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## PALESTINIAN REFUGEE WOMEN OF JABALIYA CAMP, OCCUPIED GAZA STRIP: EVERYDAY ACTS OF RESISTANCE AND AVENUES OF EMPOWERMENT

Sharon French Wallace  
*University of Kentucky*, [sharon.wallace@uky.edu](mailto:sharon.wallace@uky.edu)

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Sharon French Wallace

The Graduate School  
University of Kentucky  
2009

PALESTINIAN REFUGEE WOMEN OF JABALIYA CAMP, OCCUPIED GAZA  
STRIP: EVERYDAY ACTS OF RESISTANCE AND AVENUES OF  
EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By  
Sharon French Wallace  
Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Rosalind Harris, Professor of Sociology  
Lexington, Kentucky

2009

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### PALESTINIAN REFUGEE WOMEN OF JABALIYA CAMP, OCCUPIED GAZA STRIP: EVERYDAY ACTS OF RESISTANCE AND AVENUES OF EMPOWERMENT

The lives of Palestinian refugee women are complex and layered, embedded in the constraints and dictates of a patriarchal class system within a conservative culture that has been shaped by resistance to the Israeli military occupation since 1948. Over six decades of Israeli military occupation, ongoing national resistance, poverty and a male-dominated society are a few of the forces that continue to shape the lives of refugee women today. The Israeli occupation has obstructed the development of a viable Palestinian economy and legal institutions that could serve as a framework for attaining women's rights. In addition, Palestinian women, especially refugee women have limited employment and education opportunities due to the military violence which serves to strengthen patriarchal norms that discourage women seeking either higher education or work outside the home. Military occupation and traditional patriarchal society are therefore two inter connected processes central to the formation of gender identities and roles for women living in refugee camps. Palestinian refugee women are also part of a unique experience of being refugees on their own land.

A central question arises as to whether, in the absence of an independent Palestinian state, refugee women can be agents of transformation in their personal, familial and community relations. It is necessary to explore the potential for resistance and empowerment at the local level as defined and expressed by women and men in Jabaliya camp in an effort to assist in responding to this question. The everyday experiences of women explored in this study from the standpoint of women and men in Jabaliya refugee camp and their interpretations and perceptions of those experiences, are the basis for identifying everyday acts of resistance and potential avenues of empowerment among women in the camp. Everyday resistance and the process of empowerment are evident in the lives of women. The data show both subtle and open acts of defiance to oppressive ideas and social structures as well as a clear development of a critical understanding of women's roles and status in the camp.

KEYWORDS: Palestinian Refugee Women, Everyday Resistance,  
Empowerment, Gender Inequality, Refugee Women

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Date

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DISSERTATION

Sharon French Wallace

The Graduate School  
University of Kentucky  
2009



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To my children Camila, Lorena, Luca and Aidan, may they continue the struggle  
to build a more just world for all

## Acknowledgment

I am writing this at a time when the Israeli air force is indiscriminately bombing Gaza. Jabaliya camp has been bombed. So it is with great sadness and despair that I offer my appreciation, first and foremost, to the Palestinian women and men of Jabaliya refugee camp who shared their lives with me and taught me the meaning of “sumud” or steadfastness. In spite of the brutal Israeli occupation they continue to hope for a better future. I am also grateful to Palestinian men and women, especially Aiesha an Abu Obieda, who were committed to assisting in the completion of this work.

This dissertation benefited from the insights, direction and guidance of many people in the United States as well. It has been a privilege to work with the members of my committee. First, I would like to acknowledge my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Rosalind Harris, whose support and patience over the years helped me to persevere. I would also like to thank my co-chair, Dr. Patricia Ahmed. Dr. Ahmed continually both challenged and confirmed my efforts at every stage of the dissertation process. I wish to thank my entire committee and outside examiner, respectively: Dr. Rosalind Harris, Dr. Patricia Ahmed, Dr. Robert Olson, Dr. Shaunna Scott and Dr. Diane King. Each individual provided instructive and insightful comments that substantially improved and advanced my work.

In addition to the assistance from my committee, I received important support from my friends and family. My mother, though not directly involved in the dissertation process, has been and continues to be an inspiration to all who work for justice and human rights. My father, who died before I became “Dr. Wallace,” was happy with whatever path I chose in life. However, he did say at one time that to have one of his children complete a doctoral thesis “would be a feather in his cap.” Now he has that feather. My four children, Camila Lorena, Luca and Aidan, I am sure, are relieved that this work is completed.

The many friends who supported me in during the lengthy time it took to complete this dissertation have been and are invaluable. I am especially blessed with the friendship and support of Drs. Ibrahim Imam and Linda Jasper. Many moments of the dissertation process would have been very difficult (and lonely) without them. Anni, Rosemary, Lui, Amirage, Wendy, and many other wonderful human beings were part of my life at different stages of the dissertation and I appreciate their sincere support and joy in the final completion of this thesis.

Finally, I acknowledge that words are important, but without action they are less effective. And as a social justice activist, the struggle to build a world based on human rights and justice is not only possible, but necessary.

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## Chapter One

### Palestinian Women of Jabaliya Refugee Camp, Occupied Gaza Strip: An Introduction

The lives of Palestinian refugee women are complex and layered, embedded in the constraints and dictates of a patriarchal class system within a conservative culture that has been shaped by resistance to the Israeli military occupation since 1948. Over six decades of Israeli military occupation, ongoing national resistance, poverty and a male-dominated society are a few of the forces that continue to shape the lives of refugee women today. The Israeli occupation has obstructed the development of a viable Palestinian economy and legal institutions that could serve as a framework for attaining women's rights. In addition, Palestinian women, especially refugee women have limited employment and education opportunities due to the military violence which serves to strengthen patriarchal norms that discourage women seeking either higher education or work outside the home. Military occupation and traditional patriarchal society are therefore two inter connected processes central to the formation of gender identities and roles for women living in refugee camps. Palestinian refugee women are also part of a unique experience of being refugees on their own land.

A central question arises as to whether, in the absence of an independent Palestinian state, to what extent can refugee women be agents of transformation in their personal, familial and community relations? I have chosen to explore the potential for resistance and empowerment at the local level as defined and expressed by women and men in Jabaliya camp in an effort to assist in responding to this question. The everyday experiences of women explored in this study from the standpoint of women and men in



Jabaliya refugee camp and their interpretations and perceptions of those experiences, are the basis for identifying everyday acts of resistance and potential avenues of empowerment among women in the camp. Everyday resistance and the process of empowerment are evident in the lives of women and the data show both subtle and open acts of defiance to oppressive ideas and social structures as well as a clear development of a critical understanding of women's role and status in the camp. In this chapter I present the following: 1) goals of this study, 2) gender in research, 3) background of the study and 4) data description.

#### Goals of this Study

This study focuses specifically on women of Jabaliya camp in the Occupied Gaza Strip. The central question is whether or not the women are able to forge avenues for empowerment in the context of occupation, national resistance and male domination, through everyday acts of resistance. This study explores the ways that women perceive, articulate, and navigate through their social and political positions and whether these actions serve to empower them. The primary questions addressed in this study are as follows: Do every day experiences and interpretations as expressed by Palestinian women provide the space and opportunity to resist or alter the relations of power that define and shape their lives? How are women's roles and expectations in a patriarchal society under military occupation defined, challenged or accommodated?

These questions seek to explore the connection between everyday resistance and the process of empowerment that can lead to social change. However, the identification and definition of what qualifies as an act of resistance and the process of empowerment

are contextually dependent. For example, Western definition and conceptualization of victimization of women may not reflect the perceptions and interpretations of Palestinian refugee women. According to anthropologist Peteet, camp women in refugee camps are seen as victims representing the broader victimization of a whole people. Yet they are able to survive, in spite of the conditions of violence under military occupation. This survival in the face of overwhelming violence is considered a form of resistance. Women are viewed as survivors who continue to bear children amidst extreme poverty and insecurity, attempting to hold their families together in the face of powerful forces of military occupation and economic instability (Tucker, ed. 1993).

Motherhood has come to signify the nation as women bare and nurture children for the national struggle (Abu-Duhou, 2003) and motherhood itself is seen as a form of resistance in Palestinian society. Mariam Abu-Dakkah of the Union of Palestinian Women's Association states, "the Palestinian woman is making sure that for every funeral there is a wedding and for every death there is a birth" (Alnuweiri, 2002). When a mother loses her son or daughter as a result of his or her participation in the resistance to Israeli occupation, this maternal sacrifice is considered a "supreme political act" by the male-dominated nationalist discourse (Peteet, 1997). Yet this image of the Palestinian woman as victimized by occupation does not have the same Western connotations of victim hood. In this context victimization is revered and honored precisely because it is viewed as an act of resistance under oppressive conditions. Here victimization does not negate agency. Yet although Palestinian women are honored from a reproductive perspective this honor has not elevated her social status in Palestinian society (Amal, 2001). It is evident that

the location and context of power relations and conditions of women determines both agency and perceptions of agency. Therefore, in order to study the lives and experiences of Palestinian refugee women it is necessary to define gender and how this social category is shaped, and shapes, the relationship between agency and social forces.

### Gender in Research

According to Lorber (1994:1), gender is an all-pervasive social institution that "establishes patterns of expectations for individuals, orders processes of everyday life, is built into the major social organizations of society, such as the economy, ideology, the family and politics, and is also an entity in and of itself." Gender is also a power relation that is situated within the specific culture, social relations and political economy that is space and time specific. It is a social category that carries with it social interpretation and valuation that is both fluid and dynamic. In this study, focus on the everyday lives of refugee women allows for a local analysis of the contradictions and challenges women experience in the context of a double occupation: military occupation by an outside force and male-domination from within Palestinian society. In addition, these two forces are interrelated and this relationship shapes the social conditions of women. For example, decades of military oppression and violence has impeded the development of legal institutions and the implementation of laws that could advance opportunities and equal rights for women. The Palestinian national resistance is also male-dominated in spite of the fact that women suffer the consequences of the occupation and have been historically active in resisting the occupation forces. Gender definitions and expectations pervade all aspects of Palestinian women's lives and are shaped by patriarchal, foreign military and

economic forces. It is through the recognition of these structures of power that shape women's lives and their relational responses as expressed from their standpoint that we may uncover potential avenues for empowerment.

As a Western white feminist studying Palestinian women in a refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, it is necessary to address the critical issue of Western feminist scholarship and the political construction of "Third World women." Even to define feminism is challenging, especially in the context of Western research of non-western women. Abu-Lughod suggests that feminism is minimally the "concern with women's conditions and with the political, economic, social and cultural implications of systems of gender" (Abu-Lughod, 1993:4). However "feminists should recognize other forms of gender and culture based subjectivities, and accept that others often choose to conduct their lives separate from our particular vision of the future" (Ong, cited in Abu-Lughod, 1993:4-5). These two approaches to feminism and scholarship underlie this study. The recording of everyday lives, of women and by women, facilitates the mediation between our two politically and socially constructed worlds and provides a vehicle through which the voices of Palestinian women can be heard.

Integral to this approach is the realization that there can be no apolitical scholarship. The assumption that there is a category "women," with similar interests and aspirations implies that the definition of gender and even patriarchy is universal regardless of class, race or national location. The assumption that the oppression of women is universal and homogeneous has produced a predominantly Western image of Third World women as sexually constrained, backward, ignorant, poor, uneducated, and

tradition-bound victims. This image is in opposition to the image of the First World Woman who is educated, modern, and has control over her body and decisions that affect her life (Mohanty, 1991). Western feminist writing on women in the Third World is located primarily within the global hegemony of Western political, economic and military power. The religious, economic, legal and familial structures, for example, are often judged by Western feminist standards instead of in their local and historical contexts (Mohanty, 2003).

According to Mohanty, (1991), in her critique of Western white feminism, the objectification of women in the Third World as powerless victims denies women a role in shaping, challenging and changing the very social relations that define women contextually. The assumption assumes homogeneity and denies specificity and history. As a consequence, Western feminist discourse may silence the experiences of women of the Third World. Third World Women are not portrayed as dynamic beings capable of agency but rather frozen in time, space and place. The assumption is that the West is the norm and the “underdeveloped” world has simply not evolved to the developmental stage of the West. Women of the “developing” world are constructed as the “other.” They are defined primarily in terms of their “objective status” outside the social relations that shape and are shaped by their lives (Mohanty, 2003). This study moves beyond the political construction of “Third World Women” by localizing and contextualizing the lives of Palestinian refugee women. By recording their unique, everyday experiences, shaped by national and international forces I attempt to break down the barriers between “us and them.”

This study challenges the assumption that women who live in poverty, subjugated by male-dominated definitions of gender and living under foreign military occupation are without voice and agency. The category “woman” is constructed in a variety of interconnected political, social and economic contexts that often exist simultaneously. By highlighting the everyday experiences and interpretations of their lives we are able to avoid reductionist approaches inherent in some Western research. This study also strives to provide a conduit for the voices of those living under conditions of poverty, male domination and occupation. Highlighting the voices of refugee women can serve to make visible the often invisible. Visibility can increase our understanding of the gender dynamics unique to each context with the intent of building bridges between scholarship that stands in solidarity with the oppressed, the women who share their lives with us and our audience. As a researcher and social justice activist I am responsible for recognizing and incorporating into theory and practice, the connection between patriarchy and military occupation in Palestinian women’s daily lives as well as the western power relations that define and shape lives of “the other.”

### Background of the Study

Every year since 1991 I have traveled to, and worked in, occupied Gaza Strip and the West Bank until December of 2005 when I was refused re-entry by Israeli security. Palestinian men and women would often share a saying that, when translated into English, literally means, “the future is black.” This comment was a common response to questions about daily life. Deterioration of conditions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as a result of what Palestinians perceive as the last stages of a process of ethnic cleansing

by Israeli occupation forces that began in 1948, has resulted in an increase in despair and frustration. The continued dispossession of the indigenous population and colonization of Palestinian land, the construction of what has been described as “open-air prisons” through walled-in areas and military checkpoints has left a people without hope for a future, for themselves or their children. It is important to understand this situation of permanent crisis. The impact of Israeli military occupation on the everyday experiences of refugee women and their efforts to improve their conditions cannot be over-emphasized.

I traveled to the Occupied Gaza Strip and the West Bank for over a decade before embarking on this study. Many of my associations and interactions have been with women working in nongovernmental organizations, politically active urban women, and Palestinian women living and working in Gaza City. However, after 1991 I made a concerted effort to interview and record the experiences of women in the camps and villages of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. My aim was to record the experiences of Palestinians in the wake of the United States bombing of Iraq and the forty-two days of 24-hour curfew imposed by the Israeli military on occupied Palestinian territories outside the 1948 border. I also became aware of the lack of coordination between camp women and Palestinian women political leaders or women active in women’s organizations in the cities and towns.

This disjuncture reflects the political and economic divisions that separate women as well as the social divisions between refugee and non-refugee women. This disjuncture emphasizes the need to focus on the voices and experiences of those who are not

recognized as potential agents of change. Palestinian women, especially refugee women, play a crucial role in maintaining and transmitting Palestinian culture and history in the context of on-going ethnic cleansing by Israeli forces. Many Palestinian refugee women have also become sole financial providers for their families in a society that does not support women's employment. In spite of challenges to institutional and political change and increasing economic deterioration, Palestinian refugee women are aware of the various oppressive structures and ideologies that can silence their voices and render agency invisible. This critical awareness is a challenge to the dominant power structures. Palestinian women also exhibit raised expectations even in the absence of an independent state and the development of democratic legal institutions that could facilitate advances in women's rights. The timing of this study reflects this intersection of raised expectations and lack of viable economic, political and social vehicles for social change.

The interviews and collection of data were completed one month prior to the outbreak of the second uprising known as the second *Intifada* or the *Al Aqsa Intifada*. This uprising was the result of seven years of disillusionment with the Oslo Peace Process. The Oslo Peace Process, negotiated between the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1993, called for mutual recognition and a five-year period during which Israel would remove troops from major Palestinian cities and towns. However the Oslo process failed to produce a definitive peace agreement and the Israeli government continued to build illegal Jewish settlements on confiscated Palestinian land. Since 1993 several efforts have been made to reach a settlement. None



have succeeded. The Roadmap of 2003, pulled together by the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations outlined a process that would result in the establishment of an independent Palestinian State by the year 2005. However Israel did not cease its settlement expansion in the West Bank and continued to aggressively impose its military occupation with unconditional support from the United States (Author interview with Jim Paul, Executive Director of Global Policy Forum, summer 2006.).

Although many Palestinians hoped that the Oslo peace process would bring some level of self-determination and justice it became clear that the process was a plan to stall, and ultimately make impossible, any real steps toward establishing an independent Palestinian State. For example, after signing the Oslo Accords, Israel confiscated Palestinian land and water sources at a faster pace than before the Oslo Accords and continued to build and consolidate illegal Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian land. The collection of data for this occurred during a time of increased frustration and alienation with the political process and a deterioration of economic conditions, especially among refugees in the Gaza Strip.

#### Data Description

Thirty-seven individuals were interviewed for this study. The interviews were completed by Aiesha, a resident of Gaza City, between January and August of 2000. The interviews were conducted in groups and individually. Of the three arranged groups, two are groups of four women each and one is a group of four men. Fourteen women and eleven men were interviewed individually. The men and women interviewed for this study are not homogenous in their views of women's roles in society. Their vision of the

future also varies. There is heterogeneity among the camp residents in their attitudes and choices on nearly every issue concerning women's identities, needs and demands. Nevertheless a number of patterns emerge from the study. Therefore the data provides insights on how women negotiate their realities and how they position themselves in relation to others. The respondents also offer critiques of their lives in relation to Palestinian traditions, culture, society and politics. The data thus validates the importance of both voice and experience as method and emphasizes the need to focus on the everyday lives of women. This approach will assist in developing a better understanding of the social construction and reproduction of gender roles and how both are related to the process of empowerment.

After years of living and working with Palestinian women I have realized that the daily and often invisible struggles of women are particularly critical to their own maintenance, liberation and progress as well as to that of a society under military occupation. The multi-levels of domination that Palestinian women in Jabaliya camp experience include the family and community, Israeli occupation and national resistance. How Palestinian women navigate and challenge these intersections of power can provide insight into everyday acts of resistance and the process of empowerment. The daily experiences and perceptions of non-elite refugee women in Palestinian society can also play an important role in understanding the ways gendered identities are constructed and reconstructed, produced and reproduced within social, political, religious and economic constraints. The experiences of Palestinian women with refugee status can offer insights

into a more complete interpretation of the struggle to build community and an independent state on a local level, one that includes equality for all women.

This study also has comparative value. The data were collected prior to the second *Intifada*. Since this time the political and military situation in the region and locally has become progressively worse at every level. This deterioration has had serious negative repercussions particularly for refugee women in the Gaza Strip. It has therefore become increasingly important to explore the daily struggles of Palestinian refugee women from the standpoint of those who navigate the limitations and opportunities of everyday experiences. However, in order to explore the everyday lives of Palestinian women in Jabaliya refugee camp it is necessary to contextualize the analyses in the local context within larger national and international context. In order to better understand the obstacles of occupation and challenges of patriarchy that women face in their daily lives I will briefly present the broader historical and contemporary context of Palestinian refugee women's lives in the next chapter.

## Chapter Two

### The Political, Economic and Social Context: A Brief Overview

Palestinian women, especially women living in the refugee camps, experience economic underdevelopment, military oppression and patriarchal rule in their everyday lives. These experiences have influenced and shaped every aspect of their identity and social condition. The local, national and international conditions and historical processes also shape how Palestinian women perceive and challenge the conditions they perceive as oppressive or unjust. The interconnection of these social forces at the local level must therefore be placed in the broader historical, economic and political context. It is also important to recognize the unique conditions of Palestinian nation-state building and the development of civil society. In the following sections I will address the political, economic and social context of the study and how women have addressed these challenges as refugees and as members of a society under colonial occupation. I begin with an overview of women in Palestinian society before and after the establishment of the State of Israel and the 1967 War. This chapter is divided into two historical periods: 1) Palestinian women before 1948 and 2) Palestinian refugee women after 1948 and 1967. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967 are two historical periods that define the colonial experience and sixty years of military occupation. This brief historical overview is followed by three additional sections: 3) an introduction to the Gaza Strip, 4) Jabaliya refugee camp and 5) the situation in Gaza after the completion of the study.

## Palestinian Women Before 1948 and 1967

Until 1948 and the Diaspora or forced exile, Palestinians were united under a common national history. The society was predominantly agrarian with several urban centers that consisted of a small elite of upper and middle class in the urban areas and a majority of peasants in the rural areas who lived off the land. Educational opportunities were available only to a small percentage of the elite (Holt, 1996). In the rural areas, social and gender relations were organized around a system of production and reproduction known as the village or Hamula system. Cultivation, land redistribution and inheritance were organized around this system. Internal conflicts were also resolved within the Hamula. The village was considered the basic unit of the society in which a hierarchical system was determined by gender, age and class differentiation.

During the latter part of the 19th century and the early 20th century, the village or Hamula began to acquire different characteristics as the Palestinian economy was transformed from a relatively self-sufficient economy into an economy involving increased production and sale of commodities. The transformation of a largely subsistence and semi-feudal, tribute-paying mode of production into a capitalist market economy and subsequently into a dependent peripheral capitalist mode of production, resulted in changes in land tenure and ownership systems, labor force transformation and population redistribution. These changes also altered women's access to resources and opportunities for themselves and their families (Farsoun, 1997).

The introduction of private property laws that began with the Ottoman Land Law of 1858 created changes within the village system as villages attempted to maintain

control over their land. Land reforms of 1872 were eventually established to increase direct Ottoman supervision over the extraction of surplus production in the villages. These reforms also forced land distribution and inheritance within the village to favor Ottoman ruling interests. The laws relating to private property placed tremendous pressure on the *fallaheen* (peasants). While only a minority of the *fallaheen* responded to these changes by registering their land and acquiring the Tabu (i.e., registration) papers, the majority adopted more stringent means to maintain control over the land they had inherited and tilled. Land holding peasants responded by retaining their tracts of land as one piece for more efficient use and higher profits. Such measures resulted in the emergence of two forms of social discrimination: gender discrimination and class discrimination. Despite the important role played by the *fallahat* (peasant women) in the production process as direct agricultural producers, patriarchal norms and values constructed by Palestinian peasant society marginalized the value of women's work and contributions. Despite their productive role, women were excluded from owning land (Farsoun, 1997).

Women were excluded or at least discouraged from inheritance in order to keep the land under the control of the village as women's share was often added to that of the head of the Hamula. The exclusion of women from inheritance was reinforced by other socially and culturally constructed norms and traditions such as endogamous marriage. Marriage to first cousins was promoted as a means to solidify the economic and political power of the head of the village by keeping land under family control. Class and gender discrimination became embedded within the Hamula system and was expressed in the

adoption of a system of inheritance in which control over the land after the death of the father remained in the hands of the elder son (ibid). With the emergence of Zionism in the late 1880s in central and eastern Europe, as a national revival movement, the colonization of Palestine became associated with the re-claiming of biblical territory. By the time Palestine was occupied by Britain in 1918, it became evident among some Palestinian leaders that the goal of Zionist leaders was a Jewish takeover of the land and expulsion of the indigenous Palestinian people. The creation of an exclusively Jewish State in Palestine was promised in 1917 by British Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour, thereby opening the gates to a conflict that would culminate with the establishment of Israel in 1948 and continue as a violent occupation of Palestinian land and lives (Pappe, 2006).

#### Palestinian Women after 1948 and 1967

In 1948 the Israeli Army and para-military gangs drove over 780,000 Palestinians, half of who were women and girls, from their homes. They became refugees. They fled to the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan and Lebanon. With the establishment of the State of Israel on Palestinian land and the mass uprooting of a people, women began to perform functions that substituted for state services (Holt, 1996). In 1967 Israel invaded and occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. The 1967 occupation created approximately half a million additional refugees, many made refugee for the second time since 1948. Palestinian women who became refugees found themselves in a social, political and economic context that was both challenging and threatening. Today, about 4.5 million registered Palestinian refugees and a worldwide Palestinian population

of nearly eight million are without a country. The Palestinian *Nakba* (catastrophe) began in 1948 and represents the beginning of one of the last remaining settler-state colonial occupations and the longest and largest unresolved refugee crisis since World War II (Pappe, 2006).

With the September 1993 Declaration of Principles and the Israeli-Palestinian interim agreements that followed, the Palestinian people and leadership entered a new phase in their history since the creation of a Jewish State in Palestine. During the decade of the nineties the Palestinian leadership attempted to negotiate and establish sovereignty. In this same time period, the Palestinian National Authority, (PNA) attempted to build political structures and institutions that would lay the foundation for a future, independent state. Yet a unique model of state formation had been imposed upon the Palestinians and its newly arrived leadership, the Palestine National Authority. Within the context of the "peace process" Palestinians were faced with the development of a Palestinian state and civil society without having first achieved independence.

The marginalization and further exclusion of Palestinian refugee women from the productive and public spheres increased after 1948. However, women's experiences were not homogeneous. After 1948 Arab women's experiences were both shared and different depending on their geographic locations; the West Bank, the Gaza Strip or within the State of Israel, Lebanon, Syria and other foreign countries (Sabbagh, 1998). The decades that follow the 1967 occupation of the rest of historic Palestine are decades of dispossession, resistance and efforts to achieve Palestinian self-rule. Though class,



geography, ideology and history divide Palestinian women, they also share similar experiences resulting from a conservative, patriarchal society.

One such commonality that characterizes most refugee camps is the phenomenon of the feminization of poverty, which is the product of the feminization of the camp household. Palestinian refugee camp women often found themselves without the traditional male breadwinner or “head-of-family.” Many men were forced to leave the camp to seek employment as migrant laborers in Israel, in the Gulf or elsewhere in the Diaspora. In addition men left the camp to join the national resistance or were taken prisoner by Israel. Lack of a male head of household constructed a special social reality for women (Loubani, 2004).

Women were often left alone to attend to the family. They assumed the roles of provider for the family, caretaker of the sick and the elderly and were the main sources of social and cultural reproduction. Social restrictions such as reduced access to education due to conservative societal norms also reduced women’s access to opportunities outside the home. Unlike boys, girls are often withdrawn from schools or even denied education because they are needed to help in maintaining and reproducing the household. Traditionally neither education nor public participation in the wage-labor force is considered acceptable avenues of development for women. Therefore Palestinian women have experienced refugee status differently than their male partners at all levels of the public and private sphere. They have been and continue to be discriminated against and often marginalized in the labor force, in education and in political representation. The restriction of movement that characterizes women’s lives in refugee camps has also

drastically reduced women's labor and educational potentials. However, the situation is not much better for those who manage to find employment. Some refugee women were, prior to 2005, employed in the informal labor sector, either as domestic workers or in the sub-contracting system for the Israeli market where wages are low and working conditions are not regulated (Sabbagh, 1998, Loubani, 2004).

Refugee camps are crowded and lack adequate water and electrical infrastructure. Palestinian refugees have also had to face additional constraints such as restricted movement from the camps by the Israeli military, particularly in the Gaza Strip. The combination of economic difficulties, overcrowding, social frustration and moral degradation among camp residents has also resulted in the increase in various forms of domestic violence. Women and girls bear the brunt of this violence. Research on domestic violence, particularly among women in Gaza refugee camps reveal an increase in physical, mental, psychological and sexual violence. The Women's Empowerment Project of the Gaza Community Mental Health Program has documented a sharp rise in cases of violence against women, including incest, rape and "honor" killings (Author interviews with Director of Women's Empowerment Project, summer 1999, 2000).

Early marriage and childbearing have also influenced women's ability to obtain an education or employment outside the home. Palestinian refugee women have been placed under particular pressure as mothers with a specific national mission. As Sayigh (1998) has observed, one of the primary roles Palestinian camp women play is that of reproducers and transmitters of the old culture and the lost national identity after the *Nakbah* of 1948. Bearing children is considered a critical part of maintaining Palestinian

identity and resistance to Israeli ethnic cleansing efforts. This has led to the further marginalization of refugee women as it has prioritized national concerns over gender rights pushing women further away from the public sphere and into the domestic realm.

The Palestine women's movement prior to 1948 began among the elite and urban women who formed charitable associations. The main focus of these associations was the social welfare of women and their children. After 1948 the charitable associations were especially concerned with the welfare of the refugee residents. After 1967 the lines between charitable work and political activism blurred and women became active in developing alternative infrastructures for education, health and food production. With the formation of the Palestine Liberation Organization in the mid-1960s and the establishment of the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW), the development of women's political consciousness and activism took place within the context of colonialism and resistance. This development conflicted with the traditional roles of women (Holt, 1996).

However, women have always taken part in national demonstrations, formed organizations and initiated direct action against the Israeli occupation forces. The young woman "suicide bomber" who blew herself up in a West Jerusalem super market in the spring of 2002 represents a long history of Palestinian women involved in military and organized direct actions against the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In spite of women's involvement in the growing national movement, social conditions of women have not change substantially. Social acceptance of, and consideration for, women active in the resistance did not translate into increased gender

equality in Palestinian society. Politically women are held as martyrs and heroines, yet socially they are shunned or marginalized when they return to daily life in their communities. This is especially evident in the socially conservative refugee camps. Women who are actively involved in the resistance may be socially chastised for having been arrested or jailed and possibly physically or sexually assaulted by male soldiers or jail employees. However, there has been an increased focus by the women's movement to improve women's status in society.

After the signing of the 1993 Oslo Agreement, the women's movement increased efforts to advance women's legal, political and social status in addition to promoting democratic values in their society. Three priorities of the women's movement (Brown, 2002) are: changing the personal status laws that discriminate against women, fighting domestic violence and increasing women's political participation. The personal status laws targeted are especially those that govern marriage, divorce, child custody and maintenance). However, efforts to improve the status of women have been hindered by the unstable political and military situation. The Israeli military has deliberately imposed curfews and travel restrictions that deny opportunities to of Palestinian men to earn a livelihood. This has placed increased stress on gender relations within the family, as many men are no longer able to provide for their families, as is expected in Palestinian society.

During a time when both sides of the conflict were supposed to be making efforts to promote peace, thousands of day laborers that once crossed the 1948 "Green-line" to work in Israel were denied travel and entry permits by the Israeli army. This restriction

resulted in increased unemployment and reduced incomes among families, especially in the Gaza Strip. As a result poverty in the occupied territories also increased. Despair, especially among the youth became widespread. Simultaneously, though contrary to international law and later the ruling by the International Court of Justice in the Hague, Israel was planning, and began construction of, the annexation-separation wall that would be twice as high and three times as long as the Berlin Wall. A wall also encloses the Gaza Strip. The concrete and barbed wire wall surrounding the Gaza Strip, like the West Bank wall, is equipped with surveillance cameras, electric fences and ground sensors. The Wall in the occupied West Bank is evicting Palestinian farmers from their own land, preventing villages and towns from accessing water sources and separating families and children from schools and health services. The illegal Wall has surrounded entire towns, such as Qalqilya, in the West Bank. In this city the residents can only exit or enter through one or two entrances controlled by the Israeli Army. For the residents of the Gaza Strip, traveling in and out of the area, even to obtain specialized health care, is difficult if not impossible.

Israeli military checkpoints and the walls are part of the matrix of control imposed on the Palestinian civilian population. Within the confines of the Wall in the West Bank, Israeli army checkpoints, roadblocks and trenches obstruct travel by car or on foot between towns, cities and villages. Although the Wall is still under construction, it has serious and deleterious effects on the Palestinian population. The roadblocks are made of concrete, barbed wire or iron swinging gates that obstruct, disrupt and deny passage to people, vehicles, goods and services. The hundreds of permanent and

“flying” (temporary) military checkpoints continue to suffocate travel and the transportation of marketable products. Many Palestinians who attempt to travel from town to town are denied passage and cannot therefore get to work, school or access health care services. If travelers persist they must wait for hours in the hot sun, rain or cold depending on the season, often for hours in order to pass. Out of desperation many Palestinians attempt to get around checkpoints on foot, often climbing mountains, ten-foot high iron and barbed-wire fences, going through homes or by taking lengthy and costly detours. The risk of injury or even death is real, as many Palestinians have been shot, beaten or arrested for attempting to by pass military checkpoints in order to travel from one area to another ([www.imemc.org](http://www.imemc.org)). Gaza Strip residents experience a similar matrix of control. However, the wall and fencing around the Gaza Strip is complete and seals the population from the rest of the world. Within the confines of the Gaza Strip, any attempt by Palestinians to approach the walled border is met by gunfire from Israeli snipers or missiles from Israel’s Air Force jets. The Gaza Strip

The Gaza Strip is a 45-kilometer piece of land surrounded by electric fences, cement walls and army posts. The land and the people are completely sealed off from the rest of the world. The only two entrances are located in the North and in the South. About one third of the land in the Gaza Strip had been confiscated by the Israeli army for the 7000 Israeli settlers living in illegal settlements until 2005 when then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon proposed the “disengagement plan.” This plan resulted in the removal of the illegal Israeli settlers from Gaza. In spite of removal of the settlements the Israeli military continues to control the entrances and exits to the Gaza Strip. The Israeli Army

also controls the air and water spaces around Gaza. As a result, Gaza is undergoing acute and debilitating economic declines marked by unprecedented levels of poverty, unemployment, loss of trade and social deterioration, especially with regard to the delivery of health and educational services.

The pauperization of Gaza's economy is not accidental, but rather deliberate. It is the result of years of continuous restrictive Israeli policies particularly since the start of the current Palestinian uprising almost eight years ago. The Palestinian Authority (PA) returned from exile during the Oslo Peace process and became dependent on two sources of income. The first is an annual aid package from Western donors amounting to about \$1 billion per year in assistance. The majority of this aid was suspended after Hamas was democratically elected to power in 2006. The second source of income is monthly transfers by Israel of \$55 million in customs and tax revenues that Israel collects for the Palestinian Authority, a source of revenue that is absolutely critical to the Palestinian budget. As of 2006, Israel is withholding close to half a billion dollars in Palestinian revenue that is desperately needed in Gaza (Roy, 2006).

The second *Intifada*, or uprising, broke out in the fall of 2000 and Israel imposed a complete closure on the Gaza Strip. These policies lead to increased levels of unemployment and poverty. The closure policy has been especially destructive in light of the thirty-year process of integrating Gaza's economy into Israel's economy that resulted in a Palestinian economy deeply dependent upon Israel. Decades of expropriation of land and the inability to develop a viable civilian infrastructure had long ago robbed Palestine of its potential for development, ensuring that no viable economic or political structure

could emerge (ibid).

Today there are more than 1.4 million Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip and by 2010 the figure is expected to reach close to two million. Gaza has the highest birthrate in the region at 5.5 to 6.0 children per woman. The population grows by 3 to 5 percent annually. Eighty percent of the population is under 50 and 50 percent is fifteen years old or younger. The Gaza Strip has one of the highest population densities in the world. In the Jabaliya refugee camp for example, there are 74,000 people per square kilometer, compared with 25,000 in Manhattan. Eighty percent of the population in the Gaza Strip depends on UNRWA or contributions from Arab States and charity organizations in order to survive. The majority of refugees in the Gaza Strip became refugees in 1948 or 1967, and many former refugees experienced dislocation for a second time in their lives as refugees in 1967 (Roy, 2006). There are 865,242 Palestinians refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and over half live in the existing eight refugee camps. Unemployment and lack of services are most severe among the refugee population in the Gaza Strip. By April 2006, 79 percent of Gazan households were living in poverty, compared to less than 30 percent in 2000. Prior to the closure in 2000, most refugees worked as laborers in Israel or locally in agriculture in the nearby town of Beit Lahia. Some owned small shops and a few worked in small businesses ([www.un.org/unrwa/refugee/gaza](http://www.un.org/unrwa/refugee/gaza)). After 2000, the closure denied thousands of workers the jobs they depended on to support their families



## Jabaliya Camp

Jabaliya refugee camp is located north of Gaza City next to a village with the same name. The camp is known for its resistance to the Israeli occupation and has earned the name “Mountain of Fire.” The first Palestinian *Intifada* or uprising is claimed to have begun in Jabaliya camp in December of 1987. This camp covers an area of 1.4 square kilometers and is the largest in the Gaza Strip. Jabaliya was established after 1948 when 35,000 refugees fled from villages in southern Palestine, now called Israel. Though the United Nations Relief and Works Agency initially provided tents for refugees, housing was later replaced with cement block shelters with asbestos roofs. The shelters are spaced close together and usually consist of two or three small rooms, a small kitchen and bathroom in an area no more than forty square meters ([www.un.org/unrwa/refugee/gaza](http://www.un.org/unrwa/refugee/gaza)).

As of December 2006 the registered refugee population in Jabaliya is 106,691 persons. UNRWA runs 25 schools (18 elementary and 7 preparatory) with 29,231 pupils enrolled in the 2004/2005 school years. All of the schools are run in two shifts. The Agency's health center provides primary health care and is run by seventy health care workers assigned to morning and afternoon shifts. On average 22,323 consultations are held at the center each month. UNRWA completed a women's center in November of 1995 and since the time of completion approximately 7,000 women have participated in the center's various activities. The Agency also provides financial and managerial support to a youth center that offers athletic, social and cultural programs (ibid).

Narrow alleys and pathways, some less than one meter wide, run between the

shelters. The camp lacks basic infrastructure. For example, electricity is not accessible through out the camp and sewage disposal flows freely into the sea where Gaza residents swim. Local municipalities, UNRWA and private wells supply water to the camps ([www.un.org/unrwa/refugee/gaza/jabalia](http://www.un.org/unrwa/refugee/gaza/jabalia)). The amount of water available to Palestinians, however, is restricted by the limited number of private wells available and the fact that Israel controls access to the water and diverts a disproportionate amount to the settlements (prior to the disengagement) and to Israel ([www.palestinemonitor.org](http://www.palestinemonitor.org)).

#### The Gaza Strip After the Completion of this Study

The Israeli government declared Gaza a "hostile entity" in the aftermath of the Hamas electoral victory, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 2007. Hamas, an Islamic organization that provides civil services to Palestinian civilian population is also involved in military resistance to Israeli occupation. Israeli occupation forces no longer allow Gaza residents to leave the area as Israel controls the borders. Supplies are also prohibited from entering Gaza with the exception of Israel's own border with Gaza. In addition, Israel restricts the flow of humanitarian relief, fuel and medical supplies from entering the Gaza Strip. According to the Israeli human rights organization, Gisha, (Legal Center for Freedom of Movement), these restrictions are in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Additional Protocol to the Fourth Geneva Convention. This convention requires that all parties facilitate provision of humanitarian relief. According to international law, an occupying power is responsible for facilitating proper functioning of civilian institutions ([www.gisha.org](http://www.gisha.org)). These conditions of occupation compounded by limited economic development, high birth rates,

lack of services and adequate employment shape women's daily lives in the camp. Yet refugee women continue to play an important role in the ongoing resistance to the Israeli military occupation as they strive to maintain their families, communities, national identity and culture.

Palestinian refugee women often must shoulder the burden of becoming the primary breadwinner when their husbands, brothers or fathers are killed, injured or imprisoned by the Israeli Army. Today there are over 10,000 Palestinians in Israeli prisons. Discrimination in the job market and work place due to cultural restrictions has placed many Palestinian women in vulnerable and unstable economic situations. Often women must choose between confronting cultural norms and meeting the needs of their families. Refugee women must also contend with the cultural emphasis on child bearing in a context of violence and poverty. All too often when speaking with women in the camps I hear women talk about the realities of their daily lives that force them to confront the contradictions of the cultural value placed on having children and their inability to care for them properly. One woman, while walking with me down a dusty refugee camp pathway dreamed out loud about "all of her seven children dying" and then immediately adding that without them she would amount to nothing. The conditions and challenges of Palestinian refugee women in the Gaza Strip are too often invisible in the eyes of reporters, film crews and researchers.

The increased violence by the Israeli Army, the construction of the Wall, the checkpoints and denial of travel permits have further eroded the ability of Palestinian

families to survive. Despair and depression is increasingly prevalent, especially among young Palestinian men and women in the refugee camps. Palestinian women living in refugee camps in the Gaza Strip suffer the consequences of war and occupation in all areas of their lives. Families continue to be torn apart through death, maiming or imprisonment of loved ones as a result of repeated Israeli Army attacks, whether from soldiers on foot, in tanks or from F-16s and Apache helicopter missiles. The disruption of daily life by military incursions and attacks is part of daily life under occupation. The abnormal is normalized by necessity in order to maintain life under these life-threatening conditions. The experiences of isolation, military violence, economic strangulation and gender discrimination have shaped Palestinian women's responses to their social status and assigned responsibilities in society. In the next chapter I will define empowerment and everyday acts of resistance to provide a theoretical framework for exploring how Palestinian women perceive their lives and challenge male-dominated society under military occupation.

## Chapter Three

### Theoretical Framework: Defining Resistance and Empowerment

This chapter provides a discussion of Western feminist scholarship and how definitions of resistance and empowerment can be applied to the everyday experiences of Palestinian women in general and specifically to refugee women in the Gaza Strip. This discussion is necessary in order to provide the framework from which everyday acts of resistance and potential avenues of empowerment among refugee women in Jabaliya can be explored and discussed in the context of colonial occupation, male domination and resistance to both. This framework will assist in exploring how Palestinian refugee women in Jabaliya camp use their intellectual, emotional and material resources in their everyday lives to survive, thrive and advance their position in society.

Recognition and incorporation into research of the various forms of oppression women endure is necessary as the study of Palestinian refugee women is both a study of women's rights and a study of human rights. The social realities of women in the camp from a feminist research perspective overlap with the concept of basic human rights. To avoid this connection is to ignore, to an extent, the context of the study that may produce partial knowledge of acts of resistance and potential avenues of empowerment. Women's status in society and the political and economic context are interrelated conditions and processes that influence the everyday lives and acts of resistance by Palestinian refugee women. In this study women contend with the constraints and complexities of refugee status, poverty, male domination, male interpreted religion and foreign domination.

As a critical theorist, I am committed to investigating the dialectical nature of resistance and empowerment with a focus on the standpoint of women, specifically Palestinian women in a Gaza Strip refugee camp. I choose to focus on the voices of ordinary women in this study. By “ordinary women” I am referring to refugee women in the occupied Gaza Strip, specifically Jabaliya Camp, who are directly influenced by, but not formally part of the social, political or economic power structure. As a result of my direct experiences as well as my academic training, I am aware of how, as Smith (1990) points out, women’s social reality and interpretation of that reality is mediated by power relations that are reproduced within a social and historical context.

Research that investigates women’s status and roles in society often limits analysis to gender oppression and patriarchal structures of power. Yet oppression has many faces and these faces are interrelated. A focus on one form of oppression-for example gender oppression-with the exclusion of other forms of oppression, such as class, racism and foreign occupation, fails to recognize the interconnection between the various forms of oppression. Although my focus in this study is on the experiences of women in particular, these experiences must be placed within the larger context of the local, national and international context. According to Reinharz, feminist ethnographers “try to interpret women’s behavior as shaped by social context” (Reinharz, 1992:53). The social context of Palestinian refugee women is shaped and influenced by this larger context.

Although women negotiate and challenge the social, political and economic forces in their everyday lives, ordinary women’s everyday lives are not, for the most part,

the focus of academic research. Significantly, the voices and everyday experiences of ordinary, and especially refugee women, in Occupied Palestine are often excluded or marginalized compared to the voices of Palestinian middle and upper class women who reside predominantly in the cities. Research conducted from the standpoint of ordinary women stresses a particular view that can highlight how everyday acts of resistance and empowerment are linked and can serve as the foundation for social change. In order to understand this connection, I will divide this discussion into two sections and explore the definitions of 1) resistance and 2) empowerment.

### Empowerment

Western feminist discourse reinforces the binary divisions between men and women (and the related power structures and institutions) as the powerful and the powerless. However, power is not merely a one-way relation of domination and oppression. As Edward Said so eloquently stated, “...human beings are not closed receptacles, but instruments through which other things flow” (Said, 1994:61). Power and oppression produce discourse and agency. Individuals experiencing oppressive power relations are actors in this relationship, not solely victims. In the occupied Gaza strip the ideological power that shapes women’s lives and experiences is produced and reproduced by male dominated customs, traditions and religious interpretations, upheld by political, economic and social conditions within the framework of foreign military rule. The everyday activities and experiences of women in Jabaliya camp are both the consequence of these powers as well as centers of challenge to these social relations. The process of empowerment is central to understanding the dynamics of power relations and social

change, as it is a journey of both the development of awareness and subtle and open acts of resistance.

According to Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) empowerment is a process by which people gain control of their lives, participate in the life of their community and develop a critical understanding of their environment. Empowerment refers to the ability of individuals to cope within the context of cultural and structural constraints. It is a process in which individuals develop a sense of worthiness, build self-esteem and develop the ability to change personal and structural conditions that are barriers to developing individual potential. The transition to empowerment is the translation of positive changes in the distribution of material and human capital into social power. Exploration and identification of this transition and how this process is interpreted and experienced by Palestinian women in Jabaliya Camp is central to understanding how everyday experiences can lead to empowerment.

Empowerment is a process that can result in changes in the capacities of individuals in everyday life at home, at work and in the community. The process of redistribution of economic, social or political resources is part of this process. Parpart, Raj and Staudt (2002), remind us however, that empowerment at the personal level, through changes in the lives of women and their social relationships at the local level will be short-lived if power at the international and national level is neglected. In this study, Palestinian women live in a refugee camp under Israeli military occupation where the social and economic conditions of their community and their individual lives are defined and severely restricted by the broader context of violence and international complicity at



an international level. In reference to the broader forces, Palestinian women specifically live under a double occupation: foreign military occupation and male-domination. The relationship between military occupation and patriarchy results in increases in economic and social hardships for women. Rising poverty, unstable living conditions, widespread political violence and the unequal social status of women place a disproportionate burden on women.

Third World feminists such as Sabbagh (1998) and Mohanty (1991, 2003) and Western feminists such as Roy (2004) recognize and focus on this simultaneity of oppressions as fundamental structures that lead to women's social and political marginalization. The interrelationship between gender oppression and the struggle for national liberation is also integral to this matrix of domination. It is necessary, especially in the context of a colonial occupation by a Western power, to move beyond the narrow analysis that divorces women's subordinate position in society from the broader political and economic context. A broad contextual analysis that links gender oppression, colonial occupation and liberation is central to this study.

The process of empowerment, however, is not linear. Individual and collective acts of resistance can range from accommodation to complicity to active resistance. Yet the motivation to change existing gender relations depends on the particular context and the risks of transformation (Charmes, et.al. 2003). Three areas can influence the process of empowerment: critical consciousness, existence of alternatives and "strategic life choices." These three areas in this study must be explored within the local context and how this context relates to the broader national context. This study also explores

women's participation outside the home and how their perceptions of community involvement and other forms of public participation shape their lives.

Participation in activities outside the home includes obtaining an education, employment or participating in political activities. Empowerment that can result from acts within the community is located within in a framework of intersecting structural and ideological constraints. Saegert and Winkel (1996) emphasize how collective acts and the transformation of one's environment can serve to empower individuals within a community. The interviews with Palestinian refugee women and men in this study explore participation in community activities and how participation impacts their lives and their own interpretations of their position in society.

An important aspect of community participation is "power to" as opposed to "power over." The difference may be gender specific. A study of black women leaders (Saegert, 1989), found that organizational action and individual empowerment are of a dialectical nature. Women seek empowerment through a process of collective action and not individual control in the form of connection, relatedness, and community collective good and social power rather than individual and political power, which is generally focused on domination and control. A study of low-income women in Central Israel (Itzhaky and York, 2000). also concludes that women emphasize collective action and community participation as avenues of empowerment. The end result is to use "power to" improve the collective good as opposed to a process that emphasizes, "power over." Peterson, (2005) argues that women's sense of community and links to empowerment may be due to the historical underprivileged status of women. This status has influenced

the development of a deeper understanding of the value of interpersonal relationships needed to maneuver through difficult social and political conditions. The exploration of community participation and social relationships among the Palestinian women of Jabaliya refugee camp can provide insights into links to empowerment as defined from the standpoint of women. For example, women's desire and expectations of higher education and employment are potential avenues of empowerment that serve not only to increase independence and help bring about a degree of self-actualization, but can also become potential avenues to improve family and community well being and development. The data reveal the potential for women to become agents of transformation through empowerment as a result of the everyday acts of resistance to the multiple forms of oppression.

### Resistance

The definition of resistance is to withstand the effect of, stop or alter the course of progress of an oppressive relation of power or condition. Resistance can also be in the form of refusing to comply or offer opposition to oppression and discrimination. Resistance is also defined as any attempt to imagine or establish a life based on respect and equality, on behalf of ones self or others (Wade, 1997). Everyday acts of resistance are integral to the process of empowerment because they expose oppressive power relations and provide the conditions to critically challenge these relations. However the risks and opportunities that are available to women in Jabaliya camp define the forms of resistance that can occur. Burstow (cited in Wade, 1997), referring to women's resistance to male violence, states that resistance can be situated on a continuum. This concept of

resistance can be extended to everyday acts of resistance among women in Jabaliya camp. At one end of the continuum are seemingly inconsequential or isolated acts of resistance that may not have an immediate effect on the status of women, but are important to the process of empowerment in terms of the development of critical consciousness and on going acts of resistance. On the other end of the continuum is open defiance or collective action that directly challenges the relations of power. This end of the continuum carries more risk in the way of social and political consequences whether in the form of increased familial control or military violence.

Scott (1985) does not define acts of resistance only as open and/or direct confrontation or defiance of oppression. He refers to “everyday” resistance as acts that may take place privately or publicly but are not collective acts of defiance. According to Scott, the powerless rarely have access to the resources or opportunities to resist openly. However, everyday acts of resistance, though they may seem insignificant and are invisible to the oppressor, challenge the relations of power and claims made by the powerful. Scott (1990) examines and illuminates the existence of “hidden transcripts” to refer to the private or individual resistance that reflects a critical consciousness of oppression but does not necessarily translate into open or public acts of resistance. The fact that acts of resistance are not recognized does not negate the power of “hidden” acts of resistance to contribute to the process of empowerment. Palestinian women who face everyday threats to their survival and to that of their families living under military occupation compounded by the consequences and dictates of a male-dominated and ideologically conservative society, may perceive open defiance as too great a risk. Therefore women’s

acts can be limited, individual and border on resignation. However, this does not dismiss their significance. According to hooks, (1990), marginality, as a place of resistance, is central for oppressed and colonized people.

The position of marginality for Palestinian women in Jabaliya camp shifts depending on the political, economic and social context. Resistance to oppression can take on many forms and produces a diversity of behaviors in different settings. Acts of resistance may be individual or collective, widespread or locally confined. Targets of resistance are also as diverse as the actions. Targets can be individuals, organizations or institutions. Individuals may also resist in some situations and choose not to resist in others. The choice to resist is often linked to the web of relationships in which an individual is embedded. Therefore, the interaction of resistance, the power of the oppressor and “third party observers” defines the various types of resistance (Wade, 1997).

Several core elements of resistance have been identified in the literature, summarized by Hollander and Einwohner (2004). These core elements are: a sense of action; opposition to existing structures; deliberate rejection of values that sustain existing power relations; and actively saying “no” in a variety of ways. A sense of action involves some active behavior, whether verbal, physical or cognitive that rejects subordination and challenges ideologies that support subordination. Opposition as a core element of resistance is the conscious questioning of existing structures that define women’s roles, in this case, and the rethinking of how these roles may be re-structured. Opposition can be expressed through contradicting, rejecting, challenging, and subverting

existing structures. Deliberate rejection of the ideas and values that legitimize and maintain power relations is also considered a form of resistance. Resistance can be displayed in the form of saying “no” in a variety of ways.

Forms of resistance therefore depend on a combination of opportunities and risks that may exist in any given situation. Open defiance, according to Scott is the least common form of resistance due to the threat of retaliation for any act of self-determination. Acts of resistance fall somewhere between open defiance and completely disguised activities. Disguised activities, or the “hidden transcripts” of resistance in the form of deception, manipulation and accommodation, according to Scott (1990) do not reflect acts of conformity. Appearances that are approved by the dominant may in fact be performances or facades that serve to empower subordinates. However, the type of resistance that is possible depends on the situation and threat of retaliation. According to Scott (1990:3),

“The greater the disparity in power between dominant and subordinate and the more arbitrarily it is exercised, the more the public transcript of subordinates will take on a stereotyped, ritualistic cast. In other words, the more menacing the power, the thicker the mask.”

To summarize, public and hidden transcripts are an area of tension and struggle between dominant and subordinate groups. Depending on the audience, hidden transcripts are formed under a variety of conditions and may or may not find public expression (Scott, 1990). The boundaries that define gender relations shift depending on the social, economic, political and historical context. These boundaries are shaped by this ongoing struggle through a range of practices, including, though not limited to speech. We can identify an act of resistance when an individual acts autonomously or collectively in self-

interest, actively opposing or refusing to cooperate with or submit to oppressive structures or values or engaging in behaviors despite opposition and force. Yet two central issues are at the heart of disagreements on the definition of resistance: recognition and intent.

Scott, (1990) argues that everyday acts qualify as resistance if these acts deny or alleviate the consequences of the oppressor. Recognition of an act as an act of resistance may or may not be necessary. Hollander and Einwohner, (2004) question whether an act of resistance must be recognized or acknowledged by the resister or the oppressor in order to qualify as an act of resistance. In addition, the perception of others as necessary for an action to be considered an act of resistance is also debated. Scott argues that resistance need not be recognized by others to be considered an act of resistance. Some resistance, in fact, is purposefully concealed from the oppressor (Scott, 1990). The use of humor, song or assumed acceptance of power structures as an act of resistance, may not threaten the power of the oppressor, but it can become a strategy to reclaim power in the lives of the oppressed.

A second core element of disagreement in the definition of resistance is intent. Daily acts of resistance don't necessarily bring about social change or the desired effect. However, if an action, verbal or physical, is intended to challenge the status quo then it is considered an act of resistance (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004). Everyday acts of resistance may not bring about immediate change nor directly challenge oppressive structures or values but empowerment is born from everyday acts of resistance. Everyday acts of resistance to reclaim lives, survive or simply push the envelope of

oppressive structures is empowering. I am not arguing however that everyday acts of resistance and the process of empowerment will necessarily lead to social change at any desired point in time. However, everyday forms of resistance can be spontaneous and lack organization and may expose and challenge the intersection between power and resistance.

Various processes and structures of power shape the social, economic and political conditions of Palestinian women in Jabaliya camp. The deliberate underdevelopment of a political economy by a foreign military occupation and the lack of Palestinian state institutions directly impact the lives of Palestinian women, especially refugee women. Increasing poverty, instability, political violence and the absence of legal protection increases hardships endured by Palestinian women in the refugee camps. These conditions subjugate, but also enable. The task, as pointed out by Brown (1996), is to illuminate how women use their abilities, experiences and resources to survive and possibly advance in a range of settings. Women are active agents in creating and recreating their identities and roles in their communities. By choosing to perform the task of conduit, listening and documenting views of Palestinian women's existential situations I attempt to identify everyday acts of resistance and better understand power dynamics and the process of empowerment. Domination and subjugation are key elements in this process but so too is perseverance and hope. The goal is to identify everyday acts of resistance from the standpoint of women and expose potential avenues of empowerment that may lead to social change.



## Chapter Four

### Method and Methodology of the Study

This study and the methods used to collect and analyze data privileges the voices of the women and men in Jabaliya camp in order to explore the dynamics of women's resistance to forces of oppression that include male domination and military occupation. I employed a multi method approach to gathering the data for this research project. Using open-ended interviews I explore the understanding of perspectives and experiences as part of a larger social setting, one that includes refugee status, poverty, military occupation, national resistance and patriarchy. This multi-method approach is grounded in feminist standpoint theory that defines knowledge as particular rather than universal and recognizes the value of experiences of marginalized or subordinated people. Palestinian women in Jabaliya camp living under military occupation share similar experiences as a group.

However, I recognize that within this group there may be multiple standpoints that can inform one another and provide a powerful understanding of the conditions of women in this context. Individual perceptions explored in the context of wider social forces can also provide a better understanding of the intersectionality of gender with other oppressive structural features in society. As a feminist and social justice activist I am interested in understanding the social conditions of Palestinian women that expose the oppressive structures in society, as well as explore how women challenge, negotiate and accommodate these forces. Choosing to study the everyday lives of Palestinian refugee women in Gaza from their perspective can serve to strengthen the bridge between, and increase the utility of, academic research and international solidarity work. In my case I

am referring to western academic research and solidarity with a people living under a western colonial military occupation. How the women-subjects benefit from my research is of concern and will be addressed in Chapter Nine. In this chapter I will focus on how and why I chose to conduct the study.

I chose the methods to gather the data for this research project and the methodology that guides the study in an attempt to reduce power differences between the researcher, the research process and the “objects” of study. This approach is also necessary to build on knowledge that challenges the “conceptual practices of power” (Smith, 1990) or the construction (and re-construction) of power relations that legitimize and maintain the subordination of marginalized groups in society. The responses to questions have been translated by Abu Obieda, a Palestinian resident of Gaza City, and reviewed by Dr. Imam, a Palestinian-American, resident of Louisville, Kentucky. This means that the sentence structure and at times the grammar are not “correct.” However, years of living and working with Palestinian people have taught me that thoughts and expressions are more than the words, especially when working from the Arabic language. The Arabic language is rich and complex. One word can have several meanings. Therefore I have left the words as spoken and as translated. Translation from Arabic to English by Abu Obieda better reflects the meaning of the words and phrases as well as the cultural context. In addition, it is necessary to protect the participants in the study due to the political and military situation. Therefore, the names of the men and women interviewed in the study have been changed.

In this chapter I will present the methods used to gather, interpret and analyze the data followed by a presentation of the way these tools are used and interpreted. The chapter is divided into three sections: 1) data collection context and method, 2) thoughts on the process and the product of research and 3) voices and the standpoint of women.

### Data Collection Context and Method

This study was conducted after the first *Intifada*, or popular uprising, and subsequent failed attempts to establish an independent Palestinian State. Ongoing and unsuccessful "peace negotiations" between the Palestine National Authority and Israel, facilitated by the United States, resulted in growing disillusionment and weariness among Gaza Strip residents. There was also palpable disenchantment with the policies and representation of the Palestine National Authority. In addition, frustration with the women's movement's limited ability to advance the social, economic and political status of women was also evident. The data for this study was therefore collected during a time of transition from active, predominantly non-violent organized resistance to ultimately failed efforts of the "peace negotiations" with Israel. However, this time of seeming "apathy and retreat" was deceiving. Less than two months after I completed the study the second *Intifada* broke out.

My first visit to Jabaliya refugee camp was on the eve of the United States-led bombing of Iraq in 1991. I traveled with a delegation of eighteen women from the United States. Our goal was to increase our understanding of the Palestinian uprising against the Israeli military occupation and to share our knowledge and experiences when we returned. After this first visit I traveled to the occupied Gaza Strip on a yearly basis

until 2003. Traveling in and out of occupied Palestine to complete this study was challenging due to conditions of military occupation. In order to obtain the interviews for this study it was necessary to first enter Israel through Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv and then enter the occupied Gaza Strip through the Eretz military checkpoint. At both points of entry into occupied Palestine I ran the risk of being detained or deported by Israeli Security forces. Israeli security and the army attempt to limit international presence in the occupied territories. The spring of 2002 was the last time Israeli occupation forces permitted me to enter the Gaza Strip. In the spring of 2003 Israeli occupation forces denied entry into Gaza to all foreigners without special authorization from the Israeli Army.

In 1995 I returned to Jabaliya camp and visited several times before 1999 when this research project was initiated. I was especially interested in Jabaliya camp as it is the largest and most densely populated camp in the Gaza Strip. The camp acquired the name “mountain of fire” during the mid-1980’s popular uprising against the Israeli occupation. Jabaliya camp received this name because of its fearless and continuous actions of resistance against the occupation forces as well as for its number of “martyred,” (i.e. those killed by the occupation forces). I was able to maintain personal contact with my friends and colleagues in Gaza until 2003. In 2005, as a result of my solidarity work with Palestinian organizations, I was permanently barred from re-entering Israel. Travel to occupied Palestine, until 2008, was only possible through Israeli controlled borders with Egypt, Jordan and Israel. In 2008, however, the siege of Israeli Gaza was successfully, though symbolically, challenged by individuals from around the world who organized

trips by boat from Cyprus and landed on the shores of Gaza (Author interviews with founding member of Free Gaza Movement, Summer, 2008, [www.freegaza.org](http://www.freegaza.org).)

Repeated visits to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank have allowed me to spend extended periods of time with Palestinian women and their families. The experiences increased my understanding of Palestinian culture and strengthened my relationships with the Palestinian men, women and children with whom I worked and lived. My visits to Gaza and the West Bank lasted between two weeks and six months. These repeated visits allowed me to see and experience daily life beyond initial and often superficial observations of Palestinian culture, family and social conditions. Over the years, I have come to recognize the value of immersion. In addition I learned that as an outsider, reputation is equally important. My political awareness of, and sensitivity to, the complexity and brutality of the Israeli military occupation afforded me respect in the communities I worked and lived in throughout the decade of the nineties and early two thousand. In addition, as a social justice activist in solidarity with the struggle to end the occupation my reputation with the people was greatly enhanced over the years.

The data collected from this study was obtained through open-ended interviews and an ethnographic approach to understanding the conditions of women in the camp. Ethnography can be an important feminist method of research in that it makes women's lives visible. Open-ended interviews can also be a method by which we can listen to and record women's everyday experiences as they perceive and interpret them. However, as Reinharz points out it is not these methods that make for feminist research but that as a

feminist I have chosen these methods as it is “ ethnography in the hands of feminists that renders it feminist,” (Reinharz 1992:48).

Since 1991 I have been actively involved in camp life from various standpoints. I was able to build strong relationships with Palestinian women through my participation in work related activities such as the Women’s Empowerment Project and the Gaza Community Mental Health Program. This allowed me to better understand the social realities of camp women as actors. In addition as a mother of four, my work often included my children. Motherhood helped me gain entry into the social networks and homes of women as I often lived with and participated in family life while working. Living and working in the Gaza Strip enhanced by my ability to implement a research project to document the lives and activities of camp women from their point of understanding and perception.

As a woman, a feminist and a researcher, my immersion in the various social settings allowed for a better intersubjective understanding. My active involvement in the production of knowledge through living and working with the women of camps in the Gaza Strip also facilitated the on-going focus on gender as a basic feature of their lives. The fact that I am a woman played an important role in the study. I believe I was able to experience a wider range of access within this culture than the access I would have experienced had I been a man. Conversations, observations and relationships of trust and confidence could not have developed had I been a man, given the strict gender separation governed by conservative gender roles, especially in intimate settings. Men and women are not permitted to mingle and converse unless they are related through family or

marriage or the woman is in the presence of another family member. This gave me an entrance into social realities that would have been otherwise more difficult to experience.

Simultaneously, I experienced enhanced access to men's culture. I include men in the study because the socially constructed condition of women in the camp is also shaped by men's perceptions and interpretations. Although the standpoint of men in the study is a standpoint of power, it is also one that is shaped within the powerful forces of foreign military occupation. Therefore there is a dynamic interconnectivity between men and women in defining and challenging or upholding gender identities within the colonial experience. This dynamic interaction is an important aspect of the interconnection of social forces that shape women's lives. As a cultural "outsider" Palestinian men did not place me within the same framework of gender roles and restrictions as Palestinian women. This gave me greater access to the men's worlds as well. As a Western woman I was not expected to conform to the traditional and cultural gender-related norms. Palestinian women welcomed me as a "biological" woman and the men seemed to welcome me socially because I was not considered to be a Palestinian woman. This phenomenon that I experienced is well documented among feminist ethnographers working in communities of highly differentiated sex roles, (Nader in Golde, 1970, Oleson and Whittaker, 1968). This simultaneous insider/outsider role gave me greater access to both men and women.

I took a multi method approach in carrying out this study. Multiple methods of collecting data are necessary as women's lives are the product of both personal and structural factors. By linking the data obtained in this study to the broader complexities

of social, economic, political and military issues I am better able to identify potential avenues of empowerment. Although the individual voices and experiences of the women and men of Jabaliya camp are my primary source of information and analysis, I also use information from interviews with members of Palestinian NGOs such as the Women's Empowerment Project, the Gaza Community Mental Health Program and data from international agencies such as the World Bank, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, and other sources. These sources help provide contextual information in terms of the overall social, political and economic conditions in the camp such as demographics, health care systems, educational facilities, and formal and informal markets.

The main source of information for this study is from interviews with refugee men and women collected over a two-year period. As such, I recognize that a crucial aspect of any qualitative research project is the role of the interviewer in collecting the data. The decision to enlist a Palestinian local to conduct the interviews and another Palestinian to complete the initial translation stems from several concerns about data collection and translation. I do not speak Arabic and my Western dress and conduct may not provide the best conditions for obtaining information about the lives of women in the camp. I decided to engage the skills and expertise of a young woman who lives in Gaza City with her husband and five children. Her name is Aiesha and I have known her since 1991. Having lived with Aiesha and her family prior to her involvement in the study we had already developed a close, trusting relationship. This relationship was important in the development of data collection. Aiesha is experienced in fieldwork and data



collection and works with several NGOs compiling information on men and women in the camps, villages and cities in the Gaza Strip. Her past employment includes the Palestine Research and Information Center, Women's Affairs Center, the Trade Union Association, and the Bissan Center for Research and Development. For the past seven years she has focused on fieldwork in the refugee camps and surrounding villages.

Aiesha has experience in conducting interviews and has the social legitimacy to interview the men and women of Jabaliya refugee camp for this study. Aiesha comes from a well-known and respected family and has worked with several organizations that provide services to the community. Though these privileges do gain her access in order to carry out the interviews, privilege can also become a barrier to communication. However, Aiesha is aware of, and sensitive to, her class and residence privileges. All interviews were conducted in Arabic, taped and later transcribed.

Transcription, translation and interpretation of the Arabic language were addressed at various stages of the data collection process. Aiesha is fluent in both English and Arabic and played an important role in developing the questionnaire, conducting focus groups and transcribing the interviews. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed by Aiesha and then translated by a native of Gaza, Abu Obieda. Though at the time of this study Abu Obieda was retired he had been an official translator in the past. A bilingual Palestinian in the United States then reviewed the interviews for additional accuracy. This process ensured the most accurate and reliable translation of the words and meanings expressed by the women and men interviewed.

In 1999 and again in 2000, I traveled to Gaza in order to work directly with Aiesha in preparing the questionnaire. Prior to conducting the interviews with men and women of Jabaliya camp, Aiesha and I organized two focus groups to discuss the questions that would be used in the study. The focus groups gave us the opportunity to clarify not only the wording of the questions but also the meaning when translated from English to Arabic. Our development of the survey tool this way highlights the value of focus groups. We found that the questions I had proposed did not convey the purpose of the question when translated directly into Arabic. In addition the focus groups and subsequent discussions gave Aiesha a better understanding of the goals of the study and assisted with the translation of the questions from English to Arabic. I quickly learned that translation from English to Arabic cannot be literal but must take into account the meaning as well as the cultural context. The interviews were completed in late August of 2000.

The interviews that took place in Jabaliya camp were done individually and in groups. We made the decision to interview no more than four in a group since we wanted small group dynamics to encourage inclusion, participation and increased intimacy. Men and women were interviewed separately. The separation of men and women was necessary due to the gender relations in the camps and Palestinian society at large. Ten of the persons selected for the study were individuals Aiesha had worked with in previous studies. She chose the first ten to be interviewed because she had already established rapport and a certain level of respect and trust is advantageous, especially when addressing sensitive gender issues in an already politically charged environment.

During the period of data collection, Aiesha walked through the narrow streets of Jabaliya camp and attempted to interview a man or woman from approximately every twenty homes. Of the thirty-seven men and women who were interviewed, three (two women and one man) refused to have the interviews taped and were therefore excluded from the study. It is not uncommon for residents to lack trust with those outside the camps under any condition. The three who refused to be interviewed were therefore excluded from the study. The exclusion did not, in my opinion, threaten validity of the study. An additional issue that surfaced during the interviews was that on three occasions Aiesha was confronted with a situation where the husband or father did not feel comfortable having their wife or daughter interviewed without their presence. Aiesha's only option was to explain the importance of conducting the interview in a private setting and left it up to the family members to decide whether to give permission or not for the interview to proceed. In all three instances the women were permitted to participate in the interview without supervision by a male member of the household. Aiesha reported that in all of the interviews, except for the three that were excluded, interviewees were eager to participate.

Aiesha began each interview with casual conversations in order to attempt to establish some level of comfort and rapport. The purpose of the study and the questionnaire were then explained to each interviewee. Prior to asking the research questions Aiesha requested information on first name, age, residence, number of children, if any, marital status, employment status, persons living in the home and education level. The interviews were conducted in homes or clinics in Jabaliya camp.

One problem that emerged was that Aiesha did not always request information on education level. This was especially evident when she interviewed men or women older than herself. Given the cultural emphasis on respect for ones elders, this is understandable. She did not feel it would be appropriate to ask an older person about his or her educational level. Aiesha attempted to compensate by suggesting education level. Although her judgments are subjective, (i.e. “well-educated” or “not educated”) they serve to give rough educational background information for some of the respondents.

### The Process and the Product of Research

The cultural perspective and interpretations of the researcher, especially in a cross-cultural study such as this one, and relationship between the researcher and the researched community is vulnerable to the political and cultural worlds to which each belongs. As a researcher I must contend with my own social reality and how this impacts the study from inception to conclusion and potential application. Mainstream research practices however well intentioned can unwittingly reproduce systems of class, race and gender oppression because these practices are consequences of power relations produced in our broader society. In the past, social research from the West has constructed the “other” as those who are not of the Western, predominantly Christian power structure. Fine defines this construction as part of “a colonizing discourse” and a “tool of the dominant.” He speaks of the Self-Other hyphen, and the way in which the dominate discourse silences, manipulates and confiscates the social realities of the oppressed and works to maintain the power of the dominant (Fine in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:70-71). Dominant power relations define who is heard, who has the right to speak and who

speaks for others. This is not to say that the production of knowledge cannot reflect social reality but rather that it can also serve to uphold the relations of power as well as provide partial knowledge of those relations. The point is that scholarly investigation must consciously connect the specific context of the study, the subject matter and its historical circumstances (Said, 1979).

This study recognizes the process of "othering." Therefore this relationship between subject and object can be one that works to deconstruct the other and othering. Fine states,

“We may self consciously or not decide how to work the hyphen of Self and Other, how to gloss the boundaries between, and within, slippery constructions of others. But when we look, get involved, demur, analyze, interpret, probe, speak, remain silent, walk away, organize for outrage, or sanitize our stories, and when we construct our texts in or on their words, we decide how to nuance our relations with/for/despite those who have been deemed Others” (Fine in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:74).

We do have a choice to write about subjugated others as if they were separate from the larger context of oppression and as if we are neutral transmitters of voices and stories. We can also choose to “construct texts collaboratively, self-consciously examining our relations with/for/despite those who have been contained as others...” (ibid:74). By choosing the latter we force a radical rethinking of the political relations of qualitative researchers to the objects/subjects of our work. This “writing against othering” engages the researcher with the struggles of social transformation and opens a space where the “motives, consciousness, politics, and stances of informants and researchers/writers are rendered contradictory, problematic, and filled with transgressive

possibilities,” (ibid: 75). It is my choice to listen to the women and men of Jabaliya Camp as they interpret and experience their everyday lives.

### Voices and the Standpoint of Women

Focus on the voices of women combines the personal with the social and strengthens our understanding of how the multiple and interconnected relations of power influence women's lives. We also gain a better understanding of how women navigate and challenge the various systems and relations that mold their lives. According to Joanna De Groot, human agency is about "thinking" as well as "doing." By listening to women we increase our ability to discover the connection between lived experiences and the mental processes and analysis of these experiences (Kandioyoti, Eds. 1996:38-39).

The perspective and activities of refugee women are important because it is one that reflects the standpoint of those outside the relations of ruling and reflects the everyday world that is experienced directly. Whereas the power relations from the standpoint of those dominating and benefiting from established social relations are not visible, the standpoint from outside the dominant power structures can define and interpret the structures and methods that produce the conditions of subjugation (Smith 1990). Palestinian refugee women experience in their daily lives the dominant power structures that are local, national and international. From the standpoint of women in Jabaliya camp their experiences can provide insight into the social relations that oppress, as well as empower. This standpoint can expose how women challenge or attempt to change relations of power. For example, a refugee women will sometimes engage in subtle and disguised efforts that challenge oppressive relations, such as refusing to clean

house or by demanding Israeli soldiers release a young boy in custody by pretending she is the mother. These are forms of resistance. Patterns of disguised insubordination that promote a woman's social position in the context of male domination, or preserve the family in the face of military occupation are the weapons of the seemingly powerless. Underlying actions and beliefs challenge the very power structures that seem incapable of being challenged from the outside. The "hidden transcripts" of resistance (Scott, 1990) to patriarchal rule and foreign domination as expressed by the refugee women in their everyday lives may help define the avenues of empowerment that can bring about social change.

Standpoint must be understood as way of thinking and writing not as a particular or universal perspective or worldview. By beginning from the standpoint of women as subjects of our everyday world and by relying on what women tell us, we can explore the relationship between social relations and local experience. From the standpoint of women, an enhanced understanding of this relationship can also lead to empowerment through the development of critical consciousness. By articulating the local and the particular, a women's voice takes on importance because of the ability to make available the knowledge of social organization through everyday direct experience (Smith 1990, Hartsock, 1983).

Smith uses a metaphor to express this relationship: the sun sinking below the horizon has been transformed by our knowledge that the world turns and that our location in the world turns away from the sun. The knowledge of social organization is not fully present in any one individual's everyday experience. However, focus on the world where

women are located physically and socially within a specific historical context can assist our understanding of social phenomena as products of action and interpretation by actual women and men (Smith, 1987). Defining the everyday world as problematic as the basis of our inquiry into the lives of women in the refugee camp redefines women's everyday lives and how it is interpreted not as end points within the existing social relations but as part of the transformation of these relations. What we observe as roles and statuses of Palestinian refugee women can now be seen in relation to the everyday local and particular as experienced and expressed by women and men, within the context of broader religious, political, economic and military power relations.

From the standpoint of refugee women we can better understand how women participate in the production and reproduction of social relations. More specifically we can understand how women define and challenge their material and social conditions. Everyday experiences as shared by the women and men in this study can also shed light on the process of empowerment as an individual or collective process. Do Palestinian camp women view empowerment as the improvement of material living conditions or do they take a more holistic approach that connects issues of land, militarization, homeland and democracy? Some Palestinian women in Jabaliya camp also envision avenues of empowerment in the context of broader community development and wellbeing.

This study was designed and completed within a two-year period. It is the result of years of active participation in, and involvement with, the women and families of the Occupied Gaza Strip, especially residents of Jabaliya refugee camp. The opportunity to conduct the research for this study grew out of my advantageous position in the



community as an activist, academic and friend to many. As a Western academic working in a non-western society, it is especially important to have an ongoing dialogue with my own social context and of the historical role of the West in defining and maintaining relations of power, including the power of knowledge production. Although the viewpoints and interpretations of women in the refugee camp are not homogeneous, women share a similar organization of social relations that has subjugated them within the context of patriarchy and foreign military occupation. The study of the interpretations and perceptions of their experiences serves to identify everyday acts of resistance and potential avenues of empowerment. The following four chapters present and explore the experiences of women and men who participated in the study and how they interpret and perceive these experiences in their every day lives.

## Chapter Five

### Presentation of Women's Lives in Jabaliya Camp

The interviews for this study were conducted at a time when years of peace negotiations with Israel had failed and the economic situation in the Gaza Strip was deteriorating. In addition, the study was completed just one month before the outbreak of the al aqsa *Intifada* in September 2000. Therefore, the responses to the semi-structured interviews must be explored within this unique social, economic and political context. . Although there is variety of interpretations and perceptions of women's social status in the camp, the data does reveal a definitive critical consciousness of conditions of women in the camp. The following two chapters identify and explore women's lives and roles as interpreted and expressed by the women and men interviewed in the study. A description of the lives of women provides a platform for understanding and exploring how women respond to, or challenge, the conditions they experience. This chapter is divided into three sections: 1) general overview of women's social status and roles in the camp, 2) early and arranged marriages and 3) daily responsibilities.

#### General Overview of the Social Status and Roles of Women

Restrictive social customs and conservative practices of Palestinian male-dominated society define women's roles and limit opportunities for social advancement in Jabaliya camp. In addition, over forty years of Israeli military and administrative occupation have stalled and distorted economic and social development in the Gaza Strip. High unemployment, restricted trade and the consequences of a violent military occupation have contributed to the deteriorating status of women in the refugee camps.

Although women are increasingly responsible for the wellbeing and survival of their families, many lack even the basic services and resources to sustain their families. Refugee status has also increased the importance of family ties as a significant source of identity and material security for refugees. Therefore extended family plays a significant role in defining and shaping the lives of Palestinian women. In addition, Palestinian refugees fall into a “third class” that is composed of peasants, un-skilled workers, service workers, street vendors, small shopkeepers and the unemployed. They are the poor and extremely poor who are considered outcasts by the non-refugee population. Family affiliation, in this context, can therefore take precedence over economic class in the camps given the social isolation and alienation from the rest of society (Rubenberg, 2001). This serves to strengthen the role of the family that influences the status of women in the camp.

The intersections of patriarchal power relations and conservative customs shape women’s lives within the context of Israeli military occupation. The identification of conditions of Palestinian refugee women and limitations imposed upon their aspiration and expectations as shaped by local and foreign forces reflects the post-colonial and third world feminist theoretical framework (Mohanty, 1991, Abu-Lughod, 1993, Sabbagh, 1998) that focuses on the interrelationship between male domination, military oppression and the colonial experience. The simultaneity of these oppressive structures is fundamental to understanding the lives of women in Jabaliya camp and the possibilities available to them in improving women’s conditions. In the case of Palestine under occupation, Palestinian women are faced with the violence and obstacles of Israeli

occupation and the expectations and limitations of a patriarchal culture. Palestinian women, (Darraj, 2004), are fighting two battles: occupation and patriarchy. These two battles are interrelated and increase rigidity of male-dominated and defined gender roles. Although Palestinian women's lives reflect unequal status to that of men, it is the military occupation and colonial experience that has also framed and influenced gender relations. The women and men interviewed acknowledge, for example, one of consequences of occupation and colonization is the perceived feminization of the men living under occupation (Naaman, 2007). Men are stripped of their stereotypical masculine qualities such as independence, ability to provide for and protect, women and children. When men lose their ability to uphold their gender responsibilities, such as financial support for the family there is a sense of loss of control and authority for men in society. This perceived loss of control can strengthen patriarchal relations of power and further limit women's opportunities as men attempt to regain control and status by increasing control over the female members of the family. According to Dr. Eyad Sarraj, founder and president of the Gaza Community Mental Health Program, the image of the father figure has been further undercut by the Israeli siege of the Gaza Strip that began in 2006 (Sarraj, 2008). This can include an increase in domestic violence.

Given this situation, according to Elrashidi, 2005, "The crisis of the male breadwinner is a gendered crisis...this places enormous stress on gender roles." Between 2001 and 2003 studies show an increase in violence against women by male family members. In three years there was an 86.6% increase in the number of women who had

experienced violence in the home. However, JoMarie (2001) argues that domestic violence experienced by Palestinian women is also increasing due to

emotional consequences that men suffer from to the beatings, imprisonment and torture by the Israeli army. Both explanations with increased implications in women's lives are directly related to the larger national context that intersects with the structural and ideological forces of male domination at the local level. Social relationships that are shaped within the family in this context directly affects the status of Palestinian women in general, but specifically refugee women in the camps.

In Arab society family, kinship and community are crucial organizers of social life and the relations and boundaries between state, civil society and the private domain are highly fluid (Rubenberg, 2001, Barghouti, 1993, Graham-Brown, 1991). The family in Arab society is a unit of economic, social and political relations and the status and roles of women are shaped largely by the structure of the family and its relationship to the community (Tucker ed., 1993). This socio-cultural framework in Arab society also places great importance on cultural identity. Women in the family are responsible for preserving their heritage and maintaining the cultural identity of their society and region (Joseph, 1994). In the refugee camps of occupied Gaza Strip the need to maintain Palestinian culture and preserve Palestinian history is crucial to the survival of society under foreign rule. The military occupation and Israeli government policies of cultural oppression and denial of Palestinian history makes the task of protecting national identity and heritage a priority that falls heavily on the shoulders of women. Maintaining the home, caring for family members and educating the children are part of this

responsibility. Family is considered the core of Palestinian society and women's influence in society is expressed through the traditional structures within the family and kinship allegiances. Central to Palestinian society are the roles of women as mothers, caretakers and as agents preserving the national heritage. These roles, however, also restrict women's social environment as Suheila describes,

“In general, women's role in Eastern societies is one of persecution and disregard, in spite of the fact that they are the backbone of society... Palestinian women have been put on a shelf.”

Women and men interviewed describe women as “housewives and mothers.” The primary responsibilities that include raising the children, maintaining the household and caring for family member are celebrated as significant and crucial to the wellbeing of the Palestinian society. Zaki shares his view of women's place in society,

“The status of my wife is the same as that of any Palestinian woman. She plays a distinguished role in building our family and a great role in the preparation and rearing of the generations. She runs the affairs of our home in an optimal cultural, social and economic manner. This role reflects positively on the neighborhood where we live as far as cleanliness, appearance and childrearing are concerned. As such, her role in the Palestinian community is the real participation in the employment of human and economic resources of our community and is in the service of the public interest.”

Zaki honors the role of women within the context of patriarchal power relations as a role that empowers the collectivity instead of the individual. Women's role in society is perceived as serving the needs of others and is considered as the vehicle for self-realization. Ezzat defines the goals and aspirations of his wife and justifies women's status in society as biologically inherent. Her development of self-awareness and sense

of worthiness is, according to Ezzat, obtained through the realization of her role as a mother,

“My wife recognizes her role and her reality. She does not aspire to complete her studies because her natural character compels her to stay indoors in order to look after the house and children. She is not the least bit interested in obtaining a Master or PhD. Her focus is on the care and success of her children. This will bring her happiness.”

Palestinian women are recognized for their role as mother and housekeeper.

Shehda refers to his wife’s efforts in the home as a “service” and praises her dedication to the wellbeing of others. He states,

“In the context of evaluating women’s role, I have to evaluate my wife’s role from the point of view of the important role she is playing with the framework of her activities in the home. She takes the initiative of teaching her sons and daughters and enlightens them with knowledge of science and social issues.... We live up to a good standard of education for our youth. She is playing a vital part in this respect, so my evaluation of her services is excellent. Her aspiration is the happiness of everybody, her sons and daughters and the whole family. She also plays an important role in helping her neighbors and by teaching them religion, as she is very religious.”

Service to others is so fundamental to women’s existence in society that some expect her status not to change. Shehda continues,

“I don’t think that her role will change because she is accustomed to struggling for the good of others and the happiness of every one. She is used to advising the family at home and other people. In this regard, nothing could influence her to change as long as she is living on this earth.”

Munier also describes her mother’s role as similar to other women in the camp-one that is dedicated to the advancement of others,

“My mother’s activities are a typical example of the camp women’s role. She performs her duties of housekeeping, cooking and

cleaning and goes shopping to provide the house with the daily necessities. My mother's main goal is to ensure that her children and other family members needs are met and no more."

A woman's perceived success as mother and wife does not necessarily increase her opportunities outside family relationships. Some men and women recognize the constraints and limitations imposed on women within the family and in broader society. Raed highlights the interconnection of these limitations,

"Palestinian women are capable, but live in a closed social situation. If she marries at an early age she loses her chance to become educated. We rarely find women educated enough to participate in the political and social activities. Our closed and complex community deprives her of participation in the clubs that could benefit her, her children and the community."

Suad calls these challenges and limitations "the red line." According to Suad,

"The red line is always in front of the woman and determines how far she can go in life. If she crosses the line, she has committed a violation of society's customs and traditions."

Whether the woman is a housewife or fully employed in a respectable institution any "crossing of the red line" can result in restrictions and limitations. "Everything is connected to the tipping of the scales, whether she (*a Palestinian woman*) can or cannot do things," explains Munira. The comments by Suad and Munira reflect an awareness of the limitations imposed by their society and how these restrictions decrease potential personal development and familial and community benefit

Fat'hi explains that women have suffered under the multiple sources of restrictions in society. Simultaneously she defines the roles of women in the camp as important and describes motherhood as a responsibility greater than the responsibilities of men,



“I believe there are many restrictions on women in the camp. They live in a conservative community governed by traditional relations and traditions. There are different families, communities and classes that interpret women’s role and status differently. I believe that women have a very important role and assume more responsibility than men. She raises, cares and teaches the children and in my community women are considered first class workers. Nevertheless her situation has not changed. As soon as a woman is married her role is restricted to the home and to the children.”

Fat’hi recognizes and upholds the traditional gender roles as beneficial. She is also aware of the detrimental impact on personal lives, especially once a woman is married.

Mu’in agrees the camps are conservative but he is not hopeful of future changes in women’s status,

“The camps are more conservative than other areas. For the past ten years nothing has been offered to women. During the first *Intifada* young girls were married off at fifteen and by twenty they would have five or six children. They have no time for anything. Women in the camp have a large role in the home but no role outside the home. Here the man plays the major role and the woman can only assist him. Women’s freedom will never be realized.”

According to Amnesty International (2005), 30% of Palestinian women who are wed are below the age of seventeen. This age is lower in the refugee camps, as Mu’in states, due to the conservative nature of the camps as well as the reduced economic and social stability. Poverty and unemployment among the men in the camp results in increased control of women through marriage as traditional gender roles are undermined by the economic deterioration in the camp. Mu’in is less hopeful about the status of married women today who already have children. In addition, he warns that change cannot take place at the expense of men’s social status.

“Even if the camps do see some development in terms of women’s role and status, for those who are married with children it will be too late. If

any developments counter men's position, no laws will be enacted to change the relationship between men and women. Even if changes occur, the role of women will not change and will stay the same."

Saadi describes Palestinian society as patriarchal. He recognizes the power of male-domination to shape women's lives in the camp. He states,

"Men attempt to impose values whether within the family or at the community level which severely restricts women, especially in the areas of decision-making."

Within this social network a woman's ability to make decisions regarding the family, marriage or education for example, is largely determined by her marital status and position within the family. If a woman is not married then she must obey her father and brother. Marriage, however, transfers decision-making authority from the father or brother to the husband and/or in-laws. Rahma explains that a married woman "must consult her husband on all matters, large or small." For example, she explains, "She must obtain her husband's approval in order to visit friends or neighbors...She must serve them according to their wishes." Abed, however, connects decision-making power of women with ability and male authority. He is aware of the impact of traditional gender roles in determining a woman's decision-making power, especially within the family. He admits that his own decision to limit his wife's power is a consequence of broader social forces that are generational. He states,

"My wife is a good housewife and she is respected in the community and can manage the house properly. This work is her exclusive role. She takes part in making decisions but not every decision made by a woman is to be executed. She only participates in simple decision-making. Our society does not approve of women having full authority. We follow the steps of our fathers and grandfathers."

Married women are expected to defer decision-making power to husbands or in-laws. Becoming a wife and mother further decreases a woman's mobility and participation in the community. Motherhood is an event that results in increased seclusion and restrictions and the high birth rates in the camp further decreases women's opportunity to personal development and participation in activities outside the home.

Mohammed explains the condition of married women once they begin to have children,

“When my wife became a mother her role became restricted to the home. Even if she had been previously employed, after delivery she should stay at home. She has no free time to participate, (*outside the home*), and prefers to devote her time in raising her children. Women are meant to be in the home and her role will not improve. A woman is a woman.”

Childbirth, and especially multiple births are expected and clearly increase restrictions for women. Yet according to Yousef K., fertility and motherhood have awarded significance to women as members of society and increases a woman's status in the camp. Yousef K.'s wife gave birth every year for nine years and in a single year gave birth to twins.

Yousef K claims,

“My wife concentrates on raising and teaching our children. She has the patience and the ability to raise them properly. This ability is holy because the children will not grow up to have an inferiority complex. In the beginning, my wife did not have many responsibilities. Every year her responsibilities increased, (*with more children*). Her role has become more necessary. Initially my wife's role was minimal, but after having children, her role has become very important.”

The honored role of motherhood is meant to serve as a vehicle to improve the lives of the husband and children. According to Talal, his wife's role is to serve the family,

“Her ambition is to be happy at home, to be the best woman and to work hard for the future of her husband and her children.”

Expectations and a development of a sense of worthiness are intertwined with expected gender roles and the economic and political hardships camp residents experience as a result of their refugee status and the foreign occupation. Abed refers to his wife’s aspirations within the context of her role as mother and wife living under challenging conditions,

“In terms of my wife’s aspirations they are similar to all women aspirations; to have children, a husband and a comfortable home, better than others and even better than her father’s home. Within the camp she aspires to be happy in a happy home environment with respect and morals, in spite of the difficult conditions in the camp.”

Women are also expected to maintain the reputation of the family by maintaining a good reputation for themselves. Therefore a woman’s ability to participate in camp activities outside the home is influenced by the potential threat of public criticism that could damage a good reputation. Referring to his wife’s participation in the clubs or centers in the camp, Talal reflects on the pressures of gossip from neighbors. He also points out that his work as a day laborer limits his wife’s ability to leave the home,

“If a woman goes out of her home and returns late or if she goes out more than one or two times, she will be a target for criticism and stinging comments. The society is still as it is and I can’t give her full freedom. And, as for me, I don’t have time to spend with my wife outside the home. I am a (day) laborer. I go to work early in the morning and return late at night.

The perceived risk of exposing the family honor to criticism is highlighted by Talal and Abed. The potential harm that can result from gossip or criticism can dictate a

man's relationship with his wife and/or daughter. Abed offers an explanation for his need to limit his wife's activities. Speaking in reference to activities in the camp he concludes,

“Even if there were any activities in which my wife could participate there would be obstacles that prevent her from participation. The obstacles are the slanders that damage our reputation. The one who wants to be on guard from losing his honor from birth to death, must follow the foot steps of his predecessors and refrain from giving freedom to his wife within or outside the camp.”

Honor refers to the appropriate ways men and women should “be” in the world.

An honorable person is one who lives according to the moral, ethical and “right” ways of living as defined and influenced by the local context. Maintaining the honor of one's family is to maintain respect in the community (Baxter, 2007:745). Honor is also translated into the supervision and control of women's sexuality. Sexual segregation, veiling and arranged marriages are means by which men protect the honor of their families. By controlling the activities and movements of women, men seek to uphold their honor and ultimately the honor of their family. Honor and the maintenance of honor play a significant social and ideological role in controlling women's sexuality and defining gender relationships and thus fundamental to patriarchy (Rubenberg, 2001, Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2003). However, according to Armstrong, (2000), gender violence in the form of honor killings, or the killing of women for dishonoring, perceived or real, the family (rape, promiscuity, refusing an arranged marriage, or wanting a divorce) date back to the pre-Islamic era and is not condoned by the Quran. Patriarchal interpretation of the Quran serves to maintain and legitimize male dominance.

For a woman to serve as a good example and maintain a good reputation she must remain obedient to the husband or to the male authority of the family. According to

Yousef, the wife must be obedient to the husband as long as the husband fulfills her needs. He gives the example of his wife whom he states cooperates with him and as a result he “gives her full freedom” and privileges in all areas of life. He concludes that his wife stands by him like “glittering gold.” However, according to Yousef, women do not have the same level of intelligence and mental stability as men. A woman must have a “sound mentality” and be able to manage the household finances in order to avoid plunging her husband into debt. Yousef states,

“She (*the wife*) must be obedient to him (*the husband*) as long as he satisfies her. For example, my wife and I work together hand-in-hand and for my part I give her full freedom, because I am used to giving her privileges in all matters of our concern...It is obvious that not all women have the same mentality as that of men. If a woman enjoys a sound mentality she will be very careful to manage her house affairs properly and to take care of the children. If her husband earns a fixed income she must manage her expenses accordingly in order to avoid creating confusion that will lead to many problems, particularly she will cause her husband to run up a debt. She will then lose his confidence and respect.”

The traditional roles of women are used to justify a woman’s lack of decision-making power and participation outside the home. According to Yousef, a woman’s role in the community is acceptable as long as her activities are known and condoned by the husband. He defines women’s role in the camp as such,

“She is expected to live up to the expectations inherent in her nature. She must be conservative in all areas of life. Her primary responsibilities are to maintain the household and a good reputation, especially in terms of her morality. Consequently she will set a good example for the community.”

He agrees education is good for women as long as women do not begin to think they are better than their husbands. Yet the decision-making power of male authorities in the family and the family responsibilities of women restrict opportunities for educational

development as well. Mu'in defines the limits and conditions of his wife that results in a vicious circle. A woman cannot participate in activities outside the home, partially due to her responsibilities as a wife and mother, but also as a result of his sole authority to determine her range of mobility. Referring to his wife, she has therefore not achieved any level of education and is considered "uneducated,"

"There are no activities for women in the camp and even if there were my wife would not attend because she can't leave the home and the children even for half an hour. If she would want to join the organizations I would not prevent her directly but I would convince her that she must stay at home with the children and take care of the house and that she has no time for such activities. My wife is uneducated and spends her time at home. I try to "awaken" her by telling her about my daily observations outside the home. However, if she plans to go any place during my absence, she must inform me in advance. I do not like my wife to go anywhere while I am work without consulting me first."

Some men protect and maintain their position of authority and privilege by defining the roles and status of women according to their self-interest. Yet this self-interest is also connected to the expectations and status of men in the camp. Farida points to men as the "main obstacle to women's development and level of participation in society." She believes a man needs to control a woman in order to promote his status. Male status includes the image he must uphold in society. Referring to a man's need to control women Farida explains,

"His pride and sense of manhood is defined by his control over her life and his decision-making power over her needs and desires. The father, brother and husband define her life according to their interests."

Rahma indicates that some men fear social advances for women. Instead of viewing women's development as a positive change that would benefit the family and community, women's social development is considered a threat to men's status.

“In all areas the man stands as a barrier to prevent women from development. A man's pride in his manhood and in his need to dominate allows him to decide a women's needs...according to what may be suitable for his interests. A man's selfishness and fears of women's development have played a significant role in motivating them to control every aspect of her life.”

Women have limited control over, and space to challenge, decisions that impact their lives. They also have limited opportunities outside the home. These conditions can influence a woman's psychological wellbeing. According to Rahma, camp women, “must remain silent, refrain from complaining and exhibit satisfaction with her role in life.” Woman's status has consequences of her mental state. Words used to describe women's psychological status are “self-blame, boredom, having suicidal tendencies, distress and an inferiority complex.” But some men also fear women. Some men believe that women pursue power at the expense of their husbands. Yousef believes that a woman will try to gain control over the male head of household. He states,

“If you give her your fingertip, she will devour your whole hand completely. Some women want to control and humiliate their husbands and even take pride in doing so. This is wrong. Men and women should enjoy equal respect.”

Mohammed expresses a similar fear and defines the role of women as limited to the home. If any changes in women's status do occur, these changes will also be limited to the home and within the family,

“Women are ambitious and want to have everything and to have the upper hand. She wants to do everything but this is not correct at all. If the



situation of women changes, the change will take place only in the home. The married woman who improves will reflect well on her home, children and husband. The married woman complies with the wishes of the husband and for the single woman; she is responsible to her family.”

Both men and women interviewed recognize that women are limited by the customs and social practices that shape their lives. The data also reveal challenges to these limitations as well as challenges to change. Palestinian refugee women are further secluded from public life and opportunities after marriage. Marriage at an early age and arranged marriages compound this social isolation.

#### Early and Arranged Marriages

The preoccupation with maintaining and preserving family honor has led some families to compel women to marry at an early age instead of seeking an education, becoming involved politically or obtaining employment. For example after the onset of the first *Intifada* the median age of marriage was eighteen, although some girls were married before reaching fifteen years of age (Rubenberg, 2001:89-90). Customs and religious teachings encourage families to wed their daughters at an early age.

Although the Quran does not indicate a specific age at which a woman can marry, it is customary in Palestinian society for women to marry at a young age. In the Gaza Strip the legal minimum marriage age is fifteen for girls and sixteen for boys. However, according to a study by the Norwegian research organization FAFO, more than one-third of Palestinian girls married when they were under the age of seventeen and 11% were fourteen years of age or younger. This discrepancy between legal and actual age of marriage age is partially due to the absence of state institutions that monitor compliance with the legal minimum age. In addition, Shar'ia judges, (religious authorities of personal

and family laws), allow girls to marry if they appear “physically mature” and if the parents are in agreement (Barron, 2001:76).

According to Saadi, young girls less than eighteen years of age are being wed. The decision to marry, in most cases, is neither made by the bride-to-be nor by her mother. The decision to wed a daughter is made by the father or other male authority in the family. Saadi states,

“What is the role of the mother when her daughter is married off at such a young age? She has no role. The father is the one who makes the decisions, with very little input, if any, from the daughter.”

Lack of decision-making power to determine with whom a young woman marries can have negative psychological effects. Early marriage is perceived as having a negative impact on women’s psychological status as well as her ability to succeed in the future. Divorce can be especially devastating for women who are married young. Munira, a divorced woman herself, shares her thoughts on divorce and early marriage,

“Palestinian women are oppressed, especially when they marry at an early age. After a month or two, or a year or two, she will be divorced with a son or a daughter or five children. She will be blamed for her fate although she is not responsible.”

Suad does not approve of early marriage because she believes young girls are not sufficiently developed physically or mentally and will therefore not be able to have a positive influence in the community. She believes a young mother lacks maturity and experience. A young mother would be unable to teach and care for her children and the children therefore would not play an effective role in the community. Munira believes early marriage is especially oppressive. She states,

“Early marriage can result in divorce and the young mother will be left with children to fend for herself. This young mother will think of suicide, especially if she is not educated.”

The voices of these women reflect a critical understanding of the consequences of marriage at a young age. Early marriage has caused increased suffering among Palestinian women. A young woman who is married at an early age is ignorant of her rights and divorce can be especially devastating. However, early marriage is not viewed as having the same impact on young men. The impact of early marriage on young men is not considered detrimental according to Yousef. Early marriage prepares the young bride to become a better wife and mother. Yousef refers to the early marriage of his son as positive for both the son and his young bride. His son was still in school when he was married at the age of fourteen. He continued his studies and entered the university. Yousef explains,

“I have not seen any changes in his behavior or mentality due to early marriage. My son’s wife is obedient and willing to do what he wishes and is advised by the family. The earlier the marriage, the more time the woman has to develop herself and become more talented.”

Arranged marriages, regardless of age, can also have negative personal consequences for young Palestinian women who are not consulted in the decision to marry. Saadi believes a majority of women in the camp do not participate in the decision-making process concerning marriage. He states,

“In a study conducted by our organization that focused on marriage between relatives, it was revealed that 70% of women are not consulted in their marriage arrangements.”

While visiting the Gaza Community Mental Health Center in the summer of 2000, I met a young woman who was recently engaged. She was employed as a secretary and sat behind her desk with tears streaming down her cheeks. Her uncle had chosen who would become her husband. However, she was in love with another man. When I asked her why she did not just marry the man she loved, she became defiant and wiped away her tears. "I would not do that, my uncle would be angry." A year later I met her again in the streets of Jabaliya Camp where she lived. She had given birth to a son and was pregnant with her second child. She was very happy. When I inquired about her husband her face became expressionless and she shrugged her shoulders. She was now a mother and had accepted a marital arrangement that she had not desired. Her attitude toward her husband was indifference.

The responsibilities of motherhood, combined with the burden of housework and food preparation consume much of a woman's daily life whether she is married with children or single. Married women with children have the increased workload as a result of increased responsibilities of child rearing. However, single women are also responsible for family members and the home.

### Women and Daily Responsibilities

Camp women are limited in their efforts to participate in social or educational activities largely due to their responsibilities at home and the amount of time and energy involved. This responsibility can be overwhelming and time-consuming, especially given the conditions under military occupation. Obtaining basic needs, for example accessing health care services and obtaining education for their children is difficult, as commodities

are scarce and the Israeli military controls access from one area to another by means of checkpoints, roadblocks and indiscriminate military attacks. Daily violence and threats of violence make obtaining even the most basic of necessities a challenge. There is, however, a general recognition of the disproportionate burden on women of home maintenance and child rearing. This burden is also associated with increased ignorance among women. Yousef K. explains,

“My wife’s time is devoted to looking after the children and teaching them, as this is a vital role. Her daily work is routine. It is said, ‘Too much work will cause stupidity.’ Because of my wife’s heavy burden at home, she is very narrow-minded and cannot acquire knowledge. She has dreams of leisure time and going to the park, but she has no time for this at all. This is typical of every camp woman. In the camp the father is too exhausted and the mother is even more exhausted.”

A woman’s daily routine consists of preparing the children for school and her husband for work, shopping for daily needs, preparing the daily meals, cleaning the home and occasionally visiting the children’s school to inquire about their behavior and their studies. Sara, a mother of ten describes her daily routine,

“My daily routine is very practical. I perform my religious duties in the morning with washing and prayer and then prepare breakfast for the children. After they have gone to school I take care of the home. I then have lunch and take a nap for two hours. After nap I perform my religious duties of prayer in the afternoon and evening. After I prepare supper and the children go to bed. My daily routine is the way it is because I am a housewife. The routine changes occasionally when I visit my daughter or neighbors.”

The work that women perform daily is repetitive and unchanging. Asma helps care for her mother and father, three sisters and seven brothers and grandmother. She describes her day are monotonous and routine,

“My daily program is extremely routine. I am anxious to change it because it is too monotonous. In the morning I go to work and return home. I have lunch and take a nap. If I have work to do I will do it at once. I perform my religious services and in the evening I prepare supper and then watch television.”

Some men describe women’s daily lives similarly. Mu’in shares his understanding of his wife’s daily routine,

“My wife has a difficult daily routine. She wakes at 4:00AM and begins preparations for the children and the house. The only change in her routine is that sometimes she makes cakes or a new kind of food. Otherwise changes do not happen in her routine.”

Fat’hi describes his wife’s daily responsibilities and compares her experiences to those of other women in the camp. He concludes, however, that women do not want to alter this daily routine.

“My wife’s daily routine is as most of the women in the camp. She prepares breakfast, sends the children to school, starts the housework, prepares lunch and reviews their lessons. Women have a daily routine and do not want to change it.”

Employment does not seem to alter the daily responsibilities of women, nor does employment seem impact their social status. Munira explains that her daily routine is similar to her sisters’ routines, even though she is employed outside the home,

“With regard to my program it is the same as my sisters’ routine. In the morning I get up, wash my face and have breakfast. I go to work and return to rest. If there is a ceremony I must attend and if I receive an invitation I will have to respond. I can’t introduce any changes to my daily routine because I must obey my father and brothers. If I want to visit a friend or sister I must get their permission.”

According to Rahma women are complicit in maintaining their status in society in spite of the heavy workload,

“Palestinian society does not include women in the development process. Often, it is the Palestinian woman herself who opposes increasing or expanding the roles of women. Her main responsibility in society is her family, which is very time consuming and exhausting.”

According to Farida, women have increased demands for higher education but are unable to take advantage of these opportunities due to responsibilities at home.

Conservative customs and patriarchal ideology also limit women to the home and her role as mother and homemaker. The physically and mentally consuming burden of raising children and maintaining a home in the context of foreign rule and poverty limits the opportunity for personal development. Mohammed offers an explanation of women’s daily life,

“Woman’s daily situation doesn’t change. In the morning she gets up, prepares breakfast for the children, sends them to school and then wakes him up for breakfast. He then goes to the market and she does the housework. If she has nothing after that she rests. When he returns from work she helps him and if she has time she makes sweets. Nothing changes. Her program is always the same because our life is always the same.”

Boredom and monotony characterize the daily lives of married women. Each day resembles the day before. However, the lives of single women, even if they are employed are similar to the daily lives of married women. The description of daily life by single women is not very different from that of married women in terms of monotony and routine. Asma offers a description of daily life,

“My daily routine is monotonous. I am eager to change my daily routine but I do not see a possibility for change. I go to work in the morning, come home for lunch and then I take a nap. I then do whatever work is necessary around the house and perform my religious duties. In the evening I prepare dinner and watch TV. My routine is controlled by circumstances and lack of opportunity makes it very difficult to change.”

The daily routines of women are shaped by conditions of poverty and lack of basic services. Violence from and restrictions imposed by the military occupation limit women's ability to make even short-term plans. Compounding this economic and political situation are the social restrictions on a woman's mobility and activities. Rahma states,

“Women's lives are primarily influenced by circumstantial and emergency situations and events...a woman's daily circle is limited in terms of her activities by the social and religious restrictions imposed on her.”

When discussing daily life with women or men in Gaza, I was frequently told that daily, weekly or monthly plans were difficult to make because the forces that impact their lives, such as military checkpoints, closures, limitations on imports and exports and military attacks that can not be anticipated. Planning something as simple as going to the market for often scarce food and supplies can be completely disrupted by an Israeli attack or military curfew.

### Summary

Oppressive and discriminatory power relations of male domination and foreign occupation shape women's lives in Jabaliya camp. Gender roles and expectations largely restrict women's lives to the home, child rearing and care of the household. Decisions by men to limit a woman's decision-making power and public participation is considered a consequence of the “red-line” or the social customs and practices that are seen as generational. The need to maintain the family honor also plays a role in restricting women's roles and opportunities. These roles are seen as “natural and inherent” and



therefore not responsive to change as women's value is measured by these roles, especially after marriage. Some women aspire to have children and raise them according to the expectations of society that are conservative and male-dominated. In addition, women's role as caretaker, child-bearer and nurturer is to serve others: the family, the husband and ultimately the community. To serve others is considered a woman's source of happiness and sense of self. Women's lives are also shaped by the national response to the violence and poverty resulting from foreign occupation. Out of this context the data reveal two perceived avenues for personal development and social power: education and employment. The following chapter will identify the challenges women face in accessing higher education or employment within the context of national resistance to occupation and male-dominated interpretations of the Islamic faith.

## Chapter Six

### Work and Education and the Influence of National Resistance and Islam

There is an increasing need and desire among women to seek employment outside the home to financially support their families or supplement their husband's income. Many women also desire an education, especially beyond the high school level, not only to increase opportunities for employment but also as a means of enhancing personal status and involvement in the camp. Yet opportunities are shaped by social customs, beliefs and expectations described in the previous chapter. Neither education nor employment is socially acceptable for all women. In addition, military and economic conditions limit opportunities for women. Women's lives are also shaped by the predominantly male-dominated interpretations of Islam and national resistance to Israeli military occupation. This chapter identifies two perceived avenues of personal and community empowerment and explores the influence of resistance and Islam on women's lives. The chapter is divided into three sections: 1) women and work outside the home, 2) women and education and 3) national resistance and Islam.

#### Women and Work Outside the Home

Economic necessity, especially since the first year of the second *Intifada*, has obliged many refugee women to enter the work force. According to the World Bank the estimated per capita income prior to the second *Intifada* was \$1,100.00. In 2003 income level in the refugee camps in the Gaza Strip was reduced by 50%. Two years after the start of the second *Intifada* unemployment rose to 42% and 75% of the population in the Gaza Strip lived at poverty level (defined as surviving on less than \$2.00 per day). In

2006 unemployment was estimated at 34.8% (World Bank, 2006). The Palestinian Bureau of Statistics reports indicate that three fourths of the population depends on food aid to survive (Palestine Bureau of Statistics, 2007).

Though women's employment is an increasing necessity, Palestinian women are discouraged from working outside the home and many lack the necessary social supports. Men have traditionally been responsible for all female members of the family and male prestige depends on the ability to not only financially support the family but also to protect the family honor through the isolation of women (Peteet, 2005, Rockwell, 1985). However, in spite of social restrictions there is an increase in women's labor activity in the informal sectors of the economy as well as limited participation in the formal labor market.

Women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have among the lowest labor participation rates in the world at 12.7% (World Bank, 2006). The low percentage of women working outside the home in the Gaza Strip is due to a combination of factors. Conservative society and extended Israeli closures of the Gaza Strip, especially after the outbreak of the second *Intifada*, contribute to the lower labor participation rates for women in the Gaza Strip. The traditional inclination to view a woman's proper place as in the home, the burden of household chores and child rearing responsibilities and chronic unemployment decrease a woman's access to employment opportunities.

After the outbreak of the second *Intifada* in September of 2000, the Israeli Army closed the Gaza Strip and barred Palestinian men from working in Israel. The immediate outcome of the closure was an increase in unemployment to 50% of the total available

work force (International Labor Organization, 2001). It has become increasingly difficult for families to meet even basic needs especially if the husband is unemployed, has left the camp in search of employment or has been deported, injured or imprisoned by the Israelis. Some women have become the sole breadwinners of the family as a result of the loss of a husband or father. Dalal shares her experience,

“Thank God I have built my family though I am a widow. I have raised three daughters and two sons after the death of my husband. The oldest was in the first grade when he died. Thanks to God they all have achieved success in their education. I was able to carry out my responsibilities successfully. I have three children studying in the university and, God willing, I will succeed with the other children.”

Intisar also became head of her household after her husband died. She recognizes that although she is solely responsible for her children, she also realizes that her role is limited to the home due to the social status of women in the camp. She laments,

“I have no role in the camp. On the other hand I am solely responsible for three sons and one daughter. I pray to God to help me raise my children properly. My status has changed compared to when the head of the family was still alive and was responsible for the whole family. At present I am responsible for the house and the children.”

In addition to social pressures that limit women’s employment, many women must request permission from their husband, father or other male guardian in order to travel outside the home. This requirement strengthens the patriarchal power structures that support women’s exclusion from the public sphere and limit women’s mobility. However, in spite of the challenges to working outside the home, women continue to seek employment.

If women do manage to obtain permission to travel and are able to work, employment is viewed as supplemental support to sustaining the family or to supplement

her husband's wage. Her paid labor is considered a form of aid to the family and is equated with the perceived benefits of voluntary work in charitable organizations.

According to Subhi women work to supplement their husband's income,

“Women have jobs outside the home to help their husband's cover the cost of living. A women's ambition is to aid her family and the community by working in charitable organizations.”

Women's participation in the community, including participation in the labor market, is viewed as a vehicle for providing and extending services to the community.

Women's involvement outside the home, whether in the form of employment or charitable work, is considered an extension of her role within the family as caretaker and nurturer. A woman's efforts to improve her status must therefore develop within the context of enhancing the wellbeing of her community. Suad believes there is an organic link between women's development and community progress. She states,

“A woman's ambition in terms of her involvement in the camp is similar to her ambitions with her family...In order for a woman to achieve status in society she must choose a job that will allow her to render services to the community. A successful human being must be successful in the community through her social activities.”

Because women have limited employment opportunities and restricted mobility they also receive lower wages and harsher working conditions. This is partly made possible as a result of social challenges to female employment. In spite of the fact that a job in a factory or office may provide increased wages, employment in a mixed gender environment and the need to travel to reach the place of employment, (thus exposing women to traveling in taxis that would be “mixed”), is not socially acceptable. Some

women choose alternate jobs that earn less in exchange for maintaining their “honor” (Rosenberg, 2001:192).

According to a study conducted by the Center of Democracy and Human Rights in Palestine, (2000), women are pressured by their families or their community not to work outside the home. For many women seeking a paid job is simply forbidden. Late hours, travel, working in offices or factories that employ men are some of the reasons given for why women should be not permitted to work outside the home. After a woman is married she faces increased social pressure not to seek employment outside the home. Married women are concerned that their employment would give the impression that their husbands are not capable of supporting them. Women, therefore, may choose to stop working outside the home after marriage (Awaida, 1997).

Job-related activities could also potentially violate the family honor. Gossip from extended family members and neighbors that criticizes a woman’s attempt to work outside the home is a significant deterrent to women’s employment. The need to maintain family honor reinforces a woman’s reluctance to pursue employment. The fear of gossip also legitimizes a husband’s willingness to refuse permission for women to work outside the home. Asma shares her experiences and the consequences of family restrictions,

“As far as I am concerned I was very keen on taking a computer course. My request was rejected because my family doesn’t approve of my working in an office as a secretary and coming home late. Except for a job in teaching, my family does not allow me to work in anything connected to factories or offices. I am compelled to stick to the area of teaching as they wish, not paying the slightest attention to my being under psychological stress because of this.”

Social restrictions imposed on women working outside the home are also applied to women seeking an education. There is even less social support for women seeking higher education. Some men and women also believe the pursuit of education by women should not disrupt or challenge men's social status. Education must be restricted to serving the community and the family.

### Women and Education

Women do not enjoy access to equal opportunities in education, especially post-high school education. Limited opportunities for women are due to several social, economic and political factors. The Israeli Army imposes checkpoints and roadblocks that limit travel to educational institutions and repeated and prolonged curfews and closures disrupt courses and the daily functioning of the universities and schools. Scarce economic resources and the need to maintain "family honor" favor education of sons over daughters. Women's responsibilities in child rearing and care of the home also limit women's ability to obtain an education. In spite of these limitations and obstacles, as of 1996 young women make up 48.9% of the school population, up from 43.5% in 1975. However 54.4% of women who reach twenty years old drop out of school between the first and the twelfth grade (Rubenberg, 2001:123-124).

Although Suad T. clearly articulates her role as a mother as one that serves her family, community and nation through her reproductive and nurturing powers she views education achievement as necessary for social and personal achievement. The success of her children through acquiring higher education is viewed as her own personal success and sense of worth. Suad expresses, through the success of her children, the "power to"

contribute to and improve the collective good to the level of nation building. She refers to the education and role of her children,

“My aspirations within the family are to raise my children properly and create educated men of the future. Education is similar to weapons in life. In the context of the community, they must become professionals and teachers in order to benefit the community. In the national context, they must serve their own country. My aspirations are bound up with the success of my children.”

Although there is less support for women entering the university, attitudes toward women entering universities have changed since the 1960s. In the past two decades, and especially with the establishment of the Palestine Authority, women and men are increasingly in favor of girls completing their basic education. Samira explains,

“I have seen changes in women’s participation since the early sixties and seventies. Previously girls were not allowed by their families to complete their studies and could only complete the secondary level or less. The Universities, especially BirZeit University in Ramallah, were considered areas of improper conduct and it was considered “shameful” to allow daughters to attend. Instead fathers considered marriage for the girls.”

Higher education is not a choice for many women because their husbands or fathers refuse their requests to attend university. The reasons given continue to be that the universities are “immoral” and not fit for women. Therefore many women in the camps are restricted from pursuing education after graduating from high school. Samira offers her own example,

“When I finished secondary school, (*highschool*), I wanted to attend a university in Ramallah, (West Bank) but my family objected and suggested I join an institution in Gaza. I attempted to join the Islamic University but I was rejected. I could therefore not complete my studies as I had hoped.”



Safiya compares women in the camp to a bird with broken wings. Women had little control over their lives, including being denied education, yet Safiya was also denied the opportunity to attend university in spite of receiving a scholarship for her academic performance,

“Women play a primary role in the community and some have succeeded areas of education, government ministries, the police force and in medical services. I am a housewife and I manage the affairs of my home, raise my children and teach them the rules of their religion. I raise them to be virtuous. Above all I help my husband with everyday management of our affairs. In the past women’s rights were denied and she was with broken wings, very weak. She was deprived of the privilege of education and was not allowed to take part in the decision to marry. She was forced to accept a husband selected by her family. I was prevented from completing my education even though I was longing to do so and I was a top student. I received a scholarship from Ein-Shams University in Egypt. My father forbids me to attend the university because he said that girls are not supposed to be educated.”

Limited resources and the priority placed by family and society on the education of male children decreases women’s opportunities in achieving a higher education. Saadi shares an example,

“If a father has one son and one daughter and both have finished secondary school, the father will try to enroll the son in the university but not the daughter. Young girls are allowed to finish secondary school but are not allowed to continue their studies in the university.”

A family’s economic situation also influences opportunities for women in the camp. The ability to obtain an education depends on the availability of resources. Adham makes a distinction between women who are poor and uneducated and women who are educated and better off economically. According to Adham, education and economic status are related to gender roles and status,

“In the community, the educated woman aspires to participate in political roles to obtain a high position, for example a minister or member of the Legislative Council. The educated woman of wealth has aspirations and goals just like a man while the opposite is true of the uneducated woman whose economic level is low. Her role is exclusively to raise children and take care of the home. My mother is not educated. Her aspirations are naturally to look after the house affairs and go shopping....in other words her role is semi-marginal. The educated women’s ambitions are naturally different from the goals of uneducated women. At the family level, the educated woman focuses on the freedom to make decisions and to assist the husband in managing the home and his work. This is contrary to the uneducated woman whose expectations are simply to care for the children and manage house affairs. An educated woman looks toward joining local community meetings and political debates and wants to have the right to participate in public services.”

Traditional gender roles and economic status can determine education opportunities available to women. Adham recognizes not only the negative effects of poverty on women’s personal development, but also perceives education as a vehicle for increasing community involvement and political participation. In addition, women’s desire for an education and her expected role as a mother reflect tension between education for the benefit of others and personal gain acquired by completing one’s education. However women’s status is enhanced when her educational achievements are linked to her participation in community development. Hana states,

“A woman’s role from my point of view depends on her level of education. An educated woman aspires to bring up the next generation to be independent. For her part, she aspires to improve her social and economic level. In my capacity as a young girl, having finished my university studies, I perceive that my status in the community will improve if I am offered employment that contributes to building our society.

When women are restricted from obtaining a higher education, some women attempt to participate in a variety of training programs that are made available to them in

the camp by international or local non-government organizations. Women are more likely to be permitted to attend lower school and continue with specialized courses offered in the camps. These specialized courses include classes in knitting, childcare, flower arranging and computers. Women also participate in programs that teach food preservation, first aid and literacy. These courses focus primarily on traditional roles of women and orient women toward servicing their families as opposed to developing their own personal potential. Badia describes the workshops available to women in the camp,

“We attend some seminars and meetings held at the municipality that teach us about cleaning streets, waste water disposal and how to put garbage in plastic bags. Women attend these seminars and benefit from them.”

According to Munira these courses are in high demand, especially among young women. However completion of these courses does not necessarily improve a woman's status in the community. Munira makes the effort to complete courses offered in the camp but does not receive increased benefits to her social status. She states,

“There are courses that are offered that are for uneducated young girls such as courses in ceramic skills, sewing, flower arrangements and computers. Young girls seek after these courses because they are of great importance. As for me, in spite of having an education, I can see that my education is not recognized. So for this reason I am motivated to attend all the lectures and courses. There is an opportunity regarding a course for nursery teachers. It is a high level course for teachers and I wish I could attend this special course.”

Hana favors the short-term courses for women and links education to economic and social improvements in the community. Courses offered serve to protect and care for the neighborhoods. Zaki explains,

“The ladies of the neighborhood work together in order to keep the area clean. They clean the streets in front of their homes, collect

garbage and put it in plastic bags and take it to the gathering points. Recently, *Save the Children* began a project of installing new drinking water pipes and the women in the neighborhood are taking care of and reducing the consumption of water.”

Training programs provided by the UN (United Nations), or NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), are short term and have little impact on women’s status in society. Rahma is clear that even when a woman attempts to develop herself by participating in the few programs offered by non-government organizations her efforts are not recognized. “She does not see results and moves quickly to another training, activity or similar development effort initiated by the United Nations or other NGOs.”

The Palestine National Authority (PNA) also provides many of the service-oriented courses. The expectation is that the governing bodies should provide opportunities for women, especially opportunities that improve the wellbeing of the family and community. Seminars and workshops are seen as beneficial to women when they benefit the family and her role as mother and homemaker. Ghalia gives several examples,

“Seminars are held for women that benefit them. *Save the Children* held a course on how to protect and clean home appliances such as refrigerators. It also held a course on health awareness among women. The Work Committee teaches women how to make jam and organizes dress-making courses.”

Ghalia wants to learn tricot and first aid and would like to see clubs for women and park areas for her children. She expects the PNA to provide these opportunities. She and other women have attempted to contact PNA offices concerning perceived needs of women and their families in the camp. She states,

“I hope that they (*PNA*) will respond, at least for the sake of the children, so that they play like other children. If the municipality pays attention to women and provides courses such as first aid, this will benefit women and the community.”

United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), provide workshops and adult education courses that focus on child rearing, preventive health care, and diet. The emphasis on courses that relate to the improvement of life in the camp is both a gender defined limitation to education and a response to the underdevelopment of social services and opportunities that are limited or absent due to military occupation and refugee status. The social support for women attending these courses serves as an extension of her expected roles as mother and caretaker and a response to the political and economic conditions that deprives the entire community. Raed supports courses that benefit children and believes that women want to take these courses,

“These programs interest women, whose main concern is how to raise her children, what to eat during pregnancy, nursing and delivery. She is concerned with the health of the child by vaccinating him against diseases. In my opinion, a husband likes his wife to be educated and aware, instead of spending time talking about others. Her education reflects positively on her home and her children.”

In spite of limitations of adult education courses and workshops these avenues for obtaining knowledge and basic skills can serve to sustain families that must survive under military occupation and economic deprivation. Palestinian women have developed space in the informal market as a means of survival. For example, the traditional activity of sewing and embroidery can serve to increase family income. Women seamstresses sell garments, teach students how to make clothing and are able to provide clothing for the family to reduce the need to purchase necessary garments. The development of cottage

industries has played an important role in the survival of families in the camps. Women have begun projects to manufacture food products at home such as dairy products, frozen and dried vegetables and fruit (*Jerusalem Times*, October 13). Another example is The Women's Empowerment Project in Gaza City. The project, run by women, provides classes in sewing and embroidery and organizes venues where women can sell their products.

However, not all women are able to participate in these short-term programs. A woman's marital status may limit her ability to participate in adult education training programs. For example, a woman who has become a widow has the additional challenge of being the head of the household. Intisar is a widow with four children. She describes her unique experience as one of exclusion and limited mobility,

“Since my children are orphans and I am the only one responsible for them, I can't participate in any activities in the camp. A widowed woman is not allowed by her relatives to participate in educational course offered because they want her to stay at home with the children. Widowed women's status is different from that of a divorced woman. A divorced woman's children may be in the custody of the father, which allows time for the mother to attend courses. A widowed woman is bound to her house and children and seldom leaves.”

Limited adult educational opportunities are vehicles for maintaining gender roles and especially women's role as caretaker. Compounding the lack of social support for women's education opportunities, education programs that are offered to women take place primarily in Gaza City. Due to restrictions by the family on women's travel and the consequential risk of becoming the target of gossip, many women are unable to take advantage of even these few programs offered in the city. Fat'hi explains the double bind his wife may experience if she attends courses,

“I have never prevented my wife from attending any of these activities. But if she does go, then she is exposed to unjust criticism by our neighbors. I believe that women should enjoy the same freedoms as men. I always encourage my wife but she does not accept my encouragements.”

Male decision-makers in the family believe some educational centers to be improper and therefore prohibit their wives from attending in an effort to avoid potential gossip from community members and neighbors. Traveling to and from the centers can also illicit criticism by neighbors and family members. In this way friends and extended family members play an important role in maintaining women’s position in the camp through the use of gossip and criticism. According to Saadi,

“These men, fathers and husbands, are afraid of the gossip and slander that may fall upon them if their women were to be granted certain freedoms. For example, if a young girl is late coming home, she is immediately suspected of either sexual deviance or relating to boys in some unacceptable manner.”

Morality and honor continue to play an important role in shaping the status of women and her ability to participate in the public arena, including educational institutions. Often a husband will claim to support his wife if she desires to pursue education. However, the husband will also warn his wife that gossip and loss of respect from friends and relatives would impact the family. Regardless of marital status, criticism from relatives is very important and plays a decisive role in limiting a woman’s freedom. Once a woman is married her movement and behavior is even more restricted and controlled by the influence of family members and friends. Fah’mi expresses a consciousness of the effects of gendered criticism that is targeted against women and impacts the family as a whole. According to Fah’mi, gossip and criticism by the

community members who "watch her every movements," and "speak unkindly behind her back" are a form of oppression towards women.

This aspect of "honor" plays a role in a woman's decision to participate in activities outside the home. However, in spite of this need to protect family honor and gender relations within the family, women demand the right to be employed outside the home or obtain an education. The critique of social norms that obstruct women's access to education and the aspirations women exhibit for pursuing especially higher education assumes a change in social status for women who are able to complete their education. However, the demand for education and the expectation that education will improve women's social status does not reflect a study by Huntington, (2001) that shows a correlation between years of education and traditional family roles. Using a multivariate model (education, employment outside the home, religiosity and political participation) to predict traditional roles among families in the West Bank and Gaza Strip the study found that higher levels of formal education was associated with more traditional roles. The study also found that women with less formal education had higher employment rates and therefore contributed more to the family income than women with more years of formal education. Less traditional roles were related to income generation and not education. The study also found that political participation was not associated with family roles. However, women have been and continue to be, involved and actively participate in the national resistance to foreign domination. Political participation, however, has not translated into improved social status for women. One reason is that male-dominated



narratives of Islam and the resistance upholds and protects patriarchal relations of power and define the expectations and roles of women's involvement in the liberation struggle.

### National Resistance and Islam

In the Gaza Strip women's status in society is partly shaped Islam and the national liberation struggle. The influence of both is present in the fabric of women's lives in Jabaliya refugee camp. Both religion and resistance have shaped gender identity and served to uphold women's traditional position in society as well as promote opportunities for women. For some Palestinian women of Jabaliya camp, Islam is considered a vehicle for securing women's rights and providing a framework for advancement. Education of women, for example, is a basic demand of Islam in order for women to be better qualified to raise and teach their children. Islam on the one hand plays an important role in upholding the traditional role of women in the family as mother and caretaker. In 1993, a statement on the role of women was issued in the Hamas Charter:

“The Muslim woman has a role in the battle for liberation which is no less than that of the man, for she is the factory of men. Her role in directing generations and training them is large ... be she mother or sister, (*she*) has the most important role in taking care of the home and raising children of ethical character and understanding that comes from Islam, and of training her children to perform their religious obligations in order to prepare them for the *Jihadic* role that awaits them. From this perspective it is necessary to take care of the schools and curricula that educate the Muslim girl, for her to become a righteous mother aware of her role in the battle for liberation. She must have the necessary awareness and attentiveness in running the home” (Hammer, 2000:305-306).

Hana believes a woman will advance within the framework of her faith. Her goal is to aid in the development of her community and to raise her children according to religious teachings. She states,

“Regardless of the level of education, women seek to raise their children within the framework of Islamic teachings. Islam provides a good way to raise our children. I am personally looking forward to building our society and raising the next generation that abides by the rules of Islam.”

Religion, whether Islamic or Christian, is considered by some to be a vehicle for advancing women's rights. If women follow the teachings of their religion they will achieve respect and status in society. Changes to women's status in society must therefore come from religious teachings. Women's status will improve if she complies with the teachings of “ideal” Islamic law. Farida reflects on her religious teachings and the relationship to women's equality,

“Women must comply with the teachings of ‘ideal’ Islamic law, laid down by the Quran or stipulated by the prophet Mohammad's rules. Both call upon all people to grant freedom to women to improve her role and efficiency in society.”

According to Yousef K., his wife teaches the “rules of religion” to her children and her neighbors. He states,

“My wife does everything possible to help her neighbors by teaching them religion. My wife is very religious. If she sees a bare headed woman she will tell her quietly that such an action is prohibited by religion and will ask her to cover her head. If she sees a part of a women's body uncovered, she will advise her to follow the right way and to obey the orders of God and that she must pray, as praying is the backbone of religion.”

Both men and women however indicate contemporary religious leaders do not uphold or teach women's rights, even rights that can be found directly in the Quran or Shari 'a (Islamic Law). Suheila shares her perceptions on women and religion,

“Though laws and the Shari 'a have granted limited rights to women, Palestinian women are unaware of their rights and fail to defend those rights.”

Saadi believes religious leaders and the offices of religious affairs neglect women's rights. According to Saadi, it is the responsibility of the religious leaders to teach men and women about women's rights. For example, Saadi works in the health clinics where they offer workshops on various issues dealing with health and health care. He recounts an exchange that occurred during one of the workshops,

“An old man asked whether his religion requires that he consult his daughters on their marriage arrangements. I told him, “yes,” that he must consult with them and that this is supported by the prophet's rule. The old man replied that it was the first time he had heard such a rule and declared, ‘be witness that I have inflicted injustice upon my daughters.’”

However, religious teachings are also inconsistent with the social upheaval witnessed with the arrival of the PNA. The establishment of the PNA in Gaza during the Oslo Peace Process resulted in the introduction of a variety of cultural and social elements imported from outside. A large number of Palestinian youth from the Diaspora who had been living in Arab and other foreign countries came to Palestine. They brought with them the social and cultural concepts from various societies about the status and roles of women. While I was working in the Gaza Strip during the return of Palestinians from the Diaspora I witnessed some of these ideas translated into practice. For example, I attempted to accompany several children from the camp to the beach and was denied

passage by PNA police officers and soldiers. I was told that “this was Chairman Arafat’s beach” and I could neither enter nor bring children near the area. I managed to peer above the walls that blocked our view of the water and the sand and saw women in skimpy bikinis sunning themselves and mingling with men. In contrast along the Gaza Strip coast where the public is able to access, women wear complete body coverage even when they swim.

Class differences were also accentuated with the return of Palestinians from the Diaspora. For example, five-star hotels that provide lodging to political representatives and their families loom over the beachfront. But with a simple turn of the head, one can also view the dilapidated homes and garbage lined, un-paved roads of Gaza residential areas. These contrasts of culturally unacceptable social interaction and wealth disparities were clearly an affront to the majority of refugee camp residents. The wealth that the PNA “returnees” brought with them from outside was considerable and obvious. Local people assumed that some of this wealth would be used to improve living standards, including those of women. Instead, “the returnees” as they were called, constructed towering apartment buildings complete with the latest amenities. Each apartment was then sold or given to a family member returning from the outside. Changes introduced by returnees did not necessarily improve women’s status in the camps. The introduction of new ideas and lifestyles brought into the Gaza Strip by the returnees contradict the religious and traditional beliefs and social rules of a conservative society. The people interviewed are aware of the impact of political transformations on women’s lives in the camps.

There are comparisons between woman's position prior to and during the first *Intifada* in the mid-eighties and women under the PNA in 2000. Women were seen to have less status and freedoms before the first *Intifada*. However, during the uprising women became more involved in the political organization of the resistance, especially as an increasing number of men were imprisoned, exiled or killed. Women went to meetings at night, organized self-sufficiency campaigns, and confronted the soldiers in street protests. Palestinian women during the first *Intifada* also collected rocks for the "shebab" or young boys who confronted the Israeli Army with slingshots and stones.

However, participation in the national resistance is not just about confronting the occupation forces but also about securing ways to survive as a people. Saadi points out the level of women's participation in national resistance during the first *Intifada* was a necessity due to the consequences of the violence that left many families without a husband or father,

"During the first *Intifada*, women had no choice but to participate in the national struggle and cover the areas left by men who were injured or dead. Some became the sole financial support for their family."

According to Rahma, however, Palestinian women have been very active in the national resistance and as a result her political status has improved. However, political participation but has not improved women's social status. She states,

"Women's participation in political activities, such as demonstrations and solidarity events, has resulted in more respect in political life by society in comparison with a woman's social life."

Women's active participation in the first *Intifada* afforded her political recognition but could be also have negative consequences to her social status in the community. In

1992 I visited several Palestinian women who had been active in the first Intifada and had been arrested and jailed by the Israeli military. Although they were recognized for their contributions in the national resistance movement as political heroines, they were also ostracized for having "dishonored" their family. They were suspected or accused of dishonoring their families because they had been raped, tortured or otherwise physically abused by male military and jail personnel. Although the impact of this sentiment has weakened over the years, especially during the most recent *Intifada*, women's active involvement in the resistance movement has not translated into a social transformation of women's' and roles and status in Palestinian society. Saadi continues,

“The national struggle to end the Israeli occupation resulted in a certain level of freedom (*for women*) in the political and economic arena but not in the social arena. During the first *Intifada*, in spite of these advances, young girls were married between the ages fifteen and twenty and immediately began having children leaving no time for self-development. After the *Intifada* women’s involvement in the public sphere decreased. The first *Intifada* ended in the early nineties and women lost their newfound freedoms and returned to the roles imposed by a male-dominated society. The end of the first *Intifada* had unexpected consequences for residents of the camp.”

Toward the end of the first *Intifada* The Declaration of Independence of 1988 declared equal rights for men and women. The Declaration was seen as both a tool to improve the status of women in society and a challenge to male authority. The expectation was that women’s status in society would improve if institutions capable of enforcing the law were functional. A woman’s right to an education or a job, for example, must be upheld through legal means. The law however can also be viewed as a threat to male authority. In the camps men are accustomed to the first and the last word in spite of laws passed by the PNA. If changes are imposed “from the outside” by legal

means and contradict or challenge male superiority, such as the right of women to request divorce, men will oppose them even if this means going to prison for disobeying the law.

### Summary

Since the first *Intifada* women are more likely to hold a job in order to help their husbands cover the daily cost of living. This is more a reflection of the deteriorating economic conditions than improvements in women's status in society. Today women are perceived as carrying a "heavier burden, as they contend with gender roles in the home and an increased need to support the family financially. For example Islah Jad, professor of Birzeit University in the Occupied West Bank, claims that the national liberation struggle in occupied Palestine has resulted in changes in Palestinian women's priorities. Jad notes, "These days women have shelved all their projects for development and for social and legal change and now will have to rebuild all that has been destroyed." Today, due to the deterioration of living conditions in Gaza Strip resulting from Israeli closures, women in the camps must focus on practical necessities such as food, shelter and safety (Abdo, 2003). Women's strategies of survival in this context of double occupation are acts of resistance to very real efforts, especially by the Israeli occupation forces, to deny Palestinian existence. The struggle to survive as an act of resistance can help us explore how women under such desperate conditions continue to challenge the very structures that place them and their families in economic, political and social danger. For example, in the occupied West Bank and in the Gaza Strip Palestinian graffiti is a form of resistance, but is also expresses the relationship between existence and resistance. Referring to the first *Intifada*, popularly called the "war of stones," Peteet points out that

the stones were “print weapons as well” (Peteet, 1996:139). Palestinians communicate through paint on stone the everyday struggle to defend the Palestinian right to exist. One example of graffiti that refers to survival as resistance is seen on the walls in the West Bank: “to exist is to resist” ([www.palestinechronicles.com](http://www.palestinechronicles.com)).

Male religious leaders and women’s lack of religious education has further strengthened male domination and upheld women’s traditional roles. The emphasis on motherhood continues to be a significant factor in the lives of Palestinian refugee women, socially and politically. Women’s status and especially motherhood is largely defined and shaped by male-dominated customs of the camp, interpretations of Islam and by the national resistance to the Israeli occupation. In this chapter the men and women of Jabaliya camp highlight the issues and conditions that define and shape women’s lives. How women and men defy, challenge, and negotiate these conditions is addressed in the following two chapters.



## Chapter Seven

### Demanding Change, Challenging Roles and Accommodating Expectations

The demand for education opportunities and to a lesser extent employment, mobility and decision-making power challenge the existing roles and expectations for women. The demands expressed also reflect a gender consciousness and critique of the gendered social norms that limit opportunities for women. The articulation of perceived oppression of women and demands to improve their lives are acts of resistance that challenge gendered relations in the camp. Women express a sense of action and opposition to existing structures as well as a deliberate rejection of values that sustain existing power relations. Yet demands for change are also framed to accommodate existing gender roles and expectations. This chapter is divided into three sections: 1) challenges to women's roles and expectations, 2) decision-making, mobility and public participation and 3) the right to education and employment.

### Challenges to Women's Roles and Expectations

Women and men express their opposition to the social and religious limitations imposed on women in the camp. It is an act of resistance to attempt to imagine or establish a life based on respect and equality, for oneself or others. Suad offers opposition to oppressive social structures and gender discrimination. She shares her belief that women should challenge the conditions and ideologies that oppress her, even if this means making life choices that may contradict societal expectations or her religion.

“Every woman has the ambition to change her status through better education, better personality and position... I encourage women in the community to participate in any area she wishes, whether it is prohibited

or not, as I object to the existence of the ‘red line’ drawn in front of the faces of women... (As the majority in the population) we should not have to beg for our rights. We have the right not to be better, but equal to men. Women should break down all barriers... I should accept things that are inconsistent with our religious teachings and our traditions if I will gain benefits as a woman.”

According to Suheila women are challenging the social limitations imposed on women. Women are demanding programs and workshops that benefit women. This is an act of resistance, as it is perceived as a vehicle for altering or challenging the relations of power that deny women the opportunity for individual development. In addition Suheila reflects a development of awareness and critical understanding of women’s conditions in the camp. As Suheila explains,

“Educated women, through her relationships with others, are attempting to end the negative customs and traditions that affect her. She has gained the ability to make demands for health care, culture and physical education. Women are aware of the negative practices and ideas in the community and especially in the family, and are demanding that these conditions end. We are aware that one of the most popular programs is the one that aims to develop women and increase her awareness.”

As a single woman, Nesrin is also determined to improve her status in society as well as her power within the family. Nesrin shares her efforts in spite of challenges to her personal development,

“I am trying to achieve success in making my dreams a reality. Within the limits of the family, I am making great efforts to build a strong personality that could give me the power to play a significant role and the ability to participate in the decision-making process on matters of concern to the family. I do not approve of being put on a shelf and I have the courage to express my ideas and offer suggestions on all issues. In terms of my participation in the camp I look forward to having a distinguished position and status that will separate me from other women of my generation based on my education. I have a BA in literature and I am working to obtain a Master degree, God willing. As a Palestinian woman,

I am attempting to change the facts of my life through education, which is the most significant way a human being can change the facts of his or her life. I must become a human being with status in society.”

The process of change as expressed by Fat’hi includes improvements in the standard of living of the community based on social relationships of mutual understanding. Although she recognizes the limitations imposed by patriarchal relations of power, she views women’s vision of future change as one that is a right for all women,

“At the community level her ambition is often higher than the man. Women prefer to live in a civilized community with all the necessary services and based on mutual understanding. Women believe they are equal to women in the US and yet they live in a closed society, governed by customs and traditions-especially in the camps.”

Families play a significant role in determining the freedom of young women and wives and framing the opportunities for challenging traditional roles. Yet families in Jabaliya camp differ in their treatment of women. It is clear to Asma that there are two types of families in the camp. One type of family encourages women’s increased participation in the decision-making process; the other imposes a more traditional patriarchal rule,

“I see two families at work in the camps. One family adopts democratic strategies that include women and the other family adopts an autocratic strategy of decision-making that results in the young girls being denied the right to freedom. However the second type of family is not the majority.”

The different types of families directly impact women’s lives. In spite of the advances women have made there are those who continue to live within the social limitations of traditional families. Samira states,

“Some Palestinian woman today have a high social position and are advancing alongside the process of development. However, there are

still women in the camp who are oppressed and are living under duress. They must be freed from certain restrictions.”

The differences in types of families can be attributed to generational differences. According to Saadi, the impact of generational differences plays an important role in the status of women. “Some people, especially the aged hold contempt toward women,” states Fahmi. Male authority, customs and traditions handed down from one generation to the next serve to limit changes in the roles and status of women. The first generation maintains the restrictive customs and traditions and rejects any attempts to liberate women, including access to education. Generational differences concerning education is expressed both men and women in the camp. Saadi offers his family as an example.

“In my family there are three generations of Palestinians, including my mother, father, my wife and children. The first generation has handed down the social customs of their generation that imposes strict restrictions on women. My father and mother reject any changes that would liberate women from these restrictions.... The first generation, still present in society today, continues to place obstacles in front of women.”

Women who compare their past with the present opportunities of younger women are very aware of the differences in women’s status in society. Men and women recognize the challenges women face in the camp, especially the right to meaningful participation in the daily decisions and participation in community development. An area of increased tension is that of the right to participate in the decisions that impact woman’s lives. Women recognize the detrimental consequences of lack of participation in the decision-making process and openly challenge this barrier to individual development and self-determination.

## Decision-Making, Mobility and Public Participation

The demand to participate in community development and have an increased role in the decision-making process within the family are separate though connected issues for women. The demand made by women to increase decision-making power is related to empowerment, as it is a clear effort to gain control over their lives. As such, Rah'ma expresses her desire to have a voice. She wants to participate in decisions concerning her personal life, such as marriage and education, but also wants to be able to apply herself in the various tasks of community development,

“I want to make my own decisions concerning divorce and education as well as use my talents and ideas in order to contribute to the development programs operating in the camp. Women are looking forward to being able to share her opinions concerning the marriage of her sons or daughters. They are keen on having the right to self-determination and the right to make decisions about divorce and education. I wish that I could contribute to the development programs (in the camp) by expressing my ideas and using my talents.”

Increased decision-making power is related to the process of empowerment and is perceived as a means toward developing a sense of worthiness. The decision-making power of male authorities in the family is challenged by daughters, wives and mothers. Asma expresses a desire to have increased decision-making power and opposes male dominance.

“Within the family, women aspire to have equal decision-making power. I don't believe that brother's should have decision-making power over the women in the family.”

The right to have a voice and to be heard as member of the family and the community is reflected in the statements of two women who feel they should have more

decision-making power concerning their daily lives. Rahma believes the only way women can advance in society and develop a significant role in the community is to bring up the next generation with a “strong personality and an ability to debate and express her opinions and to object to what is wrong.” Samira also believes women have the right to define her role in the home and with the family. Women should have the right to leave the house when she chooses and be able to participate in the community. Samira explains,

“Women should be able to participate in debates, (political) parties and proposals that benefit women and families, especially when women’s interests are at stake.”

This desire is also reflected in recommendations by women’s organizations in the West Bank. In April of 2002, a field study conducted by the Women’s Studies Department of Birzeit University, in cooperation with the United Nations in Gaza and the West Bank was completed. The study examined the basic needs of Palestinian women. One of the recommendations of the study was the need to engage women in the decision-making process by supporting women’s organizations and by encouraging women to express their needs and opinions (*The Jerusalem Times*, April 19, 2002). The study did not outline how these recommendations would be implemented. However, the suggestion that women should be a part of the decision-making process on daily basis is a reflection of the need and desire among women. The right to participate in community activities in the camp is largely determined by women’s ability to decide for them selves. Increased participation in the public sphere challenges the traditional expectations of women’s limited participation in the public arena.

Women's access to public areas has been traditionally limited, but in the refugee camps the definition of public and private space in daily activities is less clear. Camps have defined areas of public spaces such as clinics, schools and offices, but the cramped quarters of the camps, due to close proximity of physical structures and high population density has blurred the lines between public and private areas. For example, lack of space in the home has moved the private space into the streets as women prepare foods and clean. Women's food preparation activities often spill into public space as the front doors and steps are used for cleaning and preparing vegetables and grains (Peteeet, 2005:119-120). This lack of private space and extension of private activities into public spaces may also increase the desire of women to join women's activities outside the home. Though limited, clubs do exist in the camp where women can gather, discuss or exercise.

Women express the desire to increase their involvement in clubs and other public areas for entertainment and leisure. Suad offers the Jabaliya Service Club as example of women's public participation in the camp. This club is a space where women can participate in physical exercise with the goal to improve appearance and increase self-esteem. The purpose is two-fold according to Suad. "Here a woman can exercise in order to have a fine and nimble figure which would improve her appearance and beauty and build a stronger personality." Physical exercise responds to the male-dominated expectations of women's appearance, but is also considered by women as a way to strengthen their sense of worthiness.

I visited the Jabalya Service Club in the summer of 2000. The Club was located on the eight floor of a concrete building. Young men sitting on the steps of the building blocked the entrance. The “Club” is a small room in the corner of a building with several mats and pieces of exercise equipment on the floor, most of which were not in use or functioning properly. Older women accompanied the young women visiting the club. The older women sat or stood next to them as the young women performed a variety of physical movements. It was clear to me that the space was less about strenuous exercise and more about enjoying a space for women to congregate. Samira, a thirty-four year-old single woman, employed as a kindergarten teacher would like to see an increase in these public spaces for women,

“My afternoons are usually free and the time is monotonous. I wish there were a club to go to spend free time and discuss matters of concern. As a young woman without responsibilities, I would like to participate in community activities.”

Spaces for women to gather during leisure time can become a site for challenging, reaffirming and re-constructing gender identity. Sharing experiences and discussing daily lives can therefore be a source of empowerment (Eileen, 1998). Areas devoted exclusively to women are important, as Samira points out, “to discuss matters of concern,” and as Suad states, “to build a stronger personality.”

Increased need for women’s participation in community development is highlighted in a study conducted by the Women’s Study Department at Birzeit University in the West Bank. The study recommended an increase in the availability of training programs for women. This included a call for the creation of a volunteer workforce to help rebuild homes demolished by the Israeli Army, repair streets and replant fields (*The*



*Jerusalem Times*, April 19, 2002). Community participation is perceived as an activity that can increase “power to” improve the community collective good. Individual empowerment through acquiring social power can be achieved by challenging the barriers to developing individual potential.

For example, Otra explains that women in the camp can work toward improving their status in the camp through education and hard work. Otra believes this will translate into increase status in the community.

“I have my own character. I am responsible for the home and I live with ten family members. Women (in the camp) strive to get an education and enjoy a valued position in society. I dream of becoming an active member of the community. I believe women’s status will change if she develops herself in her work and gives more.”

The demand for access to education and to lesser extent employment is viewed as vehicles for improving women’s status and in the camp.

### The Right to Education and Employment

Education, especially higher education, is considered a vehicle for women’s personal empowerment and improving family and community conditions. Education is viewed as necessary to assist efforts to challenge traditional patriarchal structure in Palestinian society. Both women and men support increased participation and availability of adult education programs for women. Education therefore, is considered both necessary for developing critical understanding of women’s role and status in camp life as well as for challenging gender norms that discriminate against women.

An educated woman, according to Suheila is able to oppose the limitations of customs and traditions through her social relations. An educated woman has the ability to demand certain rights such as health, physical education and access to cultural activities. “Education equips women with a window to the world and an open-mindedness to participate in all areas of society on an equal, or superior, footing to men.” Ezzat recognizes the obstacles that women must overcome to achieve an education, but insists that education is the key to women’s participation in society.

“It is possible to raise the level of women’s status in the community through education. The more she is educated the more she is able to join in the activities of the community. There are factors that reflect negatively on her attempts to obtain an education, such as family problems, early marriage and lack of completion of her education. All of these factors are stumbling blocks in the development of women and her participation in society.”

According to Qliebo, a member of the Qalandia Cooperative Association, there has been an increase post-secondary education among women. There is an increase in the number of girls between the ages 18 and 24 who are graduating from high school. In the past, “it was the norm for girls to stop attending school at an early age” (*The Jerusalem Times*, October 13, 2000). Samira explains that women have begun to seek opportunities for education that challenge the custom of early marriage and motherhood.

“In the 1980s and 1990s education became sought after and more women are attending higher education. After finishing secondary school girls now refuse the proposal of marriage because she is determined to finish her studies. Women today now have higher expectations for the future. She now considers marriage after the completion of her degree.”

Elham agrees education has played a positive role in women’s status in the camps. She believes university enrollment can change women’s status and increase opportunities

to participate in society. Knowledge is considered the key to power in the every day decisions that affect a woman's life and the lives of her family members. Elham states,

“Today, women are motivated by the desire to achieve higher education. She is now able to make her own decisions and due to her increased knowledge should be consulted in all matters of concern in daily life.”

Rajha relates educational achievement to social production and women's service to the community. Individual potential is also developed through accessing education. Rajha perceives education as a way to respond to both individual and collective needs and encourage the interconnection between the two.

“The roles of women will change and become more effective through education. When she completes her education she will produce more and give more. Consequently, she will acquire an independent character in the community. Through education, women can render more and better services to the community in which she lives.”

The ability to leave home and obtain an education also has social benefits. A degree not only offers women the benefits of expanding their world, physically and intellectually, but also offers women the opportunity to contribute to the well being of society. Munira has faith in education as a vehicle for change,

“God willing, changes in women's roles will take place in the camp. Women see that change will happen through obtaining an education because an education will grant her freedom from the confines of the home and she will see a new world. If she remains in her home after receiving her general secondary certificate, she will remain as if not educated at all. If she enters the university she will graduate and be qualified to fill important positions that will serve society in various fields such as education, health and many others. If she stays in the home she will become like the wall and this could cause her to have an inferiority complex and other forms of distress.”

Mothers also have educational expectations for their children. They hope their children will have opportunities that they themselves did not have in their lifetime. Fat'hi explains that mother's have recognized the importance of education that they themselves were denied,

“Only the new generation is changing. Education is essential-even young girls prefer education to marriage. The revolution is not just economic-it must be social and political as well. Women have recognized their bitter reality and therefore prefer education in order to improve the lives of the next generation.”

Sara, a mother of eleven, defines herself as a housewife, dedicated to her children and their education. However she has expectations for her children that challenge the traditional customs and practices that have shaped her life.

“Women seek to have their children educated and to graduate from the university with degrees in engineering and medicine. Palestinian women's reality must change. Women must attend political party meetings and actively participate in the debates instead of “sitting idle at home.” In this way she would have the chance to meet other people and she will realize her ability to be social and converse with others.”

Badia offers her own example as a mother who is now able to teach her sons. However, she also recognizes traditions impede her attempts to improve herself for the sake of her children. She is coping with the cultural and structural constraints of her environment by hoping to provide the opportunities she was denied. Yet she remains conscious of the fact that the “red line” continues to shape her life and that of her children. Badia explains,

“I finished my secondary education and now teach my sons. I want to continue my education but circumstances beyond my control prohibit this. I am now a dressmaker. I dream of improving my sons

education and providing them with what they need but I am unable to do this because I am bound by the traditions of my community.”

Women’s active participation in the education of their children, as a means to participate in the development of the community is also viewed as a way to build Palestine as a nation. Zaki describes his wife’s vision of future participation in the community,

“My wife has great ambitions to assist the children in obtaining a university degree or higher education so that her sons and daughters may participate in building our Palestinian community. I also hope that she will work to build education opportunities for women in the camp to spread awareness and in order to play an active role in building our state.”

Women have education expectations for themselves and their children in spite of the constraints of a male dominated society under occupation. Demands for employment and efforts to obtain a job outside the home exist and are also expressed by both men and women in the camp, but these demands are not as strong as that for education. Given the severe unemployment among residents in the camp, less focus on employment may be more of a strategic choice due to limited availability than decreased interest in the labor market participation. Nevertheless, employment is presented as an economic as well as social activity that can improve the material conditions of the family and the emotional well being of women.

Women indicate there is a psychological benefit to working outside the home. Munira states, “Work makes me feel like a human being, like I exist.” Samira points out that she was fortunate enough to be offered a job as a Kindergarten teacher and that this job has social benefits. She claims, “I now participate in debates inside the Kindergarten

and in the community.” Women also view employment as a means to increased participation in the community. Reem states,

“Currently I don’t think that I have an active role in the community but when I get a job in the future this situation will certainly change and I will play an active role in the community... I am a student at the College of Education. My ambition is to complete my studies. When I graduate and find a job I will play an important role in the community because I will be a teacher and educator of the younger generation. I intend to join some courses to help me find a job after I graduate.”

In contrast Munira, who works outside the home, has sisters who are not employed. She compares her situation with that of her sisters and the impact on their self-esteem,

“I know they feel constrained and can’t bear the stupidity of being confined. They wish they could leave the home freely. I went to school and now I am working. I have realized an independent existence although I am still suffering from the many obstacles and difficulties that confront me, my work brings psychological relief and helps me forget my problems.”

Women in other camps highlight the personal benefits of training and employment. In Al-Amari camp in the West Bank the Women’s Program Center provides training in embroidery, hair styling, computer and video photography and courses in law, religion and health. According to an instructor in the Program, the courses focus on providing women a space to share their experiences and views as women, as well as increase their knowledge and skills. Um Ahmed, thirty five and a mother of seven is learning to sew in order to offset household expenses either by selling her products or by sewing clothes instead of purchasing items necessary for her family. “We in the camp suffer from grim economic conditions as a result of the (Israeli) siege. I decided to take this course in the hope of buying a sewing machine... The work makes me feel

useful,” (*The Jerusalem Times*, March 1, 2002). Women’s desire to increase their participation in society is a challenge to the gender traditions of seclusion. At the same time, women’s participation in the camps is viewed as potentially contributing to the family wellbeing. Asma explains the benefits of increased freedom for young girls,

“If the family agrees to allow young girls more freedom and the right to leave the home regularly, to obtain an education and cultural experiences and to reduce the strain of restrictions she is living under, then there will be change. Some families limit a girl’s education to the secondary level and confine her to the home afterwards. If she is allowed to obtain a higher education, she will become an asset and source of wealth in the future for the family. This will help her to raise her children and help them with their lessons.”

Men’s education is also perceived as having an impact on women’s rights to either employment or higher education. Younger men, especially those with higher education, support women’s equality and are more understanding of women’s desire to obtain an education or employment. Men, who are educated, according to Fahmi, have greater respect for women and believe they should have the right to obtain higher education, employment, and freedom of speech. Some men recognize that women can contribute to the family income and improve their overall condition. For example, Zaki supports his wife’s efforts to generate income. He also recognizes that economic conditions in the camp specifically impact women.

“My wife distributes kerchiefs for silk embroidery to women in the neighborhood. She receives a certain amount of money in exchange. ... And she reduces the daily life expenses of our home. This program represents economic participation of women. If the economic situation improves in our country then women’s role will change for the better. On the other hand if the economic situation worsens, her role will go from bad to worse. A woman’s role in society depends on the economy as it has a great impact on her. Any deficit in earnings would certainly reflect on her.”

Increased unemployment among Palestinian men in the Gaza Strip, especially after the outbreak of the second *Intifada* and the Israeli closure of the Gaza border with Israel, has resulted in a sharp increase in poverty. A study prepared by the Palestinian National Report on Poverty and released in November of 2003, concluded that increased poverty is a result of “unjust social and economic systems that exclude certain segments for the labor market.” Individuals who suffer higher rates of poverty include divorced women, widows and single mothers. Women who lack a formal education are especially vulnerable. The study highlighted the obstacles women face in the labor market and in obtaining an education. The traditional view that “women must remain at home and rely on her husband for sustenance,” was viewed as a contributing factor to increased poverty. However, married women are also unable to contribute to the family income, even when the traditional breadwinner is unable to work. A married woman whose husband was unemployed is unable to work. In spite of her husband’s inability to provide an income for the family, Saida states, “I cannot work and my husband is unemployed. My husband considers the idea of my working shameful,” (*The Jerusalem Times*, November 21, 2003). Economic deprivation and the need for women to assist in income generation can be overshadowed by the need to maintain gender relations within the family and society at large.

### Summary

Efforts to improve the conditions of women and their families can directly challenge the inequalities of gender roles. Demands made by women can also be framed



within the ideological constructs that limit and oppress women. For example, the data show that some support women getting an education as long as these changes do not challenge male control and domination. Women and men also perceive employment and education as a means to improve the overall conditions and quality of life of families and ultimately to the community. Efforts to empower women, therefore, can serve to reaffirm conservative customs and religious teachings while simultaneously achieving personal and professional development rights for women. Acts of resistance, therefore, can alter or impede the oppressive relations of power or attempt to effect change within the framework of gender relations and expectations. The following chapter explores how women (and men) challenge the limited roles imposed on women in Jabaliya camp.

## Chapter Eight

### Integrating Change and Challenging Gender Inequality: Future Expectations

There is a perceived change in women's social status and some believe that women are achieving freedom from the traditions and customs that have limited or dictated women's lives in the past. Increased freedom of movement for women, the right to an education and employment outside the home and participation in family and public life are increasingly acceptable as long as changes in women's status do not challenge the prevailing gender definitions and expectations. How women navigate this tension is discussed in the following three sections, 1) Integrating change and opportunities for women, 2) women's personal development for family and community development and 3) future expectations.

#### Integrating Change and Opportunities for Women

In this study Palestinian women in Jabaliya refugee camp may be both hindered and strengthened by the development of critical consciousness within the context of the Israeli occupation, male-dominated Palestinian resistance and patriarchal culture. The risks women take to challenge social and cultural barriers to women's empowerment exist. Risk of becoming the target of gossip, dishonoring one's family or defying a father's wishes can have serious consequences. "Strategic life choices" are defined, limited or obstructed by male domination, foreign occupation and poverty and these life choices will shift with changes in the local, national and international context. For example, Israel has drastically reduced and ultimately prohibited tens of thousands of Palestinian men, who once crossed into Israel to work, from crossing the "border" with

Israel. This decision has reduced the incomes of thousands of families whose male head of household depends on employment in Israel to survive. As a consequence, an increasing number of women have had to seek avenues of income generation to replace those lost to the Israeli closure. When a Palestinian woman in Jabaliya camp chooses education over marriage or a job outside the home despite her family's wishes, the decision can be strategic as it is necessary.

Demand for education and employment or postponement of marriage, for example, are strategic choices that are conditioned by the social, economic and political context of the women in Jabaliya camp. These areas of achieved status are strategic as they can serve as platforms for challenging conservative values and customs that serve to limit women's development. Demands and choices can also be pursued through negotiation within the present social structures that shape women's lives.

Saadi offers his opinion on the rights of women in the context of existing social structures,

“I believe women should be free to go to work, have freedom of speech and be equal to men in all respects. My vision does not contradict religious teachings, nor with the social principle of today. During the uprising, Palestinian women began to liberate themselves, although some say this was only political changes and not social. Political, economic and social changes cannot be separated.”

Efforts to improve women's social and economic conditions within the framework of traditional patriarchal structures are not exclusive to Jabaliya camp. Other areas of occupied Palestine are also witnessing efforts to empower women while reaffirming traditional customs and religious teachings.

In the West Bank for example, the Qalandia Cooperative Association serves women who “fall victim to early marriage and child-bearing, enabling them to better manage their families.” The Cooperative Association provides women training and marketing outlets for articles of clothing that they produce and are then sold. According to Khaled Mbeiro, marketing consultant of the association, “An article of clothing made at the association yields the equivalent of five dollars in income, a sum that, although meager by most standards, is significant to women whose husbands are imprisoned or unable to find employment.... The feeling of fulfillment is as rewarding as the money.” Elena Qleibo, a member of the association, highlights the importance of women’s development as necessary for the future of their children. Qleibo states, “I believe the Cooperative Association could play a major role in developing the village and improving the lot of women *while preserving their traditional roles at the same time*, (emphasis added), (*The Jerusalem Times*, October 13, 2000). The preservation of women’s traditional roles is considered not only compatible with women’s empowerment, but also necessary.

Efforts to empower women through organizing and community participation are also evident in other countries and communities. In Tyre, Lebanon, a conference on women’s empowerment in May 2007 launched projects to explore economic and social impediments to development and gender equality. Representatives of women’s organizations decided future projects should focus on financial independence and empowerment. They proposed to develop projects that would provide loans to women to

start their own businesses as well as encourage participation in workshops that focus on issues of leadership and decision-making (Zataari, 2007).

Another example of women's empowerment through economic participation is occurring in Venezuela. In 2007 I visited Venezuela and interviewed women of Banmujer, Banco de Desarrollo de la Mujer, (Development Bank for Women). This is a women run bank that focuses on loans to poor women and "amas de casa" or housewives ([www.banmujer.gob.ve](http://www.banmujer.gob.ve)). The bank provides micro credit to women to support the establishment of small businesses, coffee production and the development of structures or buildings if those buildings are essential for proposed economic activities. Banmujer also organizes workshops on economic development and provides surveys to identify socially productive projects. This institution and its services for poor and unemployed women are possible due to support from the Bolivarian Government and changes in the Constitution that established equality between men and women. The Constitutional changes include rights of both to be paid for their labor, including formerly unpaid "amas de casa" or housewives, (Article 88 of La Constitution de la Republica Bolivariana de Venezuela). Without state support of women's rights, changes in their social and economic conditions can be more challenging. Institutional and government support for the basic rights and opportunities of all citizens is crucial, but especially for women.

Marginalized and poor women also mobilize and work toward empowerment and self-reliance as part of the Self-Employed Women's Association in India. The founder of SEWA, Ela R. Bhatt recognizes that poverty and the lack of power over the decisions that impact the lives of women are shaped by economic and social structures. Both must be

understood and addressed. The goal of SEWA is to achieve full employment as well as develop activities that strengthen women's bargaining power and offer them new opportunities and alternatives that build self-reliance. Organizing and mobilization of women towards these goals is viewed as part of the process of empowerment ([www.sewa.org](http://www.sewa.org)). Many Palestinian refugee women in Jabaliya camp are faced with the need to support their families or supplement their family incomes but also encounter the economic and social structures that render self-reliance and access to resources a challenge.

Palestinian women also lack state structures and national economic development that could provide economic or higher education opportunities. Sixty years of Israeli military occupation and decades of deliberate efforts by the occupying forces to limit or impede Palestinian economic development have gravely affected both men and women, particularly in the refugee camps. Although the 1993 Oslo agreement led to major institutional changes within the Palestine National Authority, the government continues to lack sovereignty and authority. The process of developing institutions that safeguard the rights and establish obligations of citizenship has been hindered by the ongoing Israeli occupation and the need for continued Palestinian resistance. This translates into a lack of effective legal and political representation by and for women so that women may further improve their status and role in society. Nevertheless the Palestinian women's movement has been working to advance women's legal, political, and social status and promote democratic values and practices in Palestinian society.

However, the data show that support for change is also framed within the male-dominated definition of gender roles and expectations. Efforts to improve women's status in society through education or employment are acceptable as long as the traditional roles and status of women are preserved. For example, the employment of women in the police force is seen as positive change for women because it honors the tradition of limiting contact between men and women who are not related. Raed describes a new policy in the police force that was developed after the establishment of the Palestine National Authority, (PNA), in Gaza,

“Our community needs gradual development that reflects the role of women. When the PNA came to Gaza there was opposition to women in the police force. But I agree that women should join the Police force. There is a prison for men and another prison for women. Now they are part of the force and they have men and women's prisons. If a woman has to be arrested, a group of policewomen perform the job. This is a positive, especially if the government deals with the woman in a positive way, not otherwise.”

It is considered beneficial to have female police officers and prisons for women as this reflects the traditional customs of gender separation. Defiance of, and change in traditional male-dominated customs and practices are positive as long as they are framed within a specific definition of what is acceptable for women.

Elham believes women have overcome the barriers to education and employment, but continued advances must remain within the framework of what is socially acceptable.

“There is a turning point in her educational development. She has broken through the barriers of employment and demands more freedom and receives higher positions in society. The last elections are a typical example, as some women nominated themselves as candidates for the position of president or minister. They also demand freedom of movement without restrictions, *but within the limits of being a woman,*” (emphasis added).

This perspective is also applied to women's employment outside the home. Women's rights according to Suad, can be achieved while maintaining gender expectations,

“I hope women and children of the camp find their place suitable for participation in society, but not all roles are suitable for women. This does not mean that women should drive trailers. She must choose a profession that is suitable to her femininity and that which will support her in achieving her rights and her role in the community.”

Farida recognizes the limitations of society imposed on women and believes women have experienced increased participation outside the home. Though women should play an effective role in society they should not be allowed to stray from gender expectations. Farida explains,

“She does not have full rights in society and is pressured by social and religious definitions of her place in society. She is increasingly effective in private institutions, government and the schools. *However, sometimes women attempt to control others and at times her rights must be denied*” (emphasis added).

Change should not alter gender expectations. Suad questions whether changes will actually improve the conditions of women or have a negative impact on her present status as a woman. At the same time she affirms a woman's right to challenge traditional gender expectations,

“Are the changes toward developing women or forcing them to give up their good habits? In order to effect positive change, women must refuse to follow the customs and traditions that define the red line and obstruct her development.

Improvements in women's social status and expanded roles within the family and the community are shaped by the social structures that deny women opportunities. For



example, Suad defines positive change as one that maintains a woman's honor and the honor of her family.

“A good change must preserve a woman's dignity, free from insult and must maintain her respect in the community, in her family and at the office where she works.”

Efforts to bring about changes in women's status or actions that challenge gender are negotiated within the prevailing male-dominated structures and ideologies. One way that women navigate this process is by demanding or expecting change in women's status for the purpose of improving the wellbeing of the family and wider community. This strategy may be both a response to the dire conditions in the refugee camps that are a result of the political and military situation as well as a reflection of efforts to seek empowerment through linking collective good and social power.

#### Women's Personal Development for Family and Community Development

Change is acceptable, according to the residents interviewed, as long as it is within a specific framework that defines what it means to be a woman and a mother in the camp. This also means that changes in women's status should benefit others. The education of her children, improved management of the home and care of family members are linked to efforts to increase personal development opportunities. This reflects the cultural belief that “puts community above the individual” (Abufarha, 2008:347). Badia believes the social conditions of women serve to limit her and in doing so limit the potential contributions to the family and the community.

“Change, if it occurs, will happen if the family allows a young girl to leave home regularly in order to receive an education and to rid herself of the strain she is suffering from. There are some families who limit her

education to secondary schooling only and she is to be then restricted to the home. This is definitely wrong. She must exercise her right to regular movement and an education. This will be a source of wealth in the future in that she will be able to better raise her children and help them with their lessons.”

Subhi believes education for women is important in order to improve the well being of the family and the community.

“Women are attempting to achieve a higher status within the family and the camp by participating in charitable organizations that will benefit the community at large. She has pursued higher education, which is the best way for her to progress. Men are willing to develop women and to make changes in her role in the community, because the more educated and developed the woman, the more she can help the family and the community...Men will help women achieve an education by allowing her the freedom to leave the house to complete her studies. However, our customs and traditions in the camp are an obstacle for women and therefore she can not be allowed to have free movement.”

Development and advances made by women must improve the lives of others.

Rajha would like to obtain a bachelor’s degree in nursing in order to “better serve my family, children, and community.” She continues, “Through education woman can become better persons and serve the community better, as well as have a more independent character.” Courses offered in the camp are desirable because they provide knowledge that will help mothers raise their children. Safiya wants to broaden her knowledge in order to assist her children with their education and to better manage the home. She explains,

“I want to attend courses at the Health Guidance Center and the Women’s Institutions. I am interested in raising my children with the best care and I want to be able to help them with their lessons so that they will become geniuses and serve the camp and the community. As far as I am concerned, my status would change if I could attend these courses as they increase my knowledge of managing my house affairs.”

Improved performance as a mother is a reason men allow women freedom to obtain an education. Raed for example, believes educational programs should focus on skills that make women become better mothers.

“These programs are of interest to women because they concern the health of the children, how to raise them, what to eat during pregnancy, nursing and delivery and about vaccinations. However, women don’t really benefit from attending the women’s seminars even though men encourage them to go in order to improve her education. Husbands in the camp want their wives to be educated and aware, instead of spending time gossiping. An increased education and awareness reflects positively on her children. However, the community is backwards and restricts the free movement of women. If there were active and proper women’s organizations then there would be no objection for her to join these organizations. We want our community to develop because then the women will be of sound mind and this reflects well on the home and the children.”

In spite of the social limitations imposed on women in Jabaliya camp and the lack of sufficient opportunities for women outside the home, women’s perception of change is positive in terms of their status in society. Women’s expectations and aspirations remain high in spite of the deteriorating conditions in the camp.

#### Future Expectations

Both women and men express views that indicate women’s status in the community has improved. Perceptions of change are based on the belief that women, especially young women, are experiencing improved opportunities in education and changes in gender roles. Expectations for change in women’s conditions are also expressed and some women view change as possible from within their religious faith. Badia shares her personal experience as an example of change in women’s status,

“Women are now educated. In the past women were illiterate but today she works with men in the same office. In the past she was under great pressure, but now that she is educated she is able to teach her children and meet their needs. I am responsible for my home and do everything myself. I make decisions and do anything I want without orders or instructions from anyone. Family member consult me before any of them goes anywhere and I decide yes or no.”

However, Badia admits that she has lost her chance to achieve an education and indicates that traditional limits on women’s opportunities may impact her ability to raise her children the way she feels is necessary,

“I finished my secondary education and I teach my sons. I wanted to continue my education but our traditions were not in my favor. I am a dressmaker and embroiderer and I teach my sons, some of who are very good in school and some are very weak. I dream of improving their standards and providing them with what they need, but I can’t because I am governed by the traditions of the community.”

Education and employment are viewed as vehicles for improving women’s status.

However, religion is also considered a means by which women can claim their rights in society. The Islamic or Christian religion is interpreted as a positive tool for women in achieving status and equality in society. Suad expresses her perspective on change,

“If she observes the Islamic religion or the Christian religion if she is Christian, she will achieve respect and status in society. Change must come from within the religious teachings.... As a typical Palestinian woman, how could I accept change that is inconsistent with our religion and traditions from which I could gain benefits as a woman?”

Asma claims that her Islamic religion supports her demands to be treated equally and to have access to opportunities and decision-making power,

“Women must be on equal footing with men since the Islamic laws have given her this right to equality with men. Men and women have equal rights, such as the right to inherit, to obtain an education and the right to choose her husband. Women compliment men and therefore also have the

right to reject or accept a marriage proposal. She has the right to express her opinion about the man who proposes to marry her, as she is supposed to complement the man. Today, Palestinian women are more enlightened than in the past in these matters.”

Religious traditions play an important role in social and legal issues concerning women. With respect to the rights of women, Islamic Law is administered by *Shar'ia* courts. The *Shar'ia* courts deal with matters of personal status such as marriage, divorce, child custody and alimony. However, theological justification's for restrictions on women's rights have been found to be “patriarchal attitudes and cultural traditions disguised as religious norms,” (Mayer in Wing, 1994: 64). Age of marriage, male authority in the family, polygamy and women's rights in divorce are some examples of personal status laws that do not favor women. Those who have the power to interpret religion influence the interpretations of religious laws. In a male-dominated society, religion can be interpreted to favor male dominance. While in Jerusalem in May of 1998, I attended a conference on Islam and women's rights. The conference was attended by a large number of young Palestinian women. The main theme of the conference was the acknowledgement that religious traditions that do not favor equal rights for women due to interpretations by male religious leaders upholding the patriarchal structures in society. Yet women can also interpret religion to reflect their needs. For example, Suad points out that women have basic rights according to religion and that her religion can be a vehicle for achieving these rights. Religion is also a source of comfort in conditions where an individual has limited control over their daily lives. According to Suheila, some women take initiative in their daily lives while others leave matters to “God will”. She identifies two types of camp women,

“The women in our society can be divided into two groups. One group is used to drawing up plans and the other group is not interested in planning and leaves matters to God’s will, irregardless of the results. The first group, for example, would be interested in birth control and make decisions in her best interest, in the interest of the community and according her economic and social standing. When the first group goes shopping she buys only what is needed and no more. However, the second group does just the opposite and buys anything to satisfy those living under her roof without regard to budgets or a financial plan.”

Raj’ha points out that the status of women has improved. The example that she uses to prove her point is in relation to her role as a wife and mother,

“The role of women in the community has become great. In the past she was almost neglected and without character. She was a tool as home and nothing else. The situation has changed and now she is on equal footing with men. There is no difference between them at all. For example, I am a productive woman. I work and satisfy all the requirements of my family and my children.... The role of women will become more effective through education. When she completes her education she will produce more and give more. With an education, women can render more and better services to the community in which she lives.”

There is hope that women’s status will improve in the future. Personal status laws, fighting domestic violence and increasing women’s political participation continue to be priorities of Palestinian women’s organizations. Examples of women’s organizations are the Women’s Affairs Technical Committee (WATC), a coalition representing over ten non-governmental organizations (NGOs); the Women’s Center for Legal Aid and Counseling and the Women’s Empowerment Project (Barron 2002). To what extent these efforts will influence the legal protection and status of women is yet to be seen in the Gaza Strip as the complete closure of the area has suffocated any efforts of development in civil and legal structures. Reem has hopes of working outside the home and increasing her role in the community,

“Currently I don’t think I have an active role in the community but when I get a job in the future this situation will certainly change and I will play an active role in the community. The role of women in general has, no doubt, changed. In the past her role was confined to housework and child rearing, but now she shares work with men...her role has broadened and now she is a teacher, a doctor, a minister and a judge, almost on equal footing with men.”

Change is occurring and will continue but some women are also viewed as the obstacle to change. Rahma believes that women’s roles will change over time. However, she believes that women themselves can stand in the way of social change,

“Women’s lives will change but it will be a very slow process because of the difficulty and the challenges we face as well as the rejection of society to the development of women. Even women are against each other on many occasions.”

Not all believe women are capable or desire change. Yousef states that some women take the initiative to become involved in woman’s committees and community activities in addition to managing the household. However, other women “are lazy and do not do any work. Aiesha, after conducting interviews for this study made a similar conclusion. Her experiences in the camp led her to conclude that “women lack awareness of the importance of change and that she (women) is not prepared to take initiative and fight for change.” In January of 2000 Aiesha completed an interview with one of the respondents and offered this assessment,

“In January, the month of cold in this country, I entered a house to conduct an interview with a housewife. I found myself in a humble, asbestos-roof house. Some of the windows were broken and the floor was bare. The children around me were playing barefooted and their bellies were uncovered because their clothes were short and tight. I felt the blood in their feet was freezing due to the humidity. The woman was dressed in a gown with her breast uncovered. She had a thick gold necklace around her neck and gold bracelets on her arms. I asked myself, ‘Does gold give

warmth to this woman or is her brain coated because of the humidity?’ If she thinks logically, she would sell some of her gold to buy clothing for her children, cover the floor and repair the broken windows.”

Aiesha continues with another example,

“A man I was interviewing talked to his wife and tried to convince her to continue her education. He told her he was willing to assist and support her but she refused his offer under the pretext that education is not important. These are two examples of how women and society are characterized by ignorance and indifference.”

There is a clear distinction between the past and the present in terms of women’s role in society and how political changes have effected women. Nesrin distinguishes between the past and the present in terms of women’s social and political progress,

“Women in the camp now play a primary role in the community. Since the National Authority took control of administration, women play an essential role. In the camp, during the first *Intifada*, women also held a prominent position in the community. In the past women’s rights were not acknowledged by men and they were arbitrarily controlled to the extent that if she had to have her hair cut she consulted her family and all her other relatives about the style of the cut.”

Nesrin continues to explain her strategies to achieve changes in her life and the obstacles women may face in doing so,

“As an educated woman, I try to change my situation within the framework of the family. However, I could never tell my mother or father that they are wrong in certain situations, although I hint to them indirectly that their actions are wrong. We must remember that a camp woman who goes out of her house to shop would bring disgrace to her and her family and give the people around her a chance to speak poorly of them.”

Suheila offers her own experience as one that reflects the advances made by women through an increased awareness of oppressive structures and ideas in society. She also acknowledges that “women in the camp are cooperative and work to improve the



status of women in the social, economic and political arena,” and believes that changes in women’s status have occurred, especially in the area of education. Suheila explains,

“Women’s participation in the family, community and society is positive. Her role would improve if she were able to complete her education that would entitle her to introduce changes in the family and subsequently in the community. Men would then support women in making changes.”\

Referring to women’s efforts to improve their status, Suheila points to a rise in consciousness and efforts to work collectively for change.

“I have become aware that women work in the spirit of cooperation and are interested in welfare work. I realize women desire to change their lives for the better. For example, now women are more aware of the negative practices of the community that oppress her as well as the negative practices within the family that limit her progress. Women are now demanding changes to these practices. This is an example of development.”

In spite of awareness of women’s unequal social status in the camp, some women believe that women have achieved equality with men. Badia believes that today women are more educated and have increased equal rights with men,

“In the past she (the camp women) was illiterate, but now she shares the same jobs with men and sits with them in the same office. In the past she was under great pressure, but today she obtains an education and is able to teach her children and satisfies their needs.”

Elham concludes that today women have not only achieved access to public participation and employment they are also demanding freedom of movement.

“Today women have ambitions and have broken through the barriers of employment. She demands more freedoms and higher positions in the job market. For example, women today demand freedom of movement without restrictions.”

Palestinian women in Jabaliya camp are eager to participate in adult education seminars and health campaigns. Seminars and community health activities focused on women's health, child health and are especially well attended. According to Rajha, women who want to attend seminars do not encounter resistance to their participation.

“There are many health activities and seminars. For example, we participated in a four-day small pox vaccination campaign and a seminar on breast cancer early detection. These seminars are very important for us, as we (nurses) receive a great number of women everyday. There are also seminars on birth control, spacing between births and courses on family management. The seminars are held at the kindergarten and the mothers receive invitations to attend. All of them respond and participate in these events without any obstructions.”

In the summer of 2000, I visited a health clinic in Jabalya camp. When I arrived I was steered to a bright room filled with young women. The nurses were in the process of conducting a child spacing and birth control seminar. The walls were covered with explicit posters of female anatomy and various forms of contraception. The conversations were relaxed, though lively. It was clear that the women were eager to understand the process of reproduction and wanted to know how to prevent unwanted pregnancies. Men did not enter the room but the manager of the clinic sat at his desk next door. He was very supportive of the seminars and was eager for us, the foreigners, to witness the activities in the clinic that support women's knowledge of health and how to use this knowledge to improve their lives. However, not all men support changes in women's status in spite of the fact that they are more aware now than in the past of the negative and oppressive influences of the society and the family. Men expect to have sole authority and power over the lives of women and will defend their position of dominance,

violently if necessary. According to Fat'hi men will retain their dominant position even if this means going to jail.

He states,

“If women expect change at the expense of men then this will bring trouble. In the camps, men are accustomed to having the first and last word. Even if the PNA enacts laws in favor of women this will cause problems. For example, if women are given the right to divorce men as they have the right to divorce her, as in Egypt, this does not reflect our religion and conflicts may arise, even to the extent that the women will be beaten and the man may go to jail.”

Violence in the home, perpetuated by men against women members of a family is a topic that lacks statistical data. In addition, domestic violence is considered a private matter and is not a subject for discussion among Palestinians outside the home. Most data on violence against women is based on cases reported by Palestinian Non-Government Organizations, NGOs, especially women's centers. However, there are several studies that attempt to investigate both the attitudes of men and women toward wife beating as well as the prevalence of gendered violence in Palestinian society. For example, according to a study by the Bisan Center for Research and Development approximately 50% of men and women believe that it is acceptable for men to beat their wives, (Rubenberg, 2001:140-141). Reports on family violence against women have been reported by several NGOs in a summary prepared by the Women Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling, (WCLAC). For example, The Society for the Defense of the Family received 525 cases of psychological, physical and sexual violence against women and girls between 1996 and 1998. During that same time period, the Gaza Community and Mental Health Program reported 129 cases of violence against women. In 1999 WCLAC

reported 546 cases of gendered violence (WCLAC, 2003). Another form of violence against women, femicide or the killing of women and girls for tarnishing the “family honor” continues to occur in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In November of 2003 the Women Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling, (WCLAC), reported sixty-nine women were murdered for “honor” between June 1997 and November 1999. The average age of the victims was between twenty and thirty years of age and over one-half were single women (WCLAC, 2003). Fat’hi confirms that violence against women is a means to maintain and protect male dominance and male interpreted religious beliefs. The risks of challenging gender relations and values are real. However, in spite of the under reported and on going gender violence, and deteriorating economic conditions, women continue to maintain expectations for achieving equality. According to Fahmi women’s status will change in the future.

“In 1948, the year of the disaster, women played a minor role in society and within the family. After the disaster, women attempted to obtain jobs and develop professions to support their families and increase their participation in the community. Now women can become teachers and nurses. Palestinian women have increased opportunities and will achieve equality with men in the future.”

Saadi summarizes the fundamental changes that must take place in order for women to advance in society,

“The reality of women today is on the brink of eruption. First of all, through the social and political institutions, pressure should be put on the decision-makers to implement the laws and regulations that stipulate equality between men and women. Second, education opportunities must be provided to young girls. A young girl has the right to free choice. She is a human being with free will and should make decisions regardless of the man who is proposing to marry her, whether he is suitable for her or not. The question should be, ‘is she interested in pursuing an education, or not?’ It is clear that early marriage will have an effect on her opportunities

for education. Third, we have to change and develop the social status of women through social and political institutions. Institutions, trade companies and business are supposed to provide work opportunities for young women. Now a day's people feel that there is more security under the shadow of the police force and the Palestinian Authority, so a person will not be worried about his daughter going to work. This is a new point of view that a young girl who is employed is not shameful. Women are looking forward to, and seeking to develop her role. She is not a maid or servant of the community. She can produce. I know some women who have received loans on a monthly basis from "Save the Children." I can see there is an awakening among the women to activate her role in the community."

Saadi recognizes the important role men must play in the future, especially for the next generation of young girls,

"There should be programs to enlighten, not only women, but also men because a large part of the responsibility lies with the men. He must allow for education opportunities for girls and the freedom to choose a husband or job. Our society is patriarchal so the man must take the initiative in granting women her freedom so that she will play a leading role in the community."

### Summary

Palestinian refugee women and men of Jabaliya camp challenge, negotiate or accommodate traditional patriarchal structures in society. External social factors such as poverty, dispossession and violence resulting from Israeli military occupation, combined with the multifaceted effects of patriarchy shape women's daily lives. Yet women and men continue to devise strategies for women to meet the challenges they face on a daily basis. Among the strategies they employ are voicing their opinions, demanding education opportunities and seeking income-generating opportunities. These everyday acts of resistance directly challenge or navigate the oppressive structures in society that limit and

obstruct women's access to social, political and economic power. Can or do these acts empower women? Can women become agents of transformation in their personal, familial and collective community lives given the conditions of the dual occupation they experience on a daily basis? This is the focus of the discussion in the concluding chapter.

## Chapter Nine

### Conclusion, Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

This study explores the everyday acts of resistance and potential avenues of empowerment of Palestinian women in Jabaliya camp as perceived and identified by the women and men interviewed in 1999 and 2000. The local and national context of the study, specifically foreign occupation and male domination and the intersection of the two forces of oppression have shaped women's lives and their active responses to these relations of power. The constraints and complexities of refugee status, poverty, male-interpreted religious beliefs and a conservative society are perceived as significant challenges to improving or changing the status of women in the camp. The data reveal the commonalities as well as differences in experiences and opportunities among women in the camp. Women's shared experiences of gendered roles include motherhood, family care, lack of or limited decision-making power and mobility, conservative and restrictive attitudes toward women and education and employment, and the honor code. The conditions and expectations revealed in the data shape women's and men's responses to change. The data also reveal differences among women. For example, women in the camp experience differing degrees of opportunities in education, employment and decision-making power depending on familial relations and marital status. The broader political, economic and social context of poverty, lack of political representation, military occupation and a conservative, male-dominated society are shared by all women, yet the challenges to, and perceptions of, these influences vary.

The data show three areas that reflect the analytical framework that defines acts of resistance and potential avenues of empowerment. These areas are: (1) critical consciousness and a sense of action, (2) opportunities and risks of choosing existing alternatives and (3) strategic life choices.

Perceptions and articulations are not homogeneous in this study. Both women and men however, openly challenge the social, economic and political conditions of women in the camp. In spite of the dire situation of increasing poverty and isolation as a result of the Israeli military actions, in addition to social restrictions, women are demanding the right to education, employment and self-determination. They are making choices that challenge the gendered limitations imposed upon them by a male-dominated and conservative society under foreign control. The desire for personal fulfillment, community involvement and the need for income-generating opportunities have shaped women's and men's responses to gender inequality in ways that do not reflect "hidden transcripts" or disguised acts of resistance. The intent is clear. Women and men are conscientious of and challenge the fact that women do not share social, economic and political power with men. They also recognize they have the right to equality. However, it is the definition of how these rights should translate into changes for women that varies. Some women and men believe in open defiance of restrictive norms in society, while others believe change in women's status must take place within the confines of gendered expectations and gender roles.

Although everyday acts of resistance to oppression may not result in immediate or visible social change, there is a link between these acts and the empowerment process.



The data show that Palestinian women and men express a critical understanding of their social, political and economic conditions and the standpoint of ordinary Palestinian women and men stress this particular view that can assist in highlighting this process. Although the standpoint of men is one of dominance in a patriarchal society, this standpoint is also framed by military violence and economic deprivation that has resulted from Israeli occupation actions and policies. Palestinian women however, experience the double oppression of occupation and male-domination in their everyday lives are actors as well as victims, a status that can shift depending on the shifting set of relations and conditions that shape women's lives.

It is important to highlight as well the data obtained in this study is data that reflects the everyday lives of women in a society that lacks institutional and legal structures and political stability that support and defend citizen and women's rights. The Palestine National Authority lacks the authority and sovereignty to create and implement economic development strategies that would benefit women (and men), especially in the camps, due to the continued Israeli control over the Gaza Strip. From a legal perspective, women's rights in Gaza are framed not only by the overlapping Egyptian, Palestinian and Israeli legal systems but also by the fact that women lack political representation, as the leadership is male-dominated. In spite of these challenging conditions and ideologies, Palestinian women display a determination to resist and challenge the structures that limit their lives and those of their children. Although the Declaration of Independence of 1988 declared equal rights for men and women, attempts to improve women's rights through legal means have not proven to be effective. The data also reveal differing attitudes

toward the viability of laws to improve women's status. There is the belief that women's status and level of participation in society will improve if laws to protect and advance women are enforced. Therefore, political leaders must be pressured by the various social and political organizations to implement laws that grant women equal rights. For some, however, the law is not necessarily the key to women's equality. In the camps, men are accustomed to the first and the last word and even if the PNA enacts laws in favor of women this could cause problems. For example, if women were given the right to divorce that today is only a right of men, this would be perceived as contradicting religious teachings and may result in violence against women. Any developments introduced that challenge men's status will be opposed regardless of legal repercussions.

The data indicate that women are conscious of and respond to the material needs of their families by seeking alternative forms of education, such as courses offered by NGOs and by developing skills that can assist in income-generation. Higher education and employment for women receive varying degrees of support by families and communities in which the women live. Although women continue to be denied opportunities to attend a university or obtain a job, women and some men perceive education and employment not only as a right but a necessity. Demands for increased social and economic opportunities are act of resistance that may be met with social consequences such as increased restrictions in mobility or retaliatory violence whether physical or psychological.

There is recognition and rejection of women's lack decision-making power, especially concerning marriage arrangements. Although power to participate in the

decision-making process increases with marriage, position in the family and age, women continue to lack the power to determine their lives in areas such as education, employment and marriage or divorce. Fathers, husbands and to a lesser extent, relatives have decision-making power over female members of the family. Friends also play a role in maintaining women's position in the camp through the use of gossip and criticism and largely determine men's ability to grant women freedoms they demand. Morality and honor continue to play an important role in shaping the status of women and the ability to participate in community life in the camps. In addition to male authority, customs and traditions handed down from one generation to the next serve to limit changes in the role and status of women. Generational differences among men and their treatment and views of women impact women's roles and status in society. Younger men are more likely to promote women's advancement and are more understanding of women's desire to obtain an education and employment. The older or first generation of men do not support women's right to have increased control over their lives.

Palestinian women of Jabaliya camp can be in a position that is both powerful and powerless depending on the social context. For example, women are expected to nurture and care for the family and preserve national identity through oral history and memories. These are powerful roles given the political instability and poverty. Women and men exhibit a development and expression of critical consciousness of the social, political and economic conditions in the camp, yet the powerful and the powerless, or the oppressor and the oppressed, are not monolithic as both are part of the system that produces and reproduces the relations of power. The men in this study are not homogeneous in their

attitudes and beliefs about women's status in society. Some Palestinian men in the camp, for example, voice their opposition to women's limited opportunities in higher education. Husbands support their wife's active involvement in public life, such as attending course and workshops. As Suad concludes, "I encourage women to participate in any area she wishes, whether it is prohibited or not. Women should break down all barriers."

This critical consciousness however, reflects different articulations of and consequences for women's lives. For example, both women and men recognize women's status and roles as mother, caretaker, nurturer and agents in the preservation of Palestinian national heritage. They celebrate and uphold the value of these roles in society while at the same time recognize the social limitations imposed on women as a result of these roles. For example, women are deprived of active participation in the community as a result of these male dominated beliefs that limit women to the home and to the responsibilities of child rearing. Although child bearing is crucial to a woman's status, early marriage and the larger than average numbers of children women have are considered detrimental to a young woman's possibilities for development. Early marriage and multiple births impact a woman's access to education or other forms of public participation, such as political participation. Both men and women, as a result of consequences of foreign occupation, also revere motherhood. Birth is perceived as a response to the death, deportation and imprisonment of family members. It is also a challenge to Israeli efforts to force Palestinians off their land.

The women are very direct in their verbal challenges to the ideologies and customs that limit their opportunities and define their roles in society. They reject the

social limitations, such as the lack of social support for women in higher education to obtain an education and challenge the idea that universities are environments that threaten women's social status for themselves or their daughters. Young women are refusing to accept a marriage proposal and are choosing to continue their education instead. Some women also seek employment or education in spite of the social norms that do not support women's participation in the labor market. This contradicts findings that conclude middle and upper class non-refugee women focus on education, employment and participation in the public sphere as important rights for women whereas camp women locate their rights within "domesticity" (Peteet, 1991).

There is link between a woman's personal development and community progress. In order for a woman to achieve status in society she must work to provide for the community as a whole. According to Suad, "a successful human being must be successful in the community through her social activities." When access to jobs in the formal market is not available, women adopt other strategies for working to improve the material conditions of their families. The development of cottage industries assists women in income generation while they learn a skill that can enhance self-esteem. For example, income generated from embroidery, sewing and the manufacturing of food products helps provide basic needs of a family as well as produces income for other needs. Yet like education, employment can improve a woman's sense of self. The personal benefits of working outside the home are reflected in Munira's statement, "work makes me feel like a human being, like I exist."

Education is also perceived as a significant vehicle for improving woman's status in the camp. Education is considered key to increasing personal status by improving home life, teaching the children and enhancing the condition of the collective good. An educated woman, according to Suheila, is more able to demand certain rights such as health, physical education and access to cultural activities. Some of the challenges women face, however, are the scarcity of resources needed to attend educational institutions, preference of sons to be educated over daughters and the perceived need to maintain the family honor. In the sixties and seventies girls were not allowed by their families to complete their studies and could only receive a secondary certificate. Universities, though less than in the past, are still considered areas of improper conduct and the family would be "shamed" if they allowed their daughters to attend. Instead fathers considered marriage for the young women. However, in the past two decades women are seeking higher education and have higher expectations. Still many women in the camps are restricted from pursuing higher education.

In spite of social limitations, women desire and seek opportunities to educate themselves either in the university or through the courses and workshops offered by NGOs. As Nesrin clearly states, "as a Palestinian woman I am attempting to change the facts of my life through education." Women emphasize the need to obtain an education to improve their status as well as a means to improve future opportunities. "Through education, women can render more and better services to the community in which she lives," Rajha explains. Women who are not able or prohibited from achieving a higher education seek alternatives. The demand for and attendance in short term courses and

workshops offered by international organizations or Palestinian NGOs is high due to the lack of resources and social acceptability of higher education. These courses also reflect the expected gender roles women are assigned in the camp. For example, sewing, cooking, teaching and street cleaning extend and support women's roles in the family and the camp. Although workshops and short-term courses can serve to assist in income-generating activities, women recognize that their social status is not improved or enhanced as a result. The data show that women would like to participate in community activities and programs. However, there are insufficient activities for women in the camps and this limits choices. The demand for education opportunities is a strategic choice that it is limited by existing alternatives. The Israeli occupation has diminished the ability to obtain a formal education through daily acts of violence and closures decrease opportunities for families to sustain themselves financially, as they are unable to travel to work or exchange goods and services.

Even when there exists social support for increased participation of women in the camp, some women refuse to join activities or courses outside the home because of the risk of negative criticism and gossip from friends and neighbors. Gossip and negative criticism can serve to restrict women's activities as well as provide men with a reason for limiting women's opportunities, especially outside the home. Women are expected to maintain a conservative lifestyle in order uphold the family honor. Men expect, and are expected to, control women in order to preserve this honor. Examples are denial of access to education and jobs and allowing women to leave the home only when accompanied by a male family member or husband.

Women and men express future expectations, especially among the youth.

Women perceive increased opportunities in education and participation in the decision-making process, especially concerning marriage. Palestinian mothers believe their children's status in the community will improve through employment and education and that Islamic Laws support this improvement, especially for girls. As Asma state, "women must be on an equal footing with men since Islamic Laws have given her the right to equality with men." Women recognize that they have the right to self-determination and that gender inequality is not solely a woman's problem. Men must also change. As Saadi explains, "There should be programs to enlighten not only women but also men, because a large part of the responsibility lies with the men."

Although the data reflects a clear recognition of and challenge to the practices and beliefs that limit women's development, the political and economic conditions that have emerged as a result of ongoing foreign control of the Gaza Strip have limited and shaped opportunities and choices for women. Avenues of empowerment are evident in the development and expression of critical consciousness and active verbal rejection of subordination. Acts of resistance, albeit limited and often individual are not insignificant. Women express hope and expectations for a better future, in spite of the daily poverty and violence refugee women endure. Personal status and self-actualization is linked to participation in community life and in enhancing the collective good. Their perception and expression of the right to be active members of the community, to achieve higher education and increase their decision-making power is personal as it is collective. There are clear expectations and demands for change in women's status in the absence of



institutional or legal frameworks or political stability and with ongoing economic deprivation. This context will severely limit opportunities for change but does not deny everyday acts resistance and the process of empowerment that is also ongoing.

The women and men who voice their perceptions of women's lives in the camp tell a story that aids in enhancing our understanding of the commonalities and differences in women lives and reinforces the need for, and benefits of, combining the personal with the social within the broader patriarchal and foreign military experience. This strengthens our understanding of how women navigate and challenge the various restrictions imposed upon them. This also holds theoretical implications. When women and men share their lives with outsiders who conduct research this dynamic not only plays a central role in our understanding of local experiences, but also strengthens our feminists analysis that does not and should not center on the Western and predominantly white feminists experience. As the data reveal, there is a need to incorporate analysis of power relations of colonial power and military violence and women's local, everyday experiences.

I suggest future comparative research that can highlight the commonalities and differences between refugee and non-refugee women and how they may perceive and challenge the power relations that shape their lives in different ways. In addition, Palestinian women share a common historical experience of dispossession and foreign occupation and a comparative analysis of acts of resistance and avenues of empowerment of women in the camps in Gaza and those living in camps outside historical Palestine, for

example in Lebanon, would increase our understanding of how different local and specific contexts relate within a common context of national dispossession.

## Glossary

### Residents of Jabaliya Camp Interviewed in the Study

#### Abed

Abed is thirty-six years old and married with seven children. He lives with his wife, two daughters and five sons. Abed has a sixth grade education and works as a day laborer. According to Aiesha, Abed is “conservative and traditional.”

#### Ad’ham

Ad’ham is twenty years old and single. He lives with her father, mother, two brothers and two sisters. Ad’ham has completed high school and is currently taking classes in computers and video production. He has never been employed.

#### Asm’a

Asm’a is twenty-seven years old and divorced without children. She lives with her father, mother, aunt, three sisters and seven brothers. Asm’a has a degree in the Arabic Language and is currently employed as a teacher at the nursery school. She was not previously employed outside the home.

#### Badia

Badia is forty-two years old and married with five children. She lives with her husband and five children. Badia has completed high school and describes herself as a housewife. She was previously employed as a dressmaker.

#### Da’lal

Da’lal is forty-one years old and a widow with five children. She lives with two daughters and two sons. Da’lal has a tenth grade education. She currently defines herself as a housewife and has never been employed outside the home.

#### El’ham

El’ham is twenty-one, married with one child. She has a high school education and defines her self as a housewife. El’ham has never been employed outside the home.

#### Ezaat

Ezzat is forty-two years old, married with six children. He lives with his sister, his wife and their three sons and three daughters. Ezzat is trained as a nurse and is currently

teaching at the Nursing College. He has completed courses in computer, adult education and nursing.

Farida

Farida is thirty-five years old and single. She lives with her two sisters, two brothers, a sister-in-law and their two children. Farida has an undergraduate degree in the Arabic Language and has completed courses in disabilities and working with the deaf. Farida is currently employed as a teacher of deaf children.

Fah'mi

Fah'mi is thirty-six years old and is married with five children. He is currently employed as a teacher for UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Work Agency). He has an undergraduate degree in Education and a certificate in geography. Fah'mi was previously employed as a day laborer. According to Aiesha, Fah'mi is "very cooperative and articulate."

Fat'hi

Fat'hi is forty-two years old, married with seven children. He has completed grade school and has taken courses in car mechanics. Fat'hi is presently employed as a day laborer and previously employed as a plumber.

Hana'

Hana' is twenty-two years old and single. She lives with her father, mother, two brothers, two sisters, two nephews and five nieces. Hana' has completed an undergraduate degree in the Arabic Language and has never been employed outside the home.

Ghalia

Ghalia is forty-one years old and single. She is currently unemployed and previously worked as a dressmaker. Ghalia lives with her mother, father and sister.

Inti'sar

Inti'sar is thirty-six years old and a widow. She lives with her three sons and one daughter. Inti'sar has finished grade school and defines herself as a housewife. She has never been employed outside the home.

Mohammed

Mohammed is twenty-seven years old and married with three children. He has completed six years of grade school. Mohammed is currently employed as a day laborer.

Mu'in

Mu'in is thirty-one years old and married with two sons and two daughters. He has completed three years of grade school and taken courses in car mechanics. Mu'in is employed as a day laborer.

Mu'neer

Mu'neer is twenty-two years old and single. She lives with her father, mother, brother, four sisters a nephew and a niece. She has completed high school and has never been employed outside the home.

Munira

Munira is thirty years old and divorced with one child. She lives with her father, mother, four sisters, five brothers, a sister-in-law and two nephews. Munira has a degree from the Teacher Training Institute and is currently employed as a nursery teacher.

Nesrin

Nesrin is twenty-three years old and single. She lives with her father, mother, aunt, stepmother, four brothers and six sisters. Nesrin has completed courses in human rights, computers and skin and hair care. She is currently a university student. Nesrin has never been employed outside the home.

Otra'

Otra' is thirty-two years old and single. She lives with ten family members. Otra' has completed three years of grade school and is currently employed as a dressmaker.

Raed

Raed is twenty-nine years old and married with three sons and one daughter. He lives with his wife, four children and two brothers. Raed has an eighth grade education and is currently employed as a plumber.

Rah'ma

Rah'ma is thirty-six years old and single. She lives with her mother, her brother and his wife and seven children. Rah'ma has received an undergraduate degree in Arabic

Language and is presently Director of the UNRWA Women's Activities Center. She has taken courses in computer, funding and communications and was previously employed as a literacy teacher. According to Aiesha, Rah'ma has been active in the women's movement.

Raj'ha

Raj'ha is a thirty-five years old. She is married and has seven children. She completed her undergraduate degree in Nursing and is presently employed as a nurse. She has also taken courses in Motherhood and Safety, Family, and Breast Cancer Early Detection.

Raj'ha was not previously employed.

Reem

Reem is twenty-two years old and single. She lives with her mother, father and three sisters. Reem has completed her high school education and is currently a student at the university.

Ruweida'

Ruweida is twenty-one years old and single. She lives with her mother and one brother. Ruweida' has completed high school and is currently taking a course in computers. She has never been employed outside the home.

Saadi

Saadi is a forty-year-old married man with eight children. He has seven daughters and one son. He has completed a Master Degree in General Health. His current job is Director of Training in Health and Culture. He coordinates and teaches courses in health, contraception, research and teaching methods. Saadi was previously employed with the Ministry of Health as Director of the Department of Education. According to Aiesha, Saadi is "highly educated and is enthusiastic about the subject matter of the interview."

Safiya

Safiya is forty years old and married without children. She lives with her husband and twelve stepsons and stepdaughters. She has completed grade school and defines herself as a housewife. Safiya has never been employed outside the home.

Samira

Samira is thirty-four years old and single. She lives with her mother, her brother and his wife, seven nephews and three nieces.

She has completed high school and is employed as a nursery teacher. Samira was not previously employed.

Sara

Sara is forty-eight years old and married with eleven children. She lives with her husband, her four daughters and seven sons, her stepmother and her sister-in-law. Sara has an eighth grade education and describes herself as a housewife. She has never been employed outside the home.

Sheh'da

Sheh'da is fifty-nine years old and married with nine children. He lives with his wife, three daughters, one son and two grandchildren. Sheh'da has a high school degree and has taken courses in business administration. He is currently employed as an assistant to the principal in an UNRWA school. He was previously employed as a shopkeeper.

Suad

Suad is thirty-two years old and single. She lives with her father, mother, brother, and his wife and two children. She has completed an undergraduate degree in Arabic Language and is presently employed as a special education teacher. Suad has taken courses in computer, mental health, video and television and nursing. She was previously employed as a kindergarten teacher.

Suad T.

Suad T. is forty-one years old and married with seven children. She has an eighth grade education. Suad T. has never been employed outside the home and defines herself as a housewife. Aiesha states that Suad T. is socially active in women's issues.

Sub'hi

Sub'hi is forty-six years old and married with two children. He lives with his wife, two children, two brothers and their wives and seven children. Sub'hi has a high school degree and currently owns a trading company. He was previously employed as a day laborer.

Suheila

Suheila is thirty-two years old and has completed high school. She is married without children. Suheila currently describes herself as a housewife and was previously employed as a secretary.

Tal'al

Tal'al is twenty-seven years old, married with one son and one daughter. He lives with his wife and two children. He has a third grade education and works as a day laborer.

Yousef

Yousef is forty-nine years old, married with seven children, three sons and four daughters. He has completed four years of elementary school. Yousef is currently employed in a clothing store. Prior to working in the store, Yousef was a day laborer. According to Aiesha, Yousef is very cooperative "in spite of his limited education," and is very enthusiastic about issues concerning women in the camp.

Yousef K

Yousef K is fifty-one years old and married with ten children. He lives with his wife, five sons and four daughters. Yousef K has completed grade school and currently maintains audio equipment. He was previously employed in TV repair.

Zaki

Zaki is forty-three years old and married with ten children. He lives with his wife and ten children. Zaki has a bachelor degree in Nursing and has completed courses in health education and health care. He is currently employed as a supervisor in the Nursing Department of the Shifa Hospital. He was previously employed as a staff nurse.



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## VITA

Date and Place of Birth: September 29, 1958, Louisville, Kentucky, USA

Degrees Awarded: Hampshire College, BS  
Tufts School of Nutrition, MS  
Boston School of Public Health, MPH  
University of Kentucky, PHD expected graduation date 5/09

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