

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

Submitted by

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to the University of Exeter, Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies  
as a thesis for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Middle East Politics  
October 2010

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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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