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Am I Not a Human ?

Edited by

Dr. Mohsen Saleh
Rana Sa'adah

Translated by

Iman Itani

The Suffering of the **Palestinian Woman** *under the Israeli Occupation*



By

Hasan Ibhais

Mariam Itani

Dr. Sami al-Salahat



Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations

Am I not a Human?

(2)

Book series discussing
the sufferance of the
Palestinian people
under the Israeli
occupation

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For Studies & Consultations
Beirut - Lebanon**

سلسلة "أولست إنساناً؟" (2)

معاناة المرأة الفلسطينية تحت الاحتلال الإسرائيلي

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Foreword

If there could be any “pleasure” in presenting a book about human suffering, then this book would be presented as such. For pleasure could somehow be embedded in moments of achievement: as suffering is documented, it is more visible, and chances of bringing it to an end become higher. It is with such “pleasure” that al-Zaytouna Centre brings foreword to its readers the second issue of its series “Am I Not a Human”, on the suffering of the Palestinian woman under the Israeli occupation.

As a part of *Am I Not a Human?* series, this book focuses on the Israeli occupation violations of the rights of the Palestinian people. This occurs at a time when the whole world claims to defend the human being's rights, dignity, and freedom to live in peace in his homeland; but it is, nevertheless, completely indifferent towards what is happening to the dispossessed and oppressed Palestinians.

This book is about the exceptional suffering of an exceptional icon, the Palestinian woman under the Israeli occupation, where her normal role as a caregiver is burdened with inestimable additional challenges. She is the mother, the wife, the sister, the nurse, the teacher, and the supporter of the various individuals in a society under occupation. She should endure the grief of losing those dear, or having them detained or injured-sometimes handicapped; and simultaneously cover up for their absence in their various social roles. And in so, the Palestinian woman comes out as an exceptional type of women: she didn't give up resistance through all the details of her everyday life. With her house destroyed, her lands razed or expropriated, her children sick, her husband detained, and her father killed, she insisted on planting seeds of hope and endurance, on fulfilling her social role to the utmost, and on not overlooking her necessary political and resistance participation.





Introduction

Since 1948, the Israeli Occupation has imposed on Palestinian women a unique lifestyle which is different from other women's lives. Palestinian women, whether in Palestine or abroad, are denied their basic human rights, security, freedom of movement, safe and healthy environment, and education. They became refugees living in unusual conditions and bearing heavy responsibilities and duties that are beyond their capacity and endurance ability.

It is not exaggerating to say that Israeli measures have negatively influenced every aspect of life of the Palestinian women whether personally, socially, economically, or politically. This fact has made the lives of these women a unique extraordinary paradigm, where Palestinian women, unlike other women, are forced to struggle for their rights through their struggle against the occupation.





All these circumstances did not defeat the Palestinian woman or thwart her will and persistence; instead, she acquired a special character, like no other woman, with her endurance and resistance that made her a great icon. She stood by the man, a mother, a wife, a sister, or a daughter. She struggled alongside him, not only as a resister to the occupation, but also as a care-giver, a fighter, a nurse, a worker, and a teacher. Even after his death, she would take care of his family and children, to teach her children to hold on to their dignity and perseverance. So her role exceeds the 50% she represents of the society, thus she becomes responsible for building the whole community.

This book is the second in the book series *Am I Not a Human?* prepared by al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations. The goal of this series is to give a full picture of the suffering of Palestinian people under the Israeli occupation, by addressing the reader's minds and hearts in an academic context and well-documented style.

Specifically, this book is about the suffering of the Palestinian woman under the Israeli occupation. This suffering that accompanies every aspect of her life: the personal, the social, and the economic.

Additionally, it includes a section on the political participation of the Palestinian woman.



Suffering has Started since the Occupation Started



My husband and I left Kabri the day before it fell. We walked a few hours to the east on the main Kabri-Tarshiha road... It was not too long before we were met by the Jews... They stopped and searched us. We had no weapons. They took my jewelry - golden earrings, a necklace and four bracelets and four pounds we had with us. The Jews took away my husband, Ibrahim Dabajah, Hussain Hassan al-Khubaizah, etc... [other villagers, men]. They left the rest of us on the main Tarshiha road. The Jewish soldiers were dancing on the streets. They came to us and asked us about our boys. An officer came and asked me not to cry. He said he would bring my husband back, except that he had already been killed... The next morning, Umm Hussain and I went to the village... I found him. He was shot in the back of the head. I pulled him into the shade and went to bring Umm Hussain to help me bury him. I did not know what to do. I could not dig a grave for him. We carried him on a piece of wood to the cemetery and buried him sideways in his mother's grave... Until today I worry and pray that I buried him the right way, in the proper position.

- The story of Aminah Muhammad Musa as narrated by her, in: Nafez Nazzal, *The Palestinian Exodus from Galilee 1948* (Beirut: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 1978), p.61.



Chapter 1: Women in the Palestinian Society

By the end of 2008, the Palestinian population reached 10.6 million; 48.1% of them live in historic Palestine, that is 5.1 million people, distributed as 3.88 million in the West Bank (WB) and Gaza Strip (GS) and 1.22 million in Israel.¹

Women make up around half of the Palestinian people in and outside Palestine: for each 100 females in the WB and GS there are 103 males;² this ratio, which is known as gender ratio, is almost the same among the Palestinians in Israel (103.6), 100 to 102.3 in Syria and 100 to 98.5 in Lebanon (according to statistics of 2005), where no recent statistics of gender are available for Jordan (check table1 for further statistical indicators on Palestinian women in their homeland and in refugee countries).





Whether in historic Palestine or in refugee hosting countries, Palestinian communities face difficulties harder than those around them. What could be harder than the impact of Israeli occupation on women? “It entered every aspect of their lives, blatantly violating their economic, social, and cultural rights, in addition to civil and political rights,” says Yakin Ertürk, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women.³

It suffices, for instance, to note that 4,803 were killed by the occupation forces between the beginning of the second *Intifadah* (*al-Aqsa*) in 28/9/2000 till 29/5/2008, including 842 children and 163 women.⁴ Moreover, since *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, Israel has arrested around 69 thousand Palestinians, eight thousands of whom are still in custody, including 34 women, 342 children, and hundreds of ill people, detained under harsh and inhumane conditions.⁵

Amid all this suffering, the Palestinian woman has been present as a mother, wife, sister, or daughter. She is the one responsible for fulfilling the roles of missing individuals, who are victims of arrest, murder, injury, or unemployment. Those circumstances are due to Israeli measures of movement restrictions and the construction of the Separation Wall, which has raised the rates of poverty and unemployment and has deprived women and girls of education, work and being able to meet with their families and relatives.

Meanwhile in countries hosting refugees, the Palestinian women also suffer from the poor socio-economic conditions of the refugee camps, where there are high rates of poverty and unemployment and only few job opportunities are available. In addition to her housework and child



An Israeli female soldier grabbing the headscarf of a Palestinian woman, which is a humiliation to her person and to the Hijab as a religious symbol.

The photo was taken during a demonstration against the Separation Wall in the West Bank. Tens of Palestinians were injured then by Israeli bullets.



► AFP, 21/9/2004.



Israeli means of aggression and assault towards Palestinian woman are just as diverse as possible. This photo was taken in Ramallah, the West Bank, on 8/4/1988, when an Israeli soldier was spraying a Palestinian woman with tear-gas.

► Photo by Bernard Bisson, 8/4/1988.





rearing, the woman has to work and provide money to increase family's income to cover their living expenses, in addition to her patriotic role of preserving the national and cultural identity and passing it to her children. Palestinian women in Israel are not in a better situation either, where Israeli authorities discriminate against all Arabs and at all levels.⁶

Despite Israeli targeting of their social status and consequently their significant role in the struggle against the occupation, Palestinian women were able to deal with their hardships and keep up with the demographic challenge in historic Palestine. In 2006, the fertility rate of Palestinian women went up to 4.6 children per woman in the WB and GS,⁷ and 3.68 children per woman in Israel, according to estimates by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS).⁸ In contrast, the fertility rate in Israel was 2.8 children per woman.⁹ This relatively high fertility rate makes the Palestinian society a young one, with 45.5% of Palestinians in the WB and GS below 15 years old, and only 3% who are 65 years old and above.¹⁰

Table1 presents selected demographic indicators of Palestinian women in various palestinian communities (the WB and GS, Israel, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon). It is clear from the table that there are differences among these various Palestinian communities. The fertility rate, as we mentioned earlier, is high in the WB, GS and Israel; however, it is relatively low in refugee camps in Syria and Lebanon, where the demographic pyramid of Palestinians becomes older and the percentage of widowed women in Lebanon becomes higher as a result of the Lebanese civil war which involved Palestinian refugee camps.



Table 1: Selected Demographic Indicators related to Palestinian Women (2006) by Place of Residency¹¹

Indicator		The WB and GS	Israel	Jordan	Syria	Lebanon
Gender ratio (male per 100 females)		103 (in 2007)	103.6	-	102.3 (in 2005)	98.5
Female population: 0-14 years (%)		45.3	39.7	41.4 (in 2000)	32.6 (in 2003)	32
Female population: 65 years and above (%)		3.4	3.6	4.3 (in 2000)	4.3 (in 2003)	5.8
Life expectancy at birth (Years)		73.2	78.1	-	-	-
Total fertility rate (1 birth per woman)		4.6	3.68	4.6 (in 2000)	2.4	2.3
Natural increase rate (%)		3.3	2.51	-	2 (in 2002)	-
Average household size (an individual per each family)		5.8 (in 2007)	5.09	6.2 (in 2000)	4.9	3.8
Marital Status (%)	Married	57.8	60.8	50.8 (in 2000)	53.3	47.9
	Single	33.6	31.2	37.4 (in 2000)	40.8	40.5
	Widowed	7	6.2	2.6 (in 2000)	4.2	9.6
	Divorced	1.2	1.7	8.8 (in 2000)	1.7	2
	Separated	0.4	-	0.4 (in 2000)	-	-

(-) means not available.





Although the crude marriage rate in the Palestinian territories remained approximately the same throughout the years of *al-Aqsa Intifadah* (i.e. since 28/9/2000),¹² the rate of un-married women recently increased due to deteriorating living conditions and the Israeli siege. The percentage of un-married women was around 5% according to studies done before 2000, now it is above 33%, and some estimates raise it up to 39.3%.¹³ This fact means that a lot of women are left alone in the face of the Israeli forces, life difficulties, and income scarcity, in an environment where men are given priority in careers and a better chance in public life.



Palestinian women participate in demonstrations against the Separation Wall in the West Bank. Note that Israeli forces have seized large sectors of Palestinian lands for building the wall. The above photo shows a Palestinian woman yelling at an Israeli soldier during a demonstration on 11/3/2004 in Beit Daqqa village. The second photo is of Israeli soldiers “holding” an old Palestinian woman who was participating in a demonstration in the same village four days earlier, on 7/3/2004.





Chapter 2: Rights of the Palestinian Woman in Light of the International Law and Conventions

The eighth of March is celebrated worldwide as the International Women's Day, but for the Palestinian women it holds another meaning. While women across the world celebrate their individual, cultural, scientific and political development, the Palestinian woman is engrossed with her suffering under the Israeli occupation.

We believe that women's rights must be guarded every day and celebrated every moment; yet International Women's Day is merely a day when the media focuses more on women. Here appears the seriously wide gap between the rights' entitlement of every person by human rights agreements and the





rights of Palestinian women. A Palestinian newspaper cited the words of a Palestinian woman about International Women's Day. She said:

In the time when women around the world seek new mechanisms of improving their status, the women of Gaza in particular are going back to seeking more traditional and old-established means needed to adapt to the Israeli siege, the absence of electricity, and the scarcity of financial resources. These living conditions certainly impose more housework and job responsibilities on Palestinian women.¹⁴

Another Palestinian woman, 'Um Yahya Dardunah, spends her day between al-Shifa' Hospital and her house. On this day, March 8th, the only thing she ponders about is her nine years child Yahya, who lives on feeding tubes after Israeli bombs burned and distorted his innocent face. Being a mother of 6 children, 'Um Yahya tried to describe her feelings while staying near Yahya, but concerned about her other children whom she left at home near the eastern border of GS, where there is an impending danger of death due to the frequent Israeli shellings and invasions. Next to Yahya, lies another injured child, 'Ali; but 'Ali's mother brings three of her children with her to the hospital and keeps the other three at her parents' house because she does not dare to leave them alone in their house near the eastern border of the Strip. She says that the Palestinian mother, "sleeps with her eyes wide open, and lives with her heart broken, expecting grief to be renewed at any moment."¹⁵

Eighth of March is the same as all other days for 'Um 'Un 'Ashur. She spends it searching drugstores and pharmacies for a medicine for her son Muhammad, who lies in the hospital with no available treatment because of Israeli siege of GS. "I no more know today's date; my sole concern is my son's health." On the other hand, 'Um Ahmad Sa'idni



can do nothing to her three sons but hold their photos. ‘Awad, Akram, and Suhaib were detained four years ago, and their mother ’Um Ahmad has been deprived from meeting them for the last eight months, “when a Palestinian woman misses her children she can do nothing but look at their photos,” she says.¹⁶

Every person, whether man or woman, is entitled primarily to what is known as basic rights, these were first included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was approved by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution 217 D (III) on 10/12/1948. Several international conventions followed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with more illustration on its articles and principles, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

In the same framework of human rights agreements, several universal conventions and declarations were concerned particularly with women and women’s rights. These agreements were mostly a re-statement of human rights with emphasis on indiscrimination between men and women in all sectors of the society: work, education, services, etc. The most widely known women rights conventions are the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, and the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Some conventions were concerned about the unreasonable discrimination between men and women in certain domains like job opportunities, teaching and political participation. Examples of these





How does the American Media Report the Suffering of Palestinian Women?

A November 7, 2006 New York Times (NYT) news article about a Human Rights Watch report on domestic violence against Palestinian women brings welcome attention to human rights issues. Unfortunately, the same article, viewed in the context of The NYT reporting on Israel/Palestine over the last six years, provides a powerful example of typical US mainstream media bias against Palestinians. Research shows clearly that The NYT pays little attention to human rights in Israel/Palestine, downplays the larger context in which violence against Palestinian women occurs and generally silences Palestinian women's voices. Since the current Palestinian uprising began on 29/9/2000, three of the leading human rights organizations focusing on Israel/Palestine -Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Israeli organization B'tselem- have published 76 reports focused primarily on Israeli abuses of Palestinian rights, and four reports primarily focused on "Palestinians abuses" of Israeli or Palestinian rights. Yet, a Lexis-Nexis search reveals that The NYT has published only four articles on those 80 reports, just two full articles on these 76 reports primarily about Israeli violations of Palestinian rights, and two full articles on the four reports on Palestinian violations.

- Patrick O'Connor and Rachel Roberts, "The New York Times Marginalizes Palestinian Women and Palestinian Rights," The Electronic Intifada website, 17/11/2006, see: <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article6061.shtml>





are the Convention against Discrimination in Education, the Convention (No.100) concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value, and the Convention on Political Rights of Women.

The major problem with the aforementioned conventions is that the Palestinian woman is not deprived of her rights because of gender discrimination but because of Israeli measures which violate human rights indifferent to one's gender. The occupation forces have ceased all women's rights including their right to life, liberty, and security of person, the right to not being subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standards of physical health, and the right to work and learn.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes more rights that are also violated by Israeli measures, such as:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care, and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Moreover, "motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance" (article 25), "The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the state" (article 16), and that "no one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence" (article 12). In addition to the above rights, articles 5 and 9 state the





right of being protected from all forms of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment... and that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile; article 13 states that every human has the right to “freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state,” and that “everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.” Moreover, no one shall be “arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality” (article 15).

These rights do not cease to exist in a state of war because they are profound for each woman; there are other international agreements concerning the protection of the rights of women, children, and civilians in the state of war, the most known being the Geneva Fourth Convention on the Protection of Civilians in State of War ratified on 21/8/1949, and the UN Declaration on Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 14/12/1974. The first article of the latter declaration bans clearly and explicitly attacks on civilian population, especially on women and children; moreover, the third article of the same document asserts that all states must abide fully by their obligations under Geneva conventions and other agreements related to human rights in armed conflicts, which offer guarantees for the protection of women and children. The same declaration obliges state parties to make all efforts to “spare women and children from the ravages of war” (article 4), and it classifies all forms of repression and cruel and inhuman treatment of women and children as “criminal acts” (article 5).

The Geneva Fourth Convention emphasizes the right of having care and protection especially for ill and pregnant women. It states that the



injured, sick, as well as the infirm, and pregnant women should be the object of particular protection and respect (article 16). It asserts the protection of “means conveying wounded and sick civilians, the infirm and maternity cases” (article 21). Article 27 of the convention pronounces the right of all protected persons, in all circumstances, to be respected “for their persons, their honor, their family rights, their religious convictions and practices, and their manners and customs. They shall at all times be humanely treated, and shall be protected especially against all acts of violence or threats thereof and against insults and public curiosity.” The article also reasserts the right of protecting women against any attack on their honor, in particular against rape, or any form of indecent assault.

As a matter of fact, Israel violates most of the above-mentioned rights if not all of them. These violations will be further discussed and illustrated throughout the various sections of this book. The bullets of Israeli soldiers do not differentiate between women and men and do not respect woman’s right to life. The Israeli closures and siege have affected the palestinian women, whether in sickness or in health, exacerbated their sufferings, often prevented them from learning or working, banned them from leaving the country or returning to it and sometimes denied them the right of having a Palestinian identity card or living with their families. In addition to siege, there is detention and arrest; if a Palestinian woman is not in custody then one of her sons, her brothers, her father or her husband is most probably detained. Add to all this suffering, house demolitions, land expropriation and the razing of fields. The palestinian woman is deprived of a safe and secure environment, even at her house and in her family life.





Israel continuously denies any legal responsibility on its behalf, for the deteriorating human rights situation in the Occupied Territories, despite international consensus on it which was repeatedly asserted by human rights associations and the international community. For instance, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) proclaimed in 2003 that:

even in a situation of armed conflict, fundamental human rights must be respected and that basic economic, social, and cultural rights as part of the minimum standards of human rights are guaranteed under customary international law and are also prescribed by international humanitarian law.¹⁷



An injured Palestinian woman lying on the ground while other women run away after being shot by Israeli tanks in Beit Hanoun, north of Gaza Strip on 3/11/2006.

► Reuters, 3/11/2006.



An Israeli army dog attacks the Palestinian Yusra Rabay'a during an Israeli army raid in al'Abbadiyya village near Bethlehem in the West Bank on 21/3/2007. Eyewitnesses said that the dog was with Israeli troops who were searching a Palestinian house for resistance fighters but it attacked Yusra who was there accidentally.

► Reuters, 21/3/2007.





Chapter 3: The Israeli Occupation Offenses against the Palestinian Woman

Among the very basic rights of the palestinian woman is her right to live and be treated in a humanly dignified manner. This chapter illustrates the breach of this substantial right by focusing on Palestinian women killed, injured and imprisoned.

1. Women Killed and Injured:

The Israeli occupation did not exclude women from its continuous violation of Palestinians' right to life. Palestinian women were victims of Israeli assaults and attacks very often. The count of women killed by Israeli assaults soared to 163 during the period between 28/9/2000 and 29/5/2008,¹⁸ whereas no statistical figure about injured women is available. According to a report by Amnesty International, Palestinian women killed and injured were



attacked either inside or near their homes, or while moving from one village to another. The report also said that some women died under the wrecks of their homes which were demolished by the Israeli army over their heads, and that some other girls were killed by the occupation forces at schools.¹⁹

In this context, several international reports such as special UN reports and the reports of Amnesty International have rejected Israeli claims of un-intentional shooting of civilians, because international representatives, observers and foreign journalists have witnessed many cases where the occupation forces have attacked innocent Palestinian civilians or have raided crowded residential areas; such as the cases of Israeli aerial raids on Palestinians.²⁰

These reports included sorrowful stories about women's suffering due to the Israeli violations, such as the targeting girls on their way to school or at schools (e.g. Raghda al-A'sar, Ghadir Mukhaymar, Ranya Aram, Iman al-Hams, etc.) and murdering women inside their houses (e.g. Suzan Hijjo with her baby girl Iman and her elderly mother). Eriza al-Minawi was a student at al-Najah University in Nablus. Accompanying the 20 years old Palestinian at the balcony of their house, the aunt of Eriza told the story as follows:

We saw two Israeli "Jeeps" on the road crossing below. One vehicle had already been there, then when the second came, an Israeli soldier stepped out of one of the vehicles and shot upwards. Eriza was standing at the rails drinking a cup of coke. The bullet penetrated through her left wrist and into her heart. She fell down murmuring "my hand" and died immediately.²¹



The bodies of the Palestinian Sana' 'Athamneh with her two young daughters Rima and Ala' in Beit Hanoun Hospital, north of Gaza Strip. Sana' and her children were killed by the Israeli Occupation forces in an incursion into the town on 8/11/2006. They were among 18 Palestinians killed, 11 of whom were from the 'Athamneh family, in addition to 40 others who were injured.

► AFP, 8/11/2006.



The mother of Nawal Halabi giving her daughter the last goodbye after she was killed with her baby by Israeli bullets during an incursion into the village of Rajib in the West Bank on 15/1/2006.

► Reuters, 15/1/2006.





In another case, the 17 years old Hikmat al-Malalihah was killed with her mother Nasra and cousin Salmiah in the Sheikh ‘Ajlin area south of Gaza city. They were killed by “flechette”, i.e. shells packed with five thousands of steel darts; each one is five centimeter long. Hikmat’s grandmother and two other family members were also injured in the incident. The bodies of the three females were ripped tens of times according to autopsy report and body photos. At first, the Israeli soldiers claimed they were responding to rifle shootings around that area; the next day they admitted that the bombing was their fault and promised to investigate the attack, which did not occur according to the report of Amnesty International.²²

Meanwhile, there is deficiency in reporting figures of palestinian women killed and injured according to age groups, body parts targeted, or means of attack; the only figures available were published by the Palestinian Woman’s Information and Media Center (PWIMC). It classifies women killed by the occupation forces from 29/9/2000 to 28/2/2005 by territory: 46.7% in the WB and 53.3% in GS, and by age groups: 33.2% under 18 years old (23.9% in the WB and 43.9% in GS), 46.7% between 18 and 50 years old (50% in the WB and 43% in GS), and 20.1% older than 50 years (26.1% in the WB and 13.2% in GS).²³

According to PWIMC, 49% of women killed (44.9% in the WB and 53.7% in GS) were shot all over their bodies, 20.5% (13.8% in the WB and 28.1% in GS) were shot in the head and the neck, and 8.1% (8.7% in the WB and 7.4% in GS) were shot in the chest and abdomen.²⁴

Noteworthy in this context is to mention that the Israeli forces keep in what they call “Cemetery of Numbers” the bodies of Palestinian



women who execute “self-immolation” operations against Israel, without any care for, or consideration for the sacredness of the dead or the feelings of their families. Among women whose bodies are still held by Israeli occupation army are Ayat al-Akhras, Darin Abu ‘Eisha, Wafa’ Idris, Hanadi Jaradat, and Hiba Daraghmih.²⁵

2. Women Prisoners:

Palestinian women were not excluded in any of the forms of the Israeli Occupation violence and brutality against the palestinian people in general. In detentions, women constituted a significant percentage of arrests during the 40 years of Israeli occupation of the WB and GS since 1967.²⁶

The data and statistics available at the Census Department in the palestinian Ministry of Detainees indicate that the Israeli occupation forces have arrested more than 10 thousand Palestinian women from 1967 till the end of 2008, of whom 800 were arrested during *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, and 75 were still in custody by the end of 2008. These women are held under very bad conditions, without consideration for their gender, basic rights, or certain special needs; nine of them were arrested when they were minors (under the age of 18).²⁷ A prominent Palestinian woman who experienced the prison is Dr. Mariam Saleh, the first imprisoned woman member of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). She was detained on 12/11/2007 and released on 15/6/2008.²⁸

According to the international law, Geneva Conventions, UN Convention against Torture, and UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights clearly recommend dignified treatment of prisoners, especially women. Nevertheless, Israel still violates the rights of prisoners and treats





women prisoners in a very degrading and harsh manner. It confines them in prisons with poor conditions, deprives them of adequate health-care and nutrients, and from nursing their children or even seeing them. On the other hand, interrogators and guards are often men which contradicts the international law which specifies that women prisoners be guarded and inspected by female guards only, and minor girls be separated from adult women.

Another report by the UN cited that Palestinian women prisoners in Israeli jails are subject to significant levels of violence during interrogation and detention.²⁹ To this end, UN Commission on the Status of Women reported that a Palestinian pregnant prisoner was forced to sit on a small chair with her hands cuffed and eyes banded, and she was beaten on her face; other women prisoners were imprisoned and tied to their beds.³⁰ The UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) said that eight pregnant Palestinian prisoners gave birth inside jail, 31 women prisoners were not allowed to take care of their babies, six women prisoners were deprived of family visits, and eight women prisoners were diagnosed with severe psychological problems.³¹

Amnesty International reported that Palestinian women were slapped, beaten, or punched in their faces, then tied in an uncomfortable posture during interrogation, and that interrogators, who are males, often sat near them till their bodies touch in order to humiliate, intimidate and embarrass them. The arrested women were also threatened by demolishing their homes, arresting their family members (especially the elderlies and the young children), and sentencing them to long periods in prison.³²



The Palestinian prisoner Samar Sbeih talks about her pregnancy days in prison, her moment of labor and the difficulties she passed through. Samar was arrested when she was two months pregnant and was frequently threatened by abortion during her interrogation 18 hours a day, which lasted for 66 days in the infamous Maskubiya detention camp. When she was due, she was transferred to a hospital with cuffs on her hands and legs and accompanied by strict guards; her hands were released for thirty minutes only during the Caesarean delivery operation.

► *Almasry Alyoum*, 9/2/2008.

Israeli soldiers arresting a Palestinian woman at the Hawwara checkpoint on the road to Nablus city in the West Bank.

► *AFP*, 9/9/2004.





A Palestinian woman begs Israeli soldiers to release her two sons who were just captured by the Israeli soldiers in Hebron (al-Khalil) in the West Bank.

► Reuters, 19/4/2004.

The list of Israeli violations of women prisoners' rights continues like no other imprisonment environment in the world. Palestinian women are treated violently, exposed to degrading strip search, sexually abused, threatened, and are caused dread by sudden entrance of male guards to their rooms at night, having their headscarves and gowns ripped, living in a hazardous health environment, and being deprived of visits most of the time.³³

In addition, there are grave violations of pregnant prisoners' rights. The Israelis cold-heartedly impose harsh restrictions on pregnant women even at giving birth without considering the mother's or baby's health. This happens although international laws do entitle pregnant prisoners special care for their health and needs.



The head of the Census Department of the Ministry of Detainees, Abdul-Nasir Farawanah, reports several cases of pregnant women giving birth to their babies inside prison in very tiresome and harsh conditions without any medical care; they are taken to the surgery room under strict surveillance, with their hands and legs tied to beds, and they pass through the experience with their families not being allowed to see them or stand by them.³⁴

Omaymah al-Agha is a former pregnant woman prisoner who did not know when she was arrested that she was pregnant. Omaymah tells her story:

I was transferred to al-Majdal Prison and I did not know I was pregnant until I had severe pain and was accompanied to the hospital where they told me I was pregnant. After several months I was sent to give birth with my arms and legs tied. The doctor complained and argued with the head of jail and with the guards who were accompanying me, so my legs were released and my hands were tied to the bed. This, in addition to the psychological suffering due to the absence of my family. The jail administration refused to inform the Red Cross in order to contact them. Eventually, and after a painful labor I gave birth to my girl Hanin. She stayed with me two years in jail as stated in the Israeli law then she was sent by the Red Cross to my family in 1995, and I stayed in prison.³⁵

Giving birth to the baby was not the end of Omaymah's suffering. She was chained back to her bed, and her newborn was treated as a prisoner not as a baby who needs adequate comfort, nutrition, milk, the utmost medical care and necessary vaccines. These newborn babies are put in the same harsh conditions as their mothers, deprived of their





basic rights as babies, and treated cruelly such as having cold water or gas poured over them, in addition to the scarcity in warm water, the spread of large number of insects and the absence of ventilation which endangers children's health. Moreover, the jail administration frequently seizes the few toys and private things given to the babies by the Red Cross. Sometimes, women prisoners get punished for their babies' crying and wailing.³⁶

Despite all their suffering in Israeli prisons, Palestinian women are still strong and persistent; and they are still holding on to their challenge and resistance against the occupying forces. In this context, we should point out to the outstanding stance of the Women Prisoner Movement in 1996, when 40 women prisoners discarded their "unconditional release" delivered in Taba Agreement, and they eventually succeeded in pushing the Israelis to release all women prisoners early in 1997.³⁷



Testimonies from Prison

▪ Maha 'Awwad, who was arrested in November 2004 is another woman prisoner who got severely tortured during the early hours of her detention. Maha says, “as soon as I arrived to Hawwara detention center, an Israeli soldier kicked



me till blood poured out of my mouth, and another soldier threatened to rape me; I was imprisoned in an abandoned cell, with a wet and dirty mattress and no water was available; when I asked for water, a soldier peed in a bottle and gave it to me to drink it; the food was bad, and flies were all over it; bad ventilation and the windows were broken, in addition there was no yard, and the toilets were far from the detention room.”

▪ Iman al 'Akhra, another Palestinian prisoner, was interrogated in Etzion jail, she says, “I was chained to a chair for three consecutive days, with no food, drink, toilet, or sleep.”

► Akram Abu 'Amr, On International Women's Day: The Palestinian women in prison have an endless suffering, The Women's Information and Media Center, 8/3/2008.





Chapter 4: The Social and Economic Impact of the Israeli Occupation on the Palestinian Woman

Palestinian women have daily problems and responsibilities. Day after day, those daily concerns become integrated into the suffering of Palestinian women because of offensive Israeli measures such as firm closure policies, curfews, house demolitions, land seizures, razing of fields, hindrance of education, and targeting of residential areas. These actions have intervened in all facets of civilian life in Palestine, under the same old excuse “security concerns”!

1. Besiegement and Movement Restrictions:

The Israeli occupation forces increased during recent years the movement restrictions on Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. One could truly say





The sweeping restrictions on the movement of Palestinians are disproportionate and discriminatory - they are imposed on all Palestinians because they are Palestinians, and not on Israeli settlers who live illegally in the Occupied Territories. Even though the Israeli authorities claim that such measures are always imposed to protect the security of Israelis, the restrictions imposed within the Occupied Territories do not target particular individuals who are believed to pose a threat. They are broad and indiscriminate in their application and as such are unlawful. They have a severe negative impact on the lives of millions of Palestinians who have not committed any offence.

- Amnesty International, Israel: Conflict, Occupation and Patriarchy: Women Carry the Burden, MDE 15/016/2005, 30/3/2005.

that Palestine became a big nationwide jail. Israel was not satisfied by setting up more than 560 checkpoints in the WB and closing the major crossing points to GS semi-permanently, and imposing curfews, closure and permits. It resumed building the Separation Wall even after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion stating that it was contrary to international law; Israeli authorities kept working on building this everlasting violation of Palestinian human rights.

The Israeli closure system infringes on many rights in addition to the right of freedom of movement. It contravenes many basic human rights such as the right to work, the right to receive medical care, and pursue education.

The Israeli policy of movement restrictions (checkpoints, the Separation Wall, and the permit system), was identified in the report prepared by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) as a major cause of poverty and humanitarian disasters in Occupied Palestinian Territories.³⁸ In addition, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights reported in May 2003 that it is:



gravely concerned about the deplorable living conditions of the Palestinians in the occupied territories, who -as a result of the continuing occupation and subsequent measures of closures, extended curfews, roadblocks and security checkpoints- suffer from impingement of their enjoyment of economic, social, and cultural rights... and in particular access to work, land, water, or health care, education and food.³⁹

It is noteworthy that the percentage of women who died at Israeli checkpoints between the beginning of *al-Aqsa Intifadah* and 28/2/2005 reached 18.1% of the total count of women killed during that period.⁴⁰

The special UN Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the 1967 occupied Palestinian territories noted that the occupation and the wall violate women's rights, and that Palestinian women are routinely harassed and intimidated at the gates and checkpoints, as well as being humiliated in front of their families or being subjected to sexual violence by both settlers and soldiers.⁴¹ These degrading procedures have forced many girls and women to stop their work or education because many families do not want their girls to get exposed to such assault at checkpoints or on the street.⁴²





An Israeli soldier forcing a Palestinian woman to go in a specific direction at an Israeli checkpoint near the city of Nablus.

► Photo by 'Ala' Badarneh, 2/9/2003.

A Palestinian woman holding her identification papers, showing them to an Israeli soldier and hopelessly asking him to let her pass at a checkpoint in Hebron in the West Bank.

► AFP, 12/10/2004.





2. Family:

A woman plays a major and effective role within the family, for she is the mother, the nurturer and the main guardian of household affairs. Moreover, she is the source of care and tenderness for her husband and children and their emotional refuge. That's why unconsciously, she finds herself responsible for any shortcoming within the family or for any trouble that afflicts any of its members. She cannot help but overburden herself to overcome it. Hence, the suffering of the Palestinian woman, the mother and the house wife, has additional burdens with the occupation, on the domestic and family levels. These will be discussed here under the following titles:

- The dispersion of families.
- The demolition of houses and razing of land and fields.

a. The Dispersion of Families:

The occupation's practices and its policy in permanent closure have inflicted hardship on Palestinian families and scattered them. Thus, if one of the parents has to travel, then he must reconsider the matter several times, because the policy of opening and closing crossings depends on the mood of Israeli authorities, in addition to the fact that family re-unification permit requests are not usually approved.

In this context, the suffering of the people of GS is at its peak where the only path of Gazans to the outside world is Rafah border crossing, which was closed almost throughout the whole of several recent years by orders of Israeli authorities. The closure of the border crossing prevents the passage of more than one and a half million Palestinians, who live in GS, back and forth. Such policies impose restriction on the





Palestinian women's travel especially for those who have kids, where the woman would not be able to meet her family or relatives if she does not live near by them, or it would take her months waiting at the border crossing for the gate to open which would cost her lots of money, and taking into consideration the high poverty and un-employment rates, due once again to Israeli practices.

In this context too, the suffering of Palestinians in Israel and East of Jerusalem is significant, after the Israeli Knesset issued in July 2003 a new law which bans the reunification of families of Israeli citizens who are married to Palestinian spouses/ husbands (i.e. from the WB or GS).⁴³ The proclaimed law merely legalizes what Israeli authorities were already executing officially since 2002, and had unofficially performed long before that, according to a report by the Amnesty International.⁴⁴ The law resulted in banning the unification of thousands of families with the case above.⁴⁵

The family of Nazmiyah Safadi is one of such families. Nazmiyah is 31 years of age and comes from Old Jerusalem. She first met her husband, Ibrahim, during her visit to Gaza city, and they got married in 2001. Two months after her marriage in GS, Nazmiyyah went to visit her family back in Jerusalem, and her suffering started when the Israeli authorities banned her from re-entering GS for five months. Later, when Nazmiyah was pregnant with her first baby, she had some health problems and had to go back to Jerusalem for treatment. Again she was interrogated and humiliated by Israeli intelligence agents. She stayed at her parents till her baby's birth, then returned to her husband in Gaza. In another two months, Nazmiyah went to visit her parents and



A group of Palestinian women demonstrate at one of the gates of the Separation Wall on Qalandya crossing which leads to Jerusalem near Ramallah in the West Bank, on the occasion of “International Women’s Day”.

➤ AFP, 8/3/2007.



Samira, from Nablus, has been married for three years to a resident of East Jerusalem but has not been able to obtain a family reunification permit and has been living with her husband in Jerusalem illegally: “I used to work as a teacher but since I got married I have not been able to work because I don’t have a permit. I can’t go anywhere and can’t do anything. Often I am too afraid to even leave the house because I am afraid that if I come across a police patrol and they ask for my papers they will arrest and expel me. I can’t visit my parents at all because they are in Nablus and I cannot go in and out of Jerusalem and they cannot visit me because they have no permit either. I am very happy with my husband but I miss my family and I miss working and I am lonely; and I wonder if I will have to live like this for the rest of my life.”?

➤ Amnesty International, Israel: Conflict, Occupation and Patriarchy: Women Carry the Burden, MDE 15/016/2005, 30/3/2005.





the same problem recurred: “for a year and 3 months Israeli Intelligence has prevented me from going back to Gaza. Whenever I go out, I cannot return unless I renew my residency, which requires waiting a whole day at Beit Hanun military checkpoint.” Nazmiyah first child, Mansur (5 years old) has not seen his father for a year and a half, while the second child, Muhammad, who is almost one year old, does not know his father yet. Israeli soldiers claim that banning Nazmiyah’s passage is for “security” purposes. Moreover, the Israeli Ministry of Interior refused to registrate her baby Muhammad on her identity card, with the pretext that the family’s record is in GS. Nazmiyah finds that her family is scattered. She feels as a prisoner in her own country because she cannot contact her husband or live with him like other families.⁴⁶

Nazmiyah preferred suffering continuous traveling, waiting, and Israeli mis-treatment, with the probability of facing problems and delays on her way back to her husband for the sake of seeing her parents. Other women, with similar marriages, chose to stay with their husband and children, but in doing so, they deprived themselves from seeing their parents. Among them is Su’ad, who is from Jenin, and lives in Gaza with her husband and 3 years old kid. Su’ad was not able to visit her family for four long years.⁴⁷

On the other hand there are Palestinian women who are married to men from Israel or Jerusalem. These are not allowed to be “reunified” with their families, so their only choice is to live “illegally” with their husbands, which forces them to stay house prisoners all their time in order to avoid being arrested or sent away to their original place of residence in the WB or GS without their husbands and children.⁴⁸



Social studies report that some families suffer from cases where the husband is unemployed or unable to provide money for his family. In such cases, a new social problem looms and both mother and father become under much pressure. This predicament is also reflected by violence occurring within the family and the society.⁴⁹ The Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling has reported that increasing movement restrictions on men forced many women to go out of "their protected domestic cocoons" to seek employment while their husbands stay at home. "This sudden and involuntary reversal of gender roles disturbs the stability of intra-family relationships, and puts women in a perilous position." Many men resort to violent means to assert their control over the family, feeling insecure about their status in the family, and frustrated by feelings of helplessness and powerlessness.⁵⁰ On the other hand, several women also try to impose their control on the family when they are the ones providing money, without sympathizing with the exceptional circumstances of their husbands, which might in turn lead to other social problems.

b. The Demolition of Houses and the Razing of Land and Fields:

"Home" has always been the major property of the Palestinian woman, it is her "tiny kingdom," for which she overcomes all her hardships. That is why continuous house demolitions, as a collective Israeli punishment to Palestinians, have drastic negative influence on Palestinian women.

Usually, Israeli authorities destroy houses without prior notice, and often at night, giving the house residents only a few minutes to evacuate it. There have been cases of women getting injured during leaving their homes, and other cases of women getting their homes demolished over their heads, certainly killing them.⁵¹





A group of Palestinian women mourn the ten year old Noran Deib in Rafah refugee camp, South of Gaza Strip. Noran was killed when the Israeli bullets targetted her school playground.

► Reuters, 31/1/2005.

A Palestinian woman tries to save her young child from Israeli arrest in the city of al-Khalil in the West Bank.

► Reuters, 8/3/2006.





Manal 'Awad is a Palestinian social worker who provides counseling and rehabilitation for women facing difficulties. Manal's home was demolished by the occupation authorities in the third week of May 2004, in the largest operation of house demolitions committed by the Israeli army in Rafah in southern GS; during which 200 houses were demolished in three days, as well as 200 other heavily damaged houses that became no longer fit for residence. Manal tells the story of her home being demolished:

That morning I was working in Gaza city and my 65 years old mother was home with my sister and my 85 years old aunt who lives with us too. My mother called and told me that they could not leave the house "because an Israeli bulldozer is parking right in front of the house which makes leaving thru the front door very risky." Then the bulldozer started destroying the house... finally one of the neighbors made a hole in the rear wall of the house and my mom and sister got out; my aunt was not able to go out so they had to pull her. It was a horrible encounter.⁵²

Following the launch of *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, Israel house demolitions, especially because it needed to expropriate more lands for building the Separation Wall. The UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing has repeated on several occasions the disproportionate effects of house demolitions on women, children and the elderly, and they increased the psychological and economic burden on Palestinian women who remained primarily responsible for running households and caring for family members.⁵³

The PCBS reported that 29,314 families lived in partially or completely destroyed houses between 28/9/2000 and 15/6/2006, distributed as 15,267 families in the WB and 14,047 families in GS.⁵⁴





Many families, having their houses demolished, find themselves forced to move in with some relatives because of poverty and low living standards. Since women spend most of their time inside the house, then they are the most affected. Consequently, they are annoyed and suffer from their loss of privacy in addition to daily life matters.

What exacerbates the crisis of demolition is the present situation of increasing and widespread poverty, unemployment and high commodity and construction prices, which is also due to Israeli siege and closures. The PCBS notes that out of 454,697 families in occupied territories who need to build new residence units in the next ten years, only 117,909 families will be able to afford it.⁵⁵

Regarding the issue of lands being expropriated and fields being bulldozed, it is evident for Palestinian women who live on agriculture to suffer psychologically in addition to the fact that their family has lost their livelihood. Maha Abu Diyyeh Shammas, from Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling in Palestine talked about the relationship between the Palestinian woman and the land describing it as a relationship greater than love, attachment, and life; the land and the trees are the past, the roots and the identity.⁵⁶

In addition to bulldozing fields, Israeli authorities prevent thousands of Palestinians from reaching their lands and crops, especially after the construction of the Separation Wall. Although the Israeli government had claimed that the wall would not inflict problems upon land ownership or on the access of citizens to their workplaces, more than 230 square kilometers of the most fertile lands of the WB have been expropriated, which represents around 15% of total agricultural lands of the WB area, in order to construct the wall.⁵⁷



Moreover, the construction of the wall has cut off 95% of the water resources, forcing more than seven thousand Palestinian families to avert from agriculture.⁵⁸

The International Labor Office pointed out that Israeli restrictions on Palestinian agriculture have particular harm to women because they make up the majority of agriculture workers.⁵⁹ Zahirah Murshid (72 years old) used to work in her land, which was isolated by the Separation Wall. All her plants and trees were razed upon administrative orders “justified” by the closeness of the field to the house of Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz. Zahirah felt that her whole life was damaged, she said helplessly:

The army built a fence around my land and disabled me from taking care of it and now they want to cut my trees and my livelihood. At first, they said I need a permit to enter my land, which is not easy to obtain, and requires me to go to Kedumim settlement which is very risky. And even if I succeed in getting a permit, it will be only for me personally. I cannot take care of the land on my own, it is a tough work which needs several workers, but no one else can obtain the permit, that’s why I couldn’t take care of my land, and my trees are withering. Now I have to work in picking up olives in other people’s fields. I am an old woman, I do no harm to the Israeli Defense Minister, on the contrary to the Israelis who harmed me severely, they destroyed my life.⁶⁰

3. Health:

The physical health of the Palestinian woman has been affected drastically by Israeli practices. Inflictions on the health of Palestinian women can be categorized under two titles; the first is general, it includes the lack of medical centers and adequate health care, and





So'ad 'Arar, a lady from Beit Forik near Nablus, cries over the wreckage of her family's home which was bulldozed by the Israeli army and hugs the photo of her brother who was killed by the Israelis too.

► Photo by 'Ala' Badarneh, 7/7/2004.

A Palestinian woman looks for any belongings -or what left of them- in the wreckage of her destroyed home in Khan Yunis Refugee camp, South of Gaza Strip on 25/9/2004. The IDF demolished more than 35 Palestinian homes in the context of the Jewish state's "preparations" for the Yum Kippur celebrations.

► AFP, 19/1/2005.





the inability of Palestinian women to reach them, it includes also the physical implications of poverty and over-working and the psychological implications of the Israeli practices such as siege, searches, and frequent harassment of Palestinian women. The second title is specifically concerned with the Palestinian pregnant women and subsequent maternal health, and the process of giving birth and the neonatal health.

The UN Secretary General announced in his 2006 report “Assistance to the Palestinian People,” that the continued closure within and between the territories severely challenged the Palestinian health system’s ability to function at appropriate levels.⁶¹ Moreover, the current financial crisis, which followed the harsh responses to Hamas parliamentary victory, threatened to undermine the delivery of health services that served the majority of Palestinian population, including women.⁶²

Palestinians who need a certain kinds of treatment are forced to go to Egypt, Jordan, Israel, or foreign countries. Most of those cases are Gazan people who have cancer, particularly women with breast cancer.

Breast cancer is the second most common cause of death among Palestinian women, even though the prevalence rate is much lower among Arab women than Western women; but the rate of cancer among Palestinian women is dramatically on the rise. Estimates suggest that seven out of ten Palestinian women with breast cancer will die. The Palestinian Health Ministry reports that 60% of women diagnosed with breast cancer in GS were diagnosed after the disease had already spread to other parts of the body: 42.2% showed that cancer had spread to the lymph nodes at the time of diagnosis, and in 17% of cases the cancer had reached other areas of the body.⁶³





Olive Trees: Blessed and Named upon Grandchildren

Age has marked the warm features of her face, and time has burdened her memory with much pain, but the bitterness of losing the land and olive trees far exceeded her feeling of being also detained behind the wall, to take in a more severe form. The grandmother said dejectedly, "Even after confiscating the land and building the Separation Wall, we would get permits to pass to our land, for the past two years to harvest the olives. But this did not appeal to them," referring to the settlers of Beit Arie, a settlement built on the lands of her village.

"Seven months ago we woke up to a huge cloud of smoke in our sky, they had burned the land with the trees and the plants, and burned my heart with it." The old woman continued, "I can just recall that I was there, I don't know how I reached the land, I tried to extinguish the fire with my clothes and scarf, a shred of my soul was leaving with every burning stem. I grew old with these olives, I took good care of them as my children and more."

Her glittering eyes unveiled tears resisted by the proud grandmother, moaned a sigh while her body language spoke in rage when words failed her. She had owned lands, then turned suddenly into a burden on her grandchildren, who are unemployed since the hard economic situation prevailed due to the construction of the Apartheid Wall.

The new living circumstances forced the grandmother to build a new world for her and her thirteen grandchildren who are not familiar with olive trees. "I planted thirteen olive trees around this house, and I named them after my grandchildren, and this year was the first year they produce olives ... they should know the value of our olives," says the grandmother, with an insipid smile on her face.





Mahfouza 'Oudeh, from Salem village, embracing an olive tree after Israeli settlers cut olive fields, which is not something new to them; olive trees are a source of living for many families of that village.

► photo by 'Ala' Badarneh, 27/11/2005.



Looking at the reasons behind the high rate of death among infected women, observers note the scarcity of mammography machines. In GS, for example, there are only 3 mammography machines per 1.4 million persons: The mammogram costs \$30 which is quite expensive with the spread of the poverty in GS, where 80% of the families are below the national poverty line.⁶⁴ Even when a woman is diagnosed with cancer, she cannot find treatment in her country, and leaving GS is hard on Gazan people because it requires an Israeli permit which is often not given; The Israeli closure regime does not take into consideration its effects on the sick, women and children, or for the life or death of patients.⁶⁵

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and the International Labor Organization (ILO) report that Israeli closure measures are a major obstacle to the Palestinians from reaching medical services. A poll showed that the main obstacle for 52.5% of families is Israeli closure measures, while for 53.6% of the families it is Israeli military checkpoints and for 16% of the families in the WB it is the Separation Wall. These obstacles hinder Palestinian families from health services.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) notes that the problem was more acute in rural areas, especially for those women who lived in villages cut off by checkpoints from the cities where the hospitals were located.⁶⁷ These obstacles also hinder the arrival of ambulances and medical staff to patients with emergency cases such as deliveries.

Most of the time, the Israeli occupation army does not allow Palestinian ambulances to pass; thus detoured and more delay occurs. Sometimes Palestinian patients have to change ambulances en route across the Israeli checkpoints on their way to the hospital.⁶⁸



It was 25 February 2002, not long after midnight, I started having contractions. I woke up Muhammad, my husband, and we went to his parents' house to call an ambulance. We couldn't get through, so my husband took his brother's car and we set off for the hospital in Nablus. My father-in-law came with us. We arrived at Huwara checkpoint at the entrance of Nablus after about 15 minutes and there we were stopped by Israeli soldiers. Muhammad was ordered out of the car and they checked his papers. Then my father-in-law and I had to step out as well and show our papers. Then the car was thoroughly searched. We told the soldiers I had to go to hospital to give birth as soon as possible, that I was in severe pain. They first refused, then told me to uncover my belly, so they could see I was telling the truth. After all this, which lasted about an hour, we were told to go ahead. We drove on and after a few hundreds of meters I heard shots. There was heavy gunfire coming from the front of the car. The car stopped, and I saw that my husband was hit and was lying on the steering wheel; he had been shot in the throat and upper body, and was bleeding heavily. My father-in-law, who was sitting in the front passenger seat, was hit in the upper body as well. I crouched on the floor at the rear of the car, and held the bag with baby clothes on my head for protection. I was injured in my shoulder by shrapnel and glass from the shattered window. The gunfire lasted about 5 minutes and after that, it was silent. I spoke to my husband and father-in-law, but neither answered. I realised the situation was serious and I was afraid and the contractions were faster and more painful. I was crying and started to scream. Soldiers came and pulled me out of the car. They made me take off all my clothes to examine me. Then they left me on the ground, bleeding from the wounds and in labour. I asked for something to cover myself with but they didn't give me anything. To this day, I feel shame and anger about this. They also examined my husband and father-in-law, and said they would have to bring him to a hospital in Israel. Then they called a Nablus ambulance for me.

After a while the ambulance came and took me and my father-in-law. When I reached Rafidiya hospital in Nablus, I gave birth in the elevator to a girl. I called her Fida; she is my first and only child. My mother, who happened to be in the hospital because my sister gave birth that same night, told me that my husband had died; my father-in-law, who was 66, was severely wounded; he had bullets in his lungs and remained in a coma for 40 days. After that, I went and lived with my daughter at my mother's house. I have not returned to my husband's family as they blame me for the death of their son.

► The story of Maysoon Saleh Nayef al-Hayek (23 years old) as she narrated it in.





The policy of movement restriction has had particular inflictions on pregnant Palestinian women, especially when they want to give birth. Many women had to give birth at military checkpoints where no adequate hygienic or medical care is available for the mother and her newly born baby. The UN Commission on Human Rights prepared a report about this issue, titled “The Issue of Palestinian Pregnant Women Giving Birth at Israeli Checkpoints” in 23/2/2007. The report notes that 69 cases of Palestinian pregnant women giving birth at Israeli checkpoints were reported between 2000 and 2006 according to Information Health Center of the Palestinian Ministry of Health.⁶⁹

Among the above reported cases, 35 newborn babies had died at checkpoints as their mothers did not receive the urgent care required by their condition and five cases of women who died while giving birth at Israeli checkpoints. Moreover, six cases were reported in which pregnant Palestinian women had been injured at checkpoints as a result of beating, shooting, and use of toxic gas by Israeli soldiers.⁷⁰

In the same vein, the report says that 10% of pregnant women who wished to give birth in a hospital had been delayed on the road between two to four hours before reaching health facilities, while 6% of them had spent more than four hours for the same journey. Before *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, the average time to reach health facilities was 15 to 30 minutes. The fear of such hardships led a significant number of Palestinian pregnant women to choose to give birth at home (with an increase by 8.2% of home deliveries).⁷¹

This problem is aggravated in rural areas and villages, where it takes Palestinian pregnant women long hours to reach medical centers, and



they cannot cross checkpoints during the night, especially in villages of the WB which are isolated by the Separation Wall. The village of ‘Azzun ‘Atmah next to Qalqilya is surrounded by the wall from three sides and the fourth is near the green line, where there are Israeli settlements. The only exit for villagers is an iron gate controlled by the occupation army, it is opened from 6:30 a.m. till 6:00 p.m. Pregnant women sometimes have to stay at others’ houses at night to be on the other side of the wall as their due date approaches, then they have to rush back to the village with all necessary documents to include their babies’ names in their village’s records of Israeli authorities before the baby is 48 hours old, otherwise the child will not be allowed to enter the village forever. This policy has impelled many women to avoid becoming pregnant again.⁷²

One of the heart-rending stories that occurred at the checkpoints, is what happened to Ruwayda Naji al-Rashid who conceived her baby after a long journey of infertility treatment. Ruwayda is from the village of Walja in Beit Lahm. Going out of the village requires passing across a military checkpoint. She was seven months pregnant when she felt symptoms of labor, but the soldiers at the checkpoint at the entrance of the village did not allow her husband to drive her to the hospital. She tried with her husband to re-cross the checkpoint after 20 minutes but in vain, so the only way to go to the hospital was to drive for an additional hour and a half along a bumpy and corrugated sandy road. Ruwayda gave birth to a premature baby on the road, weighing 1.416 kg, who is considered to have had a chance of living if proper medical care had been available. When they reached the hospital, the baby was in such a poor condition and had a low body temperature that although doctors tried to save him, they failed, and he died one hour later.⁷³





Another tragic event was the death of the twin baby girls of Lamis Qasim (25 years old), who had to give birth in the ambulance due to a delay of more than one hour at an Israeli checkpoint.⁷⁴

Rula Ishtaya suffered even more than Lamis. Rula was eight months pregnant when she felt labor symptoms at five o'clock in the morning. She wakened her husband Daoud, took the suitcase they had prepared for the hospital earlier and headed to Rafidiah Hospital in Nablus. That drive usually takes less than 15 minutes. Daoud phoned the Red Crescent to send an ambulance, but they informed him that it was impossible to enter the village because of Israeli checkpoints and that they would meet them at the Beit Furik checkpoint, to where they could walk. Finally Rula and Daoud arrived at the checkpoint but the soldiers did not allow them to pass and the ambulance was stopped by Israeli soldiers at another checkpoint; By then, Rula's contractions were getting stronger and that the birth was imminent. She had to crawl toward a nearby rock to hide behind it and gave birth by herself, yelling and screaming loudly, heartbreaking yet helpless. All that time, Daoud was begging the Israeli soldiers to let them pass, explaining that his wife had just delivered her baby, but the soldiers did not listen to him and to Rula's cries. Minutes later Rula screamed again, but this time she was yelling, "The girl died... The girl died"; only then, Israeli soldiers allowed Daoud to call a taxi to convey them to the hospital. It was too late to save the baby; she was born at the checkpoint and died there. They had wanted to call her "Mira", but her name was never used, save only on her little grave.⁷⁵



Muhammad al-Astal, from the city of Khan Yunis, tells what happened to his wife Mona, who felt labor symptoms when she was stuck with him at Rafah border. He called an ambulance to take them to Rafah Hospital but the baby was born before reaching the hospital, so they called him “Ma‘bar” (which means border crossing in Arabic) as a protest against the Palestinian suffering at border crossings.⁷⁶

The aforementioned stories are just few examples of the innumerable cases of the suffering of Palestinian women. Pregnancy has become a state of apprehension as they feared a probable death instead of its being a source of joy in anticipation of the birth of a new baby.

The Palestinian Ministry of Health reports that the lack of adequate medical care during pregnancy is the third highest cause of death among Palestinian women of child-bearing age.⁷⁷ Both primary and secondary services have declined, especially as the large majority of delivery and newborn services (80% of the deliveries in six Health Ministry hospitals in GS and the WB), are unable to perform regular maintenance. Pregnant women with post-natal complications may also be at greater risk when discharged too early from hospital owing to lack of staff and space.⁷⁸

In this context, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) says in its 2006 humanitarian report that there is a shortage in basic equipment for treatment of the pre-natal and maternal health of women in Palestinian territories.⁷⁹ The UNICEF notes in a later report that the 41% mortality rate of neo-natal was due to premature birth and inadequate maternal health services and the quality of health services offered to women in their post-natal period and to the newly born.⁸⁰ This rate rose to 46% in GS,⁸¹ which suffers more because of the siege and





the resultant food deficiency. The Women's Health and Development Department of the Palestinian Ministry of Health indicates in its annual report that the percentage of women who are anemic during pregnancy in GS is about 69% of women included in the "Home Visits" program of the UN Fund.⁸² Meanwhile, one third of Palestinian women at child bearing age in refugee countries suffer from anemia due to iron deficiency.⁸³

In addition to health problems and malnutrition, Palestinian women in general, and particularly pregnant women, nursing mothers and breastfed babies, suffer from the deterioration of environment and utility services especially of water supply which is scarce and polluted in Occupied Palestinian Territories. Israeli measures, water seizures and settlements' waste-debris have played the major part in these problems.

Moreover, Palestinian women live under psychological pressure and stress. As a consequence of the aggravated crises due to the Israeli Occupation, many women and families live with the feeling of permanent lack of security due to the absence of major life necessities, serious economic deterioration, movement restrictions, isolation and escalation of violence.⁸⁴

A report issued by the PCBS in 2001 said that more than half the women surveyed have passed through periods of hysteric crying, and one third of the surveyed women are obsessed about death; 46% of women said they felt helpless and depressed, and 29% said they felt angry and had encountered a nervous breakdown.⁸⁵ Several reports indicated that such severe conditions, especially extreme poverty, force most Palestinian women to ignore their personal health and focus on their children and other family members.⁸⁶



*When 5-minute-journey turned into half an hour
“If you had got here 20 minutes earlier”!*

Malake Kafishe lives in Hebron’s Old City, and she was seven months pregnant last November when the Israeli military attacked. “There was shooting, and then I heard the helicopter gunships coming in and my heart just stopped,” she said. She began to bleed and then collapsed at the doorstep. Her family called an ambulance, but because of a curfew imposed on the 40,000 Palestinians in Hebron’s Old City, it took an hour for an ambulance to arrive. In place of paramedics, two Israeli soldiers insisted on examining Kafishe.

Before the ambulance could get her to a hospital, it had to pass four checkpoints. At each roadblock, soldiers swung open the vehicle doors and peered at the ashen-faced woman inside. By the time she reached the hospital, a journey that normally takes five minutes, one and a half hours had elapsed. The baby was dead. “The doctor told me: If you had got here 20 minutes earlier, you could have saved the baby,” Kafishe said.

- Phyllis Bennis, “Palestinian Women Suffer under Occupation,” Progressive Media Project, 8/3/2001.





4. Education:

Like other life aspects, education has been influenced by Israeli measures and closures; educational institutions and schools have recursively been targeted by Israeli raids or transformed into limited detention centers. Military checkpoints and barriers have particular negative effect on women and girls. Many families find themselves forced to keep their daughters at home to avoid them suffering recurring humiliation and long waiting hours at Israeli checkpoints, other females had to quit learning before graduation in order to help their families financially in view of increased unemployment and poverty rates.

Recent studies report that the completion of the Apartheid Wall in the WB is expected to impinge on 170 thousand students in 320 schools, half of whom are females.⁸⁷

In this context, the Amnesty International mentioned in a report two reasons which make the above situation harder on females than male students. The first reason is the economic deterioration and increase in poverty rate forcing families who cannot afford providing college education to their children to prioritize their sons since these are expected to be able to support a family when they marry. The second reason is that some families, especially in rural or more conservative areas are unwilling to allow their daughters to live away from home or to be exposed to the potential dangers of daily commuting to and from university, such as being stranded at a closed checkpoint and unable to return home at night, a fairly frequent occurrence for thousands of Palestinians.⁸⁸



Other than going to school, i.e. when they can, young Palestinian girls had few opportunities for development, recreation and participation, very few safe spaces exist for young girls to congregate, and even these suffer from lack of necessary funding and are poorly equipped and managed. Meanwhile, some families have no choice but to pressure their daughters to marry at an early age because of poverty and living expenses.⁸⁹

Despite all these difficulties, the rates of learning and school attendance are growing, which proves the strong will of Palestinian females and give their credence to education. The percentage of illiterate women (15 years and above) in the WB and GS decreased from 15.9% in 2000 to 10.2% in 2006. Although it is higher than illiteracy rate among males,⁹⁰ it remains lower than its parallel rate in Palestinian refugee communities, which was estimated at 24.4% in Jordan's camps in the year 2000,⁹¹ 20.7% in Syria in 2006, and 29.5% in Lebanon in 2006 as well.⁹² Meanwhile, female student enrollment at the elementary and secondary school levels remained high in the WB and GS (90% and 81.6% in 2006 and 2007 respectively).⁹³ This percentage is particularly greater than the level of female student enrollment among Palestinians in refugee hosting countries, which was estimated at 68% in Jordan in 2000 (for females aged 6-24 years), 66.5% in Syria in 2006 (for females aged 7-24 years), and 59.3% in Lebanon in 2006 (for females aged 7-17 years).⁹⁴

5. Labor:

The PCBS indicated that 14.5% of the labor force in Palestinian territories were females in the year 2006, while the rate of unemployment among females was 24.2%.⁹⁵





The percentages vary in refugee hosting countries. The percentage of female labor in Jordan was 12.9% in 2000 which was the lowest among various Palestinian communities, and the rate of unemployment was the highest, estimated by 23.2%. The same percentages were around 18% and 18.3% respectively in Syria in the same year, and around 16.8% and 18.4% respectively in Lebanon in 1999.⁹⁶



Israeli soldiers stop an ambulance at a military checkpoint in the city of Hebron (al-Khalil) in the West Bank and order the woman inside to step out.

► AFP, 12/3/2007.

It is true that female employment rates have historically been low in general, yet they have declined even further due to Israeli Occupation according to a report by the International Labor Organization (ILO) on the situation of workers in occupied Arab territories.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, Palestinian women have traditionally worked unpaid in agriculture or running the household. The ILO report notes that Israeli restrictions on the labor market in the WB and GS have placed a greater economic and psychological burden on Palestinian women, especially on those



who work illegally or freelance, because of soaring poverty rates and unemployment, consequently Palestinian families became in dire need of any additional income.⁹⁸

Palestinian women who are forced to work due to poverty and need are more vulnerable to gender wage gap, according to several studies like the World Bank's "Poverty Report in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip" and human development reports. A report by the ILO stressed that Israeli measures have tended to reinforce discrimination both directly and indirectly.⁹⁹

The ILO also reported that working patterns of women and men were highly differentiated in the occupied territories. More women than men were studying. However, only one woman in ten of working age was employed. With regard to wages, the hourly wages of women were above those of men in agriculture and in services, but below those of men in manufacturing and in commerce, hotels and restaurants.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, the amount of pay does not always reflect working conditions of women; many women, for instance, work too much overtime without getting paid.

Although education levels are approximately similar between males and females, employment opportunities were limited for women. Females accounted for 31.2% of lawyers, 21.4% of journalists, and 11.7% of doctors, and are heavily concentrated in agriculture and services.¹⁰¹ Nearly 90% of unpaid female family members are engaged in agriculture work,¹⁰² and those are more affected by Israeli measures concerning land expropriation and field bulldozing.





A Palestinian student defies an Israeli soldier during a demonstration at an Israeli checkpoint in the city of al-Khalil in the West Bank.

► Reuters, 5/12/2005.

A Palestinian graduating college student holds her certificate with her left arm and her sleeping baby with her right during the graduation ceremony at al Najah National University in the city of Nablus in the West Bank.

► photo by 'Ala' Badarneh, 9/6/2007.





In Israel, Palestinian female participation in the labor force was 20.2%, which was the highest among various Palestinian communities, while the female unemployment rate was 16.9% which was the lowest among Palestinian communities in the year 2006,¹⁰³ this unemployment rate, however, is relatively high compared to female unemployment rate in Israel which is around 9%.¹⁰⁴ This fact reflects the policy of discrimination against Arab women who work in Israel, knowing that 51% make minimum wage or less.¹⁰⁵

It is noteworthy that women who work in Israel are usually those who are obliged to work for their living. In most cases they are divorced, widowed or have ill husbands. The majority of these workers are from refugee camps and to a less extent from villages. This is how a Palestinian female student tells the story of her working mother in Israeli settlements as the Amnesty international reports it:

Most of the times, my father can't find a job here... currently my mother works in the fields in an Israeli settlement. We, family members, have to keep this secret, because working in Israeli settlements makes people in our society see you as a traitor or a collaborator and so it is risky. For us, it is also shameful as well. We owned a land in the past, but the Israelis bulldozed it a few years ago and destroyed our home. We have nothing left. My mother has to work for the Israelis who destroyed everything we had... my dad can't find a job, he is stuck at home, which makes him very miserable and depressed, and causes tension at home... It is very difficult, all the time there are attacks and military operations, we are always worried about mom, and I think she is worried too even if she doesn't say that.¹⁰⁶





Chapter 5: The Palestinian Woman as a Relative of the Killed, Detained, or the Pursued

It is evident that Israeli offences on the father, brother, husband, and son has destructive repercussions on the mother, sister, wife, and daughter. The Israeli Occupation practices of killing, arresting and pursuing becomes harder on both; the victim and his wife, daughter, or mother as it becomes a systematic measure and targets relatives especially female ones.

UN and Human rights organizations report that Israel has the policy of threatening, arresting or demolishing houses of female relatives of Palestinian fighters to force them to turn themselves in, or to make certain confessions.¹⁰⁷ The BBC published on 13/4/2008 a report on Israeli methods of psychological torture of the prisoners to force them to make confessions that are often false.





The report includes the story of Jerusalemite student Ghaith Nasr (18 years old) who was arrested four times and ordered to confess things he knew nothing about, Ghaith says: “When I saw my mom locked up in the cell... what could I say? I was ready to tell them anything they wanted just to leave her alone.” His mother said that the Israeli police told her and her husband that they will take them to see their son Ghaith, so they accompanied them; they did not realize they will be arrested until they arrived, and the mother was used to force her son to talk.¹⁰⁸

However, official Israeli sources have denied using such ways despite the fact that the prisoners and human rights organizations such as the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI) confirmed it. PCATI included in its report six stories told personally where psychological pressure was used against detainees through their female relatives: according to the BBC, all these six stories are far more serious than that of Ghaith’s story.¹⁰⁹

A sample of these stories is the detention of ‘Abir Khalid Mansur, the wife of Walid al-‘Obaidi, a commander in al-Quds Brigades, who was assassinated in 16/1/2008,¹¹⁰ the wife of the prisoner Wael Hasan ‘Awad who was arrested while pregnant,¹¹¹ and Asmaa’ Muhammad Abu al-Heija, the wife of the prisoner Jamal Abu al-Heija, who was arrested in order to force him into exile in Jordan in exchange for her release, but he rejected .¹¹²

Israeli policy of targetting female relatives of detainees, killed or wanted Palestinians includes arrest or arrest threat, and home demolition. The tragedy of ‘Um Mansur Shreim is a typical story of the suffering



of the Palestinian mother and wife. 'Um Mansur has three sons in detention: Mansur, Muhammad, and Muhannad, who is sentenced to 29 life sentences and 20 additional years.¹¹³ In addition to arresting her children, 'Um Mansur's husband was killed at an Israeli checkpoint on his way back from his first and last visit to his son Muhannad in prison. The father was killed by a heart attack on his way back, and Israeli soldiers delayed his ambulance. He had been waiting to make that visit since his son's arrest three years earlier, and he had a cardiac arrest several months before the visit when he was told that there is no visit permit available at that time.¹¹⁴ Moreover, the home of 'Um Mansur was demolished three months after Muhannad's arrest. Their home was not the only one destroyed, Israeli bulldozers demolished the whole four story building leaving the mother with her husband and daughters with no shelter.¹¹⁵ Home demolition is one among other measures adopted in policy by the occupation against Palestinians fighters of the resistance or "wanted ones", as a means of forcing them to turn themselves in.

Another Palestinian woman, the mother of 'Ala' Sanaqra of *al-Aqsa* Brigades in Nablus, had her home demolished as well. The house was blown up the dawn of 23/9/2004 leaving 'Ala's mother and her 10 family members homeless. The mother did not blame 'Ala' at any moment; rather she said:

Prior to destroying the house, the Israeli occupation army and the Israel Security Agency-Shabak used to break into our home and threaten us that they will demolish the house if 'Ala' does not turn himself in... I never thought of making him turn himself in for the sake of the house... this is the price we, Palestinian people, should pay. I appreciate my son and his life sacrifice. The house is not important, what's important is that our sons stay well and resume fighting the occupation.¹¹⁶





Photos Tell the Story

The mother of 'Imad 'Akoubeh, an activist in Fatah affiliated to al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, faces an Israeli jeep during an Israeli incursion into Nablus city in the West Bank on 28/5/2004. The second picture shows the Israeli soldiers arresting her with a Red Crescent member in the scene. The other three photos are of the arrest while an Israeli soldier points his rifle at the photographer to prevent him from taking photos.







Unfortunately, 'Um 'Ala's wish of her sons staying well did not last long: Ahmad, the brother of 'Ala', was assassinated by the occupation army at the break of 18/1/2008 dawn, leaving him in a pool of blood; his mother arrived to the scene of the assassination, she held her son's body and kissed him, then she fell unconscious.¹¹⁷

Another Palestinian mother, In'am Nazmi Karsuh, an employee in the Association of Mothers of Martyrs, was stuck with tens of Palestinians in the Egyptian city of al-'Arish, waiting for Rafah border to re-open so she could go back to her family in Beit Lahiah in GS. In'am was stuck there when she saw on the television that her son Hamza Karsuh (18 years old) was killed by occupation army. She was shocked and conveyed to the hospital since she was pregnant; there, she was told that her six month old fetus had also died.

The dead fetus was In'am's third lost child after Hamza and his brother Ayyoub who died 15 years earlier at the age of only three years. In'am was on her way back from 'Umra (minor pilgrimage) when she told her story, she said that Hamza had prepared all needed official documents to go with her to the 'Umra but he did not go for financial reasons. He got something more valuable: "martyrdom."¹¹⁸

As she puts it: Another heart-breaking story of Palestinian women is that of 'Um Nasir Abu Hamid. This woman has 10 sons. One of them, Abdul-Mun'im, was assassinated by the occupation army in al-Ram northern of Jerusalem, while seven of her other sons were in detention, prevented from parental visits for "security reasons"; these seven are Nasr, Nasir, Sharif, Muhammad, Basel, Islam and Jihad. Four of them have been sentenced to life imprisonment; this is not the end of her story, her house was demolished twice.¹¹⁹



It is significant how those Palestinian women, despite the severity of their hardships, are still ready to sacrifice and persistent in their struggle against the occupation. Their challenge is a sound and clear answer to Israeli policy showing that they cannot be used to stop their children and husbands from resisting; instead they are great examples of child rearing, patience and sacrifice.

As the Palestinian woman has always been man's companion in persistence and resistance, she has been also his partner under fire. For instance, the wife of Salah Shhadah, Laila, was killed with him and their 15 years old daughter In'am in a massacre by the occupation army, in which tens of Palestinians, mostly women and children, were killed. Three houses were completely destroyed and four others were heavily damaged. Another example is Islam Taha, the wife of Muhammad 'Ali Taha. She, the was pregnant, and their 18 months old daughter Khawla were with Muhammad in their car, when it was bombed by the Israeli occupation army and they all died.¹²⁰

But for the conclusion, we choose the story of 'Um Nidal Farhat, who became "Palestine's Khansa'" for her sacrifice (The Khansa' is a heroic figure from Islamic history). Three of her sons, Muhammad, Nidal, and Rawad, were killed



The mother of the Palestinian Naser Hajahjeh (16 years old) kisses his forehead before his funeral in city of Bethlehem in the West Bank. Hajahjeh was killed when the Israelis opened fire at a group of children throwing stones at them. Following their IDF incursion into the holy site of Qabr Raheil (Grave of Rachel) in the West Bank, which is banned for non-Jews despite its holiness in Islam as well as in Judaism.

► AFP, 3/4/2004.





Mariam Farhat ('Um Nidal), three children of whom were killed by Israelis. The photo was taken at her home in Gaza, where she was a candidate on the Hamas list for Legislative Council elections which ran late on January 2006. Farhat is currently a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council (2006-2010).

► Reuters, 8/12/2005.

by the Israeli army. Prior to Nidal's killing, he and two of his brothers, Husam and Wisam, were detained, and her son Mo'men was shot in his pelvic bone during clashes with Israeli soldiers in the Shoja'iyah neighborhood in Gaza city.

'Um Nidal presented the undefeatable image of a woman who sacrifices, and a marvelous image of motherhood. She considered herself the mother of all fighters. She sheltered in her house those fighters who are wanted by the Israeli forces. At the top of these was 'Imad 'Aqil who hid in her house and got killed there too, and she also appeared in the video tape kissing her son, a resister, goodbye forever, knowing that he would never return.

This mother sent a message to all the mothers of the world, who do not comprehend her emotions as she bestows her children; she explained her feelings saying:

We don't wish our children death, we like to live in peace, security, and stability, but if we have to do otherwise we do what our holy duty tells us to do for our country. We are not killing and destruction fans, but we want to free our country from this cruel occupation, live in our land securely and peacefully, save our children and live freely like all other nations.¹²¹



She wanted to tell the world that the brutal Israeli occupation and its horrible cruelty against Palestinians have forced her to sacrifice her own children for the sake of terminating that cruelty; for the sake of her country, and of her nation.





Chapter 6: The Political Participation of the Palestinian Woman

The Israeli occupation, and the British Mandate before it, has encompassed all aspects of Palestinian society, casting its shadow over the social and political realities. Indeed, women, who make up one half of the society, are inevitably influenced by these conditions; most of the time it's effects are worse on her and her psychological, financial and social status. The Palestinian woman finds herself obliged to stand by the man to face their fate jointly. She participates in demonstrations and marches, provides medical and nutritional aid to the injured, resists with arms, gets detained and sacrifices her life for the sake of her cause, country and nation; in addition to this, she is a devoted mother who raises her children and takes care of them. In this section, we view the historical participation of Palestinian women in politics under the Israeli Occupation.





1. Before 1948 Catastrophe (*al-Nakba*):

Amid the national conflict and resistance of the Palestinian people against British Mandate and Zionism, the Palestinian woman has always been the male's partner, as a wife, a daughter or a sister. She traded her jewelry for a rifle and contributed in supplying food, arms, supplies and information to fighters. Some women fought fiercely side by side with their men, others dressed in military outfits and received military training to resist, such as Fatima Ghazal who was killed in 'Azzun Battle and "Sisters of Qassam" of old Haifa, who fought strongly by their husbands.¹²²

The participation of Palestinian women in the national struggle started with the emergence of the Palestinian cause. First, they established charity organizations and indulged in social work, then they participated in political demonstrations and arenas. The first remarkable female political activity was in 'Afula in 1893, when women demonstrated against the construction of a new Jewish settlement. Then in 1929, nine women were killed by British bullets in al-Buraq Battle, which was a turning point for the Palestinian woman, it called upon the Palestinian woman to fight for her economic and political status. So, the first Palestinian women's conference was organized in Jerusalem, and the executive committee of The Arab Women's Association was established in addition to the Arab Women's Union which was founded in Jerusalem and in Nablus. These unions embarked on several economic, social, cultural, and national efforts such as arranging for demonstrations, sending petitions to the British High Commissioner for Palestine and writing letters to Arab leaders.¹²³



It is worth noting that women had a remarkable participation in the 1936 revolution; for instance, Zakiya Halila demonstrated that women can do more extraordinary work than supplying food, particularly transporting arms and training to fight.¹²⁴

Palestinian women also played a major role in 1948 War, when a group of women from Yafa (Jaffa) formed a secret women squad called the Daisy Flower (Zahrat al-Uqhuwan) responsible for urging Palestinians to fight and providing food and arms to fighters. Another women association was formed under the name of Women's Solidarity Association, it contributed in providing medical, ambulatory, and first aid services.¹²⁵

2. Between 1948 and 1967:

By early 1948, the palestinians were experiencing new harsh conditions, forcing the establishment of refugee camps in the WB and GS and in Diaspora. This phenomenon was accompanied by a total collapse of the Palestinian economy and social life prior to *al-Nakba* in 1948.

Palestinian refugees, especially women, had to go for unusual social activities which were earlier rejected in rural areas such as becoming working women, and leaving their children relatively independent. The spread of poverty, deprivation, suffer, and unemployment forced women to wait in queues for humanitarian aid. These circumstances created an important role for women after the 1948 *Nakba*, and unintentionally contributed in igniting their patriotic spirit and in holding to the identity and the right of return. It was an efficient means for stirring up those feelings because the women were suffering severely in addition to the





collective anguish that the Palestinian refugees were surviving. Those plunging circumstances urged all refugees to participate in the National Palestinian Movement since then, after 1948 *Nakba* till present day.¹²⁶

In 1964, the Union of Palestinian Women was founded. Its main goals were to “improve the economic, social, and health status of women, take care of working women, and providing care for mothers and children.” A year later, the General Union of Palestinian Women was founded after the establishment of Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), in addition to the foundation of other charity societies in the WB and GS. Nevertheless, there was no nation-wide women’s social movement throughout the years 1948-1967. Women’s unions, organizations and charity societies activities were limited to a certain number of elite meetings and assemblies, or through leftist women gatherings in the poor areas of the cities, villages, and refugee camps.¹²⁷

3. Between 1967 and 1993:

Following the defeat in June 1967, Palestinian resistance and its efficiency escalated and predominated every civil and social activity. Most of the publicly active women joined the Palestinian resistance factions and indulged in political work. The national participation of women continued during that period, whether in armed fighting, in social work, or in secret organizational work in the WB and GS.¹²⁸

Shadia Abu Ghazalah is a historical example of female participation, she was killed in November 1968 while making a bomb. Prior to Shadia’s death, Fatima Barnawi was arrested in November 1967 and sentenced to life after planting a bomb in Zion Cinema in the city of Jerusalem.¹²⁹



A Palestinian woman votes for the first time in her life in a voting centre in the town of Beit Hanoun, North of Gaza Strip on 27/1/2005, during the first municipal elections in the Strip.

► Reuters, 27/1/2005.



Dr. Mariam Saleh, member of Legislative Council and minister of women's affairs in the tenth Palestinian cabinet (Haniyyah's cabinet). Saleh holds a Ph.D. in Islamic Law and teaches at the college of Da'wa and Religious Principles in Ramallah. She is married with seven kids and is a political and social activist affiliated with Hamas. Saleh was nominated to legislative elections of 25/1/2006 in Change and Reform Bloc. She won the elections and was appointed Minister of Women's Affairs.





In 12/4/1976, the Israeli military governor ordered for the amendment of the Jordanian election law of 1955 pronouncing the right of a municipal vote to every Palestinian aged 21 and above, including women. The Israeli objective of this amendment was to find a Palestinian leadership that is capable of “taming” the Palestinians. However female participation contributed together with male participation in causing failure to the Israeli plan, because the majority of national figures candidates won the elections. This development played a role in promoting women’s role in politics and caused hundreds of women to be sent into detention upon long and cruel sentences.¹³⁰

One of the significant women of that period was Laila Khalid, who was the first woman in history to take part in hijacking a plane. A US airplane was hijacked on its way to Damascus, the goal was to focus world attention on the Palestinian cause.¹³¹

Whereas Dalal al-Mughrabi carried out the operation known as Kamal ‘Udwan operation. She landed by boat with ten fighters on the beaches of Tel Aviv having departed from Lebanon, and there they hijacked an Israeli bus and went to Tel Aviv to exchange the bus passengers with Palestinian prisoners in Israeli detention. However, the occupation army under the command of Ehud Barak terminated the deal by military force, killing and injuring Israeli citizens, and killing Dalal with some of her partners. Cold heartedly Barak pulled Dalal’s body by her hair in front of cameras and journalists.¹³² Israel kept the corpse of Dalal for more than 30 years in the Cemetery of Numbers before purporting to include it in a prisoner exchange deal with Hizbullah on 16/7/2008. The authenticity of the body was, however negated by DNA test results. This leaves the true fate of Dalal’s body obscure until now (summer 2009).



Also among significant women of that period was ‘Itaf ‘Ulayyan, who was arrested in her house in Beit Lahm at the midnight of 2/8/1987 and accompanied to the Maskubiyyah detention camp. ‘Itaf was interrogated for more than 40 days on the charge of planning a military operation.¹³³

‘Itaf recalls her early childhood moments in al-Dheisha refugee camp in Bethlehem saying: “Israeli soldiers were everywhere in the camp... I was always scared of their look, their outfit, and their walk; but my fear turned later into deep anger against them.” As she grew up, her only thought was to be militarily trained which came true in 1986. Before being detained, she was supposed to enter in a detonated car into the headquarters of Israeli Cabinet and blow it up. The operation was successfully planned, but ‘Itaf was arrested a short time before the date which had been set for the operation.¹³⁴

With the beginning of first *Intifadah* on 8/12/1987, Palestinian female participation developed along with the widespread development of public participation in all of the WB and GS. Women’s participation, in resistance was frequent and significant in villages and refugee camps and were on a daily basis. More than 500 women were arrested during that *Intifadah*.¹³⁵

4. After the Establishment of the Palestinian Authority:

Although Palestinian women had a role in politics after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 1994 and they worked in public ministries and institutions, female participation was weak. It was limited and marginalized, and the careers were either secretaries, typists, or teachers in public schools.





The teaching profession was most notable among working women. In mid 2001, 40% of women working in the public sector were in education field¹³⁶; where as only 25 of 340 general directors in public institutions were females, the latter were distributed amongst the Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health, which are considered close to the traditional role of women as a mother and homemaker, and no women had by then occupied the general director position in ministries of agriculture and industry.¹³⁷

Regarding the Legislative Council, women legally had the right of voting and nominating. During the first legislative elections, on 20/1/1996, women participated in the election out of excitement and eagerness, which demonstrated the need of incorporating women into political decision making. The lists of voters included at the time 495,839 women and 517,396 men, i.e 49% of voters were female. However, the number of female candidates was only 25 out of 672, or 3.7%. Only five female candidates made it to the council out of 88 cabinet members.¹³⁸ During the second legislative elections, which took place on 26/1/2006, 46% of voters were women,¹³⁹ which indicated a major improvement in women's political participation and political awareness by some factions. This time, 17 out of 132 cabinet members were women, eight from Fatah, six from Hamas, one from the Popular Front, and two from the Third Way and Independent Palestine candidate lists.¹⁴⁰

During the four phases of the 2005 municipal elections, 48% of participants were women. 68.8% of women included in voting lists voted, with 71.5% of males.¹⁴¹



5. The Second *Intifadah* (*al-Aqsa Intifadah*):

With the launch of *al-Aqsa Intifadah* on 28/9/2000; Israeli forces raised their brutality against Palestinians, implementing recursive military operations against the WB and GS which were re-occupied, Israel resumed its policy of assassinating significant Palestinian leaders and resistance activists and of targeting schools, homes, universities, fields and working places. The toll of women killed in those attacks scored 163.¹⁴²

In view of such aggressiveness, the Palestinian public resistance surged and became better planned and implemented. Female participation was remarkable in *al-Aqsa Intifadah* on both civil and military levels.

Palestinian women have already had a significant share in the *Intifadah*. Most popular were women demonstrations, one of which turned into a heroic epic, when the women of Beit Hanun moved early on Friday 3/11/2006 to release about 70 Palestinian resistance fighters besieged by Israeli occupation army in Nasr mosque.¹⁴³

Those women had no arms or weapons when they came forward to face Israeli soldiers and tanks. Israeli forces directly showered bullets on their heads in front of media, killing two and injuring 18, three of whom had their lower limbs cut badly. A remarkable member of the demonstration was the member of PLC Jamilah al-Shanti, who commented several days later, “The truth was greater and stronger than what you saw on satellite T.V. screens... we were adamant on ending that Israeli besiegement of the mosque even if it cost us our lives.” This brave stance was not tolerated by occupation army, so they responded by shelling the house of al-Shanti by two air-ground rockets, killing her sister-in-law and her two bodyguards who were near her house although she was not there at that moment.¹⁴⁴





Despite the Occupation and Hardships... there is Hope *Amal* Mohammad Siyam*

Her name is Amal Mohammad Sheikh Mahmoud Siyam. Born in Gaza on 14/12/1962, Amal lives currently with her husband and four children in Bethlehem.

After obtaining her Master's degree in Islamic Studies, Amal became the Minister of Women's Affairs in the National Unity Government.

Her husband is a former detainee; her eldest son is currently in detention. She is the daughter of Sheikh Mohammad Siyam, one of the founders of the Islamic University of Gaza, who was exiled to Marj al Zuhoor in the nineties then to Yemen.



'Um Attayeb, as she likes to be called, says that it was "shocking for me and my whole family" to know of the new appointment at the Ministry. It was not easy, "my feelings got mixed up, pride, joy and resentment towards the suffering of Palestinian people under the Israeli occupation." She goes on to say that "despite all hardships, this is an earnest pledge, I ask God to help me do it perfectly as He would like it to be done."

* "Amal", is an Arabic name, that means "hope"

► Al-Jazeera talk website, 19/3/2007.





The women of Beit Hanun were former contributors in the actions against occupation. They had volunteered to convey injured people to hospitals during the Israeli military operation against the town of Beit Hanun, when Israeli forces banned medical and first-aid staff from doing their job which made the place crowded with the injured and killed.¹⁴⁵

Another prominent figure during the *Intifadah* was Ayat al-Akhras, from al-Dheisha refugee camp in Bethlehem. Ayat was in her last year of school, and was engaged and soon to be wed in July 2002. Nevertheless, Ayat chose a third option, another important date in her life. On the morning of 29/3/2002, she headed to an Israeli market west of Jerusalem, there she blew herself up wearing an explosive belt killing and injuring tens of Israelis.

This is how Ayat's mother describes the last day in her daughter's life:

Ayat woke up early that day, she was not usual, most probably she had not slept all night. She prayed Fajr Prayer and read some verses of the Quran, then she put on her school clothes and told me she was going to school to catch up some lessons she had missed. But it was Friday, Friday is a vacation day in all schools here. She replied that it was the most important day of her life, so I prayed for her audibly... As soon as I started murmuring my prayers, her eyes glowed as if she was waiting for me to give her hope, and she smiled at me saying: This is all I want from you mom. And she left to school with her sister Samah.

The mother continues, after wiping her tears:

At 10 a.m. sharp, Samah returned home and without Ayat. I was so scared because the security situation was very bad, the





camp could be attacked by Israelis at any moment. All terrible speculations hustled to my head: Where did she go? Did she achieve her wish of martyrdom? But what about her fiancé? What about her wedding dress? What about all her future dreams?

The mother was confused, her mind negating her fears and heart feelings that Ayat had executed an operation. Moments later the television announced that there was an operation, and that it was executed by a female. Her mother choked with tears continues, “I was sure that it was her, she had insisted on taking revenge for our neighbors ‘Issa Farah and Sa‘ed ‘Eid who were killed when their house was shelled by rockets.”

A young lady, an outstanding student, and a beloved girl, this was Ayat when she left. She was preparing for her future house and her wedding to the love of her life. She is a precise answer to those who argue that failure and despair are the motives of performing “self-immolation” operations; her reply explains that the true motives are the depth of Palestinian wounds and Israeli cruelty, in which no human can find happiness. “This idea was always on her mind” says her mother. “She always used to ask what is the benefit of our life when death is all around us. Let us face death before it comes to us, and revenge for ourselves before we die.”¹⁴⁶



The photo of Fatima Najjar (57 years) published by Hamas media office. Fatima is from Jabaliya in Gaza strip, she executed self-immolation operation on 23/11/2006 injuring three Israeli soldiers.





Conclusion

Since 1948, Palestinian women are denied their basic rights by Israeli viciousness. They are surviving harder pressure, aggressiveness and suffering. This is a general Palestinian calamity for the whole society under Israeli occupation.

Despite various factors for the weak female political participation, one could say that the occupation had a major impact upon women's political and social role. Israeli policy of isolating villages and towns from each other is what made Palestinian women get out from their homes and indulge in public life and political activities.

Moreover, severe poverty and unemployment, which are mostly due to Israeli measures, are what urged Palestinian women to work, when this was normally rejected in her society. This development doubled the physical duties of women, added on her psychological and social responsibilities, and confined her political participation.





One Last Thing

We have to leave. Um Leila gets up from behind the desk shakes hands with us and says:

“One final thing, one thing you must mention in your book. Write that in spite of all the obstacles, in spite of the opposition from the men, the Palestinian women will participate in liberation struggle. Every day people are killed amongst us, every day produces a martyr. If people don’t understand the situation we live, they won’t understand the pain that makes mothers wish, more than anything else, for their sons to become commandos.”

- Ingela Bendt and James Downing, *We Shall Return: Women of Palestine* (London: Zed Press Ltd., 1982), p. 118.

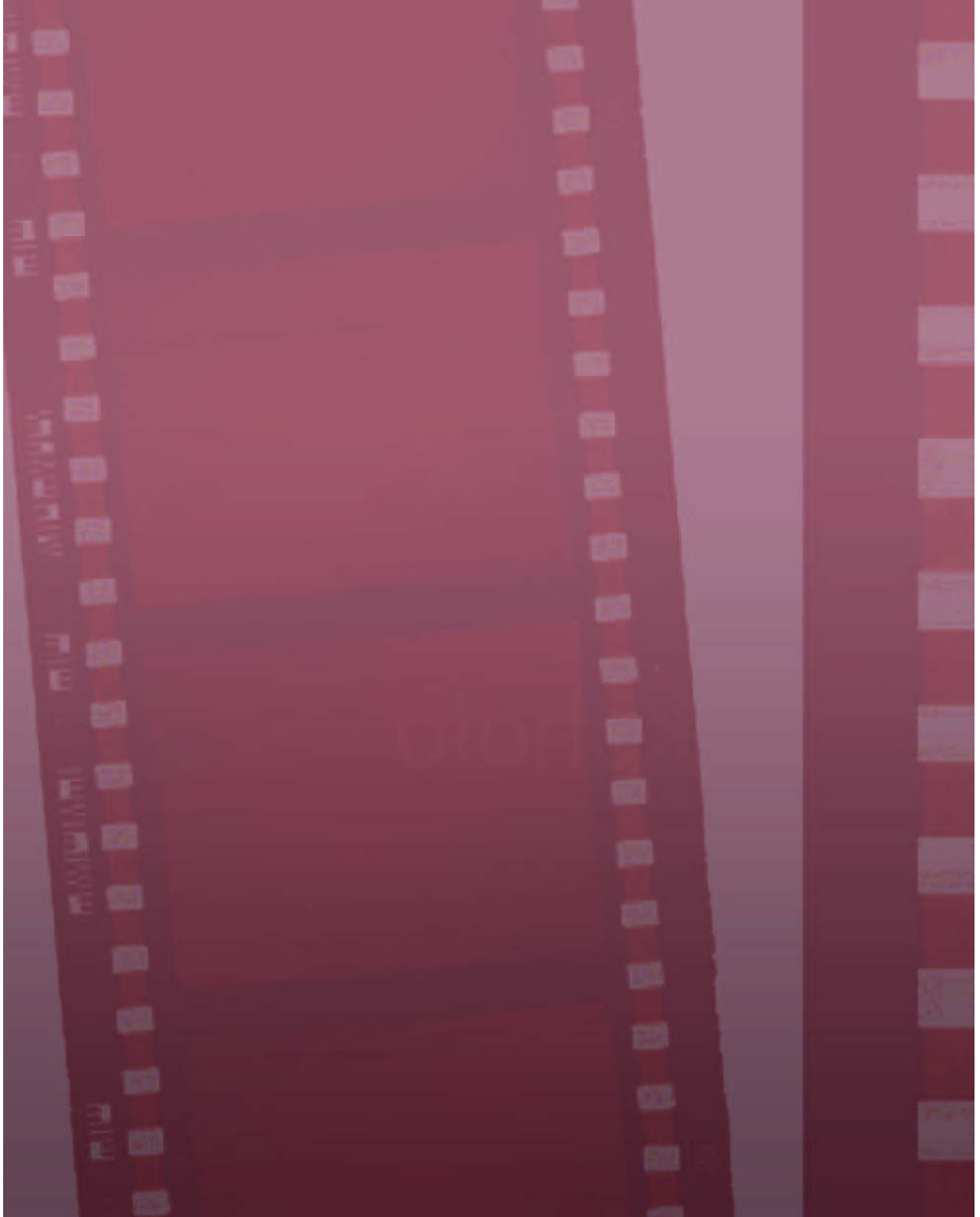
Notwithstanding their suffering, Palestinian women demonstrated their increasing persistence to hold on to their rights and to stand firm in the face of Israeli aggression. Their sacrifices were amplified, as well as their role in politics and in resistance. They held on to their daily perseverance as the occupation caused a surge of assassinations, arrests, and movement-restrictions against men. Consequently, many additional responsibilities laid upon women’s shoulders, yet they were up to them.

Anyone who looks at the life of Palestinian women observes their suffering. The eyes and the ears of the world and women’s rights associations included are witnesses, too. However, no one has offered protection to Palestinian women from daily Israeli violations. No one has contributed to saving their lives from the Israeli death plot which aims at the Palestinian people as a whole. No one helps them in keeping their dignity while they are under daily Israeli assaults, or providing them with their basic rights of education and medical care.



In view of all this, some people are still surprised by Palestinian women sacrificing their children for their cause or fighting beside their men... Isn't there anything else in those scenes to be surprised of?





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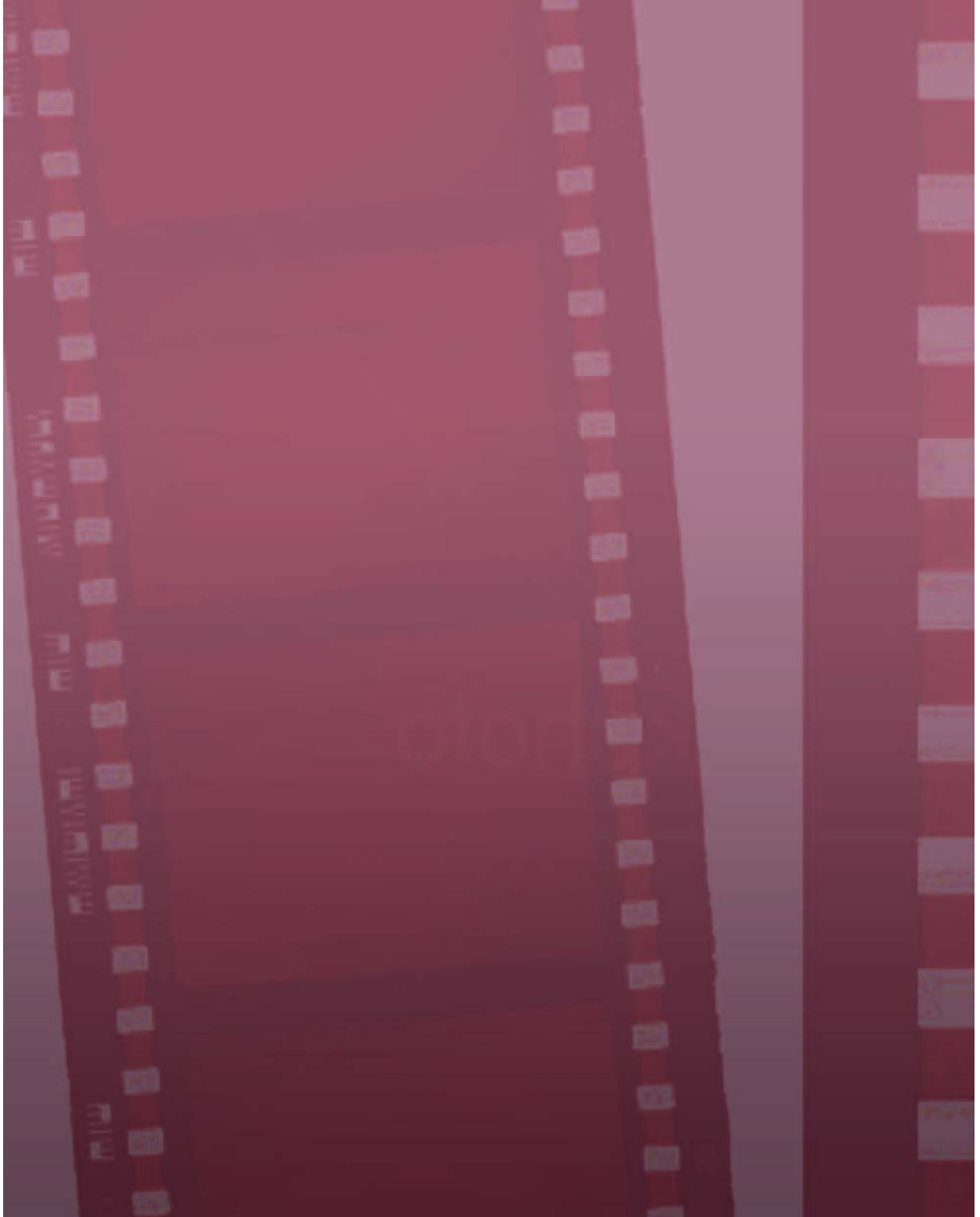


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The Suffering of the Palestinian Woman under the Israeli Occupation

**معاناة المرأة الفلسطينية
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This Book

As a part of *Am I not a Human?* series, this book focuses on the Israeli occupation violations of the rights of the Palestinian people. This occurs at a time when the whole world claims to defend the human being's rights, dignity, and freedom to live in peace in his homeland; but it is, nevertheless, completely indifferent towards what is happening to the dispossessed and oppressed Palestinians.

This book is about the exceptional suffering of an exceptional icon, the Palestinian woman under the Israeli occupation, where her normal role as a caregiver is burdened with inestimable additional challenges. She is the mother, the wife, the sister, the nurse, the teacher, and the supporter of the various individuals in a society under the occupation.



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