

FURTHER READING

Fariba Adelkhah's (1991) *La Révolution sous le voile: femmes islamiques d'Iran*, is an anthropologist's account of life in post-revolutionary Iran, seen from the perspective of Islamic/Islamist women. Based on sixteen months' fieldwork in Tehran (between 1985 and 1987) and on interviews with seventy-two women of varied backgrounds – though all with a strong religious commitment – the book discusses aspects of religious practice, marriage, Islamic dress, and general participation in the life of the capital. The author avoids (or rather exposes the inadequacy of) stereotypes of women in Islam, arguing that far from being mute and passive in the face of an imposed Islamic ideology, these women see themselves, in their very varied ways, as articulate agents with some control of the conditions of their life. The book is rich in insights and a welcome contrast to the usual feminist writings on Iranian women, with which the author is thoroughly familiar.

Leila Ahmed's (1992) *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, explores the historical roots and development of Islamic discourses on women and gender from the ancient Middle East to modern Arab societies. Its main thesis is that in conquering other civilisations early Islam came to adopt their gender systems, and that in its gradual evolution Islam lost its egalitarian gender vision and became hierarchical and sexist; its exposure to Western societies led to dramatic social change and the emergence of a new discourse on women. The book not only counters stereotypes of Islam but also poses a challenge to Muslim apologists.

Ziba Mir-Hosseini's (1993) *Marriage on Trial: A Study of Islamic Family Law* is about family law in theory and practice in two Muslim societies: Iran and Morocco. Based on fieldwork in the courts and outside, as well as on extensive analyses of both law books and court records, the book focuses on the dynamics of marriage and the consequences of its breakdown, as well as the way in which litigants manipulate the law in order to resolve marital difficulties. Taking an interdisciplinary approach which straddles law and anthropology, the book shows how women use the court system to renegotiate the terms of their Shari'a marriage contract, and how they can turn the very rules that give men power in marriage to contain that power and bring it in line with their personal marital aims.

Chapter 10

The women's movement, feminism and the national struggle in Palestine

Unresolved contradictions

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On 13 July 1992, a press conference organised by all four Palestinian women's committees was held in East Jerusalem under the title 'No To Intellectual Oppression'. The four speakers on the panel were, in typical Palestinian style, chosen with care to give representation to the spectrum of political and social forces that constitute the bulwark of the wider nationalist and women's movements: a leading activist from one of the women's committees, a well-known and nationally respected figure in a number of Nablus-based women's charitable societies, a university lecturer of English literature who has written on issues of feminism and national liberation, and most important of all, Faisal al-Hussaini, the only man, the leader of the Advisory Group to one of the first Palestinian peace delegations and the acknowledged figurehead of Fateh, the largest political organisation in the Occupied Territories. The immediate reason for the calling of the press conference was the receiving of a number of threatening letters from 'fundamentalist Islamic groups during the Women's Film Festival in Jerusalem in June' 1992,¹ an event organised by the Women's Studies Centre, the only women's organisation to my knowledge with an acknowledged commitment to a feminist agenda.² The speakers and audience affirmed that this was not an isolated incident, but was representative of a continuing assault on Palestinian women and their freedom of expression, which has primarily focused on the imposition of a dress code, where short sleeves, tights, and uncovered heads are equated with immoral behaviour. Analyses and suggested solutions varied, depending on gender and politics, ranging from al-Hussaini's focus on the lack of popular committees and a call for their reintroduction, to the lack of democracy within Palestinian society and institutions in general, and the specific call for a more active participation of women in these bodies.³

This event portrays in a microcosm the underlying dynamics and contradictions at play in the current Palestinian women's and nationalist movements within the Occupied Territories and the relationship between the two. First, it usually takes a crisis situation to address a 'social' issue within the Palestinian political context. The Ramallah venue of the Women's Film Festival had to be cancelled because of threats to the institution meant to host it, while

members of the panel and audience admitted the widespread nature of the phenomenon. The main parameters of the organisation of the event and the discussion which ensued were nationalist and political, with a stress on the importance of unity. Both al-Hussaini and the women speakers, including members of the audience, stressed the necessity of a transformation in political organisation, with popular committees,⁴ an essentially male domain, being the answer for al-Hussaini, while women participants stressed the need for greater democracy and the incorporation of larger numbers of women within the existing political structures. Within the women's movement in Palestine, democratisation essentially is used to refer to the inclusion of women in the political decision making process and remains an oblique but acceptable way of addressing gender inequality within Palestinian society. The composition of the panel ensured that the press conference was seen to be based on a consensus and represented a unified, nationalist position. A demographic, geographic and political cross-section of representatives was selected to give weight and legitimacy to the event and the issue at hand: women's oppression by Islamic 'fundamentalists'. Older, more traditional charitable society members, younger, more radical progressive women's committee activists, and professional, urban-based, middle-class independents were all represented. Finally, the inclusion of Faisal al-Hussaini is indicative of the women's committees' vulnerability in addressing publicly controversial social issues on their own and their need for political and male protection *vis à vis* the Islamic 'fundamentalists'. The presence of such a well-respected and mainstream political male personality is seen by the women's committees as one of the most effective means of counteracting charges of immoral and anti-nationalist behaviour by the more conservative elements in Palestinian society.

Although the Palestinian women's movement in the Occupied Territories has undergone considerable change and expansion since the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the four main women's committees affiliated to the four major political groups operating in the Occupied Territories were first established, much has remained the same.⁵ At that time, women political activists from the main political parties came together to form specifically women's organisations in order to broaden the struggle for national liberation and to enhance women's role in this process.⁶ Women's equality within the national movement and the political process was assumed to be gained primarily through education and women's integration into the workforce. It was thought that once women were educated and employed, their political consciousness would be raised to the necessary level for their participation on an equal footing with men in the political organisations and institutions within Palestinian society. Hence, all of the women's committees, despite their political differences, organised literacy programmes, established nurseries and kindergartens to facilitate working mother-members, and promoted income generation projects to lessen women's economic dependence and provide them with useful, remunerative skills.

Thus, from the very start, the contours, parameters and contradictions characterising the women's movement were set. The women's movement in general was inextricably part of the wider nationalist movement and in particular the women's committees were affiliated to separate political organisations and were organised by activist women from these organisations. This period of Palestinian history witnessed the proliferation of a whole variety of grass-roots committees, as the officially underground and illegal resistance organisations attempted to broaden their membership at a more popular level, especially after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the subsequent forced dispersal of PLO fighters from the area which made the option of armed struggle considerably more difficult. This was a crucial period in the development of a Palestinian national consciousness which gained its form and content through the daily acts of resistance and defiance against Israeli oppression and the denial of their national rights. As a result, regardless of the diversity among the political organisations and their affiliated committees as to ideology, the common and unifying agenda was national liberation and self-determination.⁷ All other agendas, such as gender and class, were for the most part relegated as secondary and were seen essentially as relevant issues for post-independence society.

As women's organisations, the programmes of the committees were indistinguishable from those supported by the more traditional charitable societies. Income-generation projects were essentially an extension of women's domestic work, although some of the committees attempted to transform social relations through the establishment of small-scale co-operatives and to teach non-traditional female skills such as brasswork. As a movement, it gave expression to a female and not a feminist consciousness,⁸ based on 'women's awareness of their rights within the prevailing division of labour and dominant ideology'.⁹ That is, the contemporary Palestinian women's movement at its inception had no feminist agenda based on a feminist consciousness, i.e. 'women's awareness of their subordinate position within a cultural and power system and the articulation of a specifically female perspective on the social process'¹⁰

Thus, from its inception, the contemporary Palestinian women's movement in the Occupied Territories was built on inherent and objective contradictions and limitations. Although the women's committees focused their recruitment along gender lines, the primary content of their agenda was political and nationalistic. And as the focus was on the national struggle, the rhetoric of unity was predominant in spite of the underlying political differences and competition among the four committees and their parent political organisations.

This particular configuration of forces and conditions which shaped the formation of the contemporary Palestinian women's movement had long-term repercussions on its future development, making the transformation of the committees into a united, independent democratic women's movement, with a clearly defined 'social' agenda, the goal espoused by all of the four major women's committees to a varying degree, a seemingly impossible achievement.

Today, as indicated by the July press conference, the women's movement in particular and women's freedom and liberties in general are under attack by conservative social and political forces in Palestinian society. Although this opposition is expressed religiously and is spearheaded by *Hamas*¹¹ the Arabic acronym of the Islamic Resistance Movement founded in early 1988, it, like everything else in Palestinian society, represents primarily a contending political agenda which is vying for a larger constituency among Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.¹² At the same time, the women's movement is currently passing through a stage of self-criticism and re-evaluation. In May 1992, the Women's Research and Development Committee of the Bisan Research and Development Centre, Ramallah, organised a seminar under the title, 'Palestinian Women's Organisations and Democracy'.¹³ The three seminar papers presented by female academics from Birzeit University, although one is also a committee activist, focused on the lack of democracy within Palestinian society at large and within the women's committees in particular. The activist and co-ordinator of the Bisan's Women's Committee, Eileen Kuttab, went so far as to say that 'the women's committees as they are currently constituted are elite groupings of women that do not represent the interests of the majority of Palestinian women, whom they have left as prey either to liberal western ideology or to Islamic fundamentalist ideology'.¹⁴ She called for the expansion of leadership cadres 'and the base of Palestinian women's committees with new and different elements: these new elements must include young people and working class people and they must be incorporated into the decision-making process'.¹⁵ A secondary criticism of both the women's committees and the nationalist movement was the continued absence of 'a complete social program which addresses the needs of Palestinian women',¹⁶ the fifth out of six recommendations summarised at the close of the seminar. An even more scathing critique of the women's committees was expressed by Fadwa Labadi, a women's committee activist associated with the Jerusalem Women's Studies Centre, on the occasion of International Women's Day in March, 1992.¹⁷

we have yet to witness a women's movement which has addressed the concrete and fundamental issues directly related to women. . . . What has our women's movement achieved for Palestinian women? Nothing. The women's movement has become paralysed, and disease has spread through its veins. The masses have left and the movement is not in a position to bring them back. . . . I think the most important demand women can raise on this day is that their leadership be put on trial. . . . The movement must demand a re-evaluation of its work. We must move from the reiteration of empty slogans to the implementation of our demands.¹⁸

This mood is a far cry from the heady and exuberant days of the first year and a half of the Intifada, at which time most women activists and commentators praised in near unequivocal fashion the social and political transformation

occurring within Palestinian society in general and in women's role and position within it.¹⁹ Women were seen to have broken the traditional patriarchal barriers to an activist role in the nationalist struggle, whereby they took to the streets in unprecedented numbers, physically fighting against heavily armed Israeli soldiers, thus challenging the predominant stereotype of the domesticated and repressed Arab woman.²⁰ How are we to understand and evaluate what has transpired during the nearly five years of the Palestinian Intifada as regards the women's movement? Are we to accept the devastating critique of Fadwa Labadi – that the women's committees have achieved nothing for their constituency and that the women's movement is back to square one of the pre-Intifada days?

During the Intifada, Palestinian society in the Occupied Territories has experienced far-reaching changes, but these changes have been neither unilinear nor geometric. While it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate the precise nature of change during a period of flux, the collective and individual experiences of the Intifada have brought into serious question the hegemony of the Israeli Zionist state and its military rule over Palestinians and have contributed to the development of a revitalised national self confidence among Palestinians. As for women, while they too have been part of the above general process, their experiences of the Intifada have been gendered which has contributed to the development of a more feminist consciousness. As Peteet has argued for Palestinian women in Lebanon,

A specifically Palestinian feminist perspective emerged in the context of a contradiction between women's national consciousness and a structurally grounded and culturally-sanctioned limit on female autonomy that prevented women from a practice of the former.²¹

Similar to their sisters in Lebanon, Palestinian women cadres and activists in the Occupied Territories through their participation in the nationalist struggle for self-determination have come increasingly to realise and acknowledge that participation in the struggle does not necessarily lead to greater political power and authority nor does it insure increased respect and prestige within society. From the consistent chorus of voices raised by women's committee activists in their publications and open forums since the latter half of 1990, it is possible to gauge the high level of their dissatisfaction with the extent of their representation within Palestinian political organisations and institutions in general.²² On the level of the individual woman activist, it has come to be recognised that while the collectivity of women may have gained in social status as a result of women's participation in the struggle, the individual women involved often face considerable social stigma, especially if they have been in prison.²³

Another expression of women activists' awareness of their current marginalisation *vis à vis* the wider nationalist struggle and their vulnerable position in post-independence society is their constant reference to the Algerian case

as a foreboding of what is possibly in store for women in Palestine.²⁴ Palestinian women activists warn of the dangers of subordinating the social struggle to the national struggle to the extent that women may have the gains of the Intifada subverted and be forced to return to the domesticity of former years, as were women activists in post-liberation Algeria.

However, in spite of this emerging feminist consciousness among activists and cadres of the women's committees and a small number of 'independent' professional, middle-class women²⁵ who have been fighting for recognition and inclusion within the Palestinian women's movement in general, and specifically within the Unified Women's Council since 1989,²⁶ feminism remains on the whole a derogatory label which connotes unacceptable social and political behaviour for Palestinian women at this stage of the national struggle. In actuality, there is no word for feminism or feminist in the Arabic language. The adjectival form of the collective noun for women, *nisa'*, connotes feminine or women's. Thus, in order to connote the meaning of feminist, it is necessary to transliterate the word into Arabic.²⁷ Within Palestinian society, feminism is equated with sexual libertarianism which is thought to characterise women's social behaviour in the West and therefore to be antithetical to the family-oriented and gender-hierarchical Palestinian society. Within the women's committees who are sceptical of it, it is primarily identified with the political behaviour of the 'independents' and the committee members who have encouraged their inclusion in the Unified Women's Council.²⁸

The extent of the general opposition to an explicit feminist agenda in Palestinian society is indicated by the difficulties faced by a group of women headed by Sahar Khalifa, a well-known Palestinian writer and considered avant-garde in her social behaviour, when they attempted to set up the Women's Resource and Training Centre in Nablus. During the year and a half it took for the centre to be established (1989-90), the founding group faced hostility and scepticism. They were confronted with questions such as:

Do you plan on treating women as a separate category from men and encouraging women towards crime? Are you going to imitate American feminists, thereby distancing women from the problems and development of their country and their love of men?²⁹

The founding group attributes their eventual success to the fact that [we] proved that we are with men, not against them, that we are for the development of women, without whom it makes talking about national liberation in its full sense difficult, ... [we support] intellectual and political pluralism, differences of opinion and discussion, all liberation movements in all parts of the world and change contributing to progress. We are not partisan to any philosophy or particular ideology ... and perhaps it is for this reason, [that we are open to all], that we were able to gain the confidence of a conservative city such as Nablus.³⁰

Thus, in the general context of a society in the process of challenging the legitimacy of a colonial settler regime and its historical right to govern over that society, and in the specific context of the Zionist state and its unique relation to international Jewish organisations such as the Jewish National Fund, which claims legal ownership of all 'state' land occupied or purchased within the 1948 boundaries and likewise within those parts of historical Palestine occupied in 1967 (the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem), and in light of the recent historical phase of massive Jewish emigration from the former Soviet Union and the subsequent intensified settlement policy of the former Likud government within the Occupied Territories, it is not surprising that the national struggle for Palestinian self-determination has taken precedence over all other struggles and social issues within the Occupied Territories. In terms of the women's movement, 'social' or gender issues as they pertain to the cultural realm have come to the forefront of public debate only when the wider nationalist political struggle has been facing internal contradictions and in times of crisis when these issues have been forced upon it. And even then, the women's movement has been slow to act and challenge openly manifestations of gender inequality pertaining to women's social position within Palestinian society.

A clear example of this is the women's movement's handling of the attempt by *Hamas* and other conservative forces to impose a dress code among women in the Gaza Strip and, to a lesser degree, in the West Bank. The issue was not challenged publicly until the summer of 1989, following a particularly dramatic incident between two well-known activist women from the Gaza Strip and a group of youths in one of the main markets in Gaza City. Although the women were wearing headscarves, they were threateningly ordered to cover 'all' of their hair. When one of the women said she would defend herself with a knife which was in her bag and started to unzip it, the youths started shouting to the crowd that the women were collaborators and were carrying a tape recorder. They were then chased en masse by a crowd of men into a local shop, where they substantiated that they were not carrying any recording device. Subsequently, the youths were 'tried' by a popular committee and found guilty. They were made to apologise to the women and their families and to pay a considerable fine of 3,000 Jordanian dinars or approximately £1,100.³¹

It was only then that the Unified Women's Council pressurised the reticent Unified National Leadership of the Intifada to issue a statement in Leaflet 43, condemning the imposition of a dress code on Palestinian women. This occurred, however, only after the Unified Women's Council issued their own statement against the phenomenon.³² But, by that time, it was virtually impossible for a woman in the Gaza Strip to walk on the street with her head uncovered, wearing short sleeves, or a skirt to the knees. Why had the women's committees waited so long to act concerning an issue which directly affected the personal freedom of thousands of Palestinian women and which had been going on for well over a year, especially since the summer of 1988?³³

It was only in December 1990, one year and four months later, that the issue was addressed in a public forum. At that time, the Bisan Centre's Women's Studies Committee held a conference under the general and vague title of 'The Intifada and Some Women's Social Issues', where the issue of the dress code (*hijab*) and other negative phenomenon *vis à vis* women, e.g. the drop in the age of marriage for women and the increase in the dropout rate of female secondary and university students, were discussed.³⁴ However, it was not *the* issue discussed, as considerable attention was focused on Palestinian women's lack of political representation in this forum. The organisers had faced much trepidation in the actual holding of such an event, as fear of threats and reprisals were rampant. A well-known and nationally respected female head of a charitable society even declined to participate in the conference as part of one of the panels.³⁵ And, once again, Faisal al-Hussaini was needed to give legitimacy to the issue and protection to those organising the event by presenting one of the opening speeches which had little relevance to the subject of the conference. Nevertheless, the women's movement has been unsuccessful in reversing the imposition of a dress code in the Gaza Strip, in spite of official condemnation by *Hamas* and all nationalist political organisations, and has shifted its emphasis back again to the political arena and the issue of democracy within the women's committees.

In conclusion, I would argue that in the articulation of the women's movement's current slogans of *unity* and *democracy* and in its demand for the equal importance of the *social* and *political* agendas are inherent contradictions which emanate from the particular conjuncture of forces and circumstances which have given rise and helped to shape the contemporary Palestinian women's movement and which help to explain the current dilemma facing this movement in its struggle against gender inequality within Palestinian society. *Unity* is crucial in the struggle for Palestinian self-determination against Israeli occupation, while *democracy* provides the space needed for all marginal social and political forces to express themselves in the ongoing struggle over hegemony within Palestinian society, be they those arguing for gender issues or for a radical, non-capitalist alternative to the organisation of society. But these two things are in objective contradiction to one another. Likewise, a clear commitment to a *social agenda* by the women's movement is required if they are to justify their existence as a separate movement and if they are to address and give voice to the real gender inequalities characterising social and political relations within Palestinian society. On the other hand, the historical, ideological and pragmatic links between the women's committees, the vanguard of the Palestinian women's movement, and the political organisations and power structures cannot be denied. Similarly, the immediacy and the determinancy of the *political* within Palestinian society at its current juncture precludes the possibility of the withdrawal of the women's movement and its leaders from this arena. Not even the most critical of the women's committees' lack of a commitment to a social agenda would suggest that they abandon the nationalist struggle.³⁶

In the end, the most serious dilemma facing the women's committees in my opinion is in the necessity to challenge that most basic and sacred unit of social organisation within Palestinian society, the family, and the gender inequalities on which it is built. For it is in the unequal gender division of labour within the household and in the lack of control over women's reproductive capabilities that lie the major objective factors which prohibit Palestinian women, at a theoretical or actual level, to participate as equal partners in the political process and the nationalist struggle. With extremely high birth rates,³⁷ and in conditions of inadequate infrastructure and poverty, especially in the refugee camps and villages where the majority of Palestinians live, and with social and kinship relations which increase the daily domestic chores for Palestinian women in an unequal gender division of labour, where men virtually do no domestic chores, most Palestinian women do not even have the option of participation in politics or in the women's committees. In spite of this, the women's committees have made only tangential remarks about these inequalities, with the most radical suggesting the need for communal, public laundromats, restaurants, etc., but not a reorganisation of the division of labour between the sexes.³⁸ Such an issue is seen as smacking of Western feminism and inappropriate for Palestinian society at this stage in its development.

But, perhaps the most problematic of all is the very pro-natalist attitude predominant within Palestinian society, with activists from the women's committees being no exception to the rule. While the size of their families may be small compared to the majority of those women living in refugee camps and villages, the majority see motherhood as a national duty. However, children and the work and responsibilities that they entail, most of which fall upon the shoulders of female family members, all act to limit women's freedom to participate in non-domestic and non-household activities.

These issues have yet to be confronted and addressed by the Palestinian women's committees in any serious way. For the majority of Palestinian women, most of whom have not even heard of the women's committees, let alone being members,³⁹ these underlying objective realities shape their everyday lives and limit the possibilities of their participation in the wider women's and nationalist movements. The real challenge to the Palestinian women's movement today is to what extent they can address the issues of gender inequality on the home front, while pursuing their political agenda of greater female participation in the decision-making process, while not alienating the bulk of ordinary women and without marginalising their movement even further. The Palestinian women's movement indeed has a difficult and an unenviable task in front of it.

NOTES

- 1 Habash (1992).
- 2 *News From Within* (1992), 8(5): 9.

- 3 Habash (1992).
- 4 Locally based popular committees (*lajan sha'biyya*) developed during the early days of the Intifada as an organisational basis to meet the new needs of the Palestinian national struggle: distribution of food and other aid to areas under long curfews, reproduction and distribution of the regular communiqués of the Unified National Leadership (UNL) of the Intifada, guarding against army and collaborator attacks and intrusions, etc. What al-Hussaini forgets is that the fundamentalist campaign to impose a dress code on women, mainly in the Gaza Strip, went unaddressed by the popular committees even in their heyday, as such a 'social' issue was considered at best, secondary, or unimportant relative to the nationalist agenda of the struggle, with some political forces actually agreeing to the dress code for tactical and ideological reasons.
- 5 The four main women's committees are: Federation of Palestinian Women's Action Committees (1978), formerly called the Women's Work Committees; Union of Palestinian Working Women's Committees (1979); Union of Palestinian Women's Committees (1981); and Union of Women's Committees for Social Work (1982).
- 6 See al-Barghuthi (1991) and Liftawi (1991).
- 7 The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and their affiliated committees proclaimed adherence to Marxism-Leninism and supported armed struggle. Fatch, the largest political organisation, focused exclusively on a nationalist agenda, the creation of a secular democratic state, and supported the armed struggle. The Palestine Communist Party (PCP), which in 1991 reorganised and renamed itself the Palestine People's Party (PPP), focused on the mobilization of the working class and trade union activity, was against armed struggle, and argued for a two-state solution. It was formally included in the PLO only in 1987.
- 8 Julie Peteet (1991) draws the distinction between female and feminist consciousness in her study on Palestinian women in Lebanon entitled *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement* (p. 71), referring to the work of Temma Kaplan (1981) 'Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918', in N. Keohane, M. Rosaldo and B. Gelpi (eds) *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- 9 Peteet (1991).
- 10 *ibid.*
- 11 *Hamas* is the political organ of the Muslim Brotherhood which was forced by the events of the Intifada to change its name and revitalise its organisation as the four main political groups expanded rapidly in the early days of the Uprising. It supports armed struggle and the establishment of an Islamic state.
- 12 For a more detailed discussion of *Hamas* and the women's movement in the Occupied Territories, see Hammami (1990).
- 13 For a summary of the seminar's proceedings, see *News From Within*, 8(6), 3 June 1992: 9-12 and *al-Fajr The Dawn* 1992, 13(626): 11. The full proceedings will be published by Bisan Research and Development Centre in Ramallah.
- 14 *News From Within* 1992, 8(6): 12.
- 15 *ibid.*
- 16 *ibid.*
- 17 For an adaptation and translation of the original article by Fadwa Labadi entitled 'On Women's Day: The Palestinian Women's Movement on Trial' in *al-Mar'a*, March 1992, 10, see *News From Within* 1992, 8(5): 8-11.
- 18 *ibid.*, pp. 10-11.
- 19 For examples of this type of material, see the literature produced by the various women's committees during this period of the Intifada.
- 20 See for example Giacaman and Johnson (1989) and Kuttab (1990).
- 21 Peteet (1991: 72).
- 22 See Women's Studies Committee (1991) *The Intifada and Some Women's Social Issues*, 'Final Resolutions', pp. 23-9. See also the contributions of Kuttab, al-'Asali, and the four representatives of the Women's Committees' Workshop, Liftawi, Nassar, Qura, and al-Barghuthi. All but Qura, representing the Union of Women's Committees for Social Work, the mainstream women's committee, focus on the lack of female participation in political decision making.
- 23 *ibid.*, p. 25. Peteet also mentions a similar phenomenon for Palestinian female resistance fighters in Lebanon, who are often considered to have loose morals, except if they are killed heroically in battle, and then they are catapulted to the status of hero. See Peteet (1991: 152-3).
- 24 Women's Studies Committee (1991) *The Intifada and Some Women's Social Issues*, p. 90 (Liftawi), p. 108 (al-Barghuthi) and p. 34 (Kuttab). See also Labadi (1992: 11).
- 25 The 'independents' (*al-mustaqilat*) emerged as a political and social force during the Intifada. They were, and remain, a disparate group of women academics and professionals who have had varying degrees of contact and relations with the four women's committees, but who have refused to join these organisations officially due primarily to the formers' political affiliation with illegal and underground organisations. They have tended to stress the need for a united women's movement, above 'factionalist' politics, which would focus on women's issues and not nationalist politics.
- 26 During the first year of the Intifada, the four women's committees formed the Higher Women's Council (HWC) primarily to enhance their political legitimacy and increase their weight *vis-à-vis* the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising. A co-ordinating committee for the women's committees had existed since 1984, but it was the political context that provided the main impetus for the formation of the HWC. It was later renamed the Unified Women's Council (UWC) and has been plagued by differences among the committee representatives emanating primarily from political differences. For a fuller discussion of the HWC and the UWC, see Hiltermann (1991). See also Liftawi (1991), Nassar (1991) and al-Barghuthi (1991) for a critique of the UWC from the point of view of the three progressive women's committees.
- 27 For an example, see 'Introduction' to *Women's Affairs*, May 1991: 2.
- 28 See Nassar (1991: 96) for a critique of the political role of the 'independents' and their supporters within the women's committees.
- 29 'Introduction', *Women's Affairs*, May 1991: 2. *Women's Affairs* is the first publication of the Nablus-based Women's Resource and Training Centre, which has also set up a branch in the Gaza Strip.
- 30 *ibid.*
- 31 For more details of this incident, see Hammami (1990).
- 32 See Nassar (1991: 97).
- 33 Part of the explanation is the fact that the women's political leadership resides predominantly in the central region of the West Bank, i.e. Jerusalem and Ramallah, and hence was basically unaffected by the phenomenon, which focused on Gazan women. Had it not been for the dramatic event involving the two well-known activists with strong links with the movement in the West Bank, the issue might have not gained the attention it did at that time.
- 34 In the discourse on the issue of the dress code within Palestine and the Arab world in general, the Arabic word for women's veiling (*hijab*) is used.
- 35 Personal communication with one of the organisers of the conference, December 1990.

- 36 See Labadi (1992: 11).
- 37 In 1990, the birth rate in Gaza was 54.6 per thousand population, and in the West Bank it was 44.1 per thousand. The annual population growth rate for the same year was 5.2 in Gaza, and 4.3 in the West Bank (*Israel Statistical Abstract 1991*, Jerusalem: Central Bureau of Statistics).
- 38 See Nassar (1991).
- 39 See the summary of a research project on Shati', a refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, by Erica Lang and Itimad Mohanna (1991) 'Women and Work in One Refugee Camp of the Gaza Strip', where they state that 57.8 per cent of the sample of women had not even heard of the women's committees (p. 15). A study by Suha Hindiyeh and Afaf Ghazauna (nd) shows that 93.1 per cent of the women interviewed were not active in the women's committees (p. 5).

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FURTHER READING

It is necessary to make a few general comments about the nature of the literature on Palestinian society under Israeli occupation. First, sociological and anthropological studies on Palestinian society in English and in Arabic are limited in number. Given the primacy of the political and military struggle, most works on Palestine have focused on these dimensions. Second, the ethics and sensitivity of undertaking research on a

people under occupation need to be taken into consideration. The realities of Israeli occupation determine to a large extent what can and cannot be researched, both practically and politically. Finally, due to the highly politicised nature of Palestinian society, most researchers will tend to have a closer relationship with those in a particular political group. This political reality may affect the researcher's access to data and their interpretation.

In terms of studies on gender issues in Palestine, there is an even greater paucity. As the reader will have noticed from the sources used in this chapter, most of the literature is written in Arabic by local women's committees and organisations. Hence, it is not easily accessible, especially to the non-Arabic reader. Likewise, as it is mainly produced by politicised women's groups for mobilisation and recruitment purposes, this literature tends to be more journalistic than academic. Thus, there are very few detailed, empirically grounded and analytical texts on gender issues in Palestine. A useful bibliography of the literature is *Annotated Bibliography on Palestinian Women*, compiled by Pari Bauman and updated by Rema Hammami (1989, Jerusalem: Arab Thought Forum).

Nevertheless, there are a few texts available to the English reader which provide an overview of the women's question in Palestine. Perhaps the best introduction is Kitty Warnock's (1990) *Land Before Honour: Palestinian Women in the Occupied Territories* (Basingstoke: Macmillan). Warnock taught cultural studies at Birzeit University from 1981 until 1986 and hence developed a well-grounded understanding of Palestinian society. Her study is built upon a series of in-depth interviews with Palestinian women.

Another useful text is Joost Hiltermann's (1991) *Behind the Intifada: Labor and Women's Movements in the Occupied Territories*. Hiltermann carried out his research, which was originally for his doctorate in sociology, from 1984 until 1989 while he worked for al-Haq, a Palestinian human rights organisation in Ramallah. Hiltermann's study examines the processes of mass mobilisation under occupation, with a specific focus on the labour and the women's movements. By his own account, Hiltermann originally relied upon his close ties to 'one particular faction of the Palestinian national movement' (1991: x). Although he states that he has tried to rectify this bias in the final published text, I think that this tendency still remains. However, a more general comment is that his analysis of the women's movement relies heavily upon the textual analysis of women's committees' documents and interviews with their leadership. Hence, there are few data about or analysis of ordinary women in villages and refugee camps. The sex/gender of the researcher is relevant in this respect.

Another body of literature on Palestine grew considerably during the Intifada years, 1987-93. During this period, the Occupied Territories of Palestine were inundated with foreign journalists, activists and academics, many of whom had no previous expertise in the area, knew no Arabic, and usually stayed for brief periods. Some of them wrote autobiographical accounts of their experiences. Many of these accounts are written for women. Examples include Helen Winternitz's (1991) *A Season of Stones: Living in a Palestinian Village* (New York: Atlantic Monthly), Janine Di Giovanni's (1993) *Against the Stranger: Lives in Occupied Territory* (London: Viking) and Sherna Berger Gluck's (1995) *An American Feminist in Palestine: The Intifada Years* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press). One account which focuses specifically on women and gender issues is Philippa Strum's (1992) *The Women are Marching: The Second Sex and the Palestinian Revolution* (New York: Lawrence Hill). These works should be read with considerable caution.

Finally, particular mention should be made of Julie M. Pectect's (1991) *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement*. Although this work focuses on Lebanon, it is well worth reading for those interested in gender issues in Palestine.

Pectect, an anthropologist, carried out her fieldwork from 1980 to 1982, but had previously lived in Lebanon. She brings to her data a highly nuanced analytical and critical perspective. This work represents, in my opinion, the best study to date of the complex relationship between nationalism and feminism within a Palestinian context.