



# The Palestinian Women's Movement after Oslo: Peacemakers or Fighters for their Freedom?

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## Introduction

The 1993 Oslo Accords between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Israeli government have had a profound impact on the whole of Palestinian society; more particularly, they strongly influenced the development of the Palestinian women's movement. This paper will portray different forms of women's activism after Oslo; it will research the impact of peaceful female activism, feminist activism and militant female activism on women's status in society.

Such an inclusive approach that treats women's different ways of involvement in the public sphere, including militant ones, requires the dismissal of the idea of a clear public-private split where women are relegated to the private sphere while men arrange public matters (Sharoni, 1997; Waylen, 1996) and further necessitates the rejection of essentialist views which describe women as peaceful and tolerant while men are considered militant wagers of war (e.g. Gilligan, 1983; Golan, 2004; Ruddick, 1989). In doing so, it shows that gender roles are fluid and susceptible to historical change (Kandiyoti, 1988) and that such processes of redefinition of feminini-

ty and masculinity occur especially in times of conflict (Byrne, 1996). Conflict influences gender roles and can either hinder or promote women's advancement in society. In the Palestinian case, as will be argued, the occupation constituted an opportunity for women to enter "the world of men" and thus promoted their liberation in a society dominated by patriarchal structures.

Such an argument is not new; various scholars have established a relation between Palestinian women's political and social struggle. Most of these studies, however, find an, at least temporary, positive relation between women's unarmed liberation struggle in the First Intifada and their empowerment.<sup>1</sup> The impact of women's armed resistance has received critical views.<sup>2</sup> Following Apter (1997), however, it is particularly political violence that destabilizes and recreates social realities. This paper will thus analyze both the impact of women's peaceful and militant activism.

## The Early Palestinian Women's Movement

Palestinian women have historically participated through a multitude of ways in the national strug-

gle. Their activism started in the early twentieth century with relief and charitable work. This concentration on more private matters, i.e. the well-being of family and society, however, shifted during the Intifada. Women, being dominated by the national-political cause, now started to engage actively in the public sphere through political involvement in demonstrations and parties, but also through militant activism. Although women's changed political status and their "intrusion" into the previously male-dominated public sphere meant breaking the traditional public-private split, it would be wrong to assume feminist motivations behind such changes. The national cause superseded all other issues; women's increased freedom was to serve national, not gender liberation.

Nevertheless, women's gender consciousness increased as a result of their engagement in the Intifada. Peteet's (1991) differentiation between female and feminist consciousness in this respect offers valuable analytical insights. Analyzing Palestinian women's activism in Lebanese camps, she finds that their motivation for participating in the Resistance at first stemmed from their female consciousness of defending their community; during their participation, however, some women encountered social barriers to their self-fulfillment as women – these women developed a feminist consciousness and advocated "transformations in gender relations and meanings as ways to achieve autonomy and equality rather than simply integrating women into extant structures" (Peteet, 1991:97). Fighting on the national front thus increased women's feminist consciousness; it opened up a second struggle on the social front where women started to challenge patriarchal structures in their own society.

Yet, these advances took place in the exceptional situation of conflict. Advances during conflict, however, cannot be seen as a guarantee for fundamental, long-term change. The Algerian example in this respect is telling. Algerian women participated actively throughout the national struggle for independence. Despite such an active role, they neither managed to influence the Islamist discourse nor to establish institutional channels for securing their rights. Once independence was given in 1962, they thus had little means to resist the Islamists' installation of the repressive personal status law (PSL) which stripped women of virtually all their rights (Bouatta, 1994).

In Palestine women could have faced an equal fate,

yet the Intifada had created a strong "feminist generation" (Hasso, 2001:1) which could not easily be sidelined.

### **Women's Political Participation in Governmental Agencies after Oslo**

Sufficient female representation in the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) is a prerequisite for ensuring equal rights in a future state; it is one of the institutional channels that Algerian women failed to establish.

Considering their wide participation in the Intifada, Palestinian women had hoped to receive their share in political representation after Oslo. Yet, the PNA has since marginalized women from the political decision-making process; even most recent figures show that they are still highly under-represented. Women make up only 5.7 percent of the Palestinian Legislative Council, 9.2 percent of the judiciary, 8.3 percent of all ministers, and comprise only a minority on the central committees of the major political parties (5 percent of Fatah, 10 percent of the Popular Front, 19 percent of FIDA and 20 percent of the Democratic Front) (MOWA, 2005). Yet, in their efforts to reverse these trends, women have recently made two important advances.

In November 2003 the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) was established. Such a ministry had been the plan of the women's movement since Oslo, but early efforts were not approved by the PNA (Abdo, 1999). Among MOWA's achievements so far has been the introduction of gender-based programs and women's units in different ministries as well as the introduction of a gender quota of two women per local council. The percentage of women in local councils thus rose immensely from 0.5 percent in 2004 (MOWA, 2004) to 16.9 percent in 2005 (MOWA, 2005).

MOWA's importance lies in the fact that, as a governmental body, it provides institutional support from the state for the feminists of the First Intifada. The fact that MOWA is headed by Zahira Kamal, a former leader of the Democratic Union Party, run predominantly by female activists from the First Intifada (Interview, MOWA, 2005), and characterized by strong cooperation with women's advocacy NGOs, makes clear that it is a truly feminist effort and not merely a "display item to sell politics" for the PNA. With MOWA, an important institutional channel to anchor women's rights in a future Palestinian state has been established.



## Women's Feminist Activism in NGOs for Equal Rights

A legal framework that gives equal rights to men and women is another institutional channel that Algerian women failed to establish before 1962.

In Palestine, just as in Algeria, PSL, which is based on Islamic law and regulates rights in marriage, divorce and inheritance issues, discriminates against women: men are allowed to marry up to four wives, women need a male guardian in marriage decisions, they receive only half of a man's share as inheritance, and they are denied the right of child custody after divorce (Sh'hada, 1999).

In contrast to Algeria, however, Palestinian women have founded strong advocacy NGOs which seek to influence PSL, the most active of these being the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC). WCLAC's lobbying for "gendering" PSL generally works through two main approaches: a secular approach which bases claims for women's equality on human rights and international conventions, mainly the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and finds that Islam is not, or only vaguely, compatible with women's rights; and a liberal religious approach – Islamic feminism – which calls for feminist *ijtihad*, i.e. the reinterpretation of the religious sources from a woman's perspective, to provide equality based on the rulings of Islam.

Although the secular approach seems to be the "safer bet" for many secular feminists, it in fact bears the danger of provoking strong backlashes from more traditional parts of society. In Palestine, for example, WCLAC's advocacy project, the Model Parliament, which brought together women and men with religious, feminist, political or legal backgrounds with the aim of "gendering" Palestinian law, was accused by the Islamists of being part of the "Western conspiracy against Islam" (Sh'hada, 1999).

The second approach, Islamic feminism, although perhaps a "compromise" for secular women, is a less provocative model for women's emancipation. Its potential has been shown with the 1992 divorce amendments in Iran (Mir-Hosseini, 1996) and the 1956 abolishment of polygamy in Tunisia (Barron, 2002) – both results of feminist *ijtihad*. In Palestine the majority of women (85 percent) want PSL to be based on Islamic law, yet 66 percent of the same respondents also find the current Palestinian legal system to be discriminating against women

(Hammami, 2002). Both popular legitimacy for Islamic law and critique of its gender-biased nature thus coexist. Such a seemingly contradictory opinion stems from women's understanding that tradition – and not Islam – is the cause for gender inequality (Hammer, 2000). Most Palestinian women believe that the religion of Islam is a potentially positive model for female emancipation; for them, and for the majority of Palestinian society, the Islamic way is the indigenous and right way to promote women's rights.

## Women's National Peaceful Activism

Women's peace activism is closely related to both post-Oslo developments described above: women's political activism aiming at increasing female participation in governmental agencies, and increased feminist consciousness. Political marginalization was not confined to women's representation in state institutions. Since the Oslo peace negotiations were mainly prepared and held at a level of high diplomacy, women were in a minority here as well.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Palestinian women's peace organizations formed in the immediate aftermath of Oslo were aiming to guarantee women's equal participation and voice in the peace negotiations. Since Israeli women's political activism had also started to grow in the 1990s,<sup>4</sup> these two groups formed alliances and organized dialogue groups, women's peace conferences, and solidarity initiatives.

One such project which began in 1994 is the Jerusalem Link, an alliance between the (Palestinian) Jerusalem Center for Women (JCW) in East Jerusalem and the (Israeli-Jewish) Bat Shalom in West Jerusalem. Although both women's NGOs are also committed to women's empowerment and democracy training within their own societies, they receive most attention and credit for their joint peace-building efforts and are often picked out as a model for civil society's mobilization for peace-making by Western academia and media (e.g. Powers, 2003; Wrege, 2003). Consequently and especially since UN Resolution 1325 called upon all UN member states to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict in 2000 (UN, 2000), these organizations have been well-funded by European and North American donors.<sup>5</sup>

It has been widely acknowledged that "[i]nternational peacemakers have much to learn from women's efforts at peace-building" (Powers, 2003), yet, two of the assumptions on which their cooperation is based prove to be problematic.

The first assumption underlying women's peacemaking is the essentialist view that women, because of their mothering sentiments, are more peaceful and tolerant than men.<sup>6</sup> The universal applicability of such essentialist accounts to different times and societies has been questioned (Elshtain, 1995; Naples, 1992); in particular with regard to societies experiencing war and conflict (Scheper-Hughes, 1992). In the Palestinian case, Peteet (1991) finds that, as a result of ongoing conflict, the home cannot be seen as a place where "peaceful mothering" can take place. Palestinian homes are vulnerable to military raids; they are "battlefronts" and sites of resistance and militancy for women just as for men. Essentialist views thus fail to take into account the militarization of Palestinian society.

Secondly, cooperation is based on the feminist visions of global sisterhood (e.g. Morgan, 1996), and more particularly, the belief that Palestinian and Israeli women are united by similar experiences: the notion of motherhood and the common experience of sending one's sons to war is used by the Israeli-Jewish peace movement to establish commonality between Palestinian and Israeli women (Sharoni, 1995). The Palestinian women's peace organizations, however, have moved beyond this traditional image of women. JCW's motivation for joint peace-building is much more political and pragmatic: they want to use UN Resolution 1325 to "gender" peace-building with the long-term goal of ending the occupation (Interview, JCW, 2005). The Israeli women's peace movement thus, by using solidarity and commonality as their rationale for alliances, bears the danger of downplaying fundamental power inequalities between the occupier and the occupied.

Differences exist not only between, but also within the groups. The Palestinian peace movement is characterized by strong social cleavages between women from the Occupied Territories and Israeli Palestinian women. The latter, as Palestinian citizens of Israel, often find that Gazan and West Bank women, referring to themselves as the "true Palestinians," do not seriously value their struggle (Herzog, 2005). JCW's collaborative project with Bat Shalom for a Palestinian state according to the 1967 borders, for example, is viewed suspiciously by the majority, and in particular by the refugees from the *nakba* generation who perceive it as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause. While the rationale of non-violence has gained ground among a great number of Palestinians, many, and particularly those most exposed to repressive Israeli policies in the Occupied Territories and refugee camps still consid-

er dialogue between such unequal partners a mere facade.

Commonality (both Palestinian-Israeli and Palestinian-Palestinian) thus might be a "romantic" rather than solid basis for dialogue. The Jerusalem Link is unquestionably a progressive and promising model, yet its rationale of promoting dialogue as the only way to peace risks labeling those who still oppose dialogue on the above mentioned grounds as fanatics or radicals (Abu-Nimer, 1993 quoted in Sharoni, 1995).

So far, this paper has treated women's peaceful activism – a field where Palestinian women have strongly organized themselves since Oslo. Yet, the women involved in these official governmental and non-governmental organizations remain exceptional and are mostly drawn from urban elites. Furthermore, they have difficulties influencing the radical Islamist forces and face major problems reaching huge numbers of women who either do not support their (and the PNA's) peaceful rationale of negotiations for a "compromise peace" or feel alienated by their secular – and thus for many "Westoxicated" – feminist mission.

Opposition to Western influence and the rationale of negotiations is most widely associated with religious-political groups. The following chapter aims to shed light upon their rationale of militant confrontation.

### **Women's National Militant Activism** ***The Al-Aqsa Intifada***

In comparison to the First Intifada, the Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000-5) was much more male-dominated which is partly due to its increased militancy (Andoni, 2001). Seen from a Palestinian perspective, the return to armed resistance is a general response to the failure of the "peace process," corruption in the PNA, and intensified Israeli land confiscation and increased militancy.

The growing popularity of Palestinian militant political-religious groups, which has nearly doubled from 18 percent in December 2004 to 30 percent in June 2005 (PCPSR, 2005) is built on the fact that they are able to unite these various opponents of the peace process in its current form. Furthermore, their religious orientation offers stability to many Palestinians for whom their religious beliefs provide a strategy to cope with the hopeless and untenable situation of consistent loss.<sup>7</sup> Finally, political-religious groups suggest a more committed agenda than the PNA by acting as major social service



providers in the region and by providing transparency in their political proceedings.

Probably the best known resistance activity that is generally associated with political-religious groups is "martyrdom or suicide attacks." The concept of "martyrdom operations," as they are generally referred to in Palestinian and Arab coverage, has often been misportrayed in Western accounts. While *intihar* (suicide) is strictly forbidden in Islam, *istishhad* (martyrdom), i.e. the deliberate suicidal death for the sake of others, particularly Muslims, is greatly admired in Muslim society as an act of self-sacrifice and honor. The term "suicide attack," with its reference to *intihar* (suicide), therefore does not

correctly reflect the philosophical background of these acts. To epistemologically reflect this background the terms *shaheed* (m), *shaheeda* (f) and *istishhad* will be used here.

The very concept of *istishhad* is unquestioned in Palestinian society. The bombing of civilians, however, has been criticized sharply as being morally unjustified by the majority of Islamic scholars (Dabbagh, 2003). Yet,

as far as military targets are concerned, *istishhad* attacks are viewed by many Palestinians to be the "smart bomb" of the poor. For them it represents a weapon that can be used effectively against a militarily far superior nation with one of the strongest armies in the world. *Shaheeds* thus are sanctioned by religion and viewed as legitimate militant actors and national heroes who are celebrated with posters and videos after their death.

### Women's Involvement in Religious Political Groups and Armed Resistance

Muslim women make up great numbers of the active members of Palestinian Islamist groups. They often find that their work with these groups offers them a space in public life where they can gain respect and influential positions through their profound knowledge of Islam (see Hammer, 2001). Generally, Hamas and Islamic Jihad thus are not viewed as a major hindrance for women's emancipation even by secular activists (Interview, WCLAC, 2005). Yet, as far as women's militant activism is con-

... international peacemakers have much to learn from women's efforts at peace-building.



Leila Khaled

cerned, Islamists hold a very traditional view. When the First Intifada "heroine fighters" such as Dalal Mughrabi or Leila Khaled,<sup>8</sup> were celebrated as symbols of liberation, the Islamists' counter-image continued to picture women as bearers of traditional culture and mothers

who must be protected by a male member of the family and whose task it is to raise their children. The Islamist discourse in Palestine thus either ignored women's fighting role in the Resistance or publicly condemned it.

This is reminiscent of the *moudjahidates*, the Algerian female fighters, whose active fighting role in the liberation struggle was erased from history once the Islamists took over control, because such a female model was not admissible to them (Cherifati-Merabtine, 1994). Both the *moudjahidates* and the Palestinian female combatants of the First Intifada did not challenge, enter or change the Islamist discourse. They were mainly secular and did not counter the mixed responses from society.

### Female Istishhad Attacks

When Wafa Idris became the first woman to carry out an *istishhad* attack in January 2000,<sup>9</sup> it was not only the West that was shocked but also the Islamists had to struggle to find a united standpoint. In Palestinian society she is, nevertheless, celebrated as a heroine. Since then a total of seven women have become *shaheedas*<sup>10</sup> and 59 failed in their attempt to carry out an *istishhad* attack (IMFA, 2005). The new phenomenon of female *istishhad* has generated a wide debate around what motivated these women to become *shaheedas*. Media and academic coverage usually provides three main responses: religious, feminist or nationalist motivation.



Wafa Idris

Religious considerations and the belief that sacrificing one's life for the sake of the community will gain rewards in paradise can strengthen the desire for *istishhad*. The fact, however, that the first four *shaheedas* were sent out by a non-Islamist militant



group, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, proves that these women were not necessarily religiously motivated. In any case, religious motivation cannot have been the major driving force for these women, because Islamists until then had reserved the “right” to *istishhad* and its rewards in paradise for men; Wafa Idris’ death was not considered an *istishhad* by the majority of religious leaders at first. The now deceased Hamas founder, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, stressed that if a woman “goes out to *jihad* and fight, then she must be accompanied by a *mahram* (male guardian)” and that “[t]he woman is the second defense line in resistance to the occupation. She shelters the fugitive, loses the son, husband and brother, bears the consequences of this and faces starvation and blockade” (Isa, 2002 quoted in Hasso 2005). His view reflects the general Islamist understanding that Palestinian women’s identity derives from their traditional role as mothers who bear and raise the nation’s children. An *istishhad* attack where a woman destroys her own body contradicts this Islamist understanding. Dareen Abu Aisha, a devout Muslim and Hamas activist, was one of the girls who, having been rejected by Hamas and Islamic Jihad, acted on behalf of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. In a left-behind videotape she criticizes the



Dareen Abu Aisha

restrictive Islamist view stating that “women’s roles will not be confined to weeping over a son, brother or husband” (Hasso, 2005:11). Her statement kicked off a fierce debate between Islamic leaders and forced them to take up a definite position. While Yassin’s and Gaza Hamas leader Rantisi’s emphasis on women’s roles as mothers and their reluctance to legitimize female *istishhad* attacks provoked women’s protests and demonstrations from Cairo to Jeddah, others, such as Fadlallah, a spiritual guide of Hezbollah, had already legitimized women who carry out “suicide bombings” as *shaheedas* (Reuters, 2002).

The final turning point in the Islamic discourse came in 2003 when Hiba Daraghmeh and Hanadi Jaradat, acting on behalf of Islamic Jihad, became the first *shaheeda* for a religious-political group, and when in 2004 Reem Reyashi was sent out by Hamas’ militant wing (Brunner, 2005).<sup>11</sup> Following Reyashi’s attack, Yassin officially declared the female attacks as acts of *istishhad*, referring also to still existing organization-

al limitations and to the pragmatic reason that women can reach highly secured locations more easily (MEMRI, 2002; Deutsche Presse Agentur, 2004).

The *shaheedas* thus have managed to start a debate in the Islamist circles, an area that is strongly expanding but yet marginalizing women. They have succeeded in, at least temporarily, changing their discourse. While, of course, neither political violence and the idea of “equality in death” should be seen as a springboard for women’s emancipation, nor can such a “success” of influencing the radical Islamic discourse be considered a guarantee for permanent social change, yet the fact that even most conservative parts of society have recognized women’s equality in struggle and have, at least temporarily, relaxed their prior rigid traditional image of women and their dogmatic denunciation of *shaheedas* and female combatants, nevertheless, marks an important step.

This, however, is not to say that the *shaheedas* carried out their attacks with the feminist motivations of achieving gender rather than national liberation. The idea of *shaheedas* dying for a feminist cause nevertheless has prevailed, particularly in Western media. In this respect Talbot’s (2001) study on “Myths in the Representation of Women Terrorists” is interesting. She finds that “the identity of a woman terrorist is cut into mutually exclusive halves; either the “woman” or the “terrorist” is emphasized, but never together” (Talbot, 2001:1). Such an incompatibility between terrorism and feminism can be found in most accounts dealing with the Palestinian *shaheedas*.

Some sources have shown a tendency to emphasize the *shaheedas*’ female characteristics, portraying, for example, Idris as “stern-eyed” and “lush-lipped” (Florio, 2002 quoted in Hasso, 2005; or Akhras as “[a] girl as tender and as beautiful as a rose” (Atwan, 2002). The fact that Abu Aisha received only little media attention might be attributed to her strict religiosity and militancy in which she chose to present herself in her final video and photos. Such an image did not fit well with the romanticized and heroic image of, for example, Idris and Akhras, and

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challenged existing gender norms too drastically (Hasso, 2005). These authors thus negate the compatibility of aggression, brutality and violence with femininity.

Western and Israeli sources, furthermore, have often depicted the *shaheedas* either as “feminists” who, suffering from personal restrictions as women in Palestinian patriarchal society, carried out their attacks to rebel against women’s traditional role as mothers or as mere auxiliaries to men who pressured them into committing the act using their dominant patriarchal position (e.g. Dviri, 2005; Fighel, 2003; IMFA, 2003, 2005; Marcus, 2002; Schweitzer, 2003; Victor, 2004).<sup>12</sup> So Victor finds that Idris had been “a constant target for mocking after her husband divorced her” (2004:41), and Jaradat “was in love with a married man who duped her into believing that by dying a martyr’s death she would achieve equality” (2004:302).

By denying women’s willingness to participate in combat these studies reflect a conservative understanding which defines militancy as a field reserved for men and describes traditional gender roles. While some Palestinian women, in particular those

who are most exposed to Israeli military aggression in the Occupied Territories and in the camps, emphasize that women just as men have to defend their homeland and that women’s *istishhad* attacks are a sign of women’s liberation and equal readiness to die for the national cause (Interview, Ghanem, 2005; Nasar, 2005), the argument that they were also motivated by the feminist aim to initiate

change in women’s status quo seemed very far-fetched to all. Arguing that growing female emancipation has produced women’s striving for equality in militant struggle and for female *istishhad*, as Ghanem and Nasser (Interviews, 2005) and some Arab writers (e.g. Khuttab, 2003; Al-Bar’i on Al-Majd TV, 2004) do, is not a feminist statement. The feminist argument, which reverses this logical order and finds that Palestinian women carry out *istishhad* attacks to fight against female oppression in their own society, is a stereotypical Western prejudice. Palestinian women’s experience during and after

the First Intifada has clearly shown them that women’s militant involvement at best brings short-term advances and that real empowerment must be achieved through working on other levels.

If one follows Münkler’s assertion (2001) that terrorism is a “communication strategy,” it is evident that these women aimed to communicate their message to the outside world, not to Palestinian men or Islamic clerics (Brunner, 2005) and that they were concerned with communicating the Palestinian people’s plight, not women’s subordination in patriarchal society or in fundamentalist groups. The statements of female militants themselves make clear that they “represent Palestinians, not women” (Leila Khaled quoted in *The Guardian*, 2001) and that “every Palestinian, whether man or woman, is a soldier” ( Hamas activist Baid quoted in Dviri, 2005). The fact that the attacks provoked a change in the Islamist discourse is a side effect, the girls’ determination to fight the occupation and to die for their country stemmed from their nationalist feelings as Palestinians and from the despair of the hopeless situation.<sup>13</sup> The rationale of militant resistance and *istishhad* attacks for them, just as for militant men, presents a less humiliating and more promising way to an independent Palestinian state than expedient negotiations.

In sum, *shaheedas* are neither “feminists” nor religious-fanatics but at best nationalists. Palestinian *istishhad* attacks, however cruel and morally intolerable, are a consequence of 50 years of occupation, humiliation and militarization of a people which has become hopeless in its fight against a militarily far superior enemy and has lost trust in their own leaders’ and the international community’s promise to support their quest for self-determination. At least from a Palestinian’s perspective, the Palestinian female – just as male – *istishhad* attacks are defensive, not offensive acts and thus will stop once Israeli aggression and occupation ends (see Fassih, 2002; Reuter, 2003).

### Conclusion

The Palestinian women’s movement has made important advances, particularly during the last decade. They increased their official political participation, strengthened their lobbying power through the adoption of Islamic feminism, started joint peace-building with Israeli women’s groups and initiated changes in the before-exclusive Islamist discourse.

Despite its increased cooperation with national and

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international powers, the movement remains autonomous: NGOs challenge the PNA's patriarchal nature and discriminatory legal framework and Islamic feminists formulate indigenous gender policies based on the rulings of Islam. Their experiences during and after the First Intifada have made most Palestinian women aware of the fact that national and feminist policies must be tackled simultaneously.

This is true for a great number of Palestinian women, yet some, often those more directly affected by Israeli repressive policies, are marginalized. Their focus on the occupation rather than feminist issues and their resulting support of armed resistance renders them more receptive to the radical Islamist agenda. There is no question that currents of the Islamist discourse are extremely discriminatory against women. Nevertheless, some women feel empowered through their involvement in these groups. Although such choices might contradict women's long-term interest, it is important not to ignore them because they are

part of women's strategies and coping systems within their specific social and political context; they are what Kandiyoti terms "patriarchal bargains" (1991 :1).

It is important to distinguish between these short-term bargains and long-term strategies. In the Palestinian context Islamic feminism promises to be such a strategy. It does not alienate the majority of society, such as Western-style feminism and, in contrast to the short-term "patriarchal bargain" of female militancy, can change the radical Islamic discourse permanently. Islam thus is a potentially positive model for women's struggle. In view of the fact that media and academia have preferred to focus on Palestinian women's secular political, feminist and peace activism – i.e. those areas that are most compatible with Western feminism – current developments, however, rather point to a revival of religious and indigenous responses. Future research that is sensitive to these latter fields is most necessary.

## Endnotes

\* I would like to thank the German Foundation Deutscher Akademikerinnen Bund e.V. for supporting my research trip to Palestine with a travel grant. My thanks also go to all the Palestinian activists, male and female, who helped me clarifying my ideas in discussions and interviews, as well as to MEMRI TV for their provision of archive material, and to J. Steel and F. Hasso for offering me their yet unpublished papers for review.

1. For such a perception see e.g. Abdo (1994), Al-Rawi (1994), Barron (2002), Galvanis-Grantham (1996), Jad (1990), Kuttab (1991). For an account which finds a negative correlation between the occupation and women's liberation see Rubenberg (2001).

2. See Peteet's (1991:142-174) exceptional study on the impact of Palestinian women's armed resistance in Lebanon and Hasso's (2005) and Brunner's (2005) critical discussion of Palestinian women's militancy in the Second Intifada.

3. Hanan Ashrawi, spokeswomen for the Palestinian delegation at Oslo, and the other two female delegates, Zahira Kamal and Suad Ameri, are rare exceptions and their nomination should not be overestimated. Although they gained their place as a result of their persistent struggle for women's rights during the Intifada, their appointments can be seen as a "strategy of using women to sell international politics" (Sharoni, 1995:19) as well.

4. Israeli women's peace organizations include Women in Black, Women for Palestinian Women Political Prisoners, and New Profile. For a detailed study see Emmet (1996) and Sharoni (1995:88-130).

5. JCW and the Jerusalem Link is funded, amongst other donors, by the European Commission (JCW webpage, 2005). Bat Shalom's list of 33 donors includes US-Israel Women to Women, the German Heinrich Böll Foundation and the Swedish Kvinna till Kvinna (Bat Shalom webpage, 2005).

6. There are tensions within this argumentation between those

who find that women enjoy such qualities naturally and those who consider them a result of patriarchal structures (Byrne, 1996). Generally, however, such studies find that women are freer to transcend boundaries and build bridges and that their nurturing motherly sentiments enable them to perceive peace in terms of shelter, protection and defense rather than militancy, aggression and warfare (e.g. Gilligan, 1983; Ruddick, 1989; Golan, 2004).

7. In a poll conducted by E. Dabit (2004:45), 76.9 percent of the respondents said they use their religious beliefs in order to cope with the current situation.

8. Dalal Mughrabi participated in a kidnapping and was killed by Israeli security forces in 1978. Leila Khaled led a group of men to hijack a plane in 1969.

9. During the resistance fighting in Lebanon, women also carried out *istishhad* attacks. Sana Mehaydali acted on behalf of a non-Islamist Lebanese organization when she detonated explosives in front of a group of Israeli soldiers in 1985 (Schweitzer, 2003).

10. The Palestinian *shaheedas* of the Second Intifada are Wafa Idris (d. January 27, 2002), Dareen Abu Aisha (d. February 27, 2002), Ayat Akhras (d. March 29, 2002), Andaleeb Taqataqah (d. April 12, 2002), Hiba Daraghme (d. May 19, 2003), Hanadi Jaradat (d. October 4, 2003), Reem Reyashi (d. January 14, 2004), Zeinab Abu Salem (d. November 22, 2004).

11. Daraghme's and Reyashi's attacks were prepared together with the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades (Brunner, 2005).

12. Blaming Arab patriarchal culture for female *istishhad* attacks ignores the fact that female martyrs have been active worldwide (see Talbot 2001).

13. See MacMillan (2002) for an exceptional article that reflects the view of girls longing to become *shaheedas* and Chediak (2002) and Foden (2003) for two more sensitive accounts that avoid falling into the trap of blaming only personal problems, patriarchal pressure or fundamentalist fanaticism for the attacks.



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