borders, then you cannot say that these are neighbourhoods. These are colonial settlements. This is Palestinian land. [...] So it is either that they haven’t read the Charter or that they don’t understand it. They have different interpretations of the Charter (Leila, 2008).⁷⁶

⁷⁶ In 2009 the IWC members were immersed in a difficult and conflict-laden process of revisiting their Charter and had restarted discussions over its meaning. The outcomes of this process, as far as I know, were ambiguous and have not been made public.

The members of IWC thus are divided in their understandings of international law and the Palestinian members clearly face difficulties in establishing their rights-based interpretation of 1325 as authoritative. Their struggle highlights a major shortcoming of international law: its lack of monitoring and enforcement mechanisms (see e.g. Chinkin and Charlesworth, 2006). The difficulty of enforcement is even heightened in the case of 1325 because, compared to other international legal documents, UNSCR 1325 has a very weak standing, depending on the goodwill of member countries to ensure its implementation (Amar, 2004: 38). Although the Knesset has adopted a law calling for the implementation of 1325 and Palestinian President Abbas has recognised the IWC through an official decree in 2005 (UNIFEM News Release, 2006), the question remains: Who is responsible for the enforcement of 1325 and who can be held accountable for its violations?

As long as the occupation persists the Palestinian Authority has no means to enforce 1325, let alone guarantee its demand of providing protection for women. Palestinians cannot rely on their own (quasi-)government to shield them from Israeli violations of their basic rights. As stateless people they not only lack a representative authority but, more importantly, have no valid means, bodies and institutions through which to fight for their sovereignty, legitimacy and rights. “The calamity of the rightless,” as Hannah Arendt has famously remarked,

is not that they are deprived of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, of or equality before the law and freedom of opinion – formulas which were designed to solve problems within given communities – but that they no longer belong to any community whatsoever. Their plight is not that they are not equal before the law, but that no law exists for them (Arendt, 1973: 295-6).

Palestinians are not just deprived of their fundamental social, political and civic rights, but of the right to have rights: of “a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective” (Arendt, 1973: 296). As a nation without a (sovereign) state, Palestinians have no authority, no place from where to demand the enforcement of their rights; they thus remain outside the ‘universal’ human rights framework.

Consequently, they have turned time and again to the UN and other multilateral and international bodies to seek protection, but these calls have generally been disappointed. Haneen, who is not a member of IWC but a prominent woman activist critical of joint peace initiatives, expressed her disillusionment poignantly, when she asked: “How many times did we send letters to the UN calling for ceasefires, resolutions, etc. but nothing happened? There have been so many resolutions since 48, but they are never implemented. We need something very practical, not that abstract” (Haneen, 2008). Her call for “something very practical” is perfectly justified. More than 15 Security Council resolutions have been issued since 1948 on various aspects of the Palestinian cause, but the UN has altogether failed to enforce the implementation of international law and its own resolutions (see e.g. Jean-Allain, 2005; Jad, 2009).

Many Palestinians are disillusioned with the political commitment of the UN and the international community. Similarly (and despite the fact that Palestinian political discourse is full of references to it), a deep scepticism of the usefulness of international law, human rights and past agreements to support and advance their cause remains. While some sceptics cite the colonial and western origins of international laws and the double standards with which the international community tends to apply them as a proof of their irrelevance or even harmfulness for the Palestinian people, others argue that framing the national struggle in humanitarian or human rights terms risks depoliticising it further.⁷⁷

The latter argument resonates with the feminist critique that the mainstream’s focus on the protection of women and their rights in conflict victimises and infantilises female actors, robbing them of their peacebuilding agency (e.g. Chazan, 2004 cited above). The fact that Palestinian women in the IWC, however, do use a rights-based discourse to peacebuilding, shows that for them, as stateless people, the call for protection of their human and humanitarian rights does not necessarily negate the political nature of their struggle. Arendt (1973: 297) concludes that “Man, it turns out, can lose all so-called Rights of Man without losing his essential quality as man, his human dignity. Only the loss of a polity itself expels him from humanity”. By claiming their humanity through discourses of rights, protection and

⁷⁷ Chinkin and Charlesworth (2006) discuss the various objections raised in many developing countries against using international law as a framework for peacebuilding. For the Palestinian context, see Jean-Allain (2005) who analyses the applicability and relevance of international law, Hajjar (2001) who examines the various ways in which the human rights framework is used but also rejected by Palestinians as well as Allen (2009) and Feldman (2007) who counter the argument that humanitarianism necessarily depoliticises the Palestinian national struggle by showing how Palestinian link their suffering to political claims.

self-victimisation, Palestinians thus effectively make strong *political* claims: they establish a connection between their suffering and their political entitlement (Allen, 2009: 162; see also Feldman, 2007). Palestinian women's concentration and utilisation of particularly 1325's call for their protection might propagate their image as victims, but it also functions as a way to claim political rights. Humanitarianism, despite its alleged political neutrality, thus often is used by local actors to advance political claims and can have strong political effects (see Feldman, 2007).⁷⁸

Yet, doubts and disenchantments about international agendas, such as UNSCR 1325 which link political to social gender change remain. If Palestinian women (and men) agree to use UN Resolutions, international law and human rights at all as frameworks for their activism, most would refer to the Geneva Conventions, human rights and those UN Resolutions which directly acknowledge Palestinian national rights (e.g. 242, 338 or 194) or condemn Israeli violations of international law (e.g. 1322 which, just a few weeks before 1325, criticised Israel's use of excessive force against Palestinians or 1860 calling for a ceasefire in Gaza in 2009), rather than 1325. Most Palestinians with whom I spoke had never heard of 1325 or, if they had, perceived it as irrelevant to their real needs and priorities under Israeli occupation.⁷⁹

In the Palestinian context, not even those Resolutions which make strong political claims have been properly addressed, let alone implemented, by the international community. It should thus not come as a surprise that most Palestinians do not pin their hopes on 1325, a resolution that deals predominantly with women's, rather than strictly political rights. Moreover, it deals with their rights in vague terms and leaves space for reductionist liberal feminist interpretations, such as Chazan's (2004) cited above, which prioritise the Resolution's call for women's empowerment over the protection of their (national and other) rights by accusing the latter of reducing women to victims. Activists, such as the Palestinian IWC members, who nevertheless use 1325, however, insist on a political interpretation of 1325 with a focus on the protection of their *rights*. Projects and agendas based on 1325 that prioritise women's issues over national, economic and social rights (rather than establishing

⁷⁸ See chapter VII (section 4) for a discussion how women frame their struggle to enjoy a normal joyful life as their right, therefore also making political claims through the language of humanitarianism.

⁷⁹ Wi'am and the Jerusalem Center for Women (two Palestinian NGOs that work with 1325) had similar experiences when discussing 1325 with women from various backgrounds. Most stressed that 1325 is irrelevant to their everyday life and that it needs to be adapted to their specific situation of life under occupation (Interview, Wi'am, 2007; JCW, 2008).

the close connection between them), are – as the following section will show – perceived by the great majority of Palestinians as a way to hide political agendas under the cloak of feminist aspirations for social gender change.⁸⁰

2.4. *Women's Empowerment and the UN's 'Gender-sensitive' Perspective*

The third theme dealt with in the UNSCR 1325 concerns the incorporation of a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations, in the wider UN system, as well as in negotiation and implementation processes of peace agreements. The Resolution contains little specification as to what exactly a gender perspective means and entails.⁸¹ Besides paying attention to women's special needs and guaranteeing their protection under conflict, 1325 also stresses that a gender perspective would include “[m]easures that support local women's peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution, and that involve women in all of the implementation mechanisms of the peace agreements” (UNSC, 2000). The linking of a gender perspective and women's empowerment to (1) their *access* to formal and informal conflict resolution processes and (2) their (so-called) *indigenous* peacebuilding initiatives, however, is problematic.

The need to empower local women by giving them access to processes of (particularly joint) conflict resolution is one aspect often stressed in mainstream Israeli or international interpretation of 1325. Naomi Chazan, for example, finds that “women's participation in conflict resolution is integrally related to the empowerment of women” (Chazan, 2004: 55). She thus establishes the linkage between women's social and political struggle, between the ‘personal’ and the ‘political’. Particularly in psychosocial approaches to conflict resolution the feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’ is often used to support the new focus on the (inter-) personal level.

This, however, is a misinterpretation of the slogan ‘the personal is political’. ‘The personal is political’ was coined by second-wave feminists who wanted to highlight that women's so-called personal problems, such as for example domestic violence or the lack of health- and

⁸⁰ See Abu-Lughod (2003), Al-Ali (2005) and Al-Ali and Pratt (2009) for a discussion of how the issue of (Muslim) women's rights was instrumentalised in US foreign policy discourse, but also in transnational feminist and political agendas in the case of the Iraq invasion.

⁸¹ The annotated version of 1325 prepared by UNIFEM (UNIFEM, n.d.) also does not provide a clearer picture of what the UN understands as a gender perspective and even mentions that practitioners will need more guidance to understand what a gender perspective entails in specific contexts.

child-care, are in fact not personal, but political issues, because they result from broader systemic political injustices. They stressed this interconnection between the personal and the political to substantiate their structuralist argument that an individual struggle against seemingly personal, but in fact political issues will have little impact. What they called for instead was collective political action to address those systemic injustices that trickle down until the very personal level (see e.g. Hanisch 1969/2006). In the interpretation of mainstream women's psychosocial conflict resolution the slogan 'the personal is political' was turned upside down. It was changed from its original meaning - that women's 'personal' problems are produced or at least implicated by broader systemic political structures - to denoting that all political circumstances are the result of personal choices and actions of individuals.

As discussed above (Chapter V, section 2) Palestinian women, too, have continuously stressed the interrelation between the personal and the political. Their experiences under occupation has taught them that patriarchy, class and occupation are closely interrelated and mutually reinforcing sources of women's oppression. Interpreting the feminist slogan 'the personal is political' from such a structural and intersectional approach would mean not only that the different sources of political, social and cultural domination must be confronted simultaneously, but also – more importantly – that the struggle against political oppression, i.e. the occupation, must be prioritised. Strategies for women's empowerment in the Palestinian context thus, as Maha Nassar, head of the PFLP-affiliated Union of Palestinian Women's Committees, stressed, place emphasis on the national struggle and socio-economic context, not on personal women-to-women bonding:

Our Union boycotted joint projects from the beginning. For us they are a waste of time and effort and we consider them to be the wrong way of involving women in political activism. Our aim is to empower women and to give them a stronger political role, but this doesn't mean involving them in the peace negotiations. Political activism means to change laws to be empowered, to share in the decision-making process, etc. – but it has nothing to do with joint projects with Israeli women, because we will never be on an equal footing... It is very nasty to bring poor Palestinian women who need food and clothes for their children to meetings with privileged Israeli women just because both live in a male-dominated society. This is not a gender perspective. Our gender

perspective in the Union is closely related to both the class and national struggle (Interview, Nassar, 2008).

Nassar views the end of Israeli occupation and Israeli exploitation of Palestinian economy as a precondition for women's empowerment. Although not all of my interviewees would, follow Nassar's radical anti-colonial Marxist feminist approach (which situates their struggle squarely within the national and class struggle) and/or refuse to dialogue with Israeli woman activists altogether, they were united in identifying the Israeli occupation as the key obstacle to realising women's rights in Palestine. Nearly all of those involved in joint initiatives stressed that cooperation must be based on a joint *political*, rather than gender, agenda.

The conditions set down by the Palestinian JCW before re-establishing the Jerusalem Link and restarting the joint projects with its Israeli counterpart Bat Shalom (after they were frozen in 2000) reflect this concern. In order to rebut the accusation of normalisation (*taṭbiʿ*) and with the aim of achieving political changes, JCW agreed to cooperate with Bat Shalom only in joint projects which are based on full recognition of their revised principles and are of a strictly political nature (Interview JCW, 2008). The Palestinian members of the IWC, turning to a rights-based rather than the radical Marxist feminist framework, also underline that real empowerment can only be achieved once women's and men's rights under international law are guaranteed. This, as Rima, one of the Palestinian IWC members and a prominent women leader of the left explained, is one crucial aspect which distinguishes Palestinian and Israeli women's experiences and accordingly their feminist strategies for empowerment:

The suffering of Israelis and Palestinians is different, and their struggle is different. Ordinary women in Israel are struggling for their right as women whether it is related to the family, [...] health, social security and so on. The Palestinian women's suffering is more political. So they are talking about house demolitions, confiscation of IDs, etc. Of course the Israelis don't have such kind of problems. So it is a human rights issue but this issue is the outcome of a political oppression. That is why Palestinians are talking on the political level (Rima, 2008).

Whether arguing from an anti-colonial, Marxist or rights-based feminist perspective, Palestinian women are united in their understanding that their empowerment cannot be

achieved through mere access to conflict resolution processes. For them, women's empowerment is first and foremost a political issue:

When we discuss issues of how we see peace and negotiations, we want a women's perspective, but it is not our attention to turn in these meetings [...] to the issue of what the [social] situation of women in Israeli society is and what they are facing. No, this is not the issue! Because first of all this is political. Now we talk about politics, but from a woman's point of view (Suad, 2008).

Her argument makes clear that for Palestinian women in the IWC, when interpreting and trying to make use of 1325, the key is collective political empowerment: while women's or feminist perspectives must be added to negotiations, this should not result in women's issues being dealt with independently of, or even prioritised over, political change. This is not to say that women's rights and social gender change are not a major concern for Palestinian women's activists. To the contrary, it highlights that women's empowerment in the Palestinian context and their struggle for equal rights is closely linked to their political and economic empowerment which can only be achieved by ending the Israeli occupation.⁸² Joint Palestinian, Israeli (or international) women's initiatives need to acknowledge this intersectionality, if to be sustainable in bringing about social or political change.

The Palestinian and Israeli IWC members' conflicting interpretations of international law, UN resolutions and even their own Charter, however, reveal that on the Israeli and international side not all fight for Palestinian women's political and economic rights. For Palestinian women living in East Jerusalem the Israeli settlements have devastating and strongly disempowering effects: economically, politically and socially. If maintained under the pretext that they are mere 'neighbourhoods', as was supported by Israeli members of the IWC, Palestinian women's empowerment will continue to be blocked.⁸³

⁸² The fact that the UNSCR Resolution makes no mention of social or economic rights, such as the right to basic living conditions or right to housing (see e.g. Hazan 2004), further invites one-dimensional liberal feminist interpretation of the resolution's call for empowerment in which the wider socio-economic and political context is not addressed.

⁸³ See Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Abdo (2006) for an in-depth study on the difficult economic and political situation that Palestinian women face in East Jerusalem.

It is as a result of such disagreements on basic political details, that many Palestinians are sceptical of joint Palestinian-Israeli women's conflict resolution initiatives. While for some IWC members joint women's groups constitute a model that promotes "authentic and productive dialogue" (Greenblatt, 2002: 2); this hardly is the majority viewpoint among Palestinians, as Abu-Dayyeh Shamas, a Palestinian member of IWC, admits:

As feminists, we tend to adopt a global perspective – we have worked hard on joint meetings and gained much prominence addressing international bodies beyond our respective communities. However, this has limited the dialogue to a small group of people. We have really only reached out to friends within a relatively narrow circle (Abu Dayyeh Shamas, 2004: 51).

Most Palestinian women to whom I spoke were not aware of the IWC and stressed that they preferred not to be involved and associated with joint Palestinian-Israeli projects. People-to-people projects, even if mainly striving for political dialogue such as the IWC, are often seen either by women themselves or by their societies at large as forced unequal dialogue and a form of normalisation (*taṭbīʿ*). If joint projects take place between women only and focus on women's empowerment without clearly establishing their political and economic empowerment as a precondition, they receive even more scepticism from the Palestinian public and are often condemned as an attempt to weaken the resistance, an attack on Palestinian society's integrity and culture, or as a way of re-packaging and legitimising foreign intervention. Such joint initiatives, based on the mainstream narrow access-based liberal feminist interpretation of 1325, thus hardly constitute "indigenous" Palestinian women's conflict resolution initiatives and it remains highly questionable whether and how they could contribute to women's empowerment.

At the same time Palestinian women involved in mainstream liberal feminist gender and conflict resolution projects do experience empowerment in some way. The form that this empowerment takes, however, needs to be scrutinised. While some Palestinian participants in international women's peace conferences have claimed to speak "[a]s a representative of Palestinian civil society and the women's movement" (Abu Dayyeh Shamas, 2002: 1) more critical voices have clarified that they are not locally elected but rather that "international actors handpicked Palestinian women's representatives to promote peace and mutual

understanding” (Jad, 2004a: 193). The ‘globalised peace-women elite’ thus in fact are not representative of broader trends in female political discourses and practices in the Occupied Territories. They are few, they lack domestic legitimacy and many of them remained sceptical themselves of the mainstream international liberal women and peace agenda. The fact that at a recent meeting of the IWC in Brussels in March 2010, staged by Süsskind as a ‘reunion’ of the 1989 joint women’s conference, was attended mainly by Israeli (Zionist) feminists, and only three Palestinian women, reveals joint women’s projects, such as the IWC, to be Israeli-dominated and lacking Palestinian support.⁸⁴

Jad (2004a) has convincingly argued that after Oslo a shift took place in Palestinian society from women leaders (in the First Intifada, for example) transferring *power to* the grassroots, to the post-Oslo globalised feminist (including ‘peacewomen’) NGO elite now practicing a form of *power over* ordinary women. If the empowerment that the ‘globalised peacewomen elite’ through their participation in the mainstream liberal women and peace agenda experiences, is to translate into broader collective empowerment, they need to insist on widening understandings and practices of peacebuilding and 1325 from the currently predominant narrow access-based liberal to a more comprehensive rights-based discourse.

3. Conclusion

The UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security has rightly been considered a landmark in women’s struggles to mainstream gender in conflict resolution and prevention in the UN system and its member states. However, as this chapter has shown, it not only continues the problematic process of feminisation of peacebuilding, but also faces serious challenges in its implementation. These difficulties stem partially from the vague and inconsistent language employed in the Resolution. The major obstacles that hinder 1325 from constituting a conducive framework for Palestinian women’s peace activisms, however, are due to its continuation of a narrow liberal feminist approach to gender and conflict.

⁸⁴ See http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/gender-conflict-israel-palestine-programme_en.pdf for a programme of the conference. Discussions during the conference were kept official and policy-oriented, and there was a general agreement, even by the pro-peace (yet Zionist) Israeli left feminists that joint women’s projects had failed.

This chapter has shown that this mainstream liberal feminist approach is largely detached from Palestinian women's realities on the ground in its organisation (through NGOs which are removed from the grassroots), strategy and aims. It is based on a strategy which combines dialogical conflict resolution and maternal care-based peacebuilding. Facilitative or dialogical conflict resolution approaches based on Habermas' ideal speech theory and striving for reconciliation, attitudinal and behavioural change, fail to address the historical and political dimensions of the conflict. A maternal care-based strategy aims to bridge the national divide on the basis of a shared gender or feminist rather than political agenda and thus risk depoliticising the national struggle. With its psychosocial focus on the individual (essentialised) women/mother, dialogical care-based conflict resolution is hardly applicable to a settler-colonial conflict like the Palestinian-Israeli, characterised by strong material structural inequalities and power asymmetries between the two parties (rather than by ideational structures and issues of identity construction).

The mainstream liberal women and conflict agenda often puts forward the argument that women's participation in peacemaking constitute a win-win solution furthering both social (gender) and political (national) emancipation. Such a narrow conceptualisation of women's empowerment neglects to trace the ways in which gender oppression is related to and reinforced by political and economic configurations - an aspect which all of the Palestinian women I interviewed identified as most pertinent in dominating their lives. Palestinian women's struggles for empowerment take place in a context of omnipresent Israeli occupation, which strangles their entire society politically and economically, rendering it dependent on foreign aid and without the protection of a sovereign state. By detaching women's empowerment from this broader political context, the narrow access-based liberal interpretation renders 1325 irrelevant to Palestinian women's lives and activism on the ground.

Stressing this clash between certain feminist and political agendas is not to deny the political nature of most forms of feminism. Rather it highlights that the mainstream joint conflict resolution approach relies upon this specific depoliticised anti-national feminist stance, precisely because it is not willing to tackle the political nature of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In the Palestinian/Israeli context, it is mainly the Israeli side and the international community that uses the gender construction of 'peacewomen' to promote and legitimise a depoliticised care-based dialogical approach. Unsurprisingly this approach is perceived by a

large number of Palestinians as a neo-colonial feminist agenda aiming at undermining a unifying political discourse of resistance to the occupation. Palestinian society has not rejected the mainstream liberal agenda as form of normalisation (*taṭbīʿ*) because of an aversion to women's only groups, to women's involvement in politics, to the idea of advancing gender equality, or maybe even to the essentialist assumption that women are more peaceful than men, but rather because of its depoliticised psychosocial approach focusing on reconciliation between individuals and prioritising women's and feminist goals over political change.

By fragmenting the Palestinian women's movement into different constituencies, which end up competing for financial support, the mainstream liberal feminist reading and practise of 1325 has further exacerbated the detrimental impact of post-Oslo donor money on Palestinian civil society and institution building (see Jad, 2004a&b; Hammami, 1995; Hanafi and Tabar, 2005). Executed through conflict resolution programmes at NGO level it claims to represent civil society and "indigenous" women's initiatives, but in fact has delegitimised the resistance by normalising particular ways of thinking about violent conflict (see Fetherston, 2000). It might have kept its promise of empowering women as far as those few 'globalised peacewomen' who subscribe to its agenda of anti-national or dialogical care-based conflict resolution are concerned, but it falls short of advancing collective political empowerment and has even further marginalised the many female activists who are engaged in rights-based politics and non-dialogue forms of activism.

Global feminist peace agendas, if not carefully responding to local contexts, can thus exacerbate local fragmentation and end up exercising *power over* rather than giving *power to* local activists. Mainstream liberal feminist interventions not only fail to fulfil their double promise of advancing gender and peace development, but, through further fragmenting the women's movement, pose an obstacle for doing so. To avoid such counterproductive impact international policies and projects on gender and conflict need to be more embedded within the specific local context in which they intervene. Contextualising female peacebuilding means, most importantly, repoliticising it. Policy-oriented and academic studies on conflict resolution and peacemaking in other context have shown that "NGOs achieved significant peace building outcomes when they engaged with, rather than avoided political processes" (Goodhand, 2006: 115). This has important implications for feminist as well as gendered conflict resolution praxis and theory.

International gender and conflict interventions and particularly Resolution 1325 will only become relevant for the vast majority of local actors if integral to and supportive of a wider political programme for the Palestinian national struggle. In short, women's bi- or transnational anti-war initiatives need to get it right with the feminist slogan 'the personal is political': rather than aiming for individual-attitudinal change at personal level, they need to address the conflict's political and historical roots. They need to recognise that deconstructing nationalism as patriarchal and male-dominated might be an important feminist theoretical insight, but for people living in a situation of statelessness it seems paradoxical to deconstruct the nation-state that they are striving for. Rather than being based on an essentialist maternal care-based or utopian anti-national feminist agenda, transnational feminist solidarity politics with Palestine and Palestinian women needs to follow a joint political agenda which identifies and targets the Israeli occupation and settler-colonial policies as main obstacle to women's empowerment (additional to but not instead of which shared gender or feminist goals might be proposed). Only a rights-based approach to gender and conflict intervention, and to the UNSCR 1325 more specifically, holds potential to strengthen Palestinian women's peace and gender activism.

CHAPTER VI

PALESTINIAN WOMEN'S NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE

While women's participation in nonviolent resistance (NVR) during the First Intifada has been studied extensively, more recently focus has been put on women's involvement in dialogue groups and armed resistance. NVR activism during and after the Second Intifada is often deemed to be non-existent or irrelevant for conflict transformation. Those few studies that do enquire into the potentials of post-Oslo NVR as a catalyst for change (e.g. Allen, 2002; Dudouet, 2008, 2009; Kuttab, 2003; Norman, 2010; Seitz, 2003; Wright, 2009; Qumsiyeh, 2011; Zelter, 2009) do not pay particular attention to women's involvement and thus do not investigate the gendered impact that such forms of female political agency can have on prevailing gender constructions and ideologies in Palestinian political culture. Yet, acts of civil disobedience do take place in Palestine today and women are involved in them. In comparison to the First Intifada, NVR activism is, however, far less extensive, not centrally coordinated and much more localised today; it is practiced in different forms and with new methods, framed and organised under various (often competing) local, national and international agendas, and pursues different (and sometimes incompatible) goals.

This chapter provides an overview of various forms of women's NVR after 2000, traces their embeddedness within wider discourses and framings of NVR as constructed at the micro (i.e. local and national) and macro (i.e. international) level, and enquires into their potentials to facilitate popular mobilisation for conflict transformation, but also women's empowerment. While the liberal feminist position, as the previous chapter has shown, considers women's participation in joint Palestinian-Israeli dialogue groups as most empowering, I argue here that female resistance activism has in fact more transformative potential. Not only is it more socially accepted and thus more widely mobilising than dialogical conflict resolution, but the gender identity of the courageous female protestor employed by activists in their NVR discourse and practice is also more challenging and potentially disruptive to reductionist gender binaries of men/protector and women/protected. The study of women's NVR practices as a dissident practice which challenges both existing political and gender norms thus can provide insights into the ways in which conceptions of the political are constructed,

negotiated, challenged and transformed in gendered terms. Tracing women's practical and discursive strategies of courageous action-oriented, yet nonviolent, political activism, ultimately might provide visionary outlines of a non-masculinist, non-militarist, yet proactive form of political culture in Palestine.

I start with a critical discussion of social movement and conflict resolution theory on NVR and then give a brief historical overview of the developments in NVR since the First Intifada, showing that within the last decade NVR in Palestine has undergone a simultaneous process of professionalisation and internationalisation (by being promoted by NGOs as well as international justice movements) as well as localisation (by being practiced in an uncoordinated and often fragmented way at the village level). In the main part of the chapter I describe the mobilising structures of female NVR in Palestine today, presenting different organisational forms as well as methods employed. I then analyse the gendered social and political constraint and opportunity structures in which activists operate, as well as the discursive strategies they employ to frame female NVR. In the final part of the chapter, I evaluate the social and political transformative potential of women's NVR activism, paying particular attention to the ways in which activists formulate and enact alternative female political subjectivities and forms of agency. While historically, female NVR has had little success in sustaining concrete material changes, it can affect discursive and attitudinal changes both at the political and social level.

1. Theories of Collective Nonviolent Resistance

Collective NVR activism (what has also been termed "protest" [Jaspers, 1997], "civil disobedience" [Sharp, 1973], or "contentious politics" [Mc Adam, Tilly and Tarrow, 2001]), has been studied by conflict transformation scholars (e.g. Lederach, 1995; Sharp, 1973, 1989, 2005; Galtung, 1989) who have theorised about nonviolent ways to transform the structural context of conflict, as well as by 'new' and 'old' social movement researchers (e.g. Mc Adam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996; Tilly, 2004; Melucci, 1989) who look more carefully at the material and ideational context in which activists operate. Resistance acts (collective, but more so individual everyday acts) have also been of interest for anthropologists and sociologists (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977; de Certeau, 1984; Scott, 1985, 1990, 1997; Comaroff, 1985; Ong, 1987) who, in their attempts to identify alternative sites and qualities of

transformative agency, research whether and under which circumstances mundane struggles at the micro-level can bring about broader changes at the macro-political level.⁸⁵

As a result, resistance studies are characterised by strong fragmentations along disciplinary lines and a multiplicity of definitions, weakening the analytical utility of the concept. Various scholars have attempted to provide more accurate conceptualisations of resistance (e.g. Abu-Lughod, 1990b; Brown, 1996; Einwohner and Hollaender, 2004; Rubin, 1996; Ortner, 1995) and some have explicitly tried to establish synergies between disciplines.⁸⁶ Nevertheless studies of resistance remain

thin because they are ethnographically thin: thin on the *internal politics* of dominated groups, thin on the *cultural richness* of those groups, thin on the *subjectivity* – the intentions, desires, fears, projects – of the actors engaged in these dramas (Ortner, 1995: 190, emphasis added).

Ortner's observation also applies to studies of social movements and resistance in the Middle East. Until recently many studies tended to adopt a (neo-)Orientalist view treating the Middle East as exceptional, monolithic and somewhat resistant to change, restricting analysis to the elites and policy-makers rather than ordinary people as agents of change. Social movement theory and its concepts were often applied uncritically to the region, obstructing a "thick" description of the empirical context which would produce analytical and conceptual tools able to capture the specificities of the realities on the ground (Bayat, 2010: 5).⁸⁷

This chapter attempts to address these theoretical and methodological shortcomings. It will provide a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of women's NVR activism by inquiring into the internal politics of the NVR scene in Palestine, into the cultural background and framing processes utilised by its actors, as well as into women's subjectivities, aims and motivations for partaking. I adopt an eclectic approach, borrowing from conflict transformation, social

⁸⁵ Collective contentious politics or NVR thus differ from both institutional formal politics (which were dealt with in the previous chapter) and individual acts of every resistance (which will be discussed in the following chapter).

⁸⁶ Weissman (2008) and Clark, ed. (2009) link conflict resolution and social movement theory; Escobar (1992) identifies contributions that social movement theory could make to anthropological studies and vice versa; and Bayat (2010) brings together sociological and anthropological approaches on collective and everyday resistance.

⁸⁷ Only more recently have scholars attempted to, for example, adopt social movement theory to Islamic activism (see Bayat, 2010; Wictorowicz, 2004; Meijer, 2005).

movement as well as sociological, anthropological and feminist literature on resistance to better understand the reality on the ground, but also to see how Palestinian women's practices of NVR can speak to and enhance these, often western-based, theoretical frames.

1.1. Nonviolent Resistance in Conflict Transformation Theories

NVR research with its aim for structural change broadly falls within the field of conflict *transformation*. In contrast to Track II conflict *resolution* approaches, it does not rely on the idea that conflict should (or indeed can) be resolved through formal institutional politics, diplomacy or dialogue, but rather calls upon the disempowered to engage in contentious and confrontational politics. It is thus not as a result of third party intervention, but rather due to 'the people's' uprising that conflict transformation takes place. NVR theory does not assume the existence of equality between the conflict partners, but is used in situations of asymmetric conflict and radical disagreement by the oppressed group to challenge the position of the oppressor and the structural context that institutionalises unequal power relations and injustices.

Within nonviolence research there are two schools. The first, the principled approach, which treats nonviolence as an ethical or moral issue, is generally associated with Gandhi's "satyagraha" and his conviction that nonviolence is not just a means to an end, but a goal, a true way of life in itself. A more pragmatic approach to NVR is proposed by Sharp (1973, 1989, 2005) who sees nonviolent action not as a principle but as a pragmatic strategy to combat oppression. Sharp stresses that nonviolent struggle is not "about passivity or pacifism, but about "nonviolent war" which can lead to both justice and peace" (Sharp, 1989: 4). It is thus, as Curle (1971: 184) has noted, "a war by other means" which, despite being nonviolent, also requires participants to have strategies, tactics and weapons. Most empirical examples of NVR activism in recent history were motivated by such strategic considerations that nonviolent action constitutes the most effective, only available, or least costly form of intervention (see e.g. Ackerman and Kruegler, 1994: 17).

Sharp (1973) has famously identified 198 methods of nonviolent action, which he divides into forms of nonviolent *protest* (such as vigils, marches), *non-cooperation* (e.g. social and economic boycotts, political non-cooperation), and *intervention* (e.g. blockades, establishment of rival parallel governments). Activists threaten the power of the authority not by employing

actual physical violence, but, by refusing to do certain things which they are expected to do, or by doing certain things which they are forbidden to do. NVR activists press for changes through either converting or coercing their more powerful opponent (Dudouet, 2008: 15). Sharp's inventory has been further expanded, and particularly cross-border nonviolent interventions by third (often transnational) groups through raising awareness or giving technical, financial or physical support for social justice activism have received scholarly attention in recent years (see e.g. Burrowes, 2000; Dudouet, 2009; Seitz, 2003; Stamatopoulou-Robbins, 2008; Zelter, 2009).

Whether and on which levels nonviolent contentious political actions can bring about structural change, depends on the specific context, but the empowerment experienced by the oppressed who come together to actively confront the oppressor constitutes for conflict transformation scholars an important step towards strengthening local peace constituencies. The act of NVR, in their view, raises political awareness about the context and nature of structural power asymmetries and motivates citizens to take responsibility for transforming it. By challenging the opponent directly through protest or indirectly through withholding their voluntary obedience nonviolent resisters can – and in the opinion of scholars supportive of NVR have proven to be able to – “redress structural imbalance and claim rights to justice or self-determination” (Dudouet, 2008: 2).

1.2. Nonviolent Resistance in Social Movement Theory

NVR scholars, and particularly the pragmatists among them, have been criticised for overstressing the role of individual's agency, while ignoring the context which enables and constrains people's actions (e.g. Schock, 2005: xviii). It is at this point that social movement theory stresses the need to trace the embeddedness of NVR within wider material and ideational structures. Social movements have been defined in various ways. Most widely they should be understood as “a collective, organized, sustained, and noninstitutional challenge to authorities, powerholders, or cultural beliefs and practices” (Goodwin and Jasper, 2003: 3). Participants in social movements act collectively and make claims from authorities in an organised, committed, continued and (at least in its rhetoric) unified way, applying a repertoire of different protest mechanisms (Tilly, 2004).

Conceptualisations of social movements have undergone various changes: while the ‘economic model’ put emphasis on actors’ rational decisions and their economic motivations for joining collective protests (e.g. Olson, 1971), those advocating a ‘political process model’ stressed that success or failure of activists’ interactions with and claim-making from the state depends also on ‘political opportunity structures,’ i.e. the political (institutional and ideological) context provided by those in power (e.g. Mc Adam 1982). Since the 1980s scholars working from a social-constructivist perspective focused on the cultural and identity-related dimensions of social movements studying the ‘frames’ which actors construct to make sense of experiences, mobilise societal support and form collective identities for movement participants (see e.g. Benford and Snow, 2000). These scholars argue that in the post-industrial context ‘new social movements’ arose in which actors increasingly make non-materialist identity-related claims. Activists in such new social movements are actively engaged in a contest over meaning, rather than being primarily concerned with economic or political issues (e.g. Mellucci, 1989).⁸⁸

There exist, however, strong disputes about whether the recourse to identity and culture constitutes a new phenomenon restricted to post-industrial countries only (see e.g. Bartholomew and Mayer, 1992). Without doubt social movements in the developing world, as a result of histories of colonial occupation, foreign domination and economic exploitation, often struggle(d) for political and economic independence. Yet, attached to such socio-economic and political claims is very often the defence of ‘authentic’ culture from within, but also its reformulation through selective borrowing and ‘indigenising’ cultural elements from without. In order to understand contemporary social movements, then, one should avoid reproducing dichotomous understandings of ‘old’ movements motivated by socio-economic or political concerns and ‘new’ movements based on culture and identity. Rather, as scholars of developing countries, particularly in Latin America, have shown, social movements are hybrid (see e.g. Escobar and Alvarez, eds., 1992): they are both the product and practice (i.e. collective and everyday enactment) of the encounter between the global and local and merge cultural and identity-related framings with political and economic claims:

To understand contemporary social movements, one must look at the micro-level of everyday practices and their imbrications with larger

⁸⁸ Related to and following on from that shift to the non-material, the role of emotions and affect in creating movement identities and mobilising people for collective action have also moved into focus of more recent sociological studies (see e.g. Goodwin, Jasper, Polletta, eds. 2001)

processes of development, patriarchy, capital and the State. How these forces find their way into people's lives, their effects on people's identity and social relations, and people's responses and 'uses' of them have to be examined through a close engagement and reading of popular actions (Escobar, 1992: 420).

Looking at such new ways of *how people do politics* outside of institutionalised channels thus sheds light upon the ways in which ordinary people open up new, multiple and even fragmented political spaces by appropriating and creatively transforming cultural notions of difference and authenticity.

1.3. Gendered Approaches to Nonviolent Resistance in Conflict Transformation and Social Movement Theories

In contrast to conflict transformation scholars, social movement theorists thus recognise the importance of collective identities and frames for protest mobilisation. Yet, just as conflict transformation researchers, they have largely ignored the gender aspects of NVR.⁸⁹ This is despite the fact that gender dynamics have a strong impact on NVR mobilisation (and vice versa). All social movements, whether joined by men or women and irrespective of their goals being feminist or not, use gendered frames to construct collective identities. Gender, as Taylor (1999: 13) has rightly noted, "is also constructed in movements that do not explicitly evoke the language of gender conflict and, therefore, is an explanatory factor in the emergence, course, and outcome of protest groups."

Just as gender framings impact on the mobilisation for NVR, NVR activists challenge social constructions of gender. Using their bodies as sites of political engagement, women often carry out gender-specific forms of NVR. With these often symbolic acts, women perform, enact and challenge gendered norms of conventional politics.⁹⁰ Women who participate in

⁸⁹ For exceptional studies that investigate how social movements are gendered, and more particularly, trace the gendered ways in which violence and nonviolence are negotiated in movement campaigns, see e.g. Taylor (1999), Beckwith (2002) or Cockburn (2007). For a gender analysis of conflict resolution and conflict transformation theories, see Reimann (2002).

⁹⁰ My analysis of women's nonviolent resistance constituting an 'embodiment' and 'performativity' of gender identities relies on Judith Butler who has theorised that "gender is [...] instituted in an exterior space through a stylised repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (Butler, 2006: 191).

public protest struggle against political and socio-economic power hierarchies, but they also challenge ‘traditional’ male-dominated ways of making politics as well as engendered forms of power embodied in male and female political subjectivities. Gender identities are thus not only instrumentalised by NVR activists to construct collective identities, but they are also politicised and transformed through their various enactment and embodiments in political practices. Often such symbolic challenges precede and exceed real material social and political changes (Escobar and Alvarez, 1992).

This chapter goes beyond classic conflict transformation and social movement literature in that it studies the gendered processes of NVR. I rely on insights from feminist perspectives on resistance, ‘counterpublics’ (Fraser, 1992) and ‘performativity’ (Butler, 1988) to see how Palestinian women’s courageous dissident acts can widen mainstream conceptions of ‘the political’ and offer a critique to Habermas’ (1989) liberal conception of a homogenous and gender-neutral public sphere. Looking in particular at women’s often symbolic nonviolent embodied politics holds great potential to reveal alternative channels and forms of agency through and with which women demand and push forward their social, political and economic claims.

2. Historical Overview of Palestinian Women’s Nonviolent Resistance

2.1. Nonviolent Resistance during the First Intifada

Palestinian NVR activism, as discussed in Chapter IV (section 4) was most widespread during the First Intifada. While the male-dominated leadership of the Intifada solidified a discursive shift towards nonviolence (initiated by Mubarak Awad’s 1984 pamphlet), women normalised NVR through practicing it politically (by, for example, participating in protests, demonstrations and sit-ins), socially (by, for example, setting up informal alternative schooling systems), and economically (by, for example, forming food cooperatives and organising the boycott of Israeli goods). In contrast to the leadership, however, ordinary people, and it seems particularly women, tended to frame their activism as resistance (*muqāwma*), rather than nonviolence (*lā ‘unf*).

In response to popular criticisms that nonviolence represents a passive strategy and as such constitutes a form of accommodation or normalisation (*taṭbīʿ*), nonviolent activist leaders stressed their adherence to nonviolence as a pragmatic strategy, rather than a moral principle. Awad defined nonviolence as “nothing short of real war” (Awad, 1984: 25), Husseini chose the term ‘aggressive nonviolence’ (see Williams, 2001), and Sharp (1989) recommended his three pragmatic NVR methods to the Palestinians. Leaders were convinced that mass-based, proactive NVR, as a middleway between the liberationist ideology of armed *thawra* and the statist-traditionalist strategy of institutionalised *ṣumūd*, constituted the way forward for Palestinian independence (Tamari, 1991). Sharp, writing at the height of the First Intifada, for example, argued that “[w]ith that combination of forces, relying on fully nonviolent struggle, the aim of Palestinian independence – recognised by Israel and internationally – could not long be denied” (Sharp, 1989: 13). Although his positive outlook has proven to be false, the application of nonviolent methods during the First Intifada did bring some partial advances on the economic, political and social level.

Economically, the policy of self-reliance exercised by alternative social and economic organisations (which were largely sustained by women’s groups, e.g. *Inʿāsh al-ʿUsra* or the women’s committees) through the creation of food cooperatives, boycott of Israeli goods, or tax strikes, led to Israel’s GDP dropping from 5.2 % in 1987 to between only 1 and 2 % in 1988 (Grant, 1990: 68). The costs for the Israeli army were similarly damaging; between 1987 and 1989 costs for quelling the protests and maintaining military control in the Occupied Territories amounted to \$500 million (Bickerton and Klausner, 1998: 236). The policy of economic non-cooperation thus seriously challenged the sustainability of the occupation (Andoni, 2001: 210).

Politically, the Intifada produced a stalemate within Israeli political landscape. It widened the rift between Labour and Likud, reaching its climax with the Knesset’s vote of no-confidence against Shamir’s government in 1990, and also hardened divides between the left Israeli peace camp (which, although having risen in number, had little tangible impact on changing policies), and those on the right (who advocated military force and occupation). On the Palestinian side, confronting the occupation together helped achieve unity across factions (at least in the early years) and was crucial for the construction of Palestinian national identity (see e.g. Grant, 1990: 67)

Conflict transformation scholars have argued that, on a societal level, the Intifada created a sense of empowerment and strength among Palestinians. Dudouet (2008: 14), for example, finds that the uprising, on the level of the individual, “restored pride, dignity and identity,” while, on the level of the collective, power was transferred from minority militants to broader society. Moreover, the Intifada has often been lauded as a social revolution, but, as was argued in Chapter IV, such an uncritical celebration should be considered cautiously. New gender roles defining women as politically active agents did open up, but these were still circumscribed by restrictive relational gender constructions of mother, sister, wife as well as newly arising gender models of the ‘Islamic modest women.’ Women during the First Intifada never were established firmly in political leadership and decision-making and gender relations in the private sphere remained a taboo topic.

While the Intifada did not bring any lasting material changes, it nevertheless initiated ideational transformations, i.e. changes in social and political attitudes at intra-party, inter-party, and international level. Gender relations within Palestinian society relaxed temporarily (even if mostly practically, not ideologically), more face-to-face contacts between Israeli and Palestinian activists in joint protests altered attitudes among wider Israeli society, and international media attention increased international solidarity with the Palestinians.

2.2. Post-Oslo: Localisation, Internationalisation and Professionalisation of Nonviolent Resistance

In the early years after the Oslo Accords NVR activism decreased substantially as focus was put on state-building. Donor agencies favoured facilitative conflict *resolution* approaches over structuralist conflict *transformation* perspectives, which would have highlighted and addressed the persistence of structural inequalities. Many of the former nonviolent activists started to be engaged in civil society building, often becoming directors of NGOs, academic research centres or think tanks.

Since the failure of Camp David and the outbreak of the Second Intifada, the majority of Palestinians on the ground no longer hold much belief in the current liberal format of conflict resolution (*ḥal aṣ-ṣiraʿ*). Instead the rationale of resistance (*muqāwma*) – although in multiple, hugely diverging and often irreconcilable forms - has gained currency again. The Second Intifada, as several studies have shown (Johnson and Kuttab, 2001; Andoni, 2001), has been

more militarised and violent than the 1987 uprising. It is carried out by a small number of militants (mainly men) through armed struggle, rather than by ordinary people engaging in collective nonviolent resistance. Several additional reasons for the lack of mass mobilisation, ranging from ineffective organisational structures, political and social constraints, and conflictual discursive framings, can be identified (and will be discussed below), but the main cause for the current political inertia in Palestine is the lack of a unified national project: there is no national leadership or strategy and avenues for effective political participation have shrunk. Ordinary people's participation in political life is restricted to formal, but severely corrupted, political channels, on the one hand, and individual acts of everyday resistance/survival, on the other.

Several Palestinian, Israeli and international scholars and practitioners have attempted to revive NVR as a unified strategy for Palestinian independence, arguing that NVR, if adapted, practiced proactively, on a mass-base and with strong leadership still constitutes a promising strategy (e.g. Sarraj, 2003; Halper 2006; Norman, 2010; Dudouet, 2008, 2009; Müller, 2008; Zelter, 2006, 2009; Kuttab, 2003; Wright, 2009). In reaction and opposition to the construction of the wall in 2002, protest mobilisation has risen again, shifting the centres of NVR from cities and camps to villages, but this newly burgeoning movement also remains ephemeral, fragmented and without unified leadership. Responding to rising media attention on these localised struggles, several actors have put themselves forward as supporters of nonviolence. Mustafa Barghouthi, for example, has founded the political initiative *al-Mubādara* which advocates NVR as a strategy to combat Israeli occupation and raise international solidarity and awareness. The PA too has released a new policy platform, endorsed by Mahmoud Abbas and Salam Fayyad, in which – for the first time in the history of the PA – any reference to armed resistance to Israel was dropped. Instead the document supports Palestinian nonviolent popular struggle (see Stephan, 2007).⁹¹

Apart from the official political level, there has been a surge of NGOs promoting nonviolence. Some, particularly the religiously (predominantly Christian)-based organisations, tend to put forward a principled approach to nonviolence (e.g. The Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre based in East Jerusalem and Nazareth, or Musalaha in Bethlehem), while others (also often Christian-led) are more directly concerned with

⁹¹ For more information on the PA's endorsement of nonviolence see also Fatah 6th Convention Memo (4-10 August 2009) available at www.passia.org/about_us/MahdiPapers/FatehConvention.pdf.

practicing and training NVR (e.g. The Arab Education Initiative, The Holy Land Trust, The Palestinian Conflict Resolution Centre Wi'am, The Palestinian Centre for Rapprochement between People, The Center for Conflict Resolution & Reconciliation [all based in Bethlehem], the Library on Wheels for Nonviolence and Peace [in East Jerusalem and Hebron], the Middle East Nonviolence and Democracy [based in East Jerusalem with branches all over the West Bank], or the joint Israeli-Palestinian Combatants for Peace). Finally the Grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign (GPAAWC) a Palestinian NGO with strong international links, works to coordinate the anti-wall protests, organised by local popular committees in the villages. These organisations are united in their support for nonviolence, but they put different emphasis on *theorising* about nonviolence (through e.g. promoting, teaching, raising awareness) and *practicing* NVR (through e.g. training for, mobilisation, organisation and participation in civil disobedience acts).⁹²

Nonviolence NGOs or initiatives are often criticised for accepting foreign funding. Indeed, the EU and other international funding bodies have shown more interest in intra-Palestinian nonviolence projects since the Second Intifada. The EU's Partnership for Peace Programme, for example, also supports one-country-projects that promote nonviolence (see e.g. EU, 2010).⁹³ In contrast to locally initiated (pragmatic) nonviolent protest actions, such as the anti-wall demonstrations, foreign-funded (principled) nonviolence projects are perceived more sceptically. Critics have highlighted that nonviolent resistance should not, as mainstream international programmes suggest, denote a pacifist strategy that condemns any form of violence (e.g. Zwarich, 2009; see also Allen, 2002), and, except for those involved in NGO nonviolence project, the great majority of my interviewees likened nonviolence projects (*lā ʿunf*) to dialogue conflict resolution projects (*barāmiy al-ḥiwār, ḥal aṣ-ṣirāʿ*) in that they serve a western agenda of commodifying, weakening and fragmenting the originally mass-based Palestinian national movement.⁹⁴

⁹² Most of the organisations have web presence, where information on their agendas and programmes can be found. See www.sabeel.org (Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre), www.musalaha.org (Musalaha), www.aeicenter.org (The Arab Education Initiative), www.holylandtrust.org (The Holy Land Trust), www.alaslah.org (The Palestinian Conflict Resolution Centre Wi'am), www.pcr.ps (The Palestinian Centre for Rapprochement between People), www.ccr-pal.org (The Center for Conflict Resolution & Reconciliation), www.lownp.com (The Library on Wheels for Nonviolence and Peace), www.mendonline.org (The Middle East Nonviolence and Democracy), <http://cfpeace.org/> (The Combatants for Peace), www.stopthewall.org/ (GPAAWC).

⁹³ See the list of organisations that have been awarded a grant in 2009 (EU, 2010) at http://ec.europa.eu/delegations/westbank/documents/eu_westbank/20100907eupfp_ataglance.pdf.

⁹⁴ See Chapter VI (section 5) for a detailed discussion on different framings of nonviolent resistance, where I will further elaborate on the differences between foreign-funded principled nonviolence and more locally-supported pragmatic resistance approaches.

Being part of nonviolent initiatives links local actors not only to international funding agencies, but also to global justice and anti-occupation movements, such as the International Solidarity Movement (ISM). The protests against the wall have attracted attention and support from international and Israeli activists, who regularly join villagers in their protests. Although mainly initiated and carried out by local popular committees at the village level, nonviolent protest against the wall are also coordinated by solidarity groups (particularly GPAAWC, but also ISM) which aim to synthesise the various protests and mobilise support for nonviolent resistance at the national and global level. Such justice movements wield in no way the same financial power as international funding agencies, yet, they can, nevertheless, provide locals with access to wider global support networks.

The great majority of local nonviolent activists I spoke to welcomed the participation of international and Israeli activists in anti-wall demonstrations. Often they argued that the presence of international activists or journalists reduces Israeli military aggressions against demonstrators. Adnan, a local leader of NVR in a village near Ramallah, summarised potentials and problems of international and Israeli involvement in anti-wall protests in the following way:

It was good [that Israeli activists joined], because for many of the children here it was the first time that they saw an Israeli not as a soldier or a settler. But we have to make our standpoint clear: we reject all normal relations with Israelis during the occupation. We need to speak about and deal with the occupation first, before we can speak about peace. If the Israelis and internationals are with us on this point - they can join our activities. Generally, we prefer the Israelis to come with an affiliation or an organisation; otherwise we do not know who they are and what they really want. [On a cultural level,] there is a big difference between our and the Israeli or European society. Often the Israelis and Europeans are more 'easy-going' than us. We need to be careful that this does not alienate our own people. Also what happens if there starts to be a problem between the Israelis and the Palestinians? Who can mediate and who can judge? There is no one who can guarantee our rights with

Israelis. [In short,] the main problem we have with the involvement of internationals and Israelis in NVR is money and sex (Interview Adnan, 2008).

Although generally welcomed, the broader impact of solidarity groups and foreign activists on local forms of organising, understandings and practices of resistance and nonviolence is thus not that straightforward. Not only might locals who work with internationals or Israelis be accused of westernisation and alienation (particularly when gendered cultural and social norms are concerned), or political normalisation (*taṭbīʿ*), but there is also the very real danger of foreign activists practicing what a prominent Israeli anti-occupation activists, has termed “colonial activism” (Golan quoted in Seitz, 2003: 61), i.e. dominating the local Palestinian agenda.

Although various actors are involved in and compete over defining, owning and leading the NVR discourse and strategy in Palestine, all local NVR leaders I spoke to stressed that it is mainly them and the village residents who initiated, carry out and sustain the actual practices of nonviolent protest on the ground. Adnan argues that his village’s local committee was formed in September 2003 without any coordination or support of outside actors. He criticises these outsiders’ claims to owner-, and leadership of anti-wall struggles as an attempt to boost their local and international standing and as a way “to use the people as a means to fill their pockets.” He credits the GPAAWC for “do[ing] a lot of publicity and bring[ing] our case to the outside world,” but emphasises that “they are not the ones doing the work on the ground. They are good for statistics and numbers” (Adnan, 2008). In line with most nonviolent grassroots leaders to whom I spoke he is most sceptical of the PA’s sudden switch to supporting NVR, pointing out that they have never shown much interest in nonviolent protest actions (Adnan, 2008; Rapprochement Center, 2008; GPAAWC, 2008; Feryal, 2008; see also Audeh, 2007 and White, 2007). For Taghreed,

the problem on the micro level is that the Bil’in experience⁹⁵ was only recently exported to Nil’in - but from Nil’in it is not going anywhere. Qalqilya is not revolting as a community against the wall, Azzoun and Izma are not resisting together as communities against the wall. Why?

⁹⁵ Most see the village of Bil’in as initiator of the anti-wall demonstrations, because it received most media attention. As described earlier, the neighbouring villages had in fact organised demonstrations already before Bil’in.

There is something wrong. Why do these beautiful resistance examples not get exported so that they become national? There is something lacking here: the leadership. We are still suffering from the leadership that is in power. It is not just at the government level, it is also on the NGO level. The corruption is not only at high level and it is not just money, it is management corruption (Taghreed, 2008).

To sum up, the NVR scene in Palestine has undergone a process of localisation, professionalisation, and internationalisation. With the construction of the wall, NVR has become localised in different villages with little joined strategising between them. The fact that several actors at local (the popular committees at village level), non-governmental (NGOs, such as The Holy Land Trust or the Grassroots Palestinian Anti Apartheid Wall Campaign), official political (the PA as well as political initiatives, such *al-Mubādara*) and international level (global justice movements, such as ISM) have claimed ownership of the anti-wall protests should not be seen as a sign of emerging leadership. It is rather a reaction to intensified international financial support for nonviolence projects and growing internal political rivalries. So far it has merely reinforced competition and fragmentation.

The internationalisation of Palestinian NVR proceeds in two trends: Firstly, in reaction to the failure of their people-to-people projects, many mainstream international donor agencies have shifted their funding priorities to nonviolence (*lā ʿunf*), causing an influx of NGOs which work, often from a principled approach, on preventing violent radicalisation in Palestinians society (see e.g. EU, 2010). The great majority of Palestinian I spoke to rejected such principled nonviolence projects for seeking the reasons of the conflict in the nature of Palestinian resistance rather than in the occupation itself, and for turning the Palestinian struggle into short-term NGO projects. Similar to dialogue projects and the “peace business” (Tamari, 2003/4) nonviolence has thus been subject to a process of professionalisation, NGOisation and depoliticisation in post-Oslo Palestine. Secondly, in contrast to the mainstream liberal peace/dialogue agenda, the Palestinian NVR scene is internationalised through its strong links to the global justice and anti-occupation solidarity movement. Targeting the structural causes of the conflict directly, activists in this movement promote NVR as a pragmatic proactive strategy (*muqāwma shaʿbīyya/silmīyya*). Although also under attack for dominating local agendas, international solidarity and nonviolent protest movements are generally more welcomed than foreign-funded NGO nonviolence projects.

Women's nonviolent protest action is not isolated from these trends, but it is subject to specific gender-related dynamics, which impact on mobilising structures, political and social opportunities and framing processes of the movement.

3. Mobilising Structures of Women's Nonviolent Resistance

Mobilising structures of NVR are permeated by gender divisions and hierarchies, often hindering women's participation from becoming more widespread and/or forcing women to find creative and gender-specific ways of political engagement. Women's organising in NVR is often more informal, their networks more loose, and their mobilising mechanisms more community-oriented than men's.

3.1. Organisational Forms of Women's Nonviolent Resistance

Just like the wider NVR scene post-2000, the main organisations and actors to call for, claim leadership of, and participate in female civil protest range from local to international groups:

- International women's solidarity groups, such as, for example the International Women's Peace Service (IWPS), a group of international female anti-occupation activists who are permanently based in the West Bank, aim to provide support for local NVR, document human rights abuses and encourage particularly women's involvement in NVR (see e.g. Zelter, 2006; and also www.iwps-pal.org)
- Several political initiatives and parties, among them, for example, *al-Mubādara*, but also, the women's branches of the leftist parties, such as the Palestinian Women Working Society for Development (PWWSD) have encouraged women's involvement in nonviolent direct action and organised women-only demonstrations (Interview, PWWSD; see also www.pwwsd.org or www.almubadara.org)
- Several NGOs have specific women's groups, in which they train and encourage local women to participate in nonviolent actions. Among these is, for example, the Arab Educational Initiative (AEI) in Bethlehem whose female members have staged nonviolent symbolic protest actions against the wall, such as marches or collective praying. Similarly,

the Palestinian Conflict Resolution Centre Wi'am as well as the Holy Land Trust run specific nonviolence and conflict-resolution training programmes for women aiming at equipping them with theory and praxis of nonviolence (Interview Wi'am, HLT, AEI, 2007 and 2008, see also www.aeicenter.org, www.alaslah.org and www.holylandtrust.org).⁹⁶

- Local women's groups, sometimes linked to popular village committees, also organise women's involvement in anti-wall protests. Women give several reasons for the need to have separate women's organisations. Im Fuad, who was part of a local women's anti-wall group in the Salfit governorate, for example, argued that it was more difficult for women to participate in gender-mixed demonstration due to male control over organisational structures (Im Fuad, 2008). In 2003, at the initiative of local women, a network of Women Against the Wall from different governorates was founded in Bil'in, a village near to Ramallah which holds weekly nonviolent struggles against the wall and an annual nonviolence conference. The GPAAWC supported the foundation of the network by providing specific training courses on topics, such as boycott or popular NVR to women (Interview GPAAWC, 2008). As a representative of GPAAWC explained, the idea of the network

is that in the future there should be a women's branch to each of the popular committees in each village...The rationale for founding the network was that women and youth have no role in the popular committees, which are dominated by men, by farmers or by politicians of the village. Women's points are not listened to properly, but they are actually the ones doing the job just as men. For example some women complained that they were marching in the front rows, while the leaders of the popular committees were in the back of the demonstration giving interviews to journalists (GPAAWC, 2009).

Feryal, a grassroots nonviolent resistance activist, supported this argument, but her narrative highlights even more vividly the struggles of female activists to overcome control and domination from political and patriarchal sources. She explained to me that the first two

⁹⁶ Most famous, among the EU-funded women's nonviolence initiatives, is the Israeli NGO Machsom Watch, a women-only organisation that stages nonviolent protests and reports human rights abuses at checkpoints (see e.g. Keshet, 2006)

demonstrations against the wall in Salfit in March 2003 and June 2003 were attended by women only. Later, when more people started to join, men from the local popular committee attempted to take over. According to Feryal, “they wanted to delegitimise us [women] by saying that we work with the internationals...Men always want to be responsible and take the lead in the demonstration, just as they do anywhere else” (Feryal, 2008). Once the protests attracted more attention, fights between political parties, NGOs and various other campaigns and initiatives erupted:

In February 2005 the men organised a demonstration and there started to be problems between the different political parties and other organisations. Once these issues started, most people and particularly the women didn't want to join the demonstrations anymore. The problem was that now everybody wanted to take the credit for the huge mobilisation of people that *we* [the women] achieved...So, in reaction to that, we decided to form the Women Against the Wall group, rather than staying with the popular committee. We didn't want to be involved in this fighting. Our women's group is for everyone, no matter which political affiliation (Feryal, 2008).

The initiative to form independent women's branches thus stemmed from an urge to challenge, circumvent and perhaps even transform gender hierarchies (propelled by internal factionalism) in the mobilising structures of NVR in Palestine. The fact that some local women's groups later developed into more formal organisations which also began addressing social gender issues shows that even women from villages who are not part of the mainly-urban professional women's movement, are well aware of the need to establish separate organisational structures to combat male control.⁹⁷

Most of the time, however, women's participation in NVR continues to take place on an ad hoc basis, triggered by specific events and mobilised through informal networks at local community or family level. In November 2006, for example, women in Beit Hanoun, in Gaza,

⁹⁷ Feryal's Women Against the Wall group, for example, became a small *jam'īyyā* called Women for Life which strives not only to mobilise women for civil disobedience acts, but also to empower them economically, through, offering small income-generating projects and socially, by providing guidance on personal status issues, such as women's inheritance or divorce rights.

were mobilized by a call from the local Al Quds Radio station to participate in a protest march to the mosque in which resistance fighters were hiding (see e.g. BBC, 2006).

Ilham, whose thoughts on Mustafa Barghouthi's visit to her village I quoted in chapter II, recounts a similar spontaneous mobilisation to her first participation in an anti-wall protest:

The first time that we protested was when the Israeli army came here and brought the bulldozers. It was in the night, people were sleeping. They put a guard at the entrance of the village and then they didn't allow anyone to leave their houses...So us, the women, we all went down [to where the army was stationed] and we faced them. We wanted to resist them. They were sitting on the bulldozers. We fought with them and looked them eye to eye. We were just with stones. They fought with bombs, and bullets and tear gas, and they were hitting us. Then one of the soldiers came nearer to me and started cursing at me, shouting and hitting me. One soldier was speaking Arabic and he told me: "Put your hands up!" I told him: "No - thank you...We will stay here until our deaths" (Ilham, 2008).

Women's NVR activism in Palestine today is organised in a multitude of ways through various channels. While more formal organisations, such as international solidarity movements, NGOs, political parties and even the PA have claimed leadership and credit for coordinating and organising women's protest action, it is in fact through more informal family and community structures that most local women become mobilised to – often unplanned and impulsive – direct action against the Israeli army. The efforts of female activists on the ground to create independent women's organisations, separate from male-dominated organisational and mobilising structures at local, national and international level, indicate their awareness of the need to anchor their challenges to male supremacy not only through practice, but also organisationally and discursively.

3.2. *Forms of Female Nonviolent Resistance*

While during the First Intifada women (just as men) applied most of Sharp's (1973) methods through participation in demonstrations, strikes, boycott, awareness-raising campaigns, the

building and sustaining of alternative institutions and support systems, etc., today civil protest and boycott are the most widely practiced methods of NVR. Women play a special role in both these forms of NVR.

Women's protest action can take various forms and can be staged in gender-mixed settings or be joined by women only. While in the informal, often ad hoc and gender-mixed protests against the wall women mostly engage in more conventional NVR methods such as demonstrating, raising banners or the Palestinian flag, shouting slogans, blocking of bulldozers, many of those activities organised by nonviolence NGOs or networks tend to be women-only with gender-specific political practices. Nonviolence NGOs often organise more symbolic forms of female protest. The AEI, for example, has organised women-only protests next to the wall where women hold prayers or sing Palestinian songs, often dressed in the traditional costumes. Similarly, international solidarity networks, such as IWPS, support women's olive harvesting and farming on annexed land. In their locally organised NVR actions, women also have regularly made use of creative and symbolic protest techniques, such as silent marches, vigils, walks with candles, women's ululating, etc.

Yet, specific women's or feminist forms of protests, as were, for example, used by women activists in Greenham Common (Kirk, 1989; Laware, 2004), by Code Pink (Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2007), Women in Black (Sasson-Levy and Rapoport, 2003; Helman and Rapoport, 1997) or the Irish female prisoners (Aretxaga, 1995) have not been employed on a large scale by Palestinian women. Nevertheless, Palestinian women have challenged gendered assumptions in conventional Palestinian politics, by engaging in provocative symbolic acts through using their bodies as sites of political engagement. Often they justified these embodied acts as mere media strategies, thus downplaying the potential provocative and transformative impact it might have on internal Palestinian political and social structures (e.g. Interview, Im Fuad, 2008).

Most of the nonviolent activists I spoke to noted a change in the forms of NVR since the First Intifada, finding a general shift from protest to boycott. These transformations in the quality of NVR resistance, endowed, as several of particularly the female activists explained to me, women with new gender-specific roles. Women, according to Taghreed, for example, play a specific role in enforcing the boycott:

It is a women's decision to encourage and educate her children [about the boycott]. That is also part of women's resistance, and that is what we can do as women. Even on the Israeli side women can tell their children not to buy products that are produced in settlements, because settlements prolong the occupation and make us as mothers and children suffer. So there is some kind of resistance that women do without any bloodshed and even without much effort. It is more about awareness and education (Taghreed, 2008).

As educators, women not only ensure that the boycott is followed in the family, but also at community level, "reminding" (and controlling), as Im Fuad (Interview, 2008) told me about the women in her organisation, others to not purchase Israeli goods.

Sharp's third category of nonviolent *intervention* through blockades or establishment of rival parallel governments is practiced only very minimally today. This might be explained by the fact that the majority of the Palestinian population is concerned with finding, mainly short-term, survival and coping mechanisms, rather than strategising long-term sustainable developmental projects. With the exception of the Islamic movement, which has created parallel structures to the PA government, the few alternative support systems that exist are small-scale at community, family or even individual level. During a women's nonviolence training organised by the Holy Land Trust in a village near Jenin, one of the female participants explained the lack of mass mobilisation for NVR in the following way:

In the First Intifada the joint goal for all of us was to liberate Palestine. Now in the Second Intifada it is more individualistic and more about small things. People care about how they can cross the checkpoint, how they can get food on the table. It all is about personal [rather than collective] needs (HLT, 2008).

Female, just as male nonviolent resisters are aware that their actions have only little (if at all) impact on the structures of the occupation. Collective NVR in Palestine today is thus mainly aimed at raising international awareness and solidarity. This had the positive effect of boosting women's participation, since that attracts media attention. Generally, however, women's diverse forms of NVR as practiced during the First Intifada have been reduced to

mainly boycott and protest, but even here participation is fragmented and ephemeral. The decline in genuine female mass-based nonviolent movement is, as this section has shown, due to weak, male-dominated and fragmented mobilising structures, but it also stems from political and social constraints.

4. The Structural Context of Female Nonviolent Resistance Activism

4.1. Political Opportunity Structures

On the political level, the Israeli occupation, the PA and the structural dynamics between the two have severely restricted political opportunity structures for female nonviolent activists.

4.1.1. Israeli Spatial Occupation Policies

The Israeli occupation policies of fragmentation, separation and mobility restrictions have systematically dispossessed, occupied and destroyed Palestinian living spaces, breaking up Palestinian territory into several unconnected and isolated cantons. Such policies of spatial control, which have been variably described by scholars as “enclavisation” (Falah, 2005), “bantustanization” (Farsakh, 2005), “creeping apartheid” (Yiftachel, 2005), “spacio-cidal policies” (Hanafi, 2009) or “matrix of control” (Halper, 2000), are rooted in and informed by the Zionist myth of ‘a land without people for a people without land’ (see Hanafi, 2009: 119) and thus part of Israel’s long-term policies of unilateral separation and Palestinian territorial dismemberment (Falah, 2005: 1341).

With the Oslo Accords the West Bank was split into Areas A, B and C with each having different administrative and security arrangements. Israeli spatial control has, however particularly increased after 2000. In 2002 operation Defensive Shield meant the comprehensive invasion of the West Bank, and the institutionalisation of Israeli policies of house demolition, mobility restriction as well as the destruction of institutions and infrastructure, all resulting in massive economic losses and the spurring of the process of de-development (Roy, 2004). 2002 also saw the construction of the wall, which is largely (87%) built inside the West Bank, annexing most fertile lands and surrounding Israeli settlements. Following the election of Hamas in 2006 Israel intensified movement and access restrictions,

enforced a blockade on Gaza and stopped to rely on Palestinian labour. In February 2009 OCHA (2009) identified 626 obstacles to movement within the West Bank (such as checkpoints, roadblocks, earth mounds or trenches), indicating an increase of 250 obstacles (66.5%) over their baseline figure (376) of August 2005.

Israeli policies of spatial control have had severe damaging impact on Palestinian economy (Roy, 2004), society (Johnson, 2006), but also on political organisation and action (Taraki, 2008). Restrictions of mobility through checkpoints, the wall, road block or curfews have limited contact between activists, making it hard for them to organise and carry out large scale events. Among Israelis only the more radical anti-occupation activists dare to defy the ban for Israeli citizens to enter Area A. Recently, the Israeli army has imposed stricter controls to prevent Israeli and international activists from participating in nonviolent demonstrations.⁹⁸

The army's use of brutal military reprisals through shooting rubber bullets, live ammunition, tear gas and sound bombs, and crack-downs on activists and their families has also curbed broad-based participation. The combination of Israel's harsh retaliations with its spatial control policies has severely reduced spaces for NVR and led many to believe that pro-active NVR and confrontations with the army are futile and risky only:

People are depressed. They would say: "If I go to the demonstration, I will be captured and I will be put in jail, or I will be shot and at the end I will have nothing." That is how *everyone* thinks...They would also say: "OK, there is an international or maybe even Israeli person protesting. I know it is a shame that he is protesting while I am sitting at home. But at the end of the day, nothing will happen to this international. If they catch him, they might take him for investigation, one hour, and they will leave him. But a Palestinian might be in there all his life" (Interview, Holy Land Trust, 2008).

Some of my interviewees, particularly international activists, argued that it is not only the participation of internationals, but also of women that might mitigate the army's military responses. The great majority of local female activists who regularly participate in protests

⁹⁸ In March 2010, for example, the Israeli army, declared Bil'in and Ni'lin as a closed military zones, barring Israelis and internationals from access (see e.g. BBC, 15 March 2010)

contested this, however. While arguing that women-only demonstrations tend to stay more nonviolent, Im Fuad, for example, found that gender composition makes no difference:

If there are only women it is easier to keep the demonstration nonviolently. It is the young boys that start throwing stones and that might give the army the 'reason' to fire...[but in the end] the army doesn't care whether our demonstration is nonviolent or not. They shoot in any case. In Hares we had a nonviolent demonstration with women and they shoot. The army knows nothing about peace and nonviolence. They don't want anything nonviolent (Im Fuad, 2008).

Village women active in the anti-wall protests, mostly confirmed Im Fuad's observation, but some added that women are less likely than men to get arrested. This allows them to be more confrontational with the army, making them succeed in defending or even freeing men from tanks or the grips of soldiers.

Generally, however, participation in NVR activism is certainly highly dangerous for women, just as men. Some families thus discourage their sons and daughters to participate. Lama, for example, contended:

Resistance without organisation is a mistake. There is no organisation in this resistance, just someone says that there is the army in the street, so we all go out and throw stones...[In the First Intifada] we were all still very small, [but now] we grew up. Now I got married, I got kids – I started to think. I am not prepared to let my boy go out and throw stones so that he dies because of the stone. Not because I reject the resistance, or because I have forgotten about our cause – no, to the contrary: [As a mother] it is within my possibility to start a new generation which is aware, open-minded, which understands and can think right...not just throw stones and sacrifice themselves. The days and nights that I raised my son for 18 years - how can I forget them, [just] to say that I am defending my land? (Lama, 2008)

The Israeli omnipresent and brutal grip on Palestinian everyday life through spatial control and dismemberment, as well as violent reprisals thus have made the organisation and implementation of collective NVR acts extremely difficult.

4.1.2. The PA's Institutionalisation of Public Patriarchy

The policies of the Palestinian Authority, although it promotes itself as leader of NVR, similarly have curbed women's mobilisation for NVR. It is generally agreed that patriarchal structures in Palestinian society have intensified under conflict and were then consolidated by the PA (see e.g. Abdo, 1999; Amal, 2001; Sh'hada, 1999; Jad, 2005).⁹⁹ Mostly male Fatah members and returnees have received appointments (Abdo, 1999) and grassroots Intifada leaders, including many of its female activists, have been marginalised. Moreover, perceiving the burgeoning civil society as a threat to their authority, the PA has kept strong oversight over women's independent organisations, often curtailing their political and financial independence. If activities are considered to be politically or socially provocative, which can be the case with autonomous organisations that promote female NVR, control is exercised, by, for example, ensuring that local popular committees which organise the protests at village level are Fatah dominated (Interview, Adnan, 2008). Oppositional groups that gain support through building alternative institutions and support systems, such as the Islamic movement, are similarly suppressed. In short, independent and mobilisational women's as well as broader civil society nonviolent resistance movements have been actively curtailed by the PA (see e.g. Parsons, 2005: 178; Hammami and Tamari, 2001; Jad, 2004a; Abdo, 1999).

The requirements set on the PA by the Oslo agreement to guarantee security also restrict genuine nonviolent mobilisation. The establishment of the PA, as Roy (2004: 9) summarises, "was not based on Israel's desire to see democracy flourish in the West Bank and Gaza, but on the need to devolve responsibility for controlling Palestinians to a body wholly dependent on and accountable to Israel". With the PA acting effectively as Israel's security operator on the ground, the direct link between Palestinian nonviolent activists and the Israeli government, i.e. between 'the people' and 'the authority,' one of the major underlying principles for NVR, was broken. This arrangement not only forces the PA to suppress

⁹⁹ Since its early years following the Oslo Accords, the PA has been installed as a highly centralised decision-making body that secures its hierarchical nature with a strong police apparatus and systematically attacks autonomous groups of Palestinian civil society (Robinson, 2001). It is dominated by one person, the president, who monopolises executive, legislative and judicative power, controls a large share of PA financial revenues and can personally appoint posts for high-ranking positions.

demonstrations which Israel considers to be violent, but it also leaves ‘the people’ with no option to put pressure on Israeli authorities by withdrawing voluntary consent.

Since the PA engages in active suppression and control of civil society insurrections, their claim to leadership and support of the anti-wall demonstrations was seen as a hypocritical publicity show by nearly all of the local NVR leaders to whom I spoke. The media account given by one of the local leaders summarises their critical assessment of the PA’s role in post-2000 NVR well:

The PA has lapsed in its responsibilities toward all the villages west of Ramallah generally and in fact, in the entire West Bank. Its failure has been abnormal and unnatural. Right now, whatever efforts the PA makes are focused on Bi’lin. I don’t see the PA’s media outlets mentioning anything other than Bi’lin...[Before the elections, we] went to a huge rally in Bi’lin, and there were many members there from the Legislative Council holding signs for candidates; they knew there would be cameras. Even in Friday prayers they were smirking at each other. I am sure that had there been no legislative council and local elections approaching, we wouldn’t have seen a single one of them (Ayed Morrar quoted in Audeh, 2007).

In sum, primary political constraints hindering female mass-based NVR in Palestine today are to be found, firstly, in Israeli spatial control policies and the army’s heavy-handed repression of any form of collective action (where no differentiation between men and women is made) and, secondly, in the PA’s patriarchal and hierarchical nature and its suppression of independent women’s (and men’s) organising in its role as buffer zone between the Palestinian public and the occupation authorities.

4.2. *Social and Cultural Opportunity Structures*

Studying particularly women’s involvement in protest action draws attention to the fact that mobilisation depends not only on (gendered) political opportunity structures, but also is constrained and enabled by social and cultural gender norms. Women’s behaviours, bodies and dress, as the *hijāb* campaign launched by Hamas during the First Intifada illustrates, are

often controlled and instrumentalised to serve socio-political power plays. Gender symbolism is commonly employed in the construction of collective identities. “A gender analysis of social movements,” as Taylor (1999: 21) has highlighted, “requires that we recognise the extent to which gender dualistic metaphors supply the cultural symbols that social movement actors use to identify their commonalities, draw boundaries between themselves and their opponents, and legitimate and motivate collective action.” Studying social movement and protest action through a gender lens thus, while also uncovering social and cultural constraints to female political agency, more importantly reveals the ways in which groups use gender to define themselves as ‘gender-progressive’ (or ‘authentic’) and others as ‘gender-discriminatory’ (or ‘western’).

Among my interviewees, some – but remarkably few – mentioned cultural and social factors as a reason for women’s scarce participation in NVR. Among those who did, the trend towards social conservatism was either seen to be a result of the rise of political Islam, tradition, normalisation/westernisation (and resulting lack of ‘indigenous’ grassroots political mobilisation), or the occupation. Israeli spatial control policies were mentioned nearly unanimously as a major cause. They were identified as not only directly, but also indirectly limiting women’s resistance activities through reinforcing patriarchal control (by giving men a pretext to frame and legitimise the restrictions they place on women’s mobility and political activism as necessary protection from gender-specific violence and potential sexual harassment) and heightening poverty (and thus increasing women’s preoccupation with issues of survival rather than resistance). When analysing the remaining three identified causes for female political immobility (political Islam, ‘tradition’ and ‘normalisation/westernisation’) it is crucial to trace the positionality from which actors are speaking.

At least half of the secular, mainly urban-based, women leaders of NGOs or women’s branches of political parties whom I interviewed identified the rising influence of Islamic and Islamist groups as a major cause for increased social conservatism. Supporters of this argument claimed, for example, that Hamas brainwashed women into voting for them in the 2006 election by promising them socio-economic support, but that in reality the Islamic movement uses women merely as tokens and does not allow them to mobilise broadly nor to take a role in the decision-making (e.g. Interview Leila, Nisreen, 2008). The same argument, however, was brought forward by women of the leftist factions as well as those sympathising with the Islamic movement against the nationalist Fatah (e.g. Interview Maha Nassar, 2008; Salwa,

2008). So, while secular nationalist leaders claimed that the women's march in Beit Hanoun in 2006 was organised by Fatah and that only few women belonging to the Islamic movement were allowed to join, women supporting the Islamic movement maintained that this march was held with majority participation and at the initiative of Hamas women. Depending on their political affiliation or leaning women (and men) would thus brand either the Islamic or nationalist groups as patriarchal, accusing them of tokenism and only symbolically and sporadically granting women access to resistance activism.

A similar dynamic was evident between urban and rural women activists. While the great majority of the urban middle-class leaders found conservative patriarchal traditions in the rural areas to be a crucial factor barring women's public political agency, village women, or those women activists working predominantly in rural areas, stressed that peasant women have a long history of active involvement in proactive civil resistance. Salwa, who works with women in a village in the Hebron district, for example argued that:

In the cities women are the least empowered. Their husbands are rich and they can therefore put more pressure on their women. He can put her in the house and say: "I give you everything, so you don't need to go out."...In villages women have to go out and they have to work. They have to feed their family. They are very strong (Salwa, 2008).

While, of course, such generalised differentiations between secular/religious and between town, camp and village do not reflect reality, these categories are nevertheless used discursively among Palestinians to demarcate boundaries. While women sympathising with the Islamic movement, as well as those from villages and camps, tend to emphasise their active involvement in the resistance (*muqāwma*) and contrast it to what they perceive as the western-influenced depoliticised normalisation (*taṭbīʿ*) agenda of urban secular elite women leaders, many urban secular activists cling to a modernisation paradigm stressing the need to eradicate 'backwardness' and 'modernise' peasant and religious women in order to free them from patriarchal 'traditions.'

The majority of my informants, however, did not identify gender-specific cultural restrictions as major cause of the current political immobilisation. According to UPWC director Maha Nassar, for example, "[i]t is easy to get women to the street for a national demonstration. You

just say we have a confrontation with the Israeli army in this or that village and most of the women from the village will turn up” (Interview, Nassar, 2008). An overwhelming majority of my interviewees agreed with Nassar, that if social restrictions existed, they would hinder women from getting involved in ‘dialogue’ (*barāmij al-ḥiwār*) or ‘conflict resolution’ (*ḥal aṣ-ṣirāʿ*), rather than in resistance (*muqāwma*) activism. Suad summarised reasons for the current political lethargy as follows:

Of course there is more participation in demonstrations than in dialogue programmes. This is natural. If someone attacks you, you want to defend yourself...What happened, however, is that people’s interest [in politics] became less - all people, not just women. We used to go to demonstration in the thousands, but now people worry about the economic situation, there is an increase of poverty, unemployment, loss of hope for peace, the checkpoints, and the daily violations. In such a situation, how do you want to reduce women’s burden and, at the same time, encourage their political empowerment, that they have a voice and a role? (Suad, 2008)

While social and cultural norms without doubt play a role in defining women’s spaces for political agency, such cultural references cannot be isolated from the wider political and social context in which actors, as ‘identity entrepreneurs,’ often strategically construct, employ and instrumentalise them. Israeli spatial policies and harsh military reprisals in combination with the PA’s patriarchal and hierarchical nature have not only directly dissuaded women (and men) from participating in civil resistance, but they have also indirectly raised barriers to female public political action by fostering social conservatism and internal fragmentation. Within this context, women’s bodies and their behaviour have increasingly become battlefields upon which, often by reference to cultural norms framed within the ‘tradition’ vs. ‘modernity’ paradigm and/or ‘resistance’ vs. ‘normalisation’ dichotomy, political rivalries are played out and boundaries demarcated. Women in their attempts to open up spaces for female protest action, as the next section will show, have found various ways of manoeuvring through this matrix of political and social constraints, often by strategically framing their NVR in contextualised gender-specific ways.

5. Framings of Female Nonviolent Resistance

5.1. *Non-Gendered Framings of Nonviolent Resistance*

The ways in which NVR resistance is framed often determines its local as well as international reception. In their discursive strategies local NVR activists have to manoeuvre carefully between different agendas.

5.1.1. *Principled vs. Pragmatic Approach: Nonviolence vs. Nonviolent Resistance*

Local support of NVR depends strongly on whether it is framed as principled nonviolence or pragmatic resistance. In a 2002 opinion poll 80% of the interviewed Palestinians approved of a large-scale movement based on nonviolent action against Israeli occupation and more than half (56%) indicated their willingness to participate in it (with boycott being favoured over direct nonviolent action). 62%, however, believed that mass nonviolent action will have no impact on Israeli behaviour. Just as support for nonviolence was not matched with strong beliefs in its effectiveness, it did not for most entail a rejection of armed resistance (Kull, 2002: 5; Allen, 2002; Dudouet, 2008).¹⁰⁰

While avoiding denouncing armed resistance categorically, NVR scholars and activists tend to stress that the use of violence is harmful for the Palestinian struggle as it feeds into Western misrepresentation of Palestinians as violent. In 2002 a petition, which stirred heated debate, 55 Palestinian political and academic figures argued that “[s]uicide bombings deepen the hatred and widen the gap between the Palestinian and Israeli people [...] they strengthen the enemies of peace on the Israeli side and give Israel’s aggressive government under Sharon the excuse to continue its harsh war against our people” (*Al-Quds*, 19 June 2002 quoted in Allen, 2002: 39).

The signatories were heavily criticised. They were accused of following a western agenda (the petition was sponsored by the EU), of submitting to the occupation, and of delegitimising armed struggle. Particularly popular resistance leaders of the refugee camps found them to be far removed from and having little concern for the situation, needs and political viewpoints and strategies of ordinary people (see Allen, 2002). While there can, of course, be a certain

¹⁰⁰ Similarly a 2008 Gallup poll showed strong Palestinian support (62%) for nonviolence (see Saad, 2008).

truth to such charges, the branding of nonviolent activists as ‘elitist,’ ‘non-resisters’ or even ‘traitors’ also often is politically motivated. In reality both ‘the street’ and ‘the elite’ are divided on the debate over violence and nonviolence (Tamari, 2003). Such mutual accusations from the ‘resisters’ against the ‘normalising elite’ and from the ‘intellectuals’ against ‘those who glorify violence’ should thus not be viewed as a reflection of reality, but rather in a context where each party defines its political identity and agenda in contrast to the constructed other with the aim of gaining local and/or international support (see Allen, 2003).

Yet, the fear that nonviolence (*lā ‘unf*) projects, particularly if focused on spreading the concept of nonviolence, rather than staging proactive nonviolent resistance protests, undermine the Palestinians’ legal right to armed resistance as a population under occupation, is widespread and should be taken seriously (see Allen, 2002; Richter-Devroe, 2009; White, 2007).¹⁰¹ A representative of the GPAAWC gave the following analysis of developments in Bil’in:

In Bil’in the Israelis and internationals control the show. They want to provide *the* example to the outside world of not throwing stones, of a *nonviolent* resistance. I don’t like the word *nonviolence*, I am sceptical. Because it automatically delegitimises all other forms of civil popular resistance, and even stone throwing as violent, and therefore wrong (GPAAWC, 2008).

The general tendency among international and Israeli activists is to see nonviolent struggle as inherently positive and denounce – or at least distance themselves from – armed struggle (see Seitz, 2003). International funders, in order not to be accused of funding Palestinian resistance, are even more careful to stress their focus on *nonviolence* as a principle.

This position, however, is generally not shared by Palestinians. A trainer from the Holy Land Trust described her experience of promoting a nonviolent strategy with Palestinian women as follows: “A lot of the women were curious to know what nonviolence is, because in our society when I say nonviolence, they would say: “Ah – ok, you are normalising with the Israelis.” This is the bad interpretation of nonviolence” (HLT, 2008). Nonviolence projects, if

¹⁰¹ For a detailed discussion of the legal rights of an occupied people to resist see the debate between Falk and Weston (1991, 1992) and Curtis (1991), as well as Falk (2002).

not explicitly emphasising their pragmatic approach of promoting proactive NVR as a strategy to further the Palestinian national struggle, thus are greeted with suspicion. The term ‘nonviolence’ (*lā ʿunf*) has negative connotations in Palestinian popular discourse; it is used often to describe those NGO nonviolence projects which are perceived to be part of the NGOisation of Palestinian civil society and seen to merely follow a foreign agenda aimed at ‘taming’ the Palestinian national struggle and popular resistance. *Lā ʿunf*, according to nearly all of grassroots NVR leaders I spoke to, constitutes a new fashionable topic in the NGO world, replacing the earlier people-to-people projects and complementary to other ‘trend topics’ such as ‘gender’ or ‘children’ (e.g. Interview, Adnan, Ilham, Asma, Muhammad, Feryal, Mahmoud, GPAAWC, Ghassan, 2008).

Local activists have thus aimed at counter-framing their struggle as a more pro-active pragmatic strategy. Adnan, for example, stresses that

We chose nonviolent resistance here in our village not because we are angels, but it is a strategy. We are convinced that this can bring our case forward. We are the victims in this conflict - so it would be stupid to play the criminal and take up arms, as the outside world wants us to. With nonviolent resistance the world understands us as humans. We have to get them on our side... [Here] we resist the wall all together and we do not talk about political or ideological debates (Adnan, 2008).

Presenting NVR as a pragmatic strategy, he groups it under the collective action frame of resistance (*muqāwma*). His framing of nonviolent action as resistance resonates more with Palestinian political culture, rallies stronger local support and achieves broader mobilisation than a principled approach. Such pro-active nonviolent resistance and anti-occupation protest activism – whether Palestinian-only or joint by Israeli or international solidarity activists – is mostly referred to as nonviolent resistance (*al-muqāwma as-silmīyyah*) or popular resistance (*muqāwma shaʿbīyya*). While for local popular committee leaders in the villages the framing of their acts as resistance (*muqāwma*) is straightforward, nonviolence NGOs, who receive outside funding have to engage in a constant negotiation process between the nonviolence (*lā ʿunf*) discourse and requirements of donors (who do not want to be blamed for funding Palestinian resistance) and their local Palestinian publics’ resistance (*muqāwma*) discourse (who do not want to be accused of normalisation, *taṭbīʿ*). The titles they give to their training

packages and projects reflect this balancing act. The Holy Land Trust, for example, titles their women's training session "training for nonviolent popular resistance" (*al-muqāwma al-lā' unfīyya ash-sha' bīyya*), reflecting the two conflicting discourses from within and without (Interview, HLT, 2008).

5.1.2. *Nonviolence as an Inclusive Democratic Practice*

A pragmatic approach to NVR is often considered to encourage inclusive and democratic political practice. Adnan, for example, stressed that by adopting a non-ideological approach, he was able to bring together supporters from different political parties (including Hamas), age groups, socio-economic background and gender in his village's local popular committee (Interview, Adnan, 2008). Scholars as well have argued that nonviolent civil action is commonly practiced (and understood) in less hierarchical ways than conventional political arrangements. They have stressed that NVR is a particularly attractive form of political engagement for women because it constructs a desirable inclusive collective identity (Costain, 2000: 179; see also Beckwith, 2002 or Cockburn, 2007: 179). Only ca. half of the Palestinian male and female nonviolent activists whom I interviewed would support such an argument. Feryal, for example, found it important to stress how male domination had also intruded the structures and practices of NVR in her village. The peasant women involved in anti-wall demonstrations in Adnan's village, however, identified the egalitarian and praxis-oriented nature of the protests as strongly mobilising factors. During a focus group with eight women from the village, all stressed the close relations, trust and equality between protesters:

We set a very good example with everyone participating in the resistance. It was all very practical and everybody participated as volunteer. There were no personal aims. All the women in the village knew that Adnan's wife and his daughters and sons participate in the resistance and therefore they also went (Focus Group B, 2008).

Setting an example of inclusive resistance through *practicing* (rather than teaching) nonviolent action was also mentioned by Adnan himself:

You have to convince people that it is not shameful (*eib*), but the right thing for women to participate. Not by telling them, but by setting an

example and going to the demonstrations with your own family. My whole family participated and I used to take my little boy on my shoulders in the front line. This way I convinced people in the village, and particularly the men, to let their women take part (Adnan, Interview, 2008).

Besides countering accusations of normalisation by framing NVR as a proactive and pragmatic rather than principled strategy, local activists thus also emphasise its egalitarian, praxis-oriented and inclusive nature in order to rebuke commonly held associations of nonviolence with elitism and westernism. This representation might, of course, have little to do with the actual reality of (still mainly male-dominated) NVR on the ground. Rather, it highlights, that NVR leaders, by negotiating with, reformulating and borrowing from local and international discursive repertoire on political action, aim at re-establishing and presenting NVR as an indigenous and socially and well as politically progressive strategy. Doing so, they hope to gain local, but also international support. The performative element of NVR, i.e. the fact that it is often performed to ‘please’ local or international audiences, is particularly well illustrated if gender-specific ways of framing NVR are taken into account.

5.2. *Gendered Framings of Nonviolent Resistance*

Gender differentiation, that is the construction of opposed essentialised femininities and masculinities, is instrumental in forming and mobilising collective identities. Although feminist theory has called for the need to overcome and deconstruct gender binaries, in popular practice and belief masculinities and femininities are commonly contrasted against each other. Employing gender as an analytical category highlights the importance of gender stratification and dualism for the construction of collective action frames, identities and solidarities that mobilise men and women to collective action (see e.g. Taylor, 1999).

Nonviolence, like peace, is often associated with women and femininity. Despite the fact that women have participated widely in armed resistance movements, in conflict situation gender identities tend to be more strongly politicised, essentialised and juxtaposed. Resistance is commonly associated with the male “just warrior”, while nonviolence, peace and the nation is symbolised by women’s “beautiful souls” (Elshtain, 1987). In the Palestinian context, women have been reified as nonviolent actors. Local as well as international documentations and

analyses of NVR and anti-wall protest often put woman protesters into the spotlight, preferably through visual representations (Bacha, 2010; Beinín, 2010; Interview Adnan, 2008; Focus Group B, 2008).¹⁰²

When analysing the femininities and masculinities constructed and enacted in nonviolent protest action, one thus should not assume that women are (or believe to be) naturally nonviolent, but rather understand their associating of nonviolence with femininity as a strategy to gain support. An international solidarity activist argued to me that:

It is nonsense to say that women are more peaceful than men. But nevertheless, we can make use of this. Even when dealing with the Israelis it is easier to be a woman. We are not seen as dangerous...It is easier for women to get closer to the soldiers than for men. Also, as women, we can always play the naïve little girl (Mariam, 2008).

One thus needs to distinguish between how women *frame* their action and what they actually *practice*. The main two femininity constructions which female activist use (and often merge) to frame their civil resistance are the (more relational, and often dubbed ‘traditional’) mother figure, associated with peace and nonviolence (*lā ʿunf*) and the (more independent, and often claimed to be ‘modern’) female political activist, more strongly connected to protest and resistance (*muqāwma*).

5.2.1. *Motherhood and ‘Traditional’ Framings of Female Nonviolent Resistance*

The mother figure is central to Palestinian political culture (see e.g. Al-Botmeh and Richter-Devroe, 2010; Hammami, 1997; Jean-Klein, 2000; Mabuchi, 2003; Peteet, 1991; Richter-Devroe, 2009). Discourses of motherhood were (and continue to be) politicised in nationalist steadfastness (*ṣumūd*) discourses which elevate women as social, cultural and biological reproducers of the nation,¹⁰³ but “mother politics” (Cockburn, 2007) is also practiced by women themselves to open up spaces for political agency.

¹⁰² Much of the analysis and documentation of the anti-wall demonstrations in Budrus, for example, have put emphasis on the strong female participation and often presented the local leader’s, Ayed Morrar’s, daughter, Iltizam, as the new model actor for the NVR movement against the wall (e.g. Bacha, 2010; Beinín, 2010)

¹⁰³ See Chapter IV (particularly sections 3.2) for an overview of how the gender construction and political subjectivity of the mother has evolved in Palestinian political culture.

The overwhelming majority of Palestinian women with whom I spent time or whom I interviewed, particularly those not involved in official politics, related their everyday political activism to their nurturing role as mothers. In such mother politics they politicise the domestic sphere by presenting their domestic duties and biological reproductive roles as a form of political activism, and domesticate the public sphere by basing their political activities and entry into the public sphere on their domestic role as mothers (Petee, 1991: 175 - 203). Karima, for example, explained to me her reasons for participating in nonviolent resistance activism in an area of Bethlehem that has been completely deserted since the construction of the wall, in the following way: “We started this [Şumūd Peace House] near the wall to put new life in this area... We came here to plant seeds – seeds of peace. We are mothers, we want our children to come here and meet each other. We want them to be happy also in this place” (Karima, 2007).

Most ordinary women I interviewed and informally engaged with stressed that as mothers they view it as their responsibility to take part in political action to prevent youth radicalisation and ensure the survival of family, community and nation. Women protesting against the wall tended to frame their mobilisation in terms of survival, and even defence of the community. Ilham, for example, stressed that she had no other choice but to protect her land: “If the soldiers come and take my land, that means that I have nowhere to live. I have no home. So what can I do? I have to go out and defend my land.” (Ilham, 2008). Framing their action strategically to garner social support, ordinary women who engage in everyday individual or collective nonviolent resistance, protest and survival acts, thus argue that as mothers they need to not only maintain and keep intact the social fabric of society, but also defend means of subsistence to ensure survival. Doing so, they launch a discursive challenge, even if indirectly and without lasting change, against the gender construction (and superiority) of the male provider/protector.

There are, however, various pitfalls to the politicisation and idealisation of women’s reproductive role. ‘Mother politics’ might be criticised for reducing women to ‘nothing-but-mothers’ and thus for reinforcing the status quo of existing patriarchal gender power structures where women are presented as vulnerable in the category of “womenandchildren” (Enloe, 1990) and defined only in relation to and as dependents of men (see e.g. Cockburn, 2004, 2007). Without doubt, mother politics can backfire by offering patriarchal nationalist

forces a discursive strategy with which they can deny women's active agency in the national struggle and relegate them back to the home, particularly once the 'exceptional' conflict situation is over. Palestinian women's nonviolent resistance, however, points to different dynamics: women perform and enact new and provocative gendered political identities and have started to make advances on the discursive level as well.

5.2.2. *'The Independent Female Political Activist' and 'Modern' Framings of Women's Nonviolent Resistance*

While the more 'traditional' role of women as mothers of martyrs still has some currency, a significant majority of my interviewees who participate in nonviolent resistance activism defined themselves as resistive (rather than passive/caring) female political activists. Ilham, for example, argued that women must take an active part in resistance not only to defend the land, but also their men:

Everyone, including women, have to resist as much as they can. If they had resisted that much [as we did in our village] already in 1948 then perhaps it would have turned out differently...We women help the national cause and our men – what should they do without us? ... I told the other women that they have to defend their husbands and their sons, because what should she do if the soldiers take them or if they die? She needs them (Ilham, 2008).

Such praising of women's strength in defending land and people was not only uttered by female activists themselves, but also by sympathetic male nonviolent leaders. Ayed Morrar, a local nonviolent resistance leader, credits women for their courageous acts:

We have photos of the first demos here, and it was the women who were stopping the bulldozers. And this happened more than once in Budrus, and they succeeded in getting to the bulldozers before the men did. They were lying down in front of the bulldozers. I haven't seen similar participation by women in any other location (Morrar quoted in Audeh, 2007).

Some women activists go even further and contrast their very proactive role as resistive activist mothers,¹⁰⁴ wives or daughters with what they perceive to be the passive, impotent role of male leaders. Describing the rationale behind her participation in the Beit Hanoun march, Um Ahmed, for example, told the *Guardian* “It was a way of encouraging women to do something. We did something that the Arab leaders couldn’t do” (quoted in McCarthy, 2006). Similarly, Shireen from Tulkarm refugee camp introduced herself to me as a sister of a martyr and resistance activist, but at the same time insisted that “there is no difference between men and women. Women can even be stronger: in politics and as resistance activists” (Interview Shireen, 2005).

Although framings of NVR might thus often stick closer to social gender norms that associate femininity with nonviolence or motherhood, activists challenge patriarchal gender norms not only through their actual political practices (in which they encroach upon a political space traditionally controlled by men and associated with masculinity), but also discursively. They claim that they are defending not only their land (and thus the means of subsistence, a role traditionally associated with the male provider), but also their people (thus replacing men, particularly in the leadership, in their role as male protectors). In their framings of NVR women combine the accepted relational gender construction of mother/sister/wife with the more provocative femininity constructions of active female political resistance activist by selectively borrowing from Islamic and/or (secular) rights discourses.

5.2.2.1. Islamic Discourse

Women often make use of Islamic discursive repertoire. When framing her active political resistance, Ilham, just like many village women I spoke to, referred to the Prophet’s wife, Khadija, as an Islamic example of a strong resistive woman:

Men might say it is shameful [*eib*] for women to join the demonstration. Why would it be shameful? We want to resist. We want to defend our land. In the times of the Prophet Khadija also went to fight. So it is wrong to say it is shameful. Why should it be only natural for men? Women help men in their resistance and women are just as strong (Ilham, 2008).

¹⁰⁴ See Naples (1992, 1998) for an interesting analysis of “activist mothering” in the context of the African-American, Latina and white European American community in New York and Philadelphia.

Ilham is not an active member or even supporter of the Islamic movement. Her reference to religion thus, although employed to support her political agency, is not ideological, but rather is embedded in her everyday customary *practice* of Islam. Activist leaders, like Feryal, might utilise Islamic principles more strategically to promote broader social support and wide participation:

In the demonstrations I took the loudspeaker twice and said through it: “*Allahu akbar – hiyya lil-jihād!* [God is Great – let’s go to *jihād!*]” As a result everybody came out to see and to join. They wanted to see this woman who is saying “*Allahu Akbar*” and calling for *jihād*. At the same time this was their language, so they felt more ready to join. I know Islam. I have studied it and I know it better than many. I use Islam to mobilise people. When they hear *Allahu Akbar*, they know it is something important and they come out of their houses to see (Feryal, 2008).

In the case of Feryal, who had originally presented herself to me as a convinced communist, the use of Islamic slogans stems less from her own belief, but rather is employed strategically: tapping into the normative systems and discursive repertoire of ordinary village women she hopes to mobilise them with this religious language for political action.

5.2.2.2. Secular Rights Discourse

Besides Islam, many female activists borrow from human and international rights discourses. The rights-based mother politics employed by female nonviolent resisters, however, needs to be distinguished from both, the maternal care-based approach of joint conflict-resolution projects, as well as the mainstream liberal feminist rights-based framework of the ‘globalised’ peacewomen elite.

Al-Shanti, who led the women’s protest in Beit Hanoun, summarises rights-based mother politics well when – speaking as ‘a mother, sister or wife’ – she asserts: “The women of Palestine will resist this monstrous occupation imposed on us at gunpoint, siege and starvation. Our rights and those of future generations are not open for negotiation” (Al-Shanti, 2006). Many of the female protesters I interviewed combined rights-based language with the relational gender constructions of mother. Yet, in contrast to maternal care-based dialogical conflict resolution where motherhood and alleged female traits are considered essential for

bridging the national divide, Palestinian female NVR activists, like Al-Shanti, prioritise their national rights over their women's rights. They stress that they view themselves first as people who have been denied their right to self-determination and only secondly - and mainly strategically – refer to their alleged specific traits as mothers or women.

Their usage of rights also needs to be distinguished from mainstream liberal feminist approaches to dialogical conflict resolution (see Chapter V, section 2). Many of my informants from lower socio-economic and rural or camp backgrounds framed NVR activism within the discourse of rights.¹⁰⁵ In contrast to the more professional urban women leaders their rights language, however, remained vague and they seldom made references to specific UN resolutions and/or aspects of international law. Their selective appropriation of transnational rights discourse should thus not be understood as signalling support of the mainstream two-state solution agenda. Rather, it offered grassroots activists a way to connect to the global justice movement, providing them with channels through which they could make their voices heard and understood internationally.

The negative effect of the increased significance of the international solidarity movements, its support of nonviolent resistance and its framing of these acts within a rights-based discourse, however, is that many Palestinians now consider organised demonstrations a mere performance in which Palestinian are playing the role that foreigners expect them to. Lama put that scepticism aptly:

[Protests] have become now in our society like rituals, like a wedding or a birthday party...All the year we stayed silent until the World Peace Day on 20th September. So then Peace Day comes and what do we have to do? A group of Palestinians has to go to stage a sit in at the wall in Ni'lin, another group of Palestinians has to go and stage a sit in at the wall in Gaza. But what about the rest of the year? What did we do? Between the peace day 2008 and the peace day 2009 what have we done? Nothing. This is a real shame (Lama, 2009).

¹⁰⁵ See Allen (2009) and Feldman (2007) who trace how human rights and the language of victimisation and suffering is used by Palestinians, grassroots and elite alike, to assert legitimacy.

Jean-Klein (2002) in her analysis of “political audit tourism” had already detected that even at the time of the First Intifada “[l]ocal currents of political and social activism [were] shown to be subject (partly subjecting themselves) to close-up reviews by ‘transnational’ solidarity activists on whose fellow-activism their own ‘modernist’ struggle depended”.¹⁰⁶ Since local NVR activism now is even more strongly supported by, focused on, and reviewed by international media and/or international solidarity groups, this tendency of local nonviolent demonstrations and protests turning into ‘rituals’ performed to and judged by international audiences, has further increased with the rise of the international solidarity movement after 2000. Female nonviolent resistance in particular has been tooted through mainstream international organisation as well as through solidarity groups as ‘modern,’ ‘gender-equal’ and ‘civilised’ way to resist. It is not that surprising then, that, in order to present their own groups as progressive, some local activists, perform to the expectations these international actors set on them.

Because of (rather than despite) this careful hybrid framing of NVR, in which women activists borrow from Islamic and secular rights; ‘traditional’ and ‘modern,’ ‘foreign’ and ‘indigenous’ discourses and perform to different expectations set on them from within and without, they are able to build a strong publically supported platform. Activist rights-based motherhood politics, as a subaltern ‘counterpublic’ (Fraser, 1992), provides them with a strong platform and leverage for their activism.

6. Transformative Potential of Women’s Nonviolent Resistance

Women’s NVR resistance has more transformative potential than the liberal feminist dialogical conflict resolution approach. The precise impact of NVR on bringing about and sustaining social and political change, however, needs to be carefully assessed on a case by case basis and on various levels.

¹⁰⁶ See also Collins (2004) and Khalili (2007) who show how the international solidarity movement and its focus on grassroots activism has often led to Palestinians performing to international audiences what the latter consider truly ‘authentic’ and ‘indigenous’ Palestinian agency.

6.1. *Political Transformative Potential*

NVR, which today is predominantly practiced through protest and boycott, has so far brought about minor changes only, and mainly at the ideational rather than material level: the wall has been built largely on Palestinian land; small success stories, like that of the village of Budrus, where villagers managed to divert its route, remain a rare exception. The major contribution of NVR lies in its potential to change Palestinian, Israeli and international public and diplomatic opinions.

Palestinian activists not only speak of a sense of empowerment which they gain from their action-oriented political engagement, but they also often stress that joint Palestinian-Israeli NVR is more effective in transforming attitudes and behaviours than joint dialogical conflict resolution. Many criticise the Israeli peace movement with its focus on dialogue for working on reconciliation only, while shying away from targeting the occupation directly in nonviolent action. As a condition for restarting their work with Bat Shalom, JCW, for example, not only insisted on the political nature of their joint projects, but also stressed that political dialogue needs to be accompanied by joint political protest action (Interview JCW, 2008). Suad aptly summarised the requirement that she sets for joint projects, when she stated that “now [after the failure of the peace process and given the new realities since 2000] the question is no longer how do we live together, but rather how do we *struggle* together” (Suad, 2008). Most Palestinians thus are convinced of joint projects only if they involve direct political action. A representative of the Bil’in local popular committee, for example, finds that the Israelis joining the weekly anti-wall protests

became real warriors that earned the trust of all. They contributed much by revealing the true face of the occupation – its tactics, its lies and its organized terror against Palestinians – in opposition to those that attempt to normalize and whitewash the occupation...we will build together, with our bodies, real bridges of love and security and peace, in order to conquer the wall (Mansour, 2007).

Mansour here re-appropriates the symbol of bridges, which had often become an empty formula in dialogue groups. He stresses that *real* bridges which can affect attitudinal and behavioural change and which might eventually lead to real material transformations, can only be built through joint action-oriented NVR.

6.2. *Social (Gender) Transformative Potential*

If women use their bodies to defend the land, their community and their family, often building ‘real’ bridges in anti-wall and anti-occupation protests with Israeli activists, their embodied protest can also impact on social gender relations.

The great majority of my interviewees found that it is more accepted for Palestinian women to participate in NVR protests than in dialogue groups. While civil resistance (*muqāwma sha^cbīyya*) is a recognised form of female political agency, women’s participation in dialogue groups (*barāmiy al-ḥiwār*) is viewed by the majority as normalisation (*taṭbī^c*), of prioritising gender over national concerns. Due to this lack of societal support, women’s involvement in dialogue groups does not translate into women’s empowerment. Through participating in NVR, on the other hand, women gain respect from their community for their courage and this, as supporters argue, is a first step towards their empowerment. Many female resisters themselves contend that their active protesting gave them a sense of empowerment, agency and control over their lives. But, can female public protest sustain long-term social gains for women? Is it even aimed at bringing about social change, or is it a merely defensive act, aimed at ensuring survival and protection of means of subsistence?

As long as civil protest does not alter the material situation on the ground, women, of course, continue to be disempowered politically and economically. The mere fact that women invade and use political spaces traditionally defined as male, also, as Feryal points out, does not necessarily mean that women gain rights in the private sphere:

[For us women] it is much easier to fight against the occupation. But once you work on social issues, it becomes difficult. If I loose my reputation here in the village and in society, it is over. This social standing and support from the people is most important. I got a lot of respect from the people in the village for always being the first in the demonstrations. But at the same time, I also know that they talk badly about me, that they say I want to change everything in our society...The problem is how to translate this newly won empowerment in the public back in the private sphere. There are many

women who come to demonstration, but once they get back home their husbands hit them. Why is it not forbidden (*ḥarām*) for me to walk in the first line of the demonstrations, but when I want my rights back home it is a taboo? (Feryal, 2008)

Feryal's account highlights that advances made in female public political *practice* do not automatically alter gender *ideologies* and social normative structures, particularly if concerned with issues of private sphere. Yet, "for women, because of the way women are often reduced to the body and routinely sexualized, putting the body in play has a special meaning" (Cockburn, 2007: 177). The specificity of women's nonviolent resistance (in contrast to more conventional female political engagement), thus is that women often symbolically make use of and challenge predominant gendered assumptions in their societies through embodied protest, and thus also indirectly deal with 'private' social gender issues.

Gender operates as a constitutive element of social relations; women not only reproduce gender imageries to construct collective identities and frame their political messages, through their participation in male-associated protest and resistance activism they also perform and enact new gender constructions and roles. Women's NVR acts thus not only challenge male-dominated hierarchical political culture, it also launches a forceful attack on social gendered norms that define and restrict women's political participation. By defending the nation, land, community, family and also their men with their own bodies, women subvert the conventional gender binary of protected/provided-for woman vs. protecting/providing man. Doing so, women struggle against institutionalised male-defined and -controlled ways of doing politics, against the engendered forms of power embodied in male and female political subjects.

Using their bodies as shields, women protesters question the (nationalist) reduction of women's bodies to wombs, thus confronting norms that limit women's role in the national struggle to reproduction. Such feminist embodied political practices demonstrate the interlinkages between the personal and the political, but they also perform and enact alternative femininities, proposing reformulations of gender ideologies and roles. Adnan described women's appropriation of the traditionally as male-defined political space of resistance and their reformulation and adoption of new gender models in the following way:

It was the first time that we saw women playing the role of the hero [*batal*]. It was clear that now their role is more than just to cry after their lost ones. Women were resisting together with the rest of us. They were very active, in the front lines. Women were scratching the face of soldiers. After the demonstrations it was obvious that women were proud and felt empowered (Adnan, 2008).

Mobilisation to and participation in symbolical NVR activism thus is a way for women to repoliticise their gender identities with new meanings. By redefining protest and courageous disruptive acts as just as much feminine as they are masculine, female resisters reject the narrow binary association of the heroic life of public action and politics with men and masculinity, and the everyday life of nurturing and care with women and femininity (see Featherstone, 1992: 165). More specifically, they reveal and oppose the exclusivist association of citizenship (and related rights) with the courageous male citizen.¹⁰⁷ Julie Peteet (1994) studying the gendered impact of bodily violence during the First Intifada, has argued that beatings and detentions have been reformulated as rites of passages into manhood for Palestinian male youth. Bodily violence is not as central to constructions of femininities, but it does, nevertheless, impact upon the ways in which women formulate their political claims: “While the violence visited upon males credentializes masculinity that visited upon women indicates a potential equality of citizenship” (Peteet, 1994: 44).

Political discourses, citizenship and claims to it are performatively enacted; “[the body] does not only serve as a medium for change but also realizes it” (Sparks, 1997: 399). Women engage in a wide variety of NVR acts, some related to spheres traditionally associated with women and femininity, such as education, awareness-raising, or even the boycott (as it relates to household management). Other forms of women’s NVR, such as nonviolent protest action, however, involve public action-oriented physical acts - a form of political engagement commonly associated with men and masculinity. Using their bodies as sites of political engagement, they unsettle conventional political culture and associations of courage, defence of the (home)land and physical strength with men and masculinities. Female NVR activists, by demonstrating that they experience, endure and resist violence as much as men, radically

¹⁰⁷ See Lind (1992) for a similar argument in the context of women’s participation in nonviolent social movements in Latin America. See also Joseph (2000) for a critical analysis of gender and citizenship in the Middle Eastern context and Giacaman, Jad and Johnson (2000) for a study revealing the specificities of gender and citizenship in the Palestinian context of statelessness.

repoliticise gendered political subjectivities and reject the exclusivist construction of courageous male citizen. As such female NVR might be seen as a crucial democratic practice through which women, if not achieve, then at least claim equal rights as citizens.

7. Conclusion

Since the Oslo Accords, and particularly during the last decade, women's NVR in the Occupied Palestinian Territories has undergone a process of localisation, professionalisation and internationalisation. While during the First Intifada women's NVR was widely practiced through a variety of methods, today boycotts and protests are the main methods used. With the construction of the wall centres of NVR have moved from towns and refugee camps to rural areas. Although efforts are made to synthesise these localised anti-wall struggles, NVR remains sporadic, fragmented and without unified strategy or leadership. Increased media attention to local NVR has internationalised the movement through, firstly, the rise of professional, often foreign-funded nonviolence NGOs, and, secondly, the increasing influence of international solidarity and justice movements.

These shifts have opened up several opportunities, but also constraints for female activists. Israeli spatial policies and the PA's hierarchical and patriarchal nature directly suppress women's NVR. Furthermore, they have fostered political inertia and stronger social conservatism which restricts women's public political actions more indirectly. The increased internationalisation of NVR has also had ambiguous effects on the local NVR scene. Foreign funding targeted to principled nonviolence (*lā ʿunf*) approaches has stirred competition in the field, further fragmenting and weakening the movement. Although cultural restrictions to female NVR are generally not considered a major obstacle to women's involvement in NVR, such gendered cultural references are nevertheless used to define collective identities, demarcate boundaries and delegitimise rivals by accusing them of 'westernisation,' 'traditionalism' and/or 'normalisation' (*taṭbīʿ*).

The way in which activists frame their civil disobedience is critical for support. Activists have to carefully navigate between often competing agendas: Framing their activism pragmatically as nonviolent or popular *resistance* (*muqāwma silmīyya*, *muqāwma shaʿbīyya*) gains them local credit, but might freeze foreign funding; couching their public political agency as

mother politics guarantees societal acceptance, but might not be effective in challenging restrictive gender norms in the long term. NVR female activists thus also use the (more independent) gender construction of female political activists, borrowing selectively and combining elements from Islamic and secular rights discourses and often presenting their activism as 'progressive' and 'modern.' The importance of framing in determining success or failure of female (and male) nonviolent activism thus shows that even an anti-occupation movement, such as the Palestinian, which clearly struggles for economic and political rights, is not only an 'old' social movement, but also simultaneously engaged in a contest over identity and meaning.

Female NVR aims at affecting ideational and material transformations at the political and social level. Politically, although targeting the structural root causes of the conflict directly, NVR has had little success in bringing about real material changes. It has, however propelled some transformations at the ideational and attitudinal level, by, for example, giving participants a sense of empowerment, by raising international awareness and solidarity for the Palestinian cause, or by changing Israeli public opinion. Socially, women's NVR is more accepted than their involvement in joint dialogue groups and women speak of feeling empowered through their acts.

Female NVR, as a feminist critical analysis using insights on 'the political,' 'counterpublics' and 'performativity' demonstrates, holds more transformative potential than the liberal agenda of dialogical conflict resolution. The previous chapter has shown that Habermas' theory of communicative action (1984) and his understanding of a public sphere (1989) that enables discourse ethics (the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of dialogical CR) are unable to capture situations of stark power asymmetries and radical disagreement. Relying on Fraser's critique (1985) it was demonstrated that real ('system') world inequalities cannot be bracketed during dialogue and discursive deliberation; they might be glossed over, but they nevertheless determine access to resources, channels and means through which validity claims and norms are established as hegemonic.

NVR activism, in contrast, is a direct expression of radical disagreement stemming from material and ideational power asymmetries. Political practices of dissent strive to dramatically draw attention to, subvert and resist power differentials and injustices. Liberal conceptions of the public sphere with its focus on dialogue, consent and discourse ethics are unable to

theorise this radically transformative nature of NVR. Fraser goes on to argue that in situations where systemic inequality persists, “a postmodern multiplicity of mutually contestatory publics is preferable to a single modern public sphere oriented solely to deliberation” and that “a postmodern conception of the public sphere must countenance not the exclusion, but the inclusion, of interests and issues that bourgeois masculinist ideology labels ‘private’ and treats as inadmissible” (Fraser, 1995: 295).

Women’s NVR activism thus contradicts Habermas’ (1989) liberal conception of a unified and gender-neutral public sphere. It reveals that the public sphere is not inclusive, democratic or egalitarian, but that it consists of social, political, cultural and economic power relations that structure women’s (and men’s) access to and manoeuvring within public spheres. Women, when negotiating through this matrix of power relations, build ‘multiple publics’, in which they press for ‘the inclusion of so-called private issues.’ As a “counterpublic” female NVR constitutes an alternative political practice through which women activists find alternative radical ways of political engagement. For Fraser subaltern counterpublics “are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs” (Fraser, 1992: 123).

Female nonviolent activists express such “oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs” simultaneously on two fronts. Firstly, as a radical, yet democratic, act of dissent their NVR is directed against and aimed at providing alternative counterpublics to the conventional and conformist liberal political practices that have been normalised in the Palestinian context and which restrict people’s forms of political expression to institutionalised channels such as dialogue groups or voting. Secondly, as a specific feminist political expression it reformulates, repoliticises and enacts a femininity construction of women as courageous, heroic citizens and thus provides an alternative to both the nationalist-ideological reduction of women to wombs, as well as to the liberal feminist essentialisation of women as peacemakers. Although women often frame their activism within socially accepted gendered discourses, in their practices they subvert and repoliticise these ‘traditional’ meaning and thus – although indirectly and somewhat ambiguously – make claims for equal rights. Female NVR thus provides a radical alternative to mainstream politics, particularly the liberal peace/dialogue agenda, on the one hand, and to conventional male-dominated social and political culture in Palestine, on the other.

Studying women's doubly dissident acts of NVR carefully as a diagnostic of power thus reveals not only the gendered power relations that exist within a multiplicity of (counter)public spheres, but also draws attention to the ways in which public spheres are constantly evolving and how citizenship (and claims to it) are performed and enacted in specific gendered ways. In order for female (and male) NVR activists to move forward with such a vision of a non-masculinist, non-militarist, yet proactive political culture, what is needed first of all is a unified strategy – a project that under the current omnipresent control and suppression exercised by the PA and Israeli settler-colonial and occupation policies, remains difficult to achieve.

CHAPTER VII

PALESTINIAN WOMEN'S EVERYDAY RESISTANCE¹⁰⁸

Ṣumūd is 'amal (hope) and ^camal (work/action).

We need action, and we need hope for there to be action.

(Focus Group A, 2007)

Palestinian women's everyday activism at the micro-level – often referred to as *ṣumūd*¹⁰⁹ - has been largely ignored, particularly in mainstream development and conflict resolution literature. In such studies small-scale action are deemed to be irrelevant for political or social change. Power, however, is manifest and impacts upon various domains, including the everyday life. “[S]eemingly small changes,” as Escobar (1992: 237) has argued, “can have revolutionary implications for how people lead their daily lives and construct and reconfigure their worlds.” Consequently, individual actions might seem apolitical at first, but since they take place within a specific array of power structures, they also respond to and might impact on wider systemic structures. When concerned with social and political conflict transformation, it is thus pertinent to take a close look at the micro-level of women's everyday activism:

[W]e need to take account of actions that are not directly political, but, by being carried out in a particular place and time, carry political charge, for example, carrying on lives in conditions like those of Israeli occupation or in camps in Lebanon. The unique difficulty of the Palestinian struggle, its imbalance of forces, makes *sumoud* (steadfastness, staying put) an essential form of resistance on a level with political and military struggle. In addition, Palestinian women have been in the fore focus of institution building, social work, and cultural production. To focus then only on “organized” women would be to miss these other kinds of struggle (Sayigh, 1992: 4).

¹⁰⁸ Parts of this chapter draw on Richter-Devroe (2011).

¹⁰⁹ Refer to Chapter IV (particularly section 3) for an historical overview of the development of *ṣumūd* discourses and practices, and to Khalili (2007: 99–112) for a comprehensive study of *ṣumūd* as a Palestinian commemorative narrative.

In the Palestinian context everyday resistance, or “infrapolitics” as Scott (1990, 1997, 2005) has famously theorised it, is often termed *ṣumūd*, which translates as steadfastness, perseverance. In contrast to the public, heroic and overt nonviolent direct action, *ṣumūd* is a more covert, often individual and non-organised resistance. The term covers a wide variety of acts ranging from more materially-based survival strategies (such as finding employment, continuing to tend occupied agricultural land or engaging in small-scale income-generating projects to provide livelihoods) through cultural resistance (by upholding traditions, folkloric songs or dresses and other customs), to social and ideational resistance (by, for example, maintaining hope and a sense of normality). As a strategy concerned particularly with preserving family and community life *ṣumūd* has been associated particularly with women’s daily struggles (Johnson, 2007: 602-3; Peteet, 1991: 153; Richter-Devroe, 2008: 47-51).

Theory and practice of *ṣumūd* is constantly debated and evolving. Today, the main debate in Palestine centres on the questions of whether striving to build and lead a normal life under occupation constitutes normalisation (*taḥbīʿ*) or whether it should be seen as resistance (*muqāwma*), as *ṣumūd*. Is living normally in the abnormal situation of the occupation a submission to the status quo of injustices, or is the stubborn insistence not to give up, not to emigrate and stay on, even if under such harsh circumstances, an act of resistance in itself? Many of my interviewees stated that, in Palestine, “to live is to resist” – but, is a focus on mere survival compatible with development and peacebuilding, or does it foreclose any possible path to change? Does the act of circumventing and sneaking through, rather than directly targeting inequality and discrimination constitute an act of resistance with transformative power? Women often use the term resistance or *ṣumūd* to describe their acts, but do they really consider keeping up hope and finding ways to survive an effective strategy for change, or is it (merely) a discursive scheme, an attempt to keep alive and adhere to the nationalist meta-frame of resistance (*muqāwma*)?

My study of women’s everyday resistance aims to go beyond the descriptive, beyond giving an overview of what women do, but also is cautious not to be too strongly normative, judging whether or not their acts can provoke change. Rather, I aim to investigate how women themselves understand and frame their everyday resistance in their attempts to navigate through changing material and discursive power constellations. In this chapter I ask: What can Palestinian women’s changing practices, understandings and framings of their everyday acts

tell about developments in the nature of the Israeli occupation and of intra-Palestinian social and political hierarchies? Which oppressive social, political, cultural and economic constraints imposed by the occupation, nationalist, Islamist, class, patriarchal and other forces do they confront, and which do they conform to? Which of these do they merely circumvent and which might they potentially transform, discursively and/or materially? Finally, on a more conceptual level, what insights does this specific empirical example of Palestinian women's *ṣumūd* offer for the theorisation and practice of conflict transformation, peacebuilding, resistance and power more broadly?

This chapter first charts a brief overview of theories on everyday resistance and power, as mainly advanced in sociological and anthropological literature, but very recently also in peace and conflict research. I will then provide a historical outline of how practice and theory of female everyday resistance has developed in Palestine since the First Intifada. In the main part, I study how the post-2000 focus on 'living life normally' is played out and contested through everyday resistance acts at, firstly, the material and, secondly, the ideational level. This nuanced description of women's everyday resistance will provide context-specific insights into the debate on normality vs. normalisation (*taṭbīʿ*), on the one hand, and on the complexities of agency, which, although often understood within the dichotomies of resistance (*muqāwma*) vs. normalisation/accommodation (*taṭbīʿ*), in fact most of the time is both subverting and conforming to power hierarchies.

1. Theories of Everyday Resistance

Scholars from a wide array of disciplines have started to study not only collective public action but also the various forms that resistance takes, both in word and action, at the level of the everyday. Anthropological, sociological, cultural and feminist studies have been at the forefront of locating, analysing and theorising new sites, sources and pathways for social and political change, but, more recently, peace and conflict scholars have also shown more interest in the micro-level. These studies aim to, firstly, provide a definition of acts of resistance, secondly, interrogate the relationship of resistance and structures of power, and, thirdly, inquire into the potential of such individual micro-level acts to affect transformations of broader structural power relations. Below I compare the different positions which scholars have taken on the question of the transformative potential of everyday resistance, with a view

to providing a framework for the subsequent analysis of ordinary Palestinian women's daily struggles.

1.1. Survival and Coping Strategies in Track III Developmental Peacebuilding

From the late 1980s onwards development scholars and practitioners began to establish the interrelation between humanitarian relief, development and peace, calling for the need to engage in more coherent interventions that tackle these fields simultaneously. While early mainstream agendas still spoke of a continuum from relief to rehabilitation and development and peace (e.g. UN, 1991), this was quickly criticised (e.g. ACORD, 1992) and replaced by a conceptualisation of a synergetic contiguous (rather than continuous) relationship (see White and Cliffe, 2000: 316-17; Macrae, 1998). A 1996 UN report stresses the link to peacebuilding specifically, finding that “post-conflict recovery programmes that link relief and development can support peace processes by addressing the immediate needs of conflict-affected societies” (UN, 1996, paragraph 49 quoted in White and Cliffe, 2000: 317).

By the late 1990s a new paradigm of developmental or Track III peacebuilding had thus been firmly established in mainstream international development (see e.g. ECHO, 1996; UN 1996). Paying closer attention to wider socioeconomic structures and issues of human security and empowerment this approach is based on the understanding that “humanitarian and development assistance [...] may or may not have explicit peacebuilding objectives but will have an effect on the context in which peace negotiations are occurring” (Goodhand, 2006: 13). Providing aid in a conflict-sensitive way is assumed to counteract radicalisation and bottom-up violence. Relief, but more so developmental humanitarian assistance in the form of micro credits, small-scale income generating projects or capacity building, it is hoped, will strengthen local capacities and institutions for self-reliance and thus have an empowering and moderating effect on local actors.

In short, aid, in Track III studies, is seen as a tool to promote peace. Anderson (1996) had already established that aid can prolong conflicts (by, for example, financing war economies and creating dependencies) calling upon the international development community to “do no harm.” This insight is taken up in the new humanitarian agenda which argues that if aid can have negative effects on conflict dynamics, it can also affect the opposite: strengthen institutions, voices of peace and mechanisms for coping, recovery and survival. Track III

developmental peacebuilding with its focus on the interlinkages between socio-economic and political structures thus is situated in conflict transformation approaches but shifts its focus to agency at the micro-level of the individual, community and civil society, insisting that such bottom-up actions impact on wider macro-level structures.

Track III approaches, however, have also been criticised.¹¹⁰ Particularly the fusion of humanitarianism with developmental peacebuilding and political interventions has provoked discussion.¹¹¹ Track III approaches are based on an understanding that all aid, given that it interferes in highly political contexts, not only *is* political, but also *should* be political. While supporters claim that the conditionalisation of aid is a necessary move away from false neutrality to genuine solidarity in defence of human rights and peace (e.g. ODI, 2000), critics fear it might constitute a threat to the humanitarian principle of universal right to relief and act as a cover-up for new forms of imperialist or neo-colonialist interventions. The new humanitarian approach to peace and politics allows aid agencies (generally unelected and unaccountable) to decide whether or not to engage in particular countries based on foreign policy considerations, potentially creating a hierarchy of ‘more’ and ‘less’ deserving victims (see e.g. Fox, 2001; Richmond, 2009a: 340).

Secondly, linking relief, development and peacebuilding is criticised for its focus on local good governance, institutions and coping strategies, deflecting attention from the international dimensions of conflict (e.g. Bradbury, 1998), particularly global political economy structures (e.g. Duffield, 1998). Seeking the causes of conflict mainly at the domestic internal level, Track III might become a substitute for effective political engagement. The critique that traditional a-political humanitarian interventions constitute a “vicious circle in which agencies continue to apply sticking plasters without healing wounds” (Fox, 2001: 284) thus also holds for ‘new humanitarianism’. The integration of human rights and democracy into mainstream development agendas might be merely a way for the international community to put the blame squarely on local governments.¹¹² Making aid political therefore does in no way guarantee a stronger political will by international actors to tackle the root causes of and global structures which fuel conflict.

¹¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of ‘new humanitarianism’ or developmental track III approaches, its critiques and counter-critiques see e.g. Goodhand (2006), Fox (2001), White and Cliffe (2000), Macrae and Leader (2000).

¹¹¹ See e.g. the debate in *Disasters* (1998) Vol. 22, No. 4.

¹¹² Developmental institution-centered peacebuilding approaches are set within post-Washington Consensus institution-building, good governance and peacebuilding agendas.

Yet, aside from such critiques on the politicisation of aid, the actual impact that relief and development can have on peacebuilding also remains questioned. Goodhand (1998: 853), analysing the role of international aid in Afghanistan, for example, finds that “[i]n the absence of a meaningful peace process, aid investments in protracted, regionalised conflicts are unlikely to have anything but transitory impacts.” This observation also holds for the Palestinian Occupied Territories: although micro credit and relief efforts will not be rejected by local people who are in dire need, such ‘plasters’ will not end Israeli occupation and settler colonial policies. Developmental and/or conflict resolution approaches to aid cannot substitute real political engagement by the international community.

Taking the micro-level of the everyday serious as a site of political engagement would mean considering local actors not only as recipients of aid and development, but also as active agents of change. In a post-liberal critical conceptualisation of peacebuilding, “[t]he everyday becomes the site of agency in politics; rather than the institutions at various levels, both above and below states. It becomes the medium by which agency is enabled, rather than supplanted by the state or institutions, or negated by ‘bare life’” (Richmond, 2009a: 332). For Richmond a critical postliberal theorisation on peace, resistance and conflict resolution thus should start from the local everyday. It would try to assess “what both conflict and peace mean in each context, and how individual agency negotiates around violence, structural and overt, around material issues, or indeed deploys and co-opts these” (Richmond, 2009a: 331).

Studying existing local coping strategies, forms of resistance and agency can offer important insights for conflict transformation and peace-building. Particularly a focus on why people chose to opt out of violence and the ways in which they strategise for livelihoods and normal lives in defiance of or around oppressive structures offers promising inputs to conflict transformation theories. Before suggesting ‘empowerment’ and ‘capacity-building’ projects in developmental Track III approaches, it is necessary to “look at both the habits of everyday life and the practices of conflict management that existed before the conflict but also the manner in which these practices have been altered, and the emergent capacities that have developed as a direct result of the conflict” (Gilgan, 2001: 7). Responding to Gilgan’s call, I try in this chapter to better understand how ordinary Palestinian women understand and practice ‘resistance’, ‘peace’ and ‘politics’ in their everyday experiences and struggles by complementing conflict transformation theory and practice with insights from sociological, historical, feminist and especially anthropological scholarship on everyday resistance.

1.2. *Theories of Everyday Resistance in Anthropological and Sociological Literature*

In contrast to conflict transformation literature, which only very recently took notice of ordinary people's everyday struggles, scholars in other disciplines, particularly sociology and anthropology have focused since the 1970s on the notion of the everyday in their attempts to identify both the location and quality of transformative agency (see e.g. Bourdieu, 1977; de Certeau, 1984). Ethnographic studies of everyday social and political practices can contribute to unsettling universalist conceptualisation of resistance and change by revealing multiple alternative - but nevertheless political - modes of struggling. Scott put it in the following way:

So long as we confine our conception of *the political* to activity that is openly declared we are driven to conclude that subordinate groups essentially lack a political life, or that what political life they do have is restricted to those exceptional moments of popular explosion. To do so is to miss the immense political terrain that lies between quiescence and revolt, and that, for better or worse, is the political environment of subject classes (Scott, 1997: 323).

Recognising and studying the everyday as a political site offers new angles and entry points for understanding the functioning of power and resistance. While for Scott, 'hidden transcripts' clearly constitute a form of resistance with transformative power, scholars are disputing which actions should count as resistance and which should be termed otherwise.

Generally resistance scholars combine (but put different emphasis on) insights derived from a Marxist political economy structuralist approach and a poststructuralist theorisation of power as decentralised and operating not only at the material, but also at the cultural and discursive level through inscriptions of norms. Scholars tend to agree on three core elements of resistance: that it 1) refers to some form of *action* (verbally, physically or cognitive), 2) functions in *opposition* (challenge, subversion or circumvention) to domination, and 3) is *interdependent* with power (Einwohner and Hollaender, 2004). Foucault (1978: 95-6) famously argued that "[w]here there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power." His observation of resistance being conditioned by power is by now well established, not only in poststructuralist writing. Systems of power set the possibilities for distinct types of resistance

to emerge. Realising this inter-dependence between resistance and power (or agency and structure) should lead one to “use resistance as a diagnostic of power” (Abu-Lughod, 1990b: 42), i.e. as a way to better understand the material and ideational structural context in which and against which actors are strategising.

Scholarly contestations, however, start over two main criteria: whether resistance should be used only to describe acts that are *recognised* (by others) and are *conscious* (by the actors themselves). While some use the term resistance to describe a large range of small-scale acts - conscious and unconscious, individual and collective, recognised and unrecognised, at the material and ideational level, etc., and ascribe to them transformative power,¹¹³ others would prefer to “limit the term resistance to actions that have some degree of consciousness and collectivity about them, as well as some explicit attention to broad structures of domination” (Rubin, 1996: 239; see also Gutmann, 1993). Scott, who is often criticised for using the term too broadly, understood

rumours, gossip, folktales, songs, gestures, jokes, and theatre of the powerless as vehicles by which, among other things, they insinuate a critique of power while hiding behind anonymity or behind innocuous understandings of their conduct. These patterns of disguising ideological insubordination are somewhat analogous to the patterns by which, in my experience, peasants and slaves have disguised their efforts to thwart material appropriation of their labour, their production and their property: for example, poaching, foot-dragging, pilfering, dissimulation, flight. Together, these forms of insubordination might suitably be called the *infrapolitics* of the powerless (Scott, 1990: xii).

In contrast to overt collective nonviolent resistance, material and cultural everyday resistance thus is purposefully obfuscated. Scott maintains that “*infrapolitics* provides much of the cultural and structural underpinnings of the more visible political action” (Scott, 2005: 66). The (in)visibility of resistance, of ‘hidden transcripts’, thus, according to him, has little to say about its transformative potential but merely stems from the different goals and context of

¹¹³ Scott is often blamed for taking such a position, but his reply (Scott, 1993) to Gutmann’s critique (1993) in fact shows that his argument is more complex.

the resisters: while particularly symbolic nonviolent resistance aims to bring to public notice (gender and other) discriminatory assumptions and visually normalise alternative political subjectivities, covert everyday resistance sustains itself through exactly the opposite: it hides from view in order to protect the powerless resisters from repression and maintain the effectiveness of their acts.

For critics, however, the linkage and mutual support between covert and overt resistance, is questionable. Rubin, for example, finds that the application of the term resistance to unrecognised small-scale acts “risk[s] political demobilization with respect to collective movements for transformation” (Rubin 1996: 241, 239). While such a caution is warranted, a more nuanced approach to recognition of resistance is needed. When studying the functioning and effectiveness of ‘hidden transcripts’ one needs to carefully assess to whom these small-scale acts are (purposefully made) invisible (and visible), and how their (often tactically employed) visibility/invisibility determines the act’s successfulness (see Einwohner and Hollaender, 2004: 541).

The second point of contention concerns the actors own *intent/consciousness* to transform structures of domination. Do actors need to be conscious of their acts as challenging oppression, or should acts that unintentionally initiate changes also count as resistance? For Scott it is clear that resistance must be an intentional act, and he even specified that intent is a better marker of resistance than outcome (Scott, 1985: 290). Other resistance scholars, however, have relaxed the link between consciousness, action and effect to also include actions which are not targeted directly against oppressive structures or which might trigger unintended transformations (e.g. Abu-Lughod 1986/2000; Rothenberg; 2004). To claim, however, that even acts where the agent is not conscious of challenging structures of power constitute a form of resistance (see Einwohner and Hollaender, 2004: 542-544), might not only dilute the analytical purchase of the concept further, but also, paradoxically, and despite its aim to stress the significance of individual agency, deny agency. Intent and meaning of acts unquestionably are crucial for the analysis of resistance (Bayat, 2000, 2010; Rubin, 1996), but rather than generalising about actors’ intent (which in any case is difficult to assess), the main concern – just as with the issue of recognition – should be to disclose the multiple levels that one single act can target simultaneously, some of which might be consciously challenged, while others might undergo transformations without the explicit intention of the actor.

These contestations over the conceptualisation of resistance reveal that actors might often be engaged in multiple projects at the same time. One single act might not only be perceived differently by different constituencies, it might also have different effects on different structures of power: it might be visible and/or understood as resistance to some, while not to others; and it might be resisting some oppressive structures, while accommodating others (or indeed the same) simultaneously (see e.g. Ortner, 1995; Sivaramakrishnan, 2005). While poststructuralist insights have been central in revealing this ambiguity of everyday acts, the understanding of power as decentralised, however, also runs the risk to “underestimate state power, notably its class dimension, since it fails to see that although power circulates, it does so unevenly – in some places it is far weightier, more concentrated and ‘thicker’, so to speak, than in others” (Bayat, 2000: 544, see also Bayat, 2010). Particularly a context of stark power asymmetries and foreign occupation, such as the Palestinian, requires us to pay attention to the material bases of power distribution, as stressed more strongly in the Marxist political economy tradition. Power structures have different material (and consequently, also normative) impacts on different actors; these different imprints of systems of power set different possibilities for each actor to engage in distinct types of resistance.

Palestinian women devise different forms of everyday resistance according to their distinct positioning. Rather than devaluating their acts as a-political or heroifying them as unquestionably emancipatory, I aim to trace women’s multiple and hybrid subjectivities (in relation to different forms of oppression), and their ambiguous forms of agency: Which of the oppressive structures (patriarchal, class, nationalist, religious, occupation, etc.) do women accommodate and which might they challenge? Which do they consciously challenge, and which might be unintentionally transformed? Which of their acts are recognised or framed as resistance against which oppressive structure and by whom? In attempting to answer these questions, I follow a historically-contextualised and empirically-grounded approach which offers a more nuanced way of dealing with the sociological question of agency and structure or, more precisely, with that of consciousness, action and change.

2. Historical Overview of Women’s Everyday Resistance (*Şumūd*)

Taking Abu-Lughod’s (1990b) call to use resistance as a diagnostic of power seriously means, in the Palestinian context, to ask: How have understandings and practices of *şumūd*, or

everyday resistance, evolved since the First Intifada and what do these shifts reveal about changes in the matrix of intersecting internal and external, material and ideational, power structures?

2.1. Women as Bearers of Cultural Authenticity and the PLO's Institutionalised Şumūd Policies

Şumūd has commonly been understood as denoting survival and coping strategies aimed at perseverance and staying on the land. Mahmoud Darwish, writing in 1982, captures the spirit of *şumūd* (during the time when Beirut was under siege) well. Calling for “steadfastness”, he insisted that “[t]he important thing is to hold on. Holding on is a victory in itself” (Darwish, 1982: 62). Steadfastness was supposed to be practiced both on the physical level (through coping strategies and not being driven into exile), and mental level (through maintaining hope and preserving ‘Palestinianness’ in cultural, social and political practices and understandings):

Fear, shame and humiliation are supposed to drive us samidin into denouncing the fedayeen and into renouncing our sumud. The Israelis think they can force the following choice on us: relinquishing our sumud by physically leaving our land-exile; or mentally relinquishing our sumud by staying and collaborating with the occupiers (Shehade, 1982: 57).

Originally *şumūd* thus denoted an individual strategy which could be practiced by everyone. From the 70s onwards, however, *şumūd* became an institutionalised top-down policy, actively promoted by the PLO and supported through the Arab funds (Lindholm Schulz, 1999; Tamari, 1991). Women’s *şumūd* activism, although very pro-active and public, was reduced in the PLO’s nationalist-traditionalist discourse to symbolic ‘soft’ ‘feminine’ politics, embodied by the steadfast peasant mother who maintains livelihoods, cultural ‘authenticity’ and ideational spaces independent from Israeli domination.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ See Chapter IV (section 3.2) for a detailed overview of the PLO’s nationalist-traditionalist agenda which promoted institutionalised *şumūd* and the gender construction of the steadfast peasant mother.

Raja Shehade – although highly critical of institutionalised *ṣumūd* - also associates women with *ṣumūd*, finding that they, as a result of their suffering from (interlinked) social and political oppression, have unique potential to lead strategies for change:

The women have the hardest time with the occupation. Most of them must sit quietly at home and suffer the weight of their men's hurt pride as it comes down on to them. And this weight can be suffocating. [...] But I sometimes think that those few women who manage to survive this are the strongest of all samidin and it is they who will finally lead the revolt. [...] Perhaps it is the slow, deep flames of those women who do survive that will keep our *ṣumūd* alight, for it is they who know the patience and perseverance we need. Their flame is used to very little oxygen – the men's harsh, bright fire is much weaker (Shehade, 1982: 115).

Shehade here reiterates a feminist structuralist argument continuously put forward by Palestinian women activists (e.g. Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2004; Nashashibi, 2006): the analysis that external political oppression through the occupation reinforces internal political and social patriarchal control over women. Women, with their acts of steadfastness, thus struggle against multiple discriminatory forces simultaneously: they ease the material destruction caused by the occupation, but they also deal with the ideational effects that occupation policies have on Palestinian social dynamics and norms.

From the late 70s onwards institutionalised nationalist *ṣumūd* policies were criticised on several levels. It was seen as a form of non-resistance serving to prolong the status quo of occupation and as an elitist strategy aimed at strengthening class divides, but also those between 'insiders' (West Bank residents) and 'outsiders' (the PLO). Women suffered additional, gender-specific, discrimination from the PLO's institutionalised *ṣumūd* policies; it strengthened social conservatism by (1) leaving the interrelation between external political and internal patriarchal political power structures unaddressed and (2) by disregarding women's proactive contribution to development and resistance and elevating the steadfast peasant mother as symbol of *ṣumūd* (see Chapter IV, section 3.2; Tamari, 1991)

2.2. *The First Intifada and Collective Şumūd as “Suspension of Life”*

From the late 1970 onwards institutionalised *şumūd* gradually gave way to a more pro-active mass-based collective civil resistance (*muqāwma sha^cbīyya* or *muqāwma silmīyya*) with the gender construction of ‘female resistance activist’. Although the focus during the First Intifada was on resistance (*muqāwma*), *şumūd* remained present in political discourse. It was, however, re-interpreted and re-coded as ‘resistance steadfastness’ (*şumūd muqawam*) and now denoted less a strategy of passive stubborn holding on, but rather one of pro-active and even collective development through boycott, and self-reliance to ensure survival (Hammami, 2002). While collective protests and demonstrations fell under the rubric of nonviolent resistance (*muqāwma sha^cbīyya*), *şumūd* and *şumūd muqawam* was used for everyday steadfast resistance by *not* buying Israeli products, *not* opening schools, *not* paying taxes, *not* selling land and even *not* carrying on life rituals and celebrations as usual. The latter more covert everyday resistance (*şumūd* and *şumūd muqawam*), what Jean-Klein (2001: 96) has described as “suspension of life,” called upon people to live a strict and ascetic life and suspend everyday activities and joyful events. Living normally was seen as a form of normalising the abnormal situation of the occupation (*taṭbī^c*) and the suspension of everyday life, ordinary activities, joyful events and entertainment was considered a necessary sacrifice to the cause.¹¹⁵

After the Oslo Accords, *şumūd* discourse and practice persisted, both at the level of the political leadership and among ordinary people, but it was its developmentalist meaning, which had emerged during the First Intifada, that was foregrounded by the PA. In official post-Oslo political discourse, *şumūd* was used to describe the developmentalist political programme of state-, peace- and institution-building pursued by the PA. Although this was supposed to denote a change in interpretation of *şumūd* from survival to development, critics of the Oslo Accords and the PA remained sceptical. Edward Said, writing in 1995, for example, commented:

But one of the things that haunts me is that [...] we’ve only been able to think in terms of survival, steadfastness, sumud. We haven’t turned the corner to think in terms of actually winning, which is quite a different thing. To stay in one place, in order not to lose what one has

¹¹⁵ See Chapter IV (section 3 and 4) for a more detailed discussion of the discursive and practical shifts in *şumūd* and resistance (*muqāwma*) discourse in the lead up to and during the First Intifada.

– that’s very important and to a certain degree we’ve done that. We’ve remained a Palestinian people despite all the deprivations and the pressures and the Declaration of Principles and so on. There is a Palestinian national consciousness which is there. But we haven’t been able to find a mechanism or a method or a politics for converting dispossession into repossession, for converting defeat and loss, which is really the history of the last forty-five years, into something resembling an actual victory (Said, 1995: 71).

The DOP and the policies of two-stage negotiation for a two-state solution, for Said, meant stagnation, not development. His critique against the Oslo Accords thus is similar to criticisms brought forward against the PLO’s institutionalised *ṣumūd* policies in the 70s: that it is an elitist, determinist programme of accommodation, not victory or change. The fact that particularly in its cultural politics the PA continued to cherish *ṣumūd* as the preservation of ‘authentic’ Palestinian culture and tradition to forge a strong sense of national identity, embodied by the peasant mother, supports Said’s analysis.

2.3. *The Second Intifada and Individual Ṣumūd as “Affirmation of Life”*

Today, several years into the Second Intifada and with the prospects for peace- and state-building shattered, it is clear that the PA was not able to implement and realise its developmentalist *ṣumūd* policies. Most ordinary people have lost confidence in their leadership and have also stopped community practices of “self-nationalisation” and “suspension of life.” While originally in the early years after Oslo people started to resume normal everyday life hoping that the Oslo peace process would provide the structural conditions enabling them to do so, they now strive for normalcy and everyday pleasure in the immanent present for the opposite reason: since for most a stable future seems indefinitely delayed people opt for an everyday strategy of “affirmation of life” in the immanent present (Junka, 2006; see also Kelly, 2008; Allen, 2008).

A significant redefinition of practices and discourses of everyday resistance has thus taken place over the last decade. People now increasingly argue that simply carrying on a normal joyful life, to affirm life under abnormal situations and despite the destruction, death and frustration around them, constitutes a form of resistance, of *ṣumūd*. Carrying on a normal life

can take various dimensions: finding ways to counter the dire material and financial situation; re-appropriating fragmented and occupied living spaces; or simply the ability to enjoy (and make others enjoy) normal life and find hope, despite the hopeless situation. Although many use the term resistance (*muqāwma*), *ṣumūd*, or a combination of the two (*ṣumūd muqawam*) to describe these material, physical and symbolical acts of defying Israeli control, one needs to interrogate whether such framings might in fact be an attempt to conform and adhere to the nationalist meta-discourse of resistance. With these questions in mind, the following two sections will analyse understandings, practices and framings of *ṣumūd* on the material and ideational level respectively.

3. *Amal* – Everyday Resistance and the Material Level

Prolonged war, conflict and violence have a deep effect not only on political and economic conditions, but also on people's everyday life and the cultural norms and social fabric of the community. Cockburn finds that war has the effect of

rending the fine fabric of everyday life, its interlaced economies, its material systems of care and support, its social networks, the roofs that shelter it. This affects women, who in most societies have a traditional responsibility for the daily reproduction of life and community in ways that are both class and gender specific. The poorest are the least able to escape the war zone and buy protection (Cockburn, 2004: 35).

Women are not only most hard hit (in often unrecognised ways) by daily direct and structural violence, but also are overwhelmingly responsible to find ways to cope with the physical and psychological destructions caused by war. The survival strategies women devise depend on their specific context, and they are, as Cockburn stresses, class specific.

Conventional studies of war pay little attention to the everyday, let alone to women's (often covert and unrecognised) daily life struggles to (re-)create normality.¹¹⁶ I focus in this section on the ordinary and the “apparently boring” (Kelly, 2008: 353) of Palestinian women's survival strategies on the physical level: how they manage to provide food, housing, work,

¹¹⁶ For exceptions, see Richter-Devroe (2008); Shalhoub Kevorkian (2004, 2009); Taraki (eds., 2006)

healthcare, childcare, etc. and find ways to maintain – to the extent possible – a normal ordinary everyday life for themselves, their family and community. Women have had to find ways to react to the changing nature of the occupation as well as the ways it transforms internal power constellations and their grips on society.

Although over the last decades the model of resistance fighter has become less attractive for Palestinian men, who instead strive to fulfil their kinship obligations as economic providers, women nevertheless have had to take on significant roles in sustaining the household economy. A great number of men, being imprisoned or harmed, are unable to fulfil their role as providers. Men's employment has declined sharply since 2000, following mobility restrictions, destruction caused by Operation Defensive Shield and the subsequent closure of the Israeli labour market to Palestinian workers (see e.g. WB, 2010; PCBS, 2010). In response to male retreat from the market, women's economic activities have expanded since 2000 to meet economic needs (WB, 2010: 21). Palestinian women's participation in formal labour force, having averaged around 10% since 1967 and recently reaching its peak at a low approximate of 15,5% (Kuttab, 2006: 233; PCBS, 2010; WB, 2010), nevertheless, remains among the lowest in the world (WB, 2010: xv). These statistics, however, say little about women's actual participation in the household economy. Women's work is mainly informal, low-paid and unprotected.

When women sneak secretly into Israel to reach their employment there; when they find ways to access their farm lands; when they open small-scale enterprises (*jam^cīyyāt*) for home production of livestock, food, embroidery or other goods; when they join charitable organisations or voluntary work associations; when they establish money lending circles with friends and community or when they support family businesses, their activities are overwhelmingly considered an extensions of women's household activities, thus not falling into the category of paid work. In their attempts to generate supplementary family income, women thus mostly engage in unpaid unrecognised work at the margins of the informal economy (WB 2010: 43).¹¹⁷ The following section will trace how women practice, understand and frame their survival strategies. I will show that although such acts are neither a direct nor an overt form of resistance to the material and political aspects of the occupation,

¹¹⁷ A 2003 PCBS survey revealed that among the 99.000 workers involved in 55000 informal sector establishments, 85% were unpaid (PCBS, 2003 quoted in WB, 2010).

they are nevertheless meaningful and can function as a first trigger for social and political changes.

3.1. Cases

Ilham (introduced already in chapter II) is a peasant woman in her 40s. She lives in a village near Ramallah in the house of her paternal uncle. As a result of the construction of the wall, which cuts off substantial parts of the villagers' lands, Ilham has lost access to some of the family's farmlands. She has livestock, but, since most of the male members of her family are unemployed, imprisoned or dead she and her mother had to find ways to crop the lost lands on the other side of the wall to maintain the family. When crossing over to the other side, she often is caught by Israeli soldiers. For example, of the first time she tried to gain access to her land after the construction of the wall, she told me the following:

When we went there, they said that we are not allowed to access the fields. They said it is a military zone of the army. We said that we just wanted to work on the field and get the harvest. But they said: "No, it is forbidden!" All of my land was lost. Wheat, olives, fowl, onions, humus beans – everything just went (Ilham, 2008).

Additionally to trying to access her land in often covert ways, she – just as the other villagers - tries to farm those lands, which she could hold on to, more intensely: "We still have the land of my grandfather. We eat and drink from that. My brother also gave us some land. Now we live from that land - all of us." Ilham has always played an important role in maintaining the family household. Her father died when she was still young:

They [the Israeli army] killed my father when I was 12. He was just 52. They shot him straight through the heart. Directly. I saw him there lying in all the blood. I went crazy. So then my father was gone. We [my mother and me] went to Israel to get work. We were working and feeding the others. By God, I tired myself, and my mother, too, she was exhausted. My oldest brother was 18 and he was doing his *tawjihī* [A-Levels]. We did all this work and we got older - and after al that they [the Israelis] just come, take our land and we can't eat.

They came here and imposed themselves on us and then they put the wall. What shall we do? (Ilham, 2008).

Her account shows that, although men were and are required to fulfil the role of the breadwinner, in reality women often play a major – but often quiet and unrecognised – role in maintaining the family. Ilham even contributed to financing her brother's education. In the current situation, however, after increased restrictions have been imposed by the Israeli government since 2000 and particularly after the construction of the wall, she finds it much harder to persevere and invent economic strategies to support her kin:

Now, that the Israelis put the wall everything is forbidden. [Whenever I go to the annexed farmland] the soldiers tell me to go back to my house. But I refuse and I insist that I will pick my olives. They threatened to shoot me if I enter, but I said: "OK – yalla, go ahead. I better die here." There is a door in the wall where we can pass through. This year we went to pick the olives and the soldiers were guarding this door. It was hot and we needed water. They didn't want to let us back through and started hitting us. I hit them back – if only we had weapons like them, but we only have stones. This is our land on which we grow our food - just that, nothing more (Ilham, 2008).

Ilham, like all other village women I spoke to, is prepared to fight for her land. Statistics reveal that a great majority of village women have come to act as major tenders of the farmland. Men's employment on farms has decreased from 32% in the early 1970 to 12% in 2008. Women's moving out of agriculture has been much slower. In 1970 57% of women in the labour force were involved in agriculture, dropping to 30% by 1989, and inching up to 30.7% in 2008. As rural men became first integrated into the Israeli labour market and then unemployed, rural women continued working on the family farms. Since much of women's agricultural work became redefined as extensions of housework, remaining largely unpaid and unrecognised, the numbers of women farmers might even be higher. Agricultural work is a major area though which women have tried to maintain the family economy and livelihoods (WB, 2010: 25, 27, 37-38). They – often in accordance with their unemployed husbands – claim that it is easier for women to sneak around Israeli-imposed barriers and that the

violence and threats they receive are less harmful than those that their male kin would have had to face (e.g. Interview Ilham, Feryal, Asma, 2008)

Additionally to either direct confrontations or covert circumvention of Israeli mobility prohibitions to access annexed farmlands, women tend to rely on support structures provided by their extended family and community. Ilham, for example, told me that “now that I cannot reach my land and I cannot feed my family, I have to take from other houses, from my father’s family, from my mother, or even from neighbours.” With the absence of state-led support, informal community structures are often the only networks left to sustain the family economy. Women, as my interviews in line with other studies (e.g. Taraki, eds. 2006) show, are vital in upholding and reviving these informal support structures. Many village women organise collectively to reduce costs, maximise production and guarantee more protection. They found small-scale organisation (*jam‘īyyāt*) for food production, processing and selling, and even in their attempts to sneak into Jerusalem to sell agricultural products in the Old City, they tend to come together in groups to reduce costs for travel and be safer (Interview, Amani, 2009).

Many women exchanged and/or showed off their novel coping techniques to each other. In a focus group in Bethlehem, for example, women from different religious backgrounds (but socio-economically among the better-off) were trying to outdo each other. One woman remarked that during times of curfew:

We had long periods when there was no electricity, so everything in the fridge was destroyed. The soldiers were shooting into the water tanks, so we had no water. We had no water, no electricity and no telephone line – what could we do? When the water in the tanks was finished, we always had an alternative and got water from the well in the garden...When all the food in the fridge went off and we had nothing left – what could I do? I started to bake cakes. I baked a cake every day, all throughout the curfew for 40 days we ate cake (Focus Group A, 2008).

These cases provide just a small glimpse into the various and widely diverging coping tactics that women are inventing to ensure family survival. One of the major themes dominating

women's survival acts is the loss of control over land and space. Not only have many lost their major source of subsistence, their farmlands, but they are also unable to reach work, send their children to school, keep alive economic ties between rural and urban areas, meet friends, family and kin (and thus sustain informal support networks). If understood as diagnostic of changing power relations, women's survival techniques after 2000 thus reveal spatial control as one of fields in which Israeli domination has tightened immensely.

3.2. *Tightening of Israeli Spatial Control*

Israeli spatial control policies, as outlined in Chapter VI (section 4), have intensified since Oslo. They take not only physical, but also institutional and administrative dimensions. Israeli authorities have full control over the movements of goods, people, and resources and, having fragmented the West Bank into a set of social, political and economic cantons, they are able to interfere into Palestinian men's and women's everyday life. The spatial dismemberment of the Palestinian community has had severe damaging impact on Palestinian economic opportunities, such employment strategies (Roy, 2004), social practices, such as marriage patterns (Johnson, 2006) as well as political organisation and action, which has become increasingly fragmented and localised (Taraki, 2008). These impacts are not gender neutral; it is mainly women's social networks – important sources of women's social and political power - that have been destroyed through spatial control. Although women often had to replace men in the labour market, their access to the market remains severely restricted, often putting women at high risk in unrecognised, unpaid and unsecured jobs.

Women tend to relate their acts of temporarily regaining control over the land to two different – an older and a newer – interpretation of *ṣumūd*. Firstly, they use the older understanding of *ṣumūd* as a strategy to hold on to the land. In a discussion group with Palestinian women in Bethlehem, the first answers to my question about the meaning of *ṣumūd* were: “to stay on the land,” “not to sell our land,” “to stay here even though there are many problems,” “not to emigrate,” “to host people from all over the world,” “to stay even though we are suffering,” “to bear what is happening, to stay on [our] land, not to leave it” (Focus Group AEI, 2007). Nationalist discourses, both in its everyday usage and in more formal politics, celebrates, this understanding of *ṣumūd*.

Yet, as discussed above, this discourse of *ṣumūd* in its understanding of preserving the land, is often criticised for not having transformative potential and thus not constituting a forward-looking resistance strategy for the Palestinian struggle (e.g. Said, 1995; Tamari, 1991). Such strategies of survival and coping, if not accompanied by active collective political action, risk being deterministic, prolonging the occupation and might in fact function as a self-imposed humanitarian relief programme, which sidesteps historical and geopolitical causes of conflict. *Ṣumūd*, as the facilitator of the AEI women's group in Bethlehem stressed after the women's initial answers, should mean more than staying on the land "*ṣumūd* is *ʿamal wa ʿamal*—it is hope and action/work." For him and other critics only such a proactive *ṣumūd-as-action* (which resonates with the concept of *ṣumūd muqawam*) has potential to bring about and sustain change.

When discussing whether and if so in which forms *ṣumūd* can constitute an effective strategy for Palestinian resistance, it remains, however, important to situate these practices within the changing articulations of Israeli settler-colonial policies. Land-related framings of *ṣumūd* had a different meaning in the 1980s than they have today in the post-2000 context of tightened Israeli spatial control. Given that the structural and direct violence imposed through Israeli settler-colonial policies today is more intruding into Palestinian everyday life than it was in the 1980s, the act of defying this violence, by, for example, accessing or moving across the land, should not be devaluated as a mere passive holding on to the land. Hammami (2004), for example, finds that the most common forms of Palestinian *ṣumūd* against the occupation today is "getting there". This new meaning of *ṣumūd* is decidedly different from its original understanding. Now it stands for something more proactive. "Its new meaning, found in the common refrain, "*al-hayat lazim tistamirr*" ("life must go on") is about resisting immobility, refusing to let the army's lockdown of one's community preclude one from reaching school or work" (Hammami, 2004: 27). Gaining control and using the occupied space through the 'mere' movement of "getting there" is a way to survive, and for many this insistence on carrying on with life constitutes a form of everyday resistance, of proactive *ṣumūd*, *muqawam*.

To understand women's material coping acts better, de Certeau's (1984, xix) notion of tactics of everyday life is helpful:

The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansion, and secure independence with respect to circumstances. [...] it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized "on the wing." Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into "opportunities." The weak must continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them.

With their *ṣumūd* acts women never directly challenge, but rather find ways around the restrictions imposed on them by the occupation. These gains are temporary and small-scale only: Although Ilham might have managed to convince the soldiers to allow her to pick olives today, she must negotiate access to her annexed farmlands all over again tomorrow. Similarly, while women do invent a multitude of different ways to cope in times of curfew often relying on informal community and family networks, their acts are not a collective political strategy of resistance. Women do not (and do not claim to) challenge the status quo of the occupation by sneaking to their farm lands or by baking cakes in times of curfews. Their tactics to survive are not premised on effecting long-term political change. They cannot be. There is no way they realistically can revert Israeli policies of spatial control and fully take control of the physical space. As the disproportionately weaker actor they can only trick the much more powerful Israeli authorities, gain access to 'their' space and subvert the power relations from within by making use of it for their own good.

Glorifying women's everyday survival techniques as effective political resistance against Israeli occupation, therefore, obscures a deeper understanding of the functioning of their acts. The fact that women with their survival and coping acts do not (intend to) directly challenge, let alone change political oppressive structures might mean that Scott's optimistic analysis of peasants' everyday resistance being transformative in intent and outcome is not applicable in the Palestinian context of occupation and settler-colonial policies. Palestinian women's material survival acts are not a long-term resistance strategy to end the occupation; they are tactics with which women can only temporarily circumvent colonial-settler policies. Their tactics are ad hoc, improvised and most of the time – although women do from time to time

frame them as resistance (a point I return to below) – they devise them first of all out of mere necessity without attaching much broader political meaning or demands to it.¹¹⁸

Yet, although Palestinian women’s material coping struggles often start out without explicit political meaning attached to them, one should also not jump to the conclusion and see them as merely reactionary apolitical acts that do nothing but maintain the status quo. Allen (2008), in line with other more recent anthropological and sociological analyses (e.g. Kelly, 2008; Hammami, 2004) finds a way neither to over- nor to underestimate the transformative potential of everyday acts. Analysing Palestinian practices of getting around, by and used to the physical and structural violence of the occupation, she finds that, although their acts seldom are inflected with nationalist or political meaning and generally do not have determinate political effects, they, nevertheless, can be influential to social and political dynamics. She proposes the concept of “getting by” to better capture the ways in which ordinary people manage their everyday survival. Survival in this context of harsh physical and spatial control, according to her, is a way to reappropriate and sometimes even resist subjectifying colonial measures.

In many of the villages encircled by the wall, individual women at first tried to find ways to access their lands, then they got involved in confrontations with soldiers which consequently triggered off more collective nonviolent resistance demonstrations, protest or even small-scale movements. Although most women did not – at least in the beginning – understand their defiance of Israeli mobility restrictions as outrightly political acts, but rather did what they thought was most urgent and most meaningful to do, their acts did trigger broader collective political protest movements. Although, as the previous chapter has shown, such collective civil resistance also did not result in concrete political change it did endow women with a feeling of empowerment. The feeling that they can and continue to do something against the Israeli settler-colonial policies, thus constitutes a way to resist the occupation of their minds (a point I will elaborate below in section 4.2).

¹¹⁸ Advancing a similar critique, Bayat (1997, 2010), has found Scott’s everyday resistance paradigm to be inapplicable for studying the “street politics” and “quiet encroachment” of the urban poor in Iran. He finds that that ordinary people’s “quiet encroachment” on the powerful often starts without much political meaning attached to it, but rather is justified on moral grounds.

3.3. *Tightening of Patriarchal Control*

Given its gender-specific impact, Israeli spatial control has also provoked gender-specific forms of resistance. Siham explained how *ṣumūd* is gender-specific:

I think that women shoulder a lot of *ṣumūd* [...] In the current economic situation a lot people don't have work. Men often are frustrated and don't care anymore. They want to sleep, to smoke, etc. - so then, in many cases, women start to think how they can go out and provide protection and security for their children. Women have to be more practical...because they are responsible for the house (Siham, 2008).

Nearly all of my female interviewees stressed women's more pragmatic sides. They tended to refer to their male kin's inability to provide, but also stress their own innovativeness in finding new ways to feed their families and provide them with a functioning home. It is true that male unemployment is very high. Nearly 60% of Palestinian men were unemployed as of 2007 and those who do have employment work mainly in the informal sector, in small-scale businesses. Their income is neither a sufficient nor a reliable source for the family economy (WB, 2010: xiv).

The traditional role of men as providers thus clearly has been challenged, but the fact that women often had to step in as breadwinner does not mean that kinship-based patriarchy has been eroded. The occupation has brought the near collapse of the public, social, and moral order. There are no protection mechanisms for the weak, particularly for women (see WB 2010: 46). Women, not only are in risk of Israeli acts of gendered violence through, for example, body searches at the checkpoints, but also have to negotiate through internal patriarchal control. Given the increased fear of sexual harassment, the honour shame complex has been strengthened. Most of the unmarried girls I spoke to told me of their difficulties to convince their parents to allow them to go on (often very unpredictable) journeys to reach their universities or jobs. Social conservatism and patriarchal oversight, however, has increased not only because men control women's movements more, but also because many women claim and demand their part of the "patriarchal bargain" (Kandiyoti, 1991b). Women adhere (and police other women to conform) to established social gender norms (particularly

modesty codes), and, in return, demand men to comply with their role as economic providers. In situations of economic, political and social instability women thus often are complicit in reinforcing social conservatism.

One might also question whether associating women's work with holding on to the land and ensuring family survival might bear the danger of reducing their political contributions to their reproductive, caring and providing role. Peteet, writing about Palestinian refugee women in the Lebanese camps, found that "the qualities that characterise *ṣumūd* are also those that are characteristic of femininity - silent endurance and sacrifice for others (family and community)" (Peteet 1991: 153). Associating women and femininity with *ṣumūd*, however, does not necessarily victimise and relegate them back to the apolitical, passive sphere. Rather, it can also have the opposite effect, as expressed by Najla, a women's activist working mainly with rural and urban women:

Palestinian women tend to be portrayed as victims of the occupation, patriarchal society, history, etc. - and it is true that these things could have easily victimised women. But, as I see in my work [with women from rural or camp areas], it has not victimised them. These women are not victims—they are survivors, they are powerful and continue every day to find different forms of resistance to survive. This is *ṣumūd* (Najla 2007).

Ṣumūd, if understood and practiced in such an active way, does not necessarily assign women a passive role of victims in the struggle. All women I spoke to cherished their innovative survival strategies; they exchange tactics and actively help each other. Although they might not inflect their coping strategies explicitly with political meaning, they view themselves as active agents, rather than passive victims when engaging in and devising *ṣumūd* strategies.

Women's *ṣumūd* strategies might be a first step leading to more public political agency, but also towards more feminist-conscious social activism. Although women's initial motivation for devising and practicing *ṣumūd* usually stems from their "female consciousness" of defending and protecting family and community life, it might lead them to develop a more

“feminist consciousness” (Peteet 1991: 97).¹¹⁹ Women who come together in small-scale income generating organisations (*jam^cīyyāt*), who find ways to access their land, and to sell their products, of course, are first of all concerned with practical survival issues, but their coming together with other women and their joint defiance of internal patriarchal as well as external political control over their mobility, also heightens their (feeling of) social, economic and political empowerment.

In general, however, female everyday coping and survival acts remain largely unrecognised, also by women themselves. As Najla explained to me “this form of more indirect national resistance is very important and needs to be recognised as such. Women need to be reminded that their work, their everyday resistance, is important and an integral part of Palestinian resistance. They need to be proud of that and need to be strengthened” (Najla, 2007). She here makes a crucial point: that a widening of social, political and economic practices needs to be accompanied by a change in discourse and consciousness which recognises these acts, if it is to affect change.

Ṣumūd is political and should be studied as one of women’s bargaining strategies which can have significant social and political implications and might even constitute a first step towards more conscious collective and interventionist political and social activism. As such it is very relevant for Track III conflict transformation approaches. By working with contextualised, publicly accepted gender notions and addressing socioeconomic structural causes of the conflict, women are widely mobilised to these informal nonviolent everyday survival tactics. Women’s involvement in *ṣumūd* activities has contributed to sharpening their social and political consciousness and women consider themselves as active agents of change, not passive victims of conflict or mere recipients of aid. For gender and conflict transformation approaches this implies that addressing *practical* (gender) interests is crucial not only because it provides women with security and a basic livelihood, but also because the satisfaction of basic material needs should in itself be seen as a first step toward women’s empowerment (Kabeer 1994). In order to sustain women’s advances, gained mainly through expanding economic *practices*, women need to, however, ensure that their acts are recognised as politically and socially significant through a change in gendered political *discourses* as well.

¹¹⁹ See chapter III for a background discussion on definitions of gender, women’s, female and feminist activism, including a summary of Peteet’s (1991) analytical distinction between “female and feminist consciousness”.

4. 'Amal – Everyday Resistance at the Ideational Level

Ṣumūd takes place not only on the material level through *amal* (work/action) and practical survival strategies, but also on the ideational level through keeping up 'amal (hope), trying to lead a normal joyful life and resisting the Israeli occupation of the mind.¹²⁰ Particularly, the strategy of keeping a critical, humorous distance to the cruelties of the occupation is adopted by a large majority of Palestinians today. A great majority of my interviewees, particularly those not engaged in formal activism and from lower socio-economic status, stressed that since they have no control over determining their futures, they prefer to focus on the 'here and now,' affirming and making the best of what they have in each moment. Marwan, a friend from Gaza, for example, illustrated clearly to me how people find ways to laugh at the occupation. I had tried to contact him all throughout the Israeli attacks on Gaza in 2008/9, but never received a reply from him. Then, on 18 January 2008, the first day of a very fragile ceasefire, he suddenly filled my Inbox with several jokes, including the following: An Israeli arrives at London's Heathrow airport. As he fills out the entry form, the immigration officer asks him: "Occupation?" The Israeli promptly replies: "No, no, just visiting!"

Marwan's outpouring of humour and jokes, coming from Gaza which had been under constant bombardment and attack for more than three weeks, left me somewhat confused. In response to my question why he can still make jokes about the Israeli occupation, he answered me in a later email:

...about Gaza and the Israeli aggression, believe me it was the worst days in my life, very difficult, ugly and horrible especially on the kids. 8 windows were broken in my flat. My wife and the kids were in the room and the glass broke on them, but thank God nothing happened to them. Plus the sound of the explosions with the sound of the F16 made my kids, and even us, suffer until this moment. My kids now are scared of everything, even if the door [just] shuts strongly from the wind. [...] About [the question of] how we can still make jokes about Israelis and the occupation? - Because we have to,

¹²⁰ See, for example, contributions and analysis in van Teeffelen (2007) where the concept of *ṣumūd* is predominantly related to the search for hope, joy and a normal life.

we have to live and yes, you can call it “*ṣumūd*” (Marwan, 2009, emphasis and diacritics added).

This is not to claim that for all Palestinians the Israeli occupation and military attacks have become a mere joke; to the contrary: the fact that many now deal with the unbearable situation through irony and humorous distancing, highlights their quest for a normal life despite the abnormality around them.¹²¹ Palestinian novelist Liana Badr in her recent novel “The March of the Dinosaurs” describes the Israeli tank approaching as a dinosaur, and as “an enormous hen clucking, or like the Cyclops with its single eye, and the roar as it drew breath” (Badr, 2009: 388). She tells of people’s quest for normal life during the Israeli army attacks on the West Bank in 2002 and how people decided to stubbornly carry with their life. The protagonist, for example, finds the following strategy: “I vowed not to accept the loss of my everyday life, and resolved to exercise daily so my body would not become feeble and weak. Exercises had to be the best way to obliterate the daily grind – like taking tranquilisers to cure the feeling of confinement” (Badr, 2009: 389). Additionally to exercises, she relates how other joys of life can function as a way to resist o- and de-pression caused by the occupation:

Previously, I had always succumbed to that fear which makes the Occupation so burdensome, rejecting any enjoyment of the music, as though simply listening to it during an incursion was a crime. But now [when she decides to change her habit and listen to music], I felt their cruel desire to impose themselves on our lives with their aggressive presence suddenly lighten to an astonishing degree (Badr, 2009: 390).

Badr here not only confirms the shift in practices and discourses on everyday resistance that scholars have written about as moving from “suspension of life” during the First Intifada (Jean-Klein, 2001) to “affirmation of life” (in the protagonist’s case the decision to resume listening to music) (Junka, 2006), but she also specifically stresses the positive emancipatory impact that such stubborn insistence to carry on and enjoy normal life despite the occupation can have on the mental level.

¹²¹ Contemporary Palestinian art, in particular, has over the last years increasingly adopted a more cynical stance towards the occupation and Palestinian resistance. See e.g. Elias Suleiman’s latest film “The time that remains” (2010) for a semi-autobiographical work that portrays Palestinian history since 1948 through distance, irony and black humour.

It is this form of *ṣumūd* that Palestinian women from various backgrounds continuously stressed to me: their everyday struggles to maintain a normal and – to the extent possible – enjoyable life for themselves, their children and families, *despite* destruction, frustration and death around them. Lama, who was born and raised in Askeri refugee camp in Nablus, explained her *ṣumūd* in the following way to me:

When we were students in school [...] me and my best female friends we used to talk a lot about our vision for the future for our children. How much you need to keep yourself together, so that you will stay strong, despite all the sadness around you. How much you need to remain steadfast (*ṣāmid*).

Women organise wedding and other celebrations for their sons and daughters, despite economic hardship, they take their families to visit relatives and friends in other parts of the West Bank and they gather women through mainly informal networks to go on trips and picnics in the countryside, despite restrictions of mobility through checkpoints and closure. The fact that particularly women now overwhelmingly are engaged in finding ways to pursuit a normal joyful life and the fact that they identify and frame these struggles as a form of everyday resistance and *ṣumūd*, is crucial. Why at this moment in time do particularly Palestinian women put emphasis on keeping up hope, normalcy and a joyful life? What can their changing understandings, framings and practices of *ṣumūd* tell us about developments in the nature of the Israeli occupation and shifts in the matrix of different internal and external power structures?

Linking the discussion to the previous elaborations on material resistance and spatial control, I present in this section the cases of three Palestinian women, Najla, Amal and Karima (already introduced as my friends/key informants in chapter II) who frame their pursuit of everyday pleasure through travelling (i.e. through regaining control of space) as an act of *ṣumūd*. My discussion of these three detailed cases highlights that women's claiming their right to an ordinary joyful life certainly is a political (yet not necessarily transformative) act. While their acts might be a tactic to temporarily circumvent Israeli control over physical space, they also are a way for women to resist Israeli control of their mind as well as to (secretly) challenge material and normative forms of patriarchal control.

4.1. Cases

4.1.1. Najla

Najla is originally from a small village near Bethlehem, but like many other university graduates has moved to Ramallah to find a job there. She is not too happy with her job as a trainer for women's groups, but is grateful for having a source of income at all. She finds life in Ramallah boring and misses her family a lot. Every Thursday after work she embarks on the unpredictable journey with a shared taxi from Ramallah to her home village near Bethlehem. Since Palestinians with a West Bank ID like her cannot travel the direct way from Ramallah to Bethlehem through Jerusalem (which would take around an hour) she has to travel on the often make-shift roads that wind through *Wādī Nār*, "The Valley of Fire". If there are no delays, the trip can be done in 1.5 hours, but mostly, because of traffic jams caused by closed or only partially open checkpoints, it takes much longer.

When not travelling back home to her family, Najla uses the weekends to visit friends from school and university in different places of the West Bank. There is hardly a weekend where she stays in Ramallah, because, as she explained to me, "I need to see my friends and enjoy life. I refuse to be locked up here in Ramallah and just spend my life working. I go, even if there are checkpoints and it takes long. I need to have a change of scenery (*taghyīr al-jaww*) from time to time." Her expression *taghyīr al-jaww* ('a change of scenery', *lit.* 'a change of air/climate') is very common – it captures well the feeling of being stuck in one place, always breathing the same air, with nothing new or exciting happening. Her story also shows that even a leisure trip within the West Bank, clearly is a struggle of regaining control over land and living space.

4.1.2. Amal

Amal is a mother of four - two boys and two girls - in her 40s. Originally from a village not far from Ramallah, she used to live with her husband in Ar-Ram, one of East Jerusalem's neighbourhoods that were sealed off from the city when the wall was constructed. In order not to lose their Jerusalem IDs, to continue her work in one of Jerusalem's hospitals and for her kids' to be able to complete their education in Jerusalem, she and her family were forced to leave their family home and move to a rented flat in Beit Hanina, an area of East Jerusalem on

the other 'Jerusalem' side of the wall. Amal used to be an active member of the Communist party and, as she told me, used to work in different women's committees participating in demonstrations and cooperative work during the First Intifada. Her husband still is active in politics and a member of the leftist political initiative *al-Mubādara*. Amal also was approached by her husband's political party and has worked with them for a short while, but then, she told me, "I stopped. There is absolutely no point these days. Now I prefer to work as an individual, as Amal. I can, for example, go and treat sick people or help in any other way as an individual – but not in a collective, not in a political party."

Amal likes to enjoy life. The first time I met her she welcomed me with a beaming smile into her flat, dragged me into the kitchen, served me a huge plate of *maqlūba* and poured me a glass of Arak. With her female friends, many of whom used to be active in the communist party as well, she organises regular meetings and trips to different parts of the West Bank, a great deal of which is spend with eating, telling stories of the past and laughing about husbands (who are not allowed to join). "When I really want to relax, however," Amal told me one day, "then I take my book and go to the settlement nearby." I was surprised to hear that - of all places - she chooses a settlement to enjoy life. Although Amal was not referring to the highly secured Israeli settlements in the West Bank (which are impossible for Palestinians to access), but to those inside Jerusalem, I still could not imagine how and why, as a Palestinian, it could be relaxing there and I wondered if it would not even be dangerous. She explained to me that she would wear sunglasses and a shirt with short sleeves, so that no one can recognise her as Palestinian. "They think I am a Jewish woman. I can sit there and read my book and no one bothers me. They have nice gardens and parks there. Where can I go here [in East Jerusalem]? We have nothing here, and even if I would find a bench somewhere people would look strangely at me."

Although Amal's financial situation, in comparison to that of other Palestinians, is relatively secure, her life is not void of problems and suffering. To the contrary: her father was killed by an Israeli soldier when she was still young, she is working hard (and fighting with the Israeli authorities) to be able to afford the overprized rent and Jerusalem municipality tax (*Arnona*)¹²² for her flat in Beit Hanina to keep her, her children's and her husband's Jerusalem ID. Nevertheless, Amal has decided to affirm life in the present and make the best of what

¹²² The *Arnona* tax (*Arnona* is a Hebrew term) is disproportionately high in annexed East Jerusalem where little services are offered to the Palestinian residents. See Vitullo (1996) or the website of the Jerusalem Center for Social and Economic Rights at www.jcser.org for further information.

there is, even if this means finding sneaky ways to gain access to spaces formally out of her reach and control.

4.1.3. *Karima*

Karima is a forceful and restless woman in her 60s. She lives in a house near Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem and the wall cuts through her backyard, but, as she stresses over and over again, she will remain *ṣāmida* (steadfast). "All the shops around my home, all the area which used to be so vibrant and full of life is dead now. Nobody can work here. So my home here is my *ṣumūd*. We will stay in our home. They put the wall and they took the land without asking."

Karima, however, is also a self-declared ambassador of Palestine: "I see myself as the ambassador of peace and justice. I need to meet Israelis face-to-face to tell them about our suffering here and what they do to us, so that they cannot escape their responsibility and guilt," she told me after the joint Palestinian-Israeli women's meeting in Haifa (referred to already in chapter II). As the meeting's Palestinian coordinator, she had got together ca. 20 Palestinian women, mainly friends from Bethlehem, and managed to secure travel permits for them to go to Haifa for this workshop. When I joined the meeting, there was clear tension between the Palestinian women and Rachel, the Israeli programme instructor. Most Palestinian women I spoke to complained that the topic of the workshop, communication skills and self-empowerment, is irrelevant to their situation, that they felt patronised by the treatment of the Israeli instructor who, according to them, did not allow any discussion about everyday life under occupation. Rachel, however, criticised the Palestinian women for not taking the course seriously and for "just coming here to have fun."

She was right. The Palestinian women did indeed come to Haifa to have fun. Hala, a young university graduate, told me in her very im- (and ex-)pressive English:

I came to this meeting because I wanted to see Haifa and I wanted to take a break from my life in Bethlehem. Yes, you can write this in your research. I only came here to have fun. I have no problem saying that. But then – what sort of fun is that? It is not fun for me to come here and listen to her [Rachel's] bullshit. It is much better for me if I speak to my Palestinian friends who understand the situation and who

understand my feelings. There is no point to tell her anything about my life or about me (Hala, 2008).

When I met Karima a couple of weeks later in Bethlehem she immediately wanted to explain to me what had happened in Haifa. Staying true to her mission of confronting Israelis with reality, she replied back to (non-present, of course) Rachel:

Yes, we came here to enjoy! It is our right as Palestinians to also come here to Haifa to have fun. You stole our land [Karima's family is originally from Haifa], our water, our rights and our freedom. So the least we can do is to come here to our land, go to the beach and have fun. There is nothing wrong with that. Or do you really think I want to come here so that you can teach me how to communicate? (Karima, 2008)

Karima thus added yet another layer to how women understand and frame their travel practices to enjoy life. She states that it is her *right* as Palestinian to use and enjoy those spaces now inside Israel.

The previous stories provide different illustrations of how Palestinian women struggle daily to enjoy life through trips, gaining space and *taghyīr al-jaww* ('a change of scenery', *lit.* 'a change of air/climate'). They state that it is their right to have fun and relax in life, and strive to keep up or reproduce a sense of normalcy and hope, despite the destruction, death and frustration they are caught in. Najla's, Amal's and Karima's attempts to carry on with everyday life, by using and enjoying to the extent possible their fragmented and occupied living space provide important insights into their practical and discursive negotiating with changing systems of domination. Such an attempt to lead and provide for one's family an ordinary joyful life – and more importantly the framing of this struggle as an act of *ṣumūd* – is decidedly different to practices and understandings of resistance during the First Intifada and thus points to changes in the inter-workings of power and resistance in Palestine.

4.2. *Resisting (the Effects of) Israeli Settler-Colonial Policies*

4.2.1. A Tactic to Circumvent Israeli Spatial Control

Clearly, all three women through their trips are attempting to gain control over their fragmented and controlled living spaces. Najla's defiance "not to be locked up in Ramallah" and instead travel this land and use it proactively by embarking on unpredictable trips through the West Bank, despite checkpoints and closures, is a prime example of what Hammami (2004) describes as one of the most common forms of Palestinian resistance today: "getting there." To re-appropriate space for their own gains, Amal and Karima go even a step further in their defiance of Israeli spatial control. For them, the air they want to breathe is not confined to 'what is left' after the Oslo 'peace process'. Their tactic to use those spaces now formally out of their reach and control, however, must – in order to succeed – take a more covert and cunning form than Najla's straightforward insistence to "get there." Both adopt a tactic of disguise: Amal quite literally by dressing up in a short-sleeved shirt and sun-glasses (so as not to be recognised as Palestinian), and Karima by formally enrolling herself and friends in the occupier's project (to obtain the travel permit).

Going to an Israeli settlement to relax, or to Haifa to the beach, or across the West Bank to visit friends and family clearly is not an act with which women can, or believe they can, permanently change Israeli occupation. It is, if we apply de Certeau's analysis, a tactic to temporarily subvert the established power configurations. Gains are temporary, small and personal victories only: Just as Ilham accessing her lost farmlands, Amal, Karima and Najla have no possibility of sustaining their gains and must negotiate access each time anew.

4.2.2. A Strategy to Resist Israel Occupation at the Ideational Level

Yet, it is in tricking the occupier that these women find joy, feel empowered, and that they can maintain their dignity. For them, it is fun to trick the soldiers and gain access to the settlements, or to fool the organisers of what they consider to be a fake peace project. De Certeau (1984: 18) writes of tactics that: "[i]n these combatants' stratagems, there is a certain art of placing one's blows, a pleasure in getting around the rules of a constraining space. We see the tactical and joyful dexterity of the mastery of a technique."

The cunning act of subversion, of laughing at the oppressor, however temporary and individual, brings joy. This temporary gain over the Israeli spatial control thus is a way to resist Israeli occupation not of physical, but of ideational spaces. Resistance at the ideational level has been described by Raja Shehadeh in the following way:

I think a lot about the choice that samidin feel cornered into making: exile or submissive capitulation to the occupation, on the one hand – or blind, consuming hate and avenging the wrongs done to them, on the other. But it is in this conception of choice that the trap lies. States of mind cannot be forced on you. This is where you are free, your own master – because your mind is the one thing that you can prevent your oppressor from having the power to touch, however strong and brutal he may be (Shehadeh, 1982: 38).

It is interesting to compare Shehadeh's observation, written in 1982, with recent analyses of Israeli policies. Mbembé, for example, has argued that Israeli "late-modern colonial occupation" (Mbembé, 2003: 25, 27) turns Palestinians into "living dead" (Mbembé, 2003: 40) and reduces their spaces for agency to their mere control over their own bodies and death (i.e. martyrdom). He does not, as Shehadeh, stress the possibilities and potentials of resisting the occupation of the mind by maintaining alternative cultural spaces.

Hanafi (2009) has further developed the analysis of Israeli spatial control. He described Israeli "spacio-cidal" policies, i.e. the systematic dispossession, occupation and destruction of Palestinian living space, as a way not only to secure complete domination over the land, but also over the smallest details and fine grains of Palestinian everyday life by "exercising the state of exception and deploying bio-politics to categorize Palestinians into different groups, with the aim of rendering them powerless" (Hanafi, 2009: 106). While agreeing with Mbembé on the fact that Israeli "spacio-cidal" policies are aimed at all aspects of Palestinian life, Hanafi disagrees with him on the possibilities of agency left for Palestinians. Similar to Shehadeh (1982), he finds that "violence is not the only form of resistance. To counter the Israeli "spacio-cidal" project, Palestinians transgress the regime of exception by constructing their habitat without permit, even at the risk of demolition" (Hanafi, 2009: 119).

The physical and mental resistance that women invent and practice today confirm Hanafi's assertion that Israeli practices of spatial domination and subjectification are met by acts of resistance other than violence and martyrdom. They show that resistance does not necessarily have to be violent, nor does it necessarily have to be public and collective. None of these women's individual acts are clearly confrontational, rather theirs is a struggle to indirectly and quietly re-appropriate and redefine their occupied, fragmented and dispossessed spaces. Among such covert acts is the resistance on the ideational level of keeping up hope, laughter and joy, despite violence, death and loss. Whether ideational strategies to maintain alternative cultural spaces should count as resistance with transformative potential is, however, debated.

4.2.3. *Laughing as a Political Strategy*

In his earlier book *On the Postcolony* Mbembé (2001) argues that humour and ridicule have no potential to bring about change: "Those who laugh, whether in the public arena or in the private domain, are not necessarily bringing about the collapse of power or even resisting it" (Mbembé, 2001: 110). In his view humour, laughing and joy should thus not be considered resistance since they do not radically alter the oppressor's material base. However, in general accordance with other more recent literature,¹²³ the findings of my field studies, show that Palestinian women's pursuit of everyday pleasure and normalcy does neither aim to and nor can it change material realities. Junka, for example, concludes in her study on the politics of Gaza Beach:

If what is at stake in Palestine today is the very possibility of life itself and the ability of Palestinians to exercise control over their colonised bodies and spaces of everyday life, then the affirmation not only of death but also of life and pleasure becomes a meaningful aspect of the Palestinian struggle (Junka, 2006: 422).

Her conclusion also holds true for Palestinian women relaxing and enjoying life in a Jerusalem settlement, on Haifa beach or with friends and family in the West Bank. Women know that on the material level, their joyful travelling (just as their survival strategies) are, of course, only a short term tactic. Yet, by finding joy in resisting and tricking the occupier they

¹²³ For such more recent studies that deal with Palestinian's everyday resistance on the ideational level see, for example, Hammami (2004), Junka (2006), Allen (2008), Johnson (2007), van Teefelen (2007), Kelly (2008).

counter and even stop the effects that Israeli “spacio-cidal” policies intended to have on Palestinian bodies and agency: to render them powerless (Hanafi, 2009: 106, 107).

On the ideational level their acts thus are more than a tactic – they are a political strategy. Discussing Palestinian women’s rights-based interpretation of UNSCR 1325 in chapter V.2.3. I argued that for Palestinians, as stateless people, the call for protection of their human and humanitarian rights does neither necessarily victimise them, nor negate the political nature of their struggle. Citing Arendt’s assertion that “only the loss of a polity itself expels [men] from humanity” (1973: 297), I showed that by claiming their humanity through discourses of rights, protection and self-victimisation, Palestinians effectively make strong *political* claims: they establish a connection between their suffering and their political entitlement (see also Allen, 2009; Feldman, 2007).

The same is true for women’s claims to affirm life. Having been deprived not only of their social, political and civic rights, but also of the right to have rights, of a place from where to claim their rights, Palestinian women’s insistence on their *right* to have a joyful normal life (Karima, 2008) constitutes a way for them to reclaim their humanity. Their acts of maintaining normalcy, dignity and humanity are aimed at resisting their political dispossession; they are a political strategies of resisting to be expelled from humanity and thus from having the right/or a place to have rights. As such they are and should be recognised as a way of making political claims.

4.3. Resisting Different Forms of Patriarchal Control

Women’s struggles to enjoy life do not take place within and against restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation only. They are also shaped by (and shaping) internal Palestinian power structures that dominate women’s lives materially and normatively.

4.3.1. Multiple Practices and Discourses of Resistance

The call for “suspension of life” during the First Intifada was not only self-initiated by ordinary people, but it was also enforced by family, community, political party and national leaders, augmenting social pressures particularly on women (Jean-Klein, 2001). It might well be that a bride whose wedding was called off did not choose to do so on her own, but rather

that she was *expected* to sacrifice her celebration and suspend enjoyment for the bigger cause. The nationalist agenda during the First Intifada thus was enforced by various constituencies at sub-national level. This form of community-imposed *ṣumūd* – although often portrayed as voluntarily practiced solidarity - strengthened patriarchal nationalist control, particularly since women had little input on defining nationalist discourses and it was mainly their informal networks that were destroyed.¹²⁴

Today, Palestinian political culture is much more fragmented. Although resistance still remains the main explanatory paradigm for Palestinian political, social and ideological movement mobilisation, there exist a multitude of definitions and practices. Resistance is differently socially constructed: acts that constitute resistance for some are viewed as accommodation, submission or normalisation (*taṭbiʿ*) by others. One specific chosen way of defining and practicing resistance thus always also involves a challenge against internal political opponents and their chosen form of resistance (which then is branded as ‘nonresistance’). The Second Intifada, for example, was not just launched in resistance to the Israeli occupation but the form it took of public, action-oriented and predominantly armed resistance was also a way to oppose the negotiation paradigm symbolised in the failure of the Oslo ‘peace process’. Controlling what counts as resistance and when, why and how people are allowed to have fun or strive for normality thus is also a way to consolidate political and social power.

Although the PA tries to enforce its resistance paradigm, definitions and practices of resistance are multiple and conflicting today. They differ not only along political party, generational and socio-economic lines, and by the spatial categories of town-camp-village, but are also geographically defined. Israeli settler-colonial policies have fragmented spaces and political action, giving rise to new forms of more local manifestations of activism and resistance (Taraki, 2008). Such increased spatial and political fragmentation, in addition to the brutal reprisal that Israeli forces take against any collective form of resistance, has reduced collective acts and collective understandings of resistance. The Palestinian political landscape is now increasingly characterised by factionalism, lack of national unity and leadership and, consequently, a plurality of narratives and forms of resistance.

¹²⁴ See chapter IV (sections 3 and 4) chapter VII (section 2) and for a detailed discussion of the discursive and practical shifts in *ṣumūd* and resistance (*muqāwma*) discourse in the lead up to and during the First Intifada.

4.3.2. *Individualised Resistance through “Affirmation of Life”*

Internal fragmentation of Palestinian political struggle certainly has changed the matrix of power relations through which women manoeuvre and it might be argued that this lack of unity has opened up new spaces for women to define and practise more individual forms of resistance. One common trend within (and perhaps result of) this diversification has been that Palestinians, and particularly women, now frame and practice resistance increasingly on the ideational (rather than action-oriented, practical) level, individually (rather than collectively) and related to the ‘here and now’ (rather than the uncertain future). Amal sees “absolutely no point” in participating in collective political initiatives, Karima insists on her “right as Palestinian to come to Haifa to have fun,” and Lama, quoted earlier, stresses that as a mother she has to resist Israeli occupation by “keeping herself together”. The overwhelming majority of my interviewees emphasised that as mothers they feel responsible for providing a normal enjoyable life with hope and fun in the immanent present for their children and family (see also Junka (2006).

4.3.3. *To Laugh is to Resist Patriarchal Control?*

By focussing on the ‘here and now,’ claiming their right to enjoy life and movement, and - importantly - framing their acts as political resistance women also circumvent patriarchal power structures imposed at national, community and family level. Their acts highlight the need to trace how one act can have different effects on different structures of powers and how this complex inter-relationship between agency and structures plays out differently in practice and discourse.

MacLeod (1992) in a study on the new veiling in Cairo reveals women’s multiple and often hybrid subjectivities, resulting in their ambiguous agency of “accommodating protest”:

For women, there is no clear-cut other to confront directly. Facing a layered and overlapping round of oppressors, women do not have the relative luxury of knowing their enemy. Relations with men, class relations, and the more distant realm of global inequalities all affect lower-middle-class women in Cairo, yet none is exclusively responsible for women’s subordination. Women see a web of cross-

cutting power relations, and an ambiguous symbolic solution like the veil that speaks on different political levels suits the nature of these overlapping power constraints (MacLeod, 1992: 553).

Her main point - that one act can have different meanings, intentions and effects on different power structures - is crucial also for understanding Palestinian women's *ṣumūd* strategies. By claiming that it is their right to have fun women clearly frame their acts as political resistance against Israeli occupation and thus stay true to the meta-frame of resistance. Yet, in fact their acts are a challenge to patriarchal control expressed in discourses on resistance (*muqāwma*) and normalisation (*taṭbīʿ*) and exercised in family, community, secular-nationalist as well as religious-political structures that curtail women's individual freedom and mobility.

Bayat (2007, 2010) has argued that “anti-fun-damentalism” stems less from the Islamists' fear that the more spontaneous and individual nature of what he terms “the politics of fun” could disrupt moral norms, but rather that it might undermine their own regime of power and authoritative voice on social conduct. The denial of fun, pleasure and entertainment thus is nothing specific to Islam or political-religious groups, but rather is an attempt, undertaken in one way or another by most political groups, to consolidate power. Illustrating his argument with the example from a secular setting where militants from the al-Aqsa Martyr Brigade disrupted a music concert in Nablus claiming that joy and entertainment would disrupt public commitment to the cause and to (the Brigade's understanding and practice of) resistance, Bayat (2007: 456) concludes that the “militias' apprehension of “happiness” follows the same logic of power – fear from a rival frame of mind that could ultimately undercut their authority.” The authoritative understanding of resistance in Nablus thus takes inspiration from the First Intifada resistance paradigm of “suspension of life”. On the other end of the spectrum, the urban middle classes in, for example, Ramallah (but also Bethlehem and Jerusalem), understand their pursuing a normal life including pleasure and entertainment as politically meaningful acts of resistance (see Taraki, 2008).

Besides challenging patriarchal attitudes in secular and religious political groups, women's insistence on their right to joy and entertainment also constitutes a resistance to patriarchal restrictions and social control at family and community level. Women's leisure trips are often organised with a group of female friends and thus are a way of keeping intact and strengthening women's informal networks and sources of power. The suspension of activities

such as evening strolls, family visit, or women's coffee circles during the First Intifada restricted particularly women's mobility and social life. The return to a resistance paradigm that calls for the "affirmation of life" thus has been seized by women as an opportunity to challenge patriarchal restrictions, increase their mobility and revive informal networks.

While most Palestinians have shifted their understandings and practices of resistance from "suspension" to "affirmation of life" the precise forms that women's practices of "affirmation of life" can take vary widely. Women's spaces for agency are still limited by the different and often contradictory resistance discourses which differ according to class, age, geographical location, etc. While Najla's travelling within the West Bank is broadly accepted as a form of *ṣumūd* of "getting there," Amal's and Karima's acts of using Israeli space for their own ends by subverting power relations from within without, however, directly or overtly challenging them, might not be.¹²⁵ The extent to which Palestinian women succeed in regaining power by framing their crossing of patriarchal physical and normative boundaries as an act of resistance against Israeli "spacio-cidal" policies still crucially depends on their specific context.

5. Conclusion

By studying the shifts in understandings, practices and framings of female everyday resistance acts, this chapter aimed at tracing and uncovering changes in the matrix of power relations through which women are strategising. Women devise a wide variety of material and mental strategies to resist and get by the occupation. I have argued that their acts, although mostly quiet and largely unrecognised, should be considered political (yet not necessarily transformative) acts. They are, however, ambiguous: They might simultaneously challenge and accommodate different forms of domination, and might be justified as targeting certain power structures (patriarchal, class, nationalist, Islamist, occupation, etc.), while in fact covertly encroaching onto other forms of control.

¹²⁵ Particularly acts like Karima's, i.e. the participation in joint Palestinian-Israeli projects which do not clearly oppose the occupation but rather are built on and reinforce the status quo of power relations between occupier and occupied, might provoke hostile reactions and accusations of normalisation (*taṭbīʿ*). For a more comprehensive discussion of joint Palestinian-Israeli people-to-people projects and the charge of normalisation against them, see chapter V, Andoni (2003), Naser-Najjab (2004), Richter-Devroe (2008, 2009) or Sharoni (1995: 131-152).

With their acts women react to, but also themselves shape the structural context in which they are operating. This mutual interplay between agency and structure highlights that women's everyday acts should not be hastily romanticised as necessarily being fully transformative in intent or outcome, but rather should be studied as a diagnostic of shifting power relations. Palestinians experience the occupation and internal forms of control today very differently than during the First Intifada: their living spaces are highly fragmented and subject to tight control; they struggle against various forms of political (gender-based) violence, internal and external; and they face new and often harsher measures of control and subordination from the occupation as well as from domestic secular and religious political forces. Two aspects of the changing structural context were revealed as particularly strongly influencing women's everyday activism since 2000: Israeli spatial control and internal social, political and economic fragmentation.

Palestinian women today are predominantly struggling to gain control over land to "get there". Their defiance of Israeli-imposed physical restrictions is a meaningful – and often the only available – act to pursue. Clearly, their crossings of Israeli-imposed physical borders are everyday *tactics* only, with which women only temporarily and individually subvert, but never transform, the power relations of the occupation. On an ideational level, however, their trespassing is a way to resist the effects of Israeli "spacio-cidal" policies. Palestinian women's defiance of mobility restriction to pursue - to the extent possible - a normal life is a way to resist the occupation of their minds by creating and maintaining own alternative cultural spaces.

Women's struggles also reveal major changes in internal Palestinian power constellations. Palestinian political landscape today is strongly fragmented and the large majority of ordinary people are led by political disillusionment and apathy. Although resistance still is the metaframe for political action, there exist multiple (and often opposed) understandings and practices of resistance accompanied by contestations over what constitutes 'proper' resistance. I have argued that some Palestinian women have managed to turn this moment of confusion to their own benefits. They have started to covertly trespass internal patriarchal restrictions. By insisting that leading a normal joyful life is their right women frame their acts as political resistance against Israeli occupation and thus stay true to the overall meta-frame of resistance, and more specifically the newly emerging interpretations of *ṣumūd* as "affirmation of life.

Yet, the apparently unintended ‘side-effect’ of their defying Israeli “spacio-cidal” policies is their covert challenge to different internal social and political forms of male domination.

Of course, such acts do not constitute a long-term strategy for social change, but they highlight, firstly, that one act can target multiple levels of oppression simultaneously, and, secondly, the need to trace which of these multiple restrictions are foregrounded in women’s framings and representations of their acts. Palestinian women - like their Egyptian sisters - face a “layered and overlapping round of oppressors” (MacLeod, 1992: 553), but – unlike Egyptian women - they *do* have the ‘luxury’ of knowing their enemy. To gain societal approval for practices which (also) encroach upon patriarchal power, the great majority of Palestinian women frames and represents these acts not as resistance to social control and male domination, but rather to political oppression by the clear-cut other, Israel.

Such an analysis of women’s material and ideational everyday resistance acts thus has several empirical, policy-oriented and theoretical implications.

Women’s survival strategies should not be considered a developmental Track III peacebuilding strategy with transformative potential. They are short term tactics with which ease the material effects of political and structural violence. Nevertheless, their acts are important for conflict resolution theory and practice: maintaining the everyday family economy and social fabric of community in a nonviolent way is a political act and a choice, just as it is a choice to opt for violence. The ordinary is not normal under occupation and, consequently, studying why people choose and how they manage to maintain an ordinary, normal life with joy and even fun can provide insights for conflict resolution. The significance of women’s everyday resistance at the material level thus is similar to that of women’s ideational resistance: they are a way for women to maintain and reclaim their humanity, dignity and right to a normal life. At a time when all direct action seems to bear no fruits and politics seems far removed, the belief and insistence on dignity and normality as a right constitutes for most the only available meaningful form of political agency. Women, in their role as educators, are central to maintaining and preserving this awareness, practice and discourse. Given the paralysing effects of the occupation, women’s ideational and cultural resistance is thus often praised in nationalist discourse.

Women's actual practices, however, go beyond ideational and cultural resistance: they are (although in different ways and to different extents) circumventing, challenging and even overcoming material and normative forms of political and social control in largely unrecognised ways. Their acts, even if not directly or outspokenly concerned with gender change, are socially significant, not only because they allow women to temporarily trespass patriarchal control, but also because their acts often constitute a first step for more pronounced gender agendas, that would include not only practical but also strategic gender concerns.

Yet – and this insight is relevant not only for women's activism but also for wider theories of resistance and change – for an act to resist oppression effectively and lastingly it needs to be framed and recognised as such by the actors and others. Only once women consciously understand, frame and represent their striving for a normal and joyful life as challenging first of all, of course, the political oppression of the occupation, but also social patriarchal control, can they be considered more than a tactic, i.e. a strategy with potential for sustainable social and political change.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have surveyed, compared and analysed Palestinian women's different forms of political activism, focussing on the post-2000 period. I tried to investigate not only how women *do* politics, but also what their acts *mean* to them (and others), as well as how they discursively *present* them. One of the main aims of my focus on different practices, meanings and framings/discourses of women's political activism in the Occupied Territories was to counter narrow mainstream representations of Palestinian women (and women in conflict more generally) either as victims, peacemakers or armed resisters. Instead, I tried to stress the heterogeneity, hybridity and even ambiguity that is central to women's politics in a context of prolonged occupation and settler colonialism.

Throughout, I have attempted to show that women's political activism does not take place in a vacuum, but is influenced by (and influences) wider political, social, economic and cultural power structures. The work examines changes at the macro-level structural and discursive context in which women are operating, as well as at the micro-level of practices, meanings and framings of female political agency.

1. Context of Palestinian Women's Political Activism

At the macro-level, transformations in the agenda and nature of mainstream international women, peace and conflict programmes, the Israeli occupation, the PA, and internal forms of male control, have impacted upon women's activism.

In chapter V, I traced the impact that the mainstream liberal feminist agenda with its access-based 'dialogue-for-peace' programmes (*barāmij al-ḥiwār*) and its promotion of the essentialist gender construction of professional 'peacemakers' had on women's activism, particularly in urban settings. This liberal feminist approach not only is theoretically untenable because of its essentialist and universalist conceptualisation of peaceful femininity, but, given the failure of the Oslo 'peace process' and its people-to-people programmes, it is

also overwhelmingly rejected by Palestinian women (and men) as a form of normalisation (*taṭbīr*^c). The imagery of a pacifist Palestinian woman who dialogues with an Israeli woman on the basis of their peaceful nature or their joint gender interests does not provide a mobilising model for Palestinian women. Dialogue, peace, reconciliation and conflict resolution is viewed by the great majority of Palestinians today as a luxury which only the powerful can afford. For the occupied and powerless, resistance (*muqāwma*), not conflict resolution (*ḥal aṣ-ṣira*^c) constitutes the most meaningful meta-frame for political action.

In Chapter VI, I traced the impact that bi- and transnational solidarity movements (including specific feminist initiatives) with their more radical call for ‘nonviolent resistance-for-justice (and peace)’ and their promotion of a pro-active gender model of ‘political resistance activist’ had on, particularly rural and camp, women’s activism. The nonviolent resistance agenda, based in structural conflict transformation approaches, has found stronger local support than liberal feminist conflict resolution programmes. Yet, the recent shift in mainstream gender and conflict approaches to principled nonviolence (*lā ʿunf*), and the related glorification of women as symbols of nonviolence, bears the risk of co-opting the pragmatic nonviolent popular resistance (*muqāwma shaʿbīyya*) movement into more conventional liberal politics, thereby alienating local constituencies. Women’s trans- and bi-national activism needs to follow a joint political agenda in resistance to the occupation, if it is to be socially and politically empowering for women.

I traced the changing nature of the Israeli occupation and transformations in intra-Palestinian (patriarchal) power structures in chapter VII when analysing Palestinian women’s everyday resistance and survival struggles (*ṣumūd*) at the material and ideational level. The fact that women now practice *ṣumūd* predominantly at the individual and at the ideational level through keeping up hope, dignity and normalcy reveals the “spacio-cidal” nature of Israeli settler-colonial policies (Hanafi, 2009) as well as the lack of leadership on the Palestinian side. Israeli spatial control policies have not only fragmented the Palestinian community socially, politically, and economically, but they have also affected the very fine grain of Palestinian everyday life. More intrusive and indirect forms of governmentality block any form of collectivity building and aim at rendering Palestinians powerless. These external forms of political control have strengthened internal patriarchal power structures. In a context of immanent direct and structural violence, kinship-based patriarchy is revived by men’s increasing control over women’s mobility, but also through women claiming their part of the

“patriarchal bargain” (Kandiyoti, 1991b) by demanding that men fulfil their role as providers in return for complying with and enforcing female modesty codes. Furthermore, increased factionalism (provoked by Israeli policies) has strengthened social conservatism with political actors aiming at delegitimising their rivals by branding them and ‘their women,’ i.e. their gender agenda, as ‘westernised’ and a threat to ‘authentic’ Palestinian culture and traditions.

The close interrelation between external and internal, social and political forms of control have brought about a multitude of different and often ambiguous forms of female political agency, which I have tried to analyse and disentangle in this thesis by distinguishing between practices, meanings and discourses of women’s political activism.

2. Practices of Palestinian Women’s Political Activism

Intrusive Israeli control and the factionalism and lack of leadership on the Palestinian side (partly the result of this), combined with rising social conservatism have blocked any - but particularly women’s - genuine participation in politics. The great majority of Palestinians today do not hold much hope in formal politics, which seem to them far removed and futile, particularly if pertaining to the liberal negotiation/dialogue paradigm. Although characterised by disillusionment and apathy, Palestinian political culture today retains resistance (*muqāwma*) as major paradigm for political movement mobilisation. There exist, however, a variety of different and competing resistance practices (and meanings and discourses).

While initiatives guided by principled rather than pragmatic nonviolence approaches are mostly rejected as a form of normalisation (*taṭbīʿ*), nonviolent popular protest (*muqāwma shaʿbīyya*) with its aim for radical change, still receives support. Yet, even civil resistance protests against, for example, the wall or house demolitions, are not organised collectively through a unified leadership, but rather remain ad hoc, localised and fragmented. There have been few initiatives by local women leaders to organise female participation more systematically, but generally these have been taken over and blocked by male-dominated local politics, factionalism and rivalries.

Most Palestinian women (and men) today thus have resorted to practising small scale everyday resistance (*ṣumūd*) through material and ideational coping strategies at individual,

household or community level. Women find ways to access their annexed lands, they sneak into Jerusalem to sell their products, they open small income-generating cooperatives (*jam^cīyyāt*) or they establish money-lending circles to support the family economy. Additionally to such economic coping strategies, women, through their striving to keep up a normal joyful life filled with hope and dignity for themselves, their children, family and community, play a vital role in maintaining alternative cultural spaces and resisting the occupation of the mind.

Women's everyday survival and resistance struggles (*ṣumūd*), in contrast to formal liberal dialogue projects (*barāmiḡ al-ḡiwār*) and radical confrontational protest action (*muqāwma sha^cbīyya*), are mostly quiet and individual and thus remain largely unrecognised by the Palestinian and international community alike. Meanings of female everyday, as well as more formal ways of political engagement are often contradictory, multiple, and highly debated.

3. Meanings of Palestinian Women's Political Activism

Women's political agency in complex situations of prolonged conflict and violence tends to be ambiguous. One act can carry different meanings, it can target several oppressive structures simultaneously and it can be understood very differently by actors, those targeted and those observing and analysing their acts. The main question discussed in popular as well as academic debate is whether (and if so according to which criteria) women's practices, particularly their informal survival tactics, constitute *political* acts or even forms of *resistance* with (social and/or political) transformative potential.

Throughout this thesis I have argued for the need to broaden conceptualisations of 'the political.' Studying how people do politics outside of mainstream institutional channels, I proposed that even acts to which actors at first might not attach any explicit political meaning, such as women's everyday material and ideational coping struggles, should not be dismissed as apolitical. They are political acts, because they endure in a context of pervasive and omnipresent control and might even impact on political and social dynamics. Some micro-struggles (of, for example, peasant women struggling to preserve their lands), can translate into more collective protest action (of, for example, nonviolent demonstrations against the wall) and even propose alternative political and social projects (of, for example, a non-

militarist, non-masculinist political culture). Even if not bringing about concrete material political changes, such struggles can empower women socially, politically and economically and – importantly – culturally, since they constitute a way for women to maintain their humanity and dignity. In reference to Arendt (1973) I have argued in chapter VII that Palestinians, as stateless people, resist their expulsion from humanity through their everyday struggles for a normal life, thus reclaiming their right to have rights. Living a normal life in the abnormal situation of the occupation for Palestinians today means making political claims.

Which forms of women's informal and formal political engagement should be viewed as a form of resistance with transformative potential, however is debated. Views are divided on whether women's peace, civil resistance or everyday struggles offer most potential for social and political change.

While the mainstream liberal feminist position considers women's joint dialogical conflict resolution a win-win solution for both peace *and* gender empowerment, I have shown in chapter V that such agendas have in fact exacerbated social and political fragmentation in the Palestinian community and thus contributed to weakening women's struggles. Women's civil protest action, as argued in chapter VI, contains radical-transformative potential. Resistance activists with their pragmatic action-oriented practices target the occupation directly, provide alternatives to mainstream liberal political practices (such as voting or dialogue), and also challenge gendered hierarchies in Palestinian political culture by performing and enacting femininity constructions of women as heroines who defend land and people. If, however, practiced sporadically only and without clear social or political agendas, female protest action will not be able to bring about and sustain changes in gendered political discourses, ideologies and regimes. The full realisation of this non-masculinist, non-militarist, yet proactive form of political culture seems unlikely under the current omnipresent control of the PA and Israeli occupation.

The analysis of the transformative potential of women's everyday struggles in chapter VII avoided romanticising them as unquestionably emancipatory resistance acts, but rather tried to provide deeper understandings by reference to de Certeau's (1984) distinction between tactics and strategies. Women's material survival strategies are *tactics* with which women only temporarily subvert, not challenge, let alone transform, established power relations. Nevertheless, their acts provide insights into the dynamics of and possibilities for social and

political change: similar to women's everyday ideational resistance, their material survival struggles constitute a *strategy* to resist the occupation of their mind by creating and maintaining own alternative cultural spaces. They can, furthermore, act as a starting point towards women's more pronounced gender activism for social change. Pursuing practical gender interests not only empowers women economically, but also often provides a trajectory from community-oriented female to more strategic feminist consciousness (see Peteet, 1991, Molineux, 1985). The support of women's economic struggles through developmental Track III peacebuilding might thus empower women not only economically, but also socially. Palestinian women's real empowerment, however, is blocked by the political oppression of the occupation. The international community's provision of Track III peacebuilding programmes, just as their Track II conflict resolution initiatives, can thus only function as a supplement, not as an alternative to genuine political commitment for the Palestinian cause.

In Chapter VII, I also pointed to another tactic that some women have devised in their manoeuvring through political and social domination. When striving for normalcy, joy and even entertainment in the immanent present, women frame their acts as *ṣumūd* within the post-2000 resistance paradigm of 'affirmation of life.' They present their acts as resistance to the occupation, but in fact also covertly circumvent internal patriarchal control. The fact that one act might simultaneously respond to and address different power structures, and might be inflicted with different, often conflicting meanings, highlights the need to trace not only what women *do*, and what their acts *mean*, but also how they are *framed* and *presented*. A gender analysis, with its focus on the meso-level of constructed gender identities, provides insights into such intra-party dynamics and gendered political cultures.

4. Discourses and Framings of Palestinian Women's Political Activism

Three main gender models, which women strategically merge when framing their activism, have been drawn out throughout the thesis: women as pacifists/peacemakers, women as resisters/protesters, and women as survivors/strugglers.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ My categorisation is specific to time (post-Oslo) and place (the West Bank). In other Palestinian settings constructions of political femininities might differ starkly. See, for example, Sayigh's (2002) differentiation between Palestinian refugee women's "self-stereotypes" of 1) "struggle personality," 2) "confrontation personality," and 3) "all our life is tragedy" collected through life stories in Shatila camp in the late 1990s.

The gender imagery of the female pacifist/peacemaker is a construction historically upheld by upper-class women, and today promoted predominantly by the international community, Israeli female 'peace activists,' and some of the Palestinian globalised NGO elite. Within the Palestinian women's movement it is only a few of the better-off, urban professional femocrats who operationalise the notion of peaceful femininity in their (often joint Palestinian-Israeli) peace activism. The significance of gendered identity discourses, however, is less whether or to what extent they reflect reality, but rather how they are instrumentalised in processes of othering. In Palestine it is mainly the younger generation, people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, from the Islamic movement, from rural or camp residence, or with anti-Oslo political party affiliation, who brand those working in conflict resolution NGOs or dialogue groups as 'peacewomen' in their attempts to delegitimise them as elitist, westernised or normalisers.

The alleged 'authentic' gender imagery used to counter that of 'westernised peacewomen' is the politically-active female resister/protester. This gender imagery of female courageous heroine was historically associated with rural peasant women, then with the *fidā'iyya*, the female freedom fighter, and, during the First Intifada, became established and internationally known through women's extensive participation in civil resistance. Today, given the decline of the armed resistance paradigm in secular nationalist and leftist political discourse and the simultaneous rise of nonviolent resistance (*muqāwma sha'biyya*) promoted by transnational justice movements, the imagery of women as resisters/protesters is proposed by Islamic as well as rural (yet internationalised) anti-wall resistance activists. Constructing women as courageous heroine-citizens challenges binary nationalist ideologies which reduce women to wombs and elevate men to citizens-warriors, but also the essentialist liberal feminist construction of 'pacifist/peacewoman.' The fact that such a potentially disruptive gender model is constructed and enacted by supporters of the Islamic movement and village residents, i.e. by parts of society commonly known to be more conservative, highlights that a (mostly just temporary) change in framings and practices of women's political activism does not necessarily indicate a deeper change in gender discourses and ideologies.

The third gender construction often used by women to frame their political activism is that of the steadfast struggler/survivor (*aş-şāmida*). Originally associated with the steadfast peasant woman and female Nakba survivor, *aş-şāmida* was promoted in PLO discourse as the 'traditional/authentic' sister to the 'modern/progressive' female fighter (*fidā'iyya*). During the

First Intifada the internal leadership recoded the (often accused as static and traditionalist) imagery into that of a more proactive *resistance* steadfast struggler. Today the Islamic women's movement has endowed *aş-şāmida* with religious connotations, but the majority of Palestinian women, from various backgrounds, use it without attaching religious meanings to it; instead, they relate it to international humanitarian discourses. Framing their everyday mental and physical coping struggles in terms of suffering, but also steadfastness against injustice and violence, they hope to make their voice heard in the international community. To live, to struggle and to survive in the abnormal context of prolonged occupation, settler colonialism and violence, they assert, is to resist.

Any claim that the gender constructions of steadfast struggler/survivor and female nonviolent resistance activist is more 'authentic' or 'pure' than that of 'westernised peacewomen' thus is untenable. Rather, actors, in their search for local, domestic and international support, frame their political activism with mixed constructions selectively borrowing from different 'traditional' and 'modern,' 'secular' and 'religious,' 'liberal' and 'radical' discursive gender repertoires. Newly emerging gender models such as the traditional, yet courageous peasant woman who participates in transnational justice movements against the wall, or the modest, yet modern Islamic resistance activist who merges religious with secular rights language, constitute a fusion of discourses from within and without.

Gendered subjectivities in the Palestinian context are united through their foregrounding of political identities (prioritising resistance over conflict resolution), but, aside from that, they are multiple, oppositional and hybrid, giving rise to at times somewhat out-of-focus practices that carry a multitude of meanings. This ambiguity of Palestinian women's activism highlights that advances in female practices do not suffice as strategies for change. Practices need to be framed as resistance with their target clearly defined and recognised as such through changes in gendered discourses and ideologies. Eventually, they need to be anchored in concrete legal and rights provisions, if change is to be sustained.

5. Theoretical Implications

My analysis of practices, meanings and discourses of Palestinian women's political activism carries several theoretical implications.

The gendered analysis I proposed highlighted the inadequacy of certain liberal political conceptualisations of the political, the public sphere and conflict resolutions in contexts dominated by stark power asymmetries which exist not only at the inter-(Palestinian/Israeli), but also at the intra-Palestinian level.

Taking a gendered perspective at intra-Palestinian political culture of resistance revealed the multiple intersecting layers of material and discursive power structures which women resist, challenge, and circumvent through their creative, unconventional, non-(purely)secular, and non-(purely)liberal political agencies. The fact that women are subjected to a multitude of gendered forms of political, social, economic and cultural oppressions which mitigate their access to the public sphere contradicts Habermas' (1989) liberal understanding of a singular uniform public sphere, in which rational-critical debate can take place freely. Women's access to conventional politics is restricted materially and discursively through different forms of male domination expressed through political and social control. Consequently, women have had to find other unconventional forms of political engagement, such as protest activism or mother politics, through which they enact alternative political subjectivities and create counter-publics (Fraser, 1992). These counterpublics are multiple (women do politics in a variety of ways), hybrid (they mix different gendered discourses) and shifting (they spring from women's specific and changing positioning within broader structures).

At the inter-party (Palestinian-Israeli) level, as well, liberal conceptualisations of dialogical or discursive conflict resolution are misleading. Habermas' ideal speech theory (1984), which is often used to legitimate Track II conflict resolution, understands dialogue, consent and deliberation as main sources for value construction and legitimation. In an asymmetric context between occupier and occupied, dialogue, however, means reinforcing existing power hierarchies and the status quo. The possibility of dialogue and discourse to create common ethics, and change political and material structures can, in a context where the 'system world' of material and political dispossession dominates peoples' 'lifeworlds' until deep down, only be achieved if material changes are affected first. Politics by settler-colonial powers, however, are based on material asymmetries; they function and are maintained through imposition, control and violence. Meaningful ways for the occupied, the powerless to 'do politics' in such a context is not through accessing and dialoguing within given (unequal) power structures, but by radically disagreeing with, resisting and directly confronting injustices with the aim of

bringing about concrete material, rather than ideational, changes. Palestinian political culture of resistance thus offers a profound critique to western political philosophy which views discourse, dialogue and consent as main (and sometimes only) fundamentals for political engagement.

Palestinian women's gender-specific coping struggles at the micro-level offer another valuable insight for understanding 'the political.' Women who devise and practice everyday survival tactics are disillusioned with collective politics. The great majority of Palestinians today considers both the liberal proposal of gaining access to existing (asymmetric) structures, and the structuralist call to radically challenge, resist and transform unjust systems futile ways of political engagement. Instead of accessing or challenging structures, their agency is aimed at getting by and through the system with the less possible harm and noise. I have argued that their agency of "getting by" the occupation (Allen, 2008), if not directly transformative, nevertheless is political.

In the Palestinian context where everyday life is dominated by material dispossession, by political violence, and omnipresent Israeli control, "[t]he unexpected is [...] never entirely a surprise and the expected is always partly surprising" (Kelly, 2008: 353). In such a situation the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary has little analytical purchase. With their lives being dominated by uncertainty, subjected to multiple sovereignties, and no defined structures to claim their rights, Palestinian women seize any opportunity to ease their suffering and/or to make political claims. Their political agency thus tends to be improvised and full of contradictions. Women use 'traditional' gender models to open up spaces for female political and social activism; they use supposedly apolitical humanitarian language to make political claims, and they merge religious codes with secular rights discourse to engage in radical dissent politics. Women's political activism in situations of prolonged conflict, statelessness and uncertainty might be less conventional, less institutionalised and less straightforward than the way politics is done in established nation-states. Yet, this unconventional form of political engagement, despite its inherent paradoxes and ambiguities, remains for most Palestinian women today the only meaningful, only available, and often the most urgent thing to do.

ANNEX I

GROUPS, NETWORKS AND ORGANISATIONS¹²⁷

1. Conflict Resolution and Nonviolent Resistance Organisations

- Al-Mubadara, Ramallah
- Alternative Information Center (AEI), Bethlehem
- Arab Educational Institute (AEI), Bethlehem
- Beit Sahour Raprochement Center, Bethlehem
- Circle of Health International, Joint project between Palestinian and Israeli midwives, Jerusalem/Ramallah
- Combattants for Peace, Tulkarm
- Crossing Borders, Ramallah
- Holy Land Trust (HLT), Bethlehem
- International Solidarity Movement, Ramallah
- International Women's Peace Service (IWPS), Salfit
- Israeli Committee against House Demolitions (ICAHN), Jerusalem
- Israel-Palestine Centre for Research and Information (IPCRI), Jerusalem
- Just Vision, Jerusalem
- Library on Wheels for Nonviolence and Peace, Hebron
- Local Popular Committee, Bil'in
- Local Popular Committee, Budrus
- Local Popular Committee, Hares
- Middle East Nonviolence and Democracy (MEND), Jerusalem
- Musalaha, Bethlehem
- Palestine Centre for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation, Bethlehem
- Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center (Wi'am), Bethlehem
- Palestinian Research Centre in the Middle East (PRIME), Bethlehem
- Parents Circle, Jerusalem
- The Grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign, GPAAWC, Ramallah
- Willy Brandt Center, Joint project between young Palestinian and Israeli political leaders, Jerusalem

¹²⁷ The names of organisations provided here do not present a comprehensive list of conflict resolution, nonviolent resistance, women's and/or academic organisations in Palestine. They refer only to those groups that I interviewed and which are part of the research on which this thesis is based.

2. Conflict Resolution and Nonviolent Resistance Organisations

- Arab Women's Union, Bethlehem
- Coalition of Women for a Just Peace, Jerusalem
- General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW), PLO-affiliated, Ramallah
- International Women's Commission, IWC, Ramallah
- Jerusalem Center for Women (JCW), Jerusalem
- Machsom Watch, Jerusalem
- Ministry of Women Affairs, Ramallah
- Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees (PFWAC), DFLP-affiliated, Nablus
- Palestinian Federation of Women's Action (PFWA), FIDA-affiliated, Ramallah
- Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development (PWWSD), People's Party-affiliated, Ramallah
- Shashat, Women's Film-maker Organisation, Ramallah
- TAM Women, Media & Development, Bethlehem
- UNESCO Palestinian Women Research and Documentation Centre, Ramallah
- Union of Palestinian Women's Committees (UPWC), PFLP-affiliated, Ramallah
- Women for Life, Women's cooperative, Hares, Salfit
- Women's cooperative, Tulkarm
- Women's Affairs Center, Gaza
- Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counselling, Ramallah
- Women's cooperative, Beit Jala
- Women's cooperative, Durra, Hebron
- Women's Prisoner Organisation, Tulkarm
- Women's Studies Centre (WSC), Jerusalem
- Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC), Ramallah

3. Academic and Think Tank Organisations

- Al-Haqq, Ramallah
- Al-Quds University, Insan Center, Jerusalem
- Birzeit University, Institute of Women's Studies, Birzeit
- Right to Education Campaign, Nablus
- The Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA), Jerusalem

ANNEX II

LIST OF INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS¹²⁸

- Abu Isa, Al-Mubadara, Nablus, 2008.
- Adnan, anti-wall nonviolent resistance activist, leader of popular committee, village near Ramallah, 2008, 2009
- Aida, independent activist, affiliated with Islamic women's movement, Nablus, 2008.
- Aisha, independent women's and peace activist, Jerusalem, 2008.
- Alia, International Women's Commission and long-time women's activist, Ramallah, 2008
- Amal, participant in joint Palestinian-Israeli women's dialogue programme and independent women's activist, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010.
- Amira, Parents Circle, Nablus, 2008.
- Anaheed, women's cooperative and local women's activist, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010.
- Asma, Adnan's daughters, anti-wall nonviolent resistance activist, village near Ramallah, 2008, 2009
- Assad, Parent's Circle, Bethlehem, 2008.
- Bayan, participant in joint Palestinian-Israeli conflict resolution initiatives, Ramallah, 2008, 2009.
- Celia, independent nonviolent resistance activist, Bethlehem, 2008.
- Eva, Women's Affairs Technical Committee, 2007.
- Fadi, Arab Educational Institute, Bethlehem, 2007.
- Feryal, former communist activist, female nonviolent resistance activist, Gaza/Salfit, 2008.
- Fida, women's activist, Salfit, 2008
- Focus Group A, Bethlehem, 2007, 2008
- Focus Group B, village near Ramallah involved in nonviolent resistance against the wall, 2008
- Focus Group C, Bethlehem, 2008
- Focus Group D, Hebron, 2008

¹²⁸ All interviewees are anonymised, unless otherwise indicated.

- Focus Group E, Jerusalem, 2008.
- Ghassan, Rapprochement Centre, Bethlehem, 2008
- Ghaida, Holy Land Trust, Bethlehem, 2008
- Hala, participant in joint Palestinian-Israeli women's dialogue programme, Bethlehem, 2008
- Hanadi, participant in joint Palestinian-Israeli women's dialogue programme, Ramallah, 2008
- Haneen, Women's Affairs Technical Committee, 2008
- Hisam, Wi'am, 2008
- Ida, Trainer for Holy Land Trust, Jenin, 2008
- Iman, women's activist and scholar, Ramallah, 2008
- Ilham, female nonviolent resistance activist, village in Ramallah district, 2008
- Im Alaa, anti-wall nonviolent resistance activist, village near Ramallah, 2008, 2009
- Im Fadi, women's cooperative and nonviolent activist, Salfit, 2008
- Im Khaled, affiliated with Islamic charity organisation, Nablus, 2008
- Im Mahmoud, Qalandia refugee camp, Ramallah, 2008
- Im Mazen, women's cooperative, village near Ramallah, 2007, 2008
- Im Mustafa, Hebron, 2008
- Intisar, participant in joint Palestinian-Israeli women's dialogue programme, Bethlehem, 2008
- Islah, women's activist, Salfit, 2008
- Jamil, Grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign, Ramallah, 2008
- Jenna, participant in joint Palestinian-Israeli women's dialogue programme, Bethlehem, Dheheishe camp, 2008
- Jude, women's and nonviolence activist and scholar, Ramallah, 2008
- Jumana, head of women's peace NGO, Jerusalem, 2008
- Karima, independent women's peace activist, Bethlehem, 2007, 2008, 2009
- Karma, participant in joint Palestinian-Israeli women's dialogue programme, Jerusalem, 2008
- Katherine, International Solidarity Movement, Ramallah, 2007
- Liana, international human rights activist, Ramallah, 2008
- Lama, independent women's peace activist, Nablus, Askeri camp, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010

- Lara, independent women's activist, Ramallah, 2008
- Leila, International Women's Commission, Ramallah/Gaza, 2008
- Lila, Wiam, Bethlehem, 2007
- Lori, independent Israeli peace activist and participant in joint Palestinian-Israeli dialogue group, Jerusalem, 2008
- Maha Nassar, Union of Palestinian Women's Committees, Ramallah, 2008
- Mahmoud, human rights activist, Ramallah, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010
- Mariam, International Women's Peace Service/ISM, Salfit, 2008
- Marwan, human rights activist, Gaza, 2008
- Mazen, independent activist, village near Ramallah, 2007, 2008
- Mina, International Women's Commission and long-time women's activist, Ramallah, 2008
- Minu, participant in joint Palestinian-Israeli women's dialogue programme, Bethlehem, 2008
- Muhammad, nonviolent activist, Tulkarm, 2007, 2008, 2009
- Naima, Library on Wheels for Nonviolence and Peace, Hebron, 2008
- Najim, Palestine Centre for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation, Bethlehem
- Najla, women's trainer, Ramallah, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010
- Nida, independent women's activist, Jerusalem, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010
- Nisreen, International Women's Commission, Gaza /Ramallah, 2008
- Rachel, trainer of joint Palestinian-Israeli women's groups, Haifa, 2008
- Rana, participant in joint Israeli-Palestinian nonviolent anti-occupation activism, Tulkarm refugee camp, 2008
- Riham, independent women's activist, Nablus, 2008
- Rima, International Women's Commission and long-time women's activist, Ramallah, 2008
- Rose, International Women's Commission, Ramallah, 2008
- Ruba, women's cooperative, Bethlehem, 2008
- Ruth, Machsom Watch, Jerusalem, 2008
- Saafia, participant in joint Palestinian-Israeli women's dialogue programme, Ramallah, 2008
- Safa, Jerusalem Women's Studies Center, 2008
- Sahla, independent women's activist, Hebron, 2008

- Salam, Crossing Borders, 2007
- Salima, participant in joint Palestinian-Israeli women's dialogue programme, Jerusalem, 2008
- Samer, Musalaha, Bethlehem, 2007
- Sami Adwan, PRIME, Bethlehem, 2007
- Samira, head of women's NGO, Bethlehem, 2007
- Shireen, resistance activist, Tulkarm refugee camp, 2005
- Shiva, Musalaha, 2007.
- Sima, participant in joint Israeli-Palestinian nonviolent anti-occupation activism, Tulkarm refugee camp, 2008,
- Safia, participant in joint Palestinian-Israeli women's dialogue programme , Ramallah, 2008.
- Suad, International Women's Commission and long-time women's activist, Ramallah, 2008
- Taghreed, independent women's activist, Jerusalem, 2008
- Tala, participant in joint Palestinian-Israeli women's dialogue programme, village near Ramallah, 2008
- Wafa, independent activist, participant in joint Palestinian-Israeli conflict resolution programmes, Ramallah, 2007, 2008.
- Wissam, Palestinian-Israeli trainer of joint Palestinian-Israeli peace groups, Jerusalem/Akka, 2008.
- Yara, Willy Brandt Center, Jerusalem, 2007.
- Yasmin, women's cooperative, Beit Jala, 2008.

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