

FORGOTTEN REVOLUTIONARIES:
Reflections on Political Emancipation for Palestinian Refugee
Women in Lebanon

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CEDAW – Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

ICG – International Crisis Group

GUPW – General Union of Palestinian Women

WWC – Women’s Work Committee

UPWWC – Union of Palestinian Working Women’s Committees

UPWC – Union of Palestinian Women’s Committees

WCSW – Union of Women’s Committee for Social Work

FPWAC – Federation of Palestinian Women’s Action Committee

UN – United Nations

UNSC – United Nations Security Council

UNRWA – United Nations Relief and Works Agency

UNIFEM – United Nations Development Fund for Women

LAF – Lebanese Armed Forces

MENA – Middle East and North Africa

NGO – Nongovernmental Organization

OPT – Occupied Palestinian Territories

DFLP – Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine

PA – Palestinian Authority

PLO – Palestine Liberation Organization

PNC – Palestine National Council

PFLP – Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine

PCP – Palestine Communist Party

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ABSTRACT

This research explores Palestinian refugee women's political rights through a broader examination of the gender dynamics in one refugee camp in Lebanon. Using two focus groups and individual interviews with 20 women, the research highlights the patriarchal and colonial structures that dominate the women's lives, preventing them not only in engaging in political activities, but also hindering their opportunities for work and socialization outside their immediate familial spheres. The political disillusionment within the researched and broader Palestinian community, as a result of the encroaching project of *Empire* as defined by Hardt and Negri, has created a divided Palestinian cause, a failed youth, and a society attempting to hold on to its identity. However, along with that comes the oppression of a sub-section of that society – the women; the remaining possession that the men have. Women who previously engaged in armed resistance have not advanced politically, socially, or economically – and in fact the history of their struggles are being erased as surely as their land is. Nonetheless, pockets of resistance – a Multitude – of women, agents in their own fates, are fighting the current towards a more emancipatory future for themselves and future Palestinian men and women.

“I am the soldier, the supporter and the nurse in times of tears. And with my wounds, with my dreams, with my visions, with my strengths, I am the silenced one when the cause is no more” – Palestinian woman activist in 1995¹

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

I. Overview

History is peppered with tales of women breaking their bonds and taking stands against injustices, carnage, wars and oppression. The case of Palestinian refugee women is no different in that respect. Nor is it so dissimilar to numerous revolutions whose histories are forgotten or even rewritten to erase the roles these women played. It is not so different that the present fails to politically, economically and socially reflect women’s sacrifices and achievements.

“Whether as refugees, internally displaced persons, combatants, heads of households and community leaders, as activists and peace-builders, women and men experience conflict differently” (UNIFEM, 2002, p. 1). Women not only experience conflict differently than men, but war-time itself can change customary gender roles in which women often take on larger, non-traditional responsibilities – without any diminution in the demands of their conventional tasks. However, this momentary space, which women gain during conflict and where there are opportunities for leadership, “does not necessarily advance gender equality” (UNIFEM, 2002, p. 2). A UN Security Council Resolution (UNSC 1325) passed unanimously in October 2000 on women, peace and security has paved the way for women to be relevant partners in peace negotiations, especially in hotspots like the Middle East, “planning refugee camps and peacekeeping operations and reconstructing war-torn societies” (UNIFEM, 2002, p. 3). This step

¹ Karam, 2001, p. 2.

is one that can bring about significant change in approaches to development, peacebuilding and consequently, societal changes that lead to gender equality.

To find current relevance for this research, one need not step back too far into history. Today, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, revolts continue to take place since December 17th, 2010, when a street vendor in Tunisia set himself on fire due to his government's corruption and ill treatment. The actions of Mohamed Bouazizi set in motion revolts across the Arab world that continue to unfold, and conflict spreads from country to country as people struggle for more democratic societies. The world's attention on the MENA region has highlighted the groups gathered in the squares demanding freedom from oppression; the youth, the elderly, the men – and the women. An old Palestinian refugee woman I once knew said: "A revolution is like cooking – first you need to look in the cupboard to see what ingredients you have to work with". It seems the people of Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Syria, and several other countries in revolt looked in the cupboard and realized that the women in their societies are an important ingredient, and an important voice to add to the mixture. In Libya, with the end of the conflict and as attention turns to rebuilding a destroyed society, women have voiced their demands for greater participation in the country's political power: "The ... uprising against Colonel Qaddafi has propelled women in this traditional society into roles they never imagined. And now, though they already face obstacles to preserving their influence, many women never want to go back"² (New York Times Newspaper, September 12, 2011). Only history will tell whether these women succeed in maintaining their gains and achieving these goals.

² Libya's War-Tested Women Hope to Keep New Power:
http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/13/world/africa/13women.html?_r=1&src=me&ref=world

The rise of Islamist parties' political power could play a minimal role in limiting the advancement of women; but at least – and one would hope – no more than it already has. It is not a new phenomenon that Islamists hold public support; they have had it for quite a while. However, the authoritarian nature of ruling regimes in some Arab states has meant a ban on multi-party politics and an inability of parties such as En Nahda or the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt to participate in elections. With the last elections in Tunisia (October 2011) giving the Islamist party Ennahda a sweeping victory, concerns have been voiced over the reversal of women's social gains. However, the group has stated: "...its commitment to the women of Tunisia, to strengthen their role in political decision-making, in order to avoid any going back on their social gains," (BBC, 28 October 2011)³. Again, time will tell what levels the women will reach and the ideological shifts that religious groups will encounter through their engagement in governance. This is also the case in Egypt and the Muslim Brotherhood's gains in Parliament and with the new Egyptian President.

The Palestinian struggle, and women's roles in it, is not the first of its kind – nor are the problems encountered unique. Abdo (1994) refers to a phrase that Palestinian women used during the days of the First Intifada: "No Going Back" (p.148). This phrase indirectly references their Algerian sisters and their failed struggle for emancipation following the Algerian revolution (1954-1962). Ghousoub (1987) states:

The much greater radicalism of the revolutionary experience in Algeria might have been expected to produce a more advanced social situation for women after Independence than in the neighbouring states. Ironically, however, the result was rather to be the reverse. Algerian women participated in the fighting against the French forces of occupation, playing an essential role in the military and political struggle unparalleled—to this day— anywhere in the Arab world. But this practical

³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15496990>.

transformation of the position of the younger generation found no ideological or social reflection in the new Algerian state they had helped to create (p. 9).

Al-Samman (2009) adds:

One of the challenges facing female revolutionary fighters is the resistance of the male-dominated political establishment to female attempts to break out of gender-assigned private domains. Full participation in the public political arena is often sought, yet never attained unless it is defined in combative, masculine terms (p. 4).

This research asks: why are Palestinian refugee women's political rights lacking?

Consequently, this thesis explores and highlights how gender relations in a particular refugee camp interact with the political, and construct obstacles to Palestinian refugee women's political expression and participation. The focus is further narrowed on women who were part of a society that experienced a liberation movement and through active engagement and through the shifting of gender roles, women had the space to push for equal political rights. However, this research shows that those women's engagement in liberation movements – similar to the experiences of their Algerian, several Latin American (Argentinean, Mexican, Bolivian, Cuban, Nicaraguan, Salvadorian, Guatemalan)⁴, South African, and Indian counterparts – when it came time to building a nation, this did not automatically translate into equal social structures (Abdo, 1994; McClintock, 1991; Ghoussoub, 1987; Jayawardena, 1986; Jaquette, 1973).

The women in these societies, during the course of the liberation movement, suffered through similar discourses – whether as victims, producers of future revolutionaries, bearers and keepers of culture, or the gender-neutral guerrillas. In their own ways, the women in many of

⁴ A comprehensive article that traces Latin American women's involvement in revolutionary movements and the links to feminist awareness is Jane S. Jaquette's "Women in Revolutionary Movements in Latin America (1973) in the *Journal of Marriage and Family*. Despite the fact that it is an old article, the author delves into historical examples in various countries and concisely portrays the representation of revolutionary women and their struggles in post-revolutionary societies.

these countries were able to eventually fight for various levels of equality over time and in different ways. Each case differs based on country-specific context and history; in some cases, such as several Southeast and East Asian societies, nationalism and feminism were compatible and complementary (Jayawardena, 1986, as quoted in Moghadam, 1994, p. 3).

As Abdo (1994) elaborates, “It is undeniable that women’s oppression cannot be isolated from the larger structural conditions under which they live. It is also true that their emancipation is dialectically linked to the emancipation and development of their society as a whole” (p. 156).

It is important to note that nationalism is not inherently uncomplimentary to women’s emancipation; rather nationalism forged through a liberation movement “unlike institutionalized forms of nationalism [such as that of a nation-state] has the potential to be emancipatory and progressive” (Abdo, 1994, p. 150). However, that all depends on the women’s abilities to push gender discourse to the forefront at the right time – the heat of the struggle.

Peteet, in her 1991 ethnography of Palestinian refugee women in Lebanon, stated that unlike the Algerian case where the liberation movement resulted in independence and a nation, the Palestinian resistance was effectively defeated in 1982 with the exiling of the Palestinian leadership from Lebanon to even remoter bases in Tunis and the Palestinians were purely focused on survival. Therefore, she adds that it is “futile to discuss whether or not women’s issues and struggles were assigned secondary status” (p. 217). However, this research continues to show that after that period, with the First Intifada and the War of the Camps⁵ where women faced further conflict and military engagement, women’s emancipation should have been articulated alongside national emancipation. However, this is easier said than done, as it is hoped this research will show.

⁵ Both these periods and women’s roles in them are discussed further in Chapter 2 (*History*).

Using a post-colonial feminist framework to explore women's political roles in Palestinian refugee society, this researcher is of the belief that patriarchal and colonial power structures in the Middle East and North Africa dictate who interprets religious, socio-cultural, or political behaviours for the rest of society and how those are translated into social norms. In these situations of upheaval, breakdown of norms, and rebuilding, it is not to say that religious beliefs and stigmas do not play any role in perpetuating a patriarchal power structure and confining women to certain traditional domestic roles. However, the sizeable topic of religion and looking at this research through a purely theocratic lens is beyond the scope of this research and would be appropriate for a much larger doctoral study. Nonetheless, it would be remiss to completely ignore religion as the region is the origin of the Abrahamic religions and the topic did come up during discussions with participants. The use of "patriarchal and colonial structures" in this research is to signify that it is not an all-powerful, vague "patriarchy" that is the oppressive power here, but rather a complex combination of the dynamics of gender relations within a liberation movement that the men and women of that movement have, and continue to struggle with (Abdo, 1991; Sayigh, 2002).

As women in the Arab world today look towards rebuilding their societies with greater participation for themselves and others – and the uprisings are not over yet – such momentous steps are very encouraging in the struggle for equality. However, attention can shift to a society that has for decades prior to these uprisings been in this state of revolt, occupation, Intifadas (uprisings), war, rebuilding and continued upheaval. The Palestinian community's situation is a unique one in the sense that it has been in continuous deterioration and rebuilding for over 60 years. Whether in refugee camps or in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), men and women's traditional roles have been in constant flux. This is expanded further in Chapter 2

(*History*) which traces Palestinian men and women's first struggles against British colonialism, exile, Intifadas and conflicts that perpetually shifted roles and brought about changes to the society/gender relations.

In Lebanon's refugee camps, which can be seen on the map in Annex B, the lack of global attention and hope has left the population stagnant. Palestinian refugees have been living in abhorrent conditions for over 60 years and are now referred to, globally and in the region, as the "Forgotten People" (Time Magazine, February 25, 2009)⁶. There remain over 450,000 people in Lebanon's camps⁷ alone that have been left behind with no rights or the most basic of living conditions (UNRWA, 2012). Palestinian refugee women have, it seems, regressed in terms of pursuing their rights (Oxfam Novib, 2008, p. x). Palestinian women – unlike their male counterparts – have failed to gain key political rights or equality in decision-making processes, especially at leadership levels, despite prolonged, significant and ongoing involvement in the national liberation movement, whether within the OPT, in refugee camps, through ongoing conflict with Israel, Intifadas or during camp wars with Lebanese militias. Their socio-political rights to engage in political debates, political parties at a decision-making level and expect equal treatment and promotion from their peers in the popular committees or parties that govern the camps are non-existent and their roles are firmly embedded in the domestic sphere. Many are forbidden by family and husband from working, from leaving the house to socialize and any political participation is out of their grasp, save that which comes at the price of being the subject of gossip and ostracism from the community (*Focus Group 1*).

⁶ <http://www.middleeastmonitor.org.uk/articles/middle-east/433-palestines-forgotten-people>. This is but one reference out of too many that refers to Palestinian refugees (specifically those in Lebanon) as the "Forgotten People". The refugees refer to themselves using those terms as well; whether this is due to the pervasiveness of the phrase or that the term has emerged out of the camps to be used around the world is unknown.

⁷ Please refer to Annex A for a map of Lebanon with all remaining and destroyed refugee camps.

This research explores this situation and states that the oppression of women in this society is multi-layered; it is partially to be laid, as previously mentioned, at patriarchy's door and the women's internalization of patriarchal values and norms. It is a struggle of the men and women themselves to reconcile a political consciousness with a social-gender one (Abdo, 1991). It would also be remiss to ignore a 64-year-old occupation and the resulting exile, which in turn has reinforced the society's need to hold onto the past and anything representative of it. Men and women alike are grasping at what they believe is the only thing left to them. For men, the loss of land and the inability to work signify a loss of manhood, against which the only thing left to possess and to reaffirm their moral worth, is the female in the society – and more specifically, her honour (Abdo, 1994; Abu-Lughod, 1998; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009; Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989).

The refugee women themselves have accepted a socially-dictated role as bearers of future generations of freedom fighters. In addition, leaving home means leaving cramped and poor living conditions and the dictates of mothers, fathers and brothers. However, moving from the familial home to the husband's home often means going from bad to only slightly better or even worse. For the society as a whole, marrying daughters off at a young age (sometimes 13 and 14 years of age) means less poverty and less responsibility – she becomes her husband's responsibility. Unfortunately, girls are seen as burdens in this camp community (Augustin, 1993; *Kaouthar*⁸, 44, *Supervisor at the women's centre, Individual Interview*). Even though indigenous feminist activism is available in Palestinian history⁹, older generations in the camp (especially the

⁸ All names of respondents used in the text are pseudonyms. When respondents are being quoted I have identified the respondent with their pseudonym as well as their age, occupation, and whether the interview was of an individual or a focus group.

⁹ These examples will be expanded further in Chapter 2 and 3 (*History and Literature Review*) but mainly discusses the activism against Balfour declaration, British rule, Intifadas, Camp Wars.

matriarchs of the community) see it as their role to maintain such patriarchal traditions as a way of protecting Palestinian culture and identity in the face of a perceived wider international agenda based on western values that are attempting to “erase” Palestinian identity and integrate them into host societies to prevent the right of return (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009). They are perhaps the most significant “policing” (Foucault, 1980) force within the camp communities.

II. Rationale

The overall aim of this research was to revisit the current status of Palestinian refugee women in Lebanon in order to explore reasons for their lagging political rights and the obstacles encountered, through a broader exploration of contemporary gender relations within their community.

Current research suggests that there is a decline in emancipatory rights in general for Palestinian refugee women (Medical Aid for Palestinians report, 2009), specifically within the political sphere, and will focus on the social, economic and political reasons why this has happened. This thesis focuses specifically on the political aspect in a refugee camp due to a gap in the current literature, especially when discussing protracted exile situations that result from ongoing conflict since the 1948 Nakba (creation of Israel /Arab-Israeli War). Refugee camps in Lebanon, and elsewhere, after 64 years are considered established communities with a class/social/political hierarchy that involves their own social contract not to a state but to governing bodies within that system. Much of the broader literature on women in conflict situations, such as the prolonged refugee situation and an ongoing war with Israel, focuses on shifts in gender relations during wartime or uprisings (Abdo, 1994; Rubenberg, 2001; Peteet, 1991; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009) and the gains that are then lost once the conflict dies down. As

men and women are drawn into conflict, gender relations invariably shift, but whether during or post-conflict, maintaining the gains of a shifting society is and has been very difficult for women (Meintjes, Turshen & Pillay, 2001; Handrahan, 2004; Bop, 2001; Hale, 2001).

Abdo (1991) states that even successful liberation movements do not necessarily translate into victory for women. Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen (2001) state that there is no “aftermath” for women – meaning that post-conflict society holds no place for gender debates. Change needs to take place during war-time, when women are given the responsibilities and independence usually enjoyed by men – and then retained in the wake of the conflict. These works are especially relevant in that much of this researcher’s data echoes the statements of these two sources.

Palestinian refugee women in the OPT and in Lebanese camps did indeed experience an “opening-up” of gender relations during conflicts and Intifadas, which allowed them an entrance into a heretofore masculine domain. However, following the end of the conflict – which for the women interviewed was the War of the Camps (1985-1989) with the Lebanese Amal Movement – society’s patriarchal gender rules were reinstated and with an even heavier hand than previously. Many statements by the women I interviewed echoed Abdo (1991) and Meintjes *et al.* (2001) on why women have not retained the “gains”. For example, a younger generation of women may simply lack historical knowledge of their female predecessors’ involvement in conflicts (Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen, 2001, p. 19). Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2009) states that “Despite the severe militarization and violence on women’s everyday lives, their bodies and survival strategies, the documentation of women’s history and frontline activities in war and conflict zones is generally lacking” (p. 13-14). The loss of this precedence where women were involved militarily in the Intifadas and wars meant that society’s memory also erased the elevated gains in equality for these women. The international media’s oppressive and stereotypical

portrayal of Palestinian women as helpless victims lacking agency and whose honour must be safeguarded was also mentioned and has played a role in confining women to a victimized, weaker sphere (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009). Hale (2001) and Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2009) focus on the lack of organization and international collaboration and the detrimental role of international organizations as additional factors that devalue women's roles. Peteet (1991, 2011), Abdo (1991, 1994), Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen (2001) all speak in regards to the "Feminist consciousness" that women gain during war time, but add that the regression to pre-war social structures is due to women's failure to conceptualise or internalise the changes in their role and act on these changes. These representations reinforce a patriarchal society's devaluing of women's activism as simply accidental. Many of the interviews in this research reflected this literature and especially the theories by these aforementioned authors.

Peteet's feminine versus feminist consciousness is a core issue that emerged when discussing political involvement and the role of women in the camp structure. There was a marked difference in discourse between participants interviewed for this thesis – those that had gained a feminist consciousness and spoke of an equal socio-political society and those that believed they were oppressed but wanted freedom within their prescribed gender roles.

Abdo-Zubi's stress on familial influences and kinship is more relevant than ever for this research. Abdo-Zubi (1987) writes that during the first two decades of exile in the camps, with refugees living in conditions of widespread unemployment and poverty, the extended family or "*hamula*" (also in Abdo, 1994, p. 152) became the "only effective agency of socialization and social reproduction in which its members could reproduce themselves as social beings" (p. 53). The family and the influence on women in the camp where I conducted my research is very high; it is the most influential aspect on a woman's life in the camp and her decisions to work, get

married, participate in politics or demonstrations, etc., and therefore cannot be ignored when investigating this issue further.

These post-colonial feminist theorists form the bulk of this research's theoretical framework. This post-colonial feminist (or Third World Feminist) lens allows this researcher to deal with the issues of gender inequality and patriarchal power structures, as well as the intersectional analysis of colonial and post-colonial power relations present in this case-study.

Jayawardena (1986, 1994), Yuval-Davis & Anthias (1989), Chatterjee (1993), and Radhakrishnan (1992) have all written on – and provide a good theoretical framework – for “those concerned with national independence struggles, state formation, and the part played in them by women and gender” (Sayigh, 2002, p. 56). Radhakrishnan (1992) notes “the way anti-colonialist nationalist movements force themselves, in their quest for ‘cultural authenticity’, into an ideological bind by dichotomising between female/home and male/political domains” (p. 85, as quoted in Sayigh, 2002, p. 56).

With regards to methodology and approach, this research is an exploratory case study using focus groups, participatory interviews, and a somewhat ethnographic description more in line with a cultural anthropology approach to the issues of “gender” and “political participation.” While the political science discipline is more focused on the macro-systematic analysis of a structure and power relations (and indeed has a wealth of research dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict), this research follows the more anthropological discipline of examining the meanings and roles of participants within a cultural context.

III. Purpose

Women within Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps (who constitute 60-70% of the camp population – Oxfam, 2008, p. 13) are poorly – if at all – represented and taken into account as official decision-makers (Oxfam, 2008, p. 4). A report submitted by a group of international and local NGOs to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in Geneva, states: “The General Union of Palestinian women has an office in the PLO representative office in Beirut. However, there is no representation of women in the representative's office upper management in Lebanon,” (CEDAW, 2008, p. 16). In a conflict-affected region where political participation means access to rights and any form of justice, Palestinian women – whether in the camps or out – have lost significant ground from being emerging actors in a liberation movement, particularly during the First Intifada (Abdo, 1994), to having very little say in what goes on outside the domestic sphere.

The issue of women's political representation and participation is once again in the limelight due to the 2011 Arab uprisings. Women's political equality is not only an issue in developing countries, but rather a global one that is in dire need of attention. This thesis on Palestinian women will attempt to reinvigorate debates, document Palestinian women's experiences and may well serve to orient future research needs for scholars, NGOs, policy makers and practitioners to achieve full participation of women in community development, peacebuilding processes, top representation in policy-making, for an overall more inclusive society and governing structure. On a more practical level, in the Arab region, political attachment and representation is important to one's identity thus, if any development is to take place in terms of advancing gender equality in Arab communities, then political equality for women must be addressed from the grassroots in order for it to succeed.

Having conducted a month-long period of data gathering through one-on-one interviews and focus groups, in one refugee camp in Lebanon, this thesis will follow an ethnographic narrative in an effort to accurately describe the lives of the women. It is hoped that the details of the participants' experiences will illustrate, more effectively than statements, interviews or hypotheses, the extent of oppression that women face, the actions they have taken to confront, respond, or cope with that oppression, and women's own ideas of what kind of help they might need to overcome this oppression.

Before moving on, it is important to briefly specify the references made to the word 'conflict'. When referring to conflict in this research, I am particularly focusing in on the internal struggle that Palestinian refugee women face against the patriarchal and colonial structures that dominate their lives and communities (Rubenberg, 2001). However, this should not in any way diminish from acknowledging that when it comes to Palestinian refugees in general (whether male, female, elderly, young, and middle or lower class) the conflicts they face are multi-levelled and multi-faceted:

- Inter-communal conflict – The struggle against a heavily patriarchal and occupier-imposed arrangement that is perpetuated by men and women, their families and local/international NGOs (Abdo, 1994; Handrahan, 2004).
- Class conflict – The protracted nature of the exile and the size of the refugee population has allowed for the development of a lower and middle class (Peteet, 1991; Abdo-Zubi, 1987). Women in different social classes interviewed had different perceptions of the situation.

- Multi-party conflicts – Residents of each camp have political affiliations to one or more Palestinian party/faction and this sometimes pits family members against each other. These party divisions are a significant reason why some of the participants stated that they had shied away from politics completely.

IV. Limitations – Literature Gaps and Research Limits

This thesis is focusing on a specific refugee population and a sub-section of that population. The reason behind the focus on this particular community was due to:

a. The shortage of literature on Palestinian *refugee* women and their political rights.

Due to their protracted refugeehood, Palestinians in Lebanon’s refugee camps remain in a state of limbo, where for 64 years they have been stateless, and yet they constitute – through multiple generations – a society in and of themselves. The dilemma of rights-based versus needs-based aid is a significant issue within this particular refugee community due to the population numbers and their length of exile and is embroiled in political landmines. Much of the literature on Palestinian refugees has focused on the needs-based approach “that view them as recipients of humanitarian aid and as a problem and burden for the Arab host countries, especially Lebanon” (Suleiman, 2006, p. 3). Suleiman adds: “Much lesser emphasis has been placed on rights-based and bottom-up approaches that consider Palestinian refugees as active actors, and view them as a social force that has an impact on policies affecting their rights and livelihoods” (Bocco and Farah 1999; Zureik 1996, as quoted in Suleiman, 2006, p. 3).

However, issues such as oppression, gender-based violence, unemployment, crime, inter-communal conflict and many others still need to be addressed as the wait for nationhood has

taken over six decades with no real end in sight. This struggle between the pursuits of nationhood versus pursuit of gender equality will also be discussed further through the case studies.

b. The scarcity of up-to-date literature on Palestinian women's political rights and experiences.

A similar study (Rubenberg, 2001) on Palestinian women in the OPT and their struggle for gender equality was published a decade ago. I did not find this study until I had returned from field-work but the methodology used by Rubenberg was very similar to that used in this research and served as further rationale that the methods I used were sound. Again however, it was an overall picture of gender relations rather than a focus on political rights. It was also conducted in the OPT and not in the Lebanese camps. In her focus on militarization and violence against women in conflict zones, Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2009) focuses on Palestinian women in the OPT and briefly discusses again the lack of documentation of women's experiences or the history of women's activist and political roles.

c. Limited time and sample size.

Due to time and funding considerations I could not spend longer than a month within this community. However, having spent my life in quite close proximity and visiting family often in the camps provided me with a background that was invaluable for the short time I was there. After a time, it did seem that there was a saturation point reached and no new information was emerging so perhaps more time and a larger sample of participants would not have provided new insights.

One limitation that was unavoidable at this stage had to do with the men in the community and their voices. Despite looking at women's political rights, I could not discuss this issue with the men in the camp and would not have had access to a sample group. Getting access

to the women, through the NGO working in the camp¹⁰ (see below) was difficult enough due to the sensitivity of the topic. I strongly believe that further research into the men's opinions on women's political participation is necessary and would garner some very interesting results and additional insight.

Also as mentioned above, the issue of religion in the MENA region is a research topic in and of itself. Further research into this issue would actually provide even more insight into the lives of the women in these communities. Therefore, for that reason this research will not delve into the issue of religion as that is another thesis topic on its own.

V. Reflexivity

It often felt strange to this researcher to conduct a study that focused on the *political* rights of a group of people who lack so many other basic rights and have very few basic needs provided whatsoever. It may seem a luxury or secondary to some to be discussing political participation, decision-making in governance issues, and representation in governing bodies when there is rarely any fresh running water, sanitary living conditions, or enough food to feed the whole family. However, the Arab revolts currently taking place have resonated with this work and what I had seen during the field work. Whereas reading about and describing historic liberation movements in Algeria, India, South Africa, Latin America and elsewhere provides a contextual setting, seeing similar events unfold in action in the present and reading about the resurgence of Arab women demanding political rights *right now* in the midst of nationalist movements imbued a sense of urgency in this research.

¹⁰ As discussed later, the NGO is left unnamed to ensure confidentiality and to protect the respondents.

As a Palestinian woman, as a Palestinian refugee who was lucky enough not to experience first-hand life in a refugee camp, this was as much a personal exploration as a research of others. This research is one that is very close, as my mother could be any one of the women I spoke to. She is a Lebanese woman who has dedicated her whole life to the Palestinian cause. At one point, she was very politically active and her political knowledge could rival that of any leader's today. However, there were always limitations as to where she could go, how far she could rise, what she could say and what she could do – as opposed to my father's freedom to participate and express himself and rise in the ranks if he so wished, purely based on his gender. Today, my father does not talk about the experiences of being an exiled Palestinian. He bears the pain of his experiences as a refugee – whether physical or mental – alone. As for myself and my brother, we grew up as global children, with far too many obstacles such as lack of “appropriate” citizenship, far too many identities divided over the East and West, and far too much confusion over who we are and where we belong. We are not alone in this predicament and there are many who can attest to the benefits of “fitting in”, in a world-system built on nationality and identity.

It is unconscionable that after over 60 years close to 5 million people still live in refugee camps. That is nearly four generations of an entire population that have been, in their own words, forgotten by the world. Let us for a moment forget the politics behind the crisis, the power-grabbing behind the negotiations, and the ideologies behind the wars. The aim of my research has not been to rehash a conflict that has already taken far too many lives and destroyed even more, and which will continue to do so in the search for a just solution. My research first began at my mother's knee, when she would speak to me of a cause that was bigger than everything because it was about recognition of an injustice against thousands and thousands of innocent people, men, women and children. It continued while I was 10 years old, in a broken family that was yet

another casualty of the crisis. It grew as I listened to my mother cry because all her life's work, her legacy had been swept aside under political upheaval. Until no one listened anymore. It wasn't until my late 20s that I sat in a classroom hundreds of miles away thinking about what my professor was saying, asking, "What was my passion? What was my research? What was that burning question that I just had to answer?" I searched so earnestly for that "perfect research question" that would spur me on through semester after semester. And through it all, through all the struggles, I didn't notice myself getting closer to that one question I had always heard in my head.

It was not until recently that I understood the sacrifices my mother had to make; after speaking to a group of women who have similar dreams and have made similar sacrifices so their daughters can reach theirs. When I speak or write people listen. But it wasn't until I sat in a refugee camp with a group of women who craved to be heard, to be allowed an education or work, to "get out" that I truly understood how lucky I was and what it meant to physically be unable to get that education, to be heard purely due to the fact that they were born female. Through my research, that lasted a month, I embraced what I had spent 29 years resisting: I had embraced my own identity, my own life path, and my responsibility.

So I am forever going to be grateful for those women who taught me so much more than I ever thought possible. I went in with ideas and came out with a first-hand view of those theories that I had spent hours reading about in a library. I tried as much as possible to be the objective researcher and to listen to their stories and frustrations, so I could echo them in this thesis. I fought the urge, as a social scientist, to categorize these women and their experiences and I tried to be the Palestinian refugee woman. In the end I came out with that burning question imprinted well and truly in my mind. You will read the theories and data, dressed up in academic terms, but

I hope that underneath you will find at least some answers to the much, much simpler question:
“Why aren’t their voices being heard?”

Now I feel shame. I feel shamed by my fear, and by those defending the scent of the distant homeland – that fragrance they’ve never smelled because they weren’t born on her soil. She bore them, but they were born away from her. Yet they studied her constantly, without fatigue or boredom; and from overpowering memory and constant pursuit, they learned what it meant to belong to her.

“You’re aliens here,” they say to them there.

“You’re aliens here,” they say to them here. – Mahmoud Darwish¹¹.

CHAPTER II – HISTORY

I. Introduction

A brief history of the general Palestinian-Israeli conflict is needed to describe the political-cultural context in which Palestinian women lived (within Palestine and as refugees). It is also useful for laying out key dates and events that have marked women’s involvement in the various stages of the conflict. The sections below explore women’s involvement in activism throughout the conflict serve as a preface to the literature review where I will discuss the issues *surrounding* women’s involvement in the liberation movement.

Therefore, this section outlines the different and relevant time periods and geographical locations of participation, namely the broad milestones of the: British Mandate Palestine (pre-1948); life under occupation and until exile in 1967; the War of the Camps in Lebanon (1985-1989); and the First and Second Intifadas (1987-1991 and 2000-2005). Within this section, while I recognize and have delineated the broad eras, I will not follow these eras exactly but will highlight the most relevant time periods (in terms of involvement or significant effect on society) for Palestinian women and Palestinian refugees as a whole community. It will also explore the

¹¹Darwish 1995, p. The uses of “here” and “there” recur throughout Darwish’s work representing “Lebanon” (here) and “Palestine” (there) and the Palestinian’s belonging nowhere; “She” is meant to represent the homeland “Palestine”, which a significant number of refugees in Lebanon have never seen, yet continue to consider home.

specific activities – whether street protests, social activism and unionizing, or political and military engagement – the social classes of women involved, and the outcomes of these periods on women’s roles. Through this section, the hope is to show the evolving manner and scope of Palestinian women’s participation in the liberation movement and subsequently political life. However, the broader aim of this historical narrative is to highlight themes that are at the core of this research: the overarching, continuous struggle between nationalism and feminism throughout (Abdo, 1991, 1994), the feminist awakening for Palestinian women (Peteet, 1991), and the importance of documenting historical participation for future generations (Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen, 2001; Sayigh, 1987).

The above authors all highlight three important things to take note of, primarily looking at the complete shift in women’s lives during the British mandate, the awakening of a feminist consciousness emerging from engagement in the First Intifada and the Palestine liberation movement later on, and the general scarcity of documentation to preserve that engagement through history and serve as a launching point for women today. Sayigh (1987), in her article *Femmes Palestiniennes: une histoire en quête d'historiens*¹² “issues a challenge to historians to remedy this lacuna, and puzzles over the ‘vast disparity between the long, rich history of Palestinian women’s involvement in the national struggle of their people and the writing of this history’” (p. 13, as quoted in Fleischmann, 2003, p. 3).

II. Balfour and Women’s Activism (1917-1960s)

One of the Middle East’s most historically defining moments was The Balfour Declaration, a formal policy statement made by the British Government on November 2, 1917

¹² Translates as “Palestinian Women: A History in Search of Historians”

announcing that Palestine would become a national homeland for the Jewish people (Pappé, 2006, p. 13). The subsequent British mandate of Palestine, formalized from 1917 until 1948, and the influx of new British and Jewish settlers into the existing Palestinian Arab society meant significant political, economic and cultural upheaval due to contact to say the least (Divine, 1985, p. 58).

Ottoman rule had divided Palestine into provinces (*wilayat*) and local governors collected money to send back to Istanbul. However, Ottoman rule began to decline from the 1800, and European technology, economy, governance structures, and communication grew in the Middle East. By the time 1914 came about and European rivalries threatened colonial rule, new business hubs had been set up in what is now Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Palestine and “the new cities gradually drained the life away from the old ones” (Hourani, 1991, p. 297). New governance structures were established, “new architecture created homes that were visible expressions of changed ways of living” (p. 298). Heretofore, Muslim societies (where Jews and Christians were a minority and paid personal taxes or “*jizya*”) were flooded with settlers wearing European garb. British and French justifications of possessing the land were expressed as a fear of Islam the “danger, both moral and military, to be opposed” (Hourani, 1991, p. 301). As World War I broke out in Europe, nationalism was on the rise in the Arab world and politically conscious Arabs began to rethink their identities even while the British and French divided Iraq, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon amongst themselves. By 1917, the Balfour declaration had established British-Mandated Palestine as a Jewish homeland. In the period between 1914-1939, when Britain and France expanded their control over trade and production, Arab society – and particularly Palestinian society – had drastically changed.

In Palestine, the acquisition of land for European Jewish immigrants, which had begun in the late nineteenth century, continued within the new system of administration established by Britain as mandatory government. Jewish immigration was encouraged ...the structure of the country's population changed dramatically during this period... by the early 1940s Jews owned perhaps 20 percent of cultivatable land (Hourani, 1991, p. 323)

According to Doumani (1995), Palestinian people experienced these shifts in “uneven, contradictory, and internally differentiated ways’, depending upon their various overlapping class, gender, religious, and regional identities” (as quoted in Fleischmann, 2003, p. 26).

Divine (1985), Abdo (1991, 1994), Fleischmann (2003), and Sayigh (1987) have stated that one of the groups most profoundly affected by these shifts was upper-class Palestinian women. These women, whether Christian or Muslim, were more often than not veiled and restricted in their movements – unlike poor and rural women whose work responsibilities afforded them greater mobility. Fleischmann states that in this period, Palestinian women “found themselves in a maelstrom that compromised not only the famously intractable ‘conflict’ (the Arab-Israeli conflict), but also a myriad of social, cultural, and economic transformations” (p. 4) that created a massive shift in their lives. These upper and middle-class families began to send their daughters to schools – “primarily schools founded by foreign Christian missionaries” (p. 29). Women began working outside the house and discarding the veil. Discourse on gender rights began to emerge, with women, as well as men, writing about gender roles.

Divine (1985) states that despite scarce and uneven documentation of their lives it is unfathomable to think that Palestinian women remained unaffected due to the significant changes taking place at the time. The changes included the establishment of formal political institutions, “socio-economic adjustment” to the expanding population and the new educational opportunities afforded in Jewish schools set up to serve the settlers.

Such changes...placed urban, upper-class women in a new context which deeply engaged their attention. While the consequences hardly appeared transforming, the lives of these women were so altered ... that the ordinary world of their daily experience was never again quite the same (1985, p. 58).

Upper-class Palestinian women set up and joined organizations that began to deal with the changes brought about by British rule. Families, which had once been composed of entire tribes ruled by “the urban patriarch or warrior village *shaykh*, or local religious leader” (Divine, 1985, p. 58) became more nuclear and autonomous as the British enacted a “conscious colonial policy ... of maintaining certain religious or tribal structures...while creating or developing others that suited their purposes” (Fleischmann, 2003, p. 31-32).

The rapid transformations happening within Palestinian society had a slow but significant impact on these women’s lives in many ways. The progression from seclusion to emancipation for Palestinian Arab women is not a steady or linear one, but as Divine (1985) states, “Neither can it be interpreted as captive to a set of traditions so inflexible as to foreclose any and all change” (p. 61).

...The linchpin of the Palestinian Arab community – culture – was challenged from without, as European and Jewish schools expanded and ultimately threatened the community through the impact of significantly different educational experiences. Enormously important scholarly efforts have been made to map the ideologies and outlooks of the men who lived and charted this history. But never before has it been thought interesting or important enough to conduct a sustained and detailed examination of the women of any class, implicitly denying to them any historical provenance” (Divine, 1985, p. 59).

Within the women’s homes, political activity became a norm, as their fathers, brothers and other male relatives became engaged in the early stirrings of a liberation movement. As wives, sisters, mothers of urban political leaders, upper-class Palestinian women were expected to

give aid and support to their male relatives' political careers. Political struggles first took place in the living rooms of Palestinian families. "They managed large households, and sometimes more, providing care for their children and spacious facilities for male political assemblies and male receptions" (Cole, 1981; and Kark and Landman, 1981, as cited in Divine, 1985, p. 65).

A heretofore socially secluded section of society, these women now met and interacted with people in spheres outside their immediate families. While it had been economically unnecessary for them to venture out into the marketplace – which would become an arena for the Palestinian peasantry who were just as affected by later national uprisings – the now educated and gender-conscious women of Palestine began dedicating their social time to something other than their families. Their engagement in "social, educational, health care work and political activities" (Divine, 1985, p. 60) created new networks of connections for them. For the first time ever, spontaneous demonstrations against British rule – in Palestine, as well as other areas in the region such as Egypt and further in India and South Africa – included women of all classes.

According to Sir Valentine Chirol's column in the London *Times*:

... [The women] descended in large bodies into the streets, those of the more respectable classes still in veil and shrouded in their loose black coats, whilst the courtesans from the lower quarters of the city, who had also caught the contagion [of political unrest] disported themselves unveiled and arrayed in less discreet garments. In every turbulent demonstration women were well to the front. They marched in procession – some on foot, some in carriages shouting "independence" and "down with the English" and waving national banners (as cited in Phillips, 1986 in Golley, 2004, p. 532-533).

Before moving onto the consequences of these new, cross-class interactions that accompanied Palestinian women's activism, it is important to focus on the wider context of women's involvement in the national liberation struggle that was rising in the late 1930s and

1940s in response to French and British colonial rule. It was this national struggle that was the impetus for women's engagement in broader society and, according to Golley (2004), the first stirrings of indigenous Arab feminism is inevitably linked to national (rather than gender-based) liberation movements. Across Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, and Trans-Jordan, a women's movement that transcended state affinity was emerging (and often featured Palestinian liberation as one of the priorities) (Fleischmann, 2003, p. 178).

Divine's 1985 narrative of Palestinian women's involvement in the national liberation struggle spans the entire period of 1917-1948. Kazi (1987), on the other hand, breaks the involvement down into three stages. The author places the first stages of involvement further back to the establishment of the first Zionist settlements in 1882 and until the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. "The second stage extends from 1948 to June 1967 – the end of the June war and the beginning of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The third stage is the contemporary [1987] on-going struggle" (1987, p. 27).

Interestingly enough – and in a distressing example of Palestinian women themselves discounting each other's' history – according to Sayigh (1987, p. 18, as cited in Peteet, 1991, p. 39), contemporary female activists even draw a distinction between their activism and that of women pre-1948. This is what Foucault (1980) terms "Subjugated Knowledges" or "the historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist or formal systemisation (p. 81). Peteet (1991) writes: "One young militant scornfully commented, 'Those women just used to meet to drink tea, discuss clothes and their charitable projects for the poor'" (p. 39). It is possible that due to the linearly undocumented nature of women's involvement, the narrative suffers from gaps and contradictions from author to author and the achievements of these women are blurred in the retelling of history. On this point, at least, there is agreement.

Peteet (1991) has stated that very little “of a specific nature is known about women in pre-1948 Palestine” (p. 21): “The research, writing, and presentation of Palestinian women’s history is characterized by ‘fragmentation’” (Sayigh, 1987, p. 3, as cited in Peteet, 1991, p. 38).

One thing that is undisputable, however, is that a women’s movement did emerge and coalesced into a force that participated in the events of the time and played an important role in the anti-Zionist struggle. It also brought along with it the “woman question” (Fleischmann, 2003, p. 4) that struggled to place itself in Palestinian nation-building or rather the national liberation movement that became almost indistinguishable from nation-building.

Abdo (1991) sums it up succinctly:

A major concern over nationalism, as far as feminists are concerned, is not the patriotism or love which both women and men hold equally for their land, country, sovereignty and independence...Palestinian men and women have been struggling for their freedom since the 1920s in various forms of resistance. The real problem lies in the fact that national liberations, by definition, are not about gender or class emancipation. And yet, during the process of liberation, the dynamics of the movement begin to challenge the monolithic concept of nation. The active participation of women...is bound to unveil and challenge the basis of the nation’s imagined harmony, particularly around the issue of gender relations (p. 26).

III. The Palestinian Women’s Movement (1960s-Present)

I do not want to delve too deeply into the women’s movement for several reasons. The main one being that the purpose of highlighting here is to discuss the crucial time period in the formation of a “Palestinian national consciousness” (Glavanis-Grantham, 1996), which became an institutionalized nationalist agenda with the creation of the PLO in 1959. Subsequent divisions emerged within the women’s movement between those who believed that gender equality should be separated from the liberation movement and statehood, and those working within the

institutionalized state-formation that accompanied the official women's union under the PLO. This is elaborated upon further below.

The second reason is that at this point in time (post-1948) the timelines and narratives become disjointed due to the mass exile that took place with the creation of an Israeli state and the severe fracturing of Palestinian society. There is a general agreement between authors on this period on the snowball effect that the creation of an Israeli state in 1948 had on Palestinian – and neighbouring Arab – society, and the women in them.

In 1948, a war-weary Britain relinquished its colonial rule of Palestine to the three-year-old United Nations. One day prior to the end of the Mandate, Israel declared its independence as a state on May 14, 1948 (Pappé, 2006). On that same day, the Arab-Israeli war began and 750,000 Palestinians were exiled from their homes in what became known as “Al Nakba” or “The Catastrophe” (Pappé, 2004, p. 3), to become refugees in the neighbouring Arab states, where they remain 64 years later (UNRWA, 2012).

According to Kazi (1987), for Palestinian women – within the boundaries of the old Palestine and in refugee camps around the Middle East – 1948 was “a retreat from direct struggle” (p. 28). This corresponds to Divine's (1985) narrative, both having written that this time is marked by social, charitable and political regrouping and organization. One of the biggest adjustments of this time was the economic consequences of a divided population and the loss of land. A heavily agrarian society, the loss of land for the Palestinian people meant the loss of their livelihood. The agrarian population began entering into menial labour and the social traditions of women remaining at home had to be abandoned as they took on whatever menial jobs were available to them (Abdo-Zubi, 1987). Palestinian people – men and women – could not afford to remain jobless.

Despite religious and strict social control it was essential for families to allow women to enter into waged employment. This certainly provided women with freedom of movement (although it is important to emphasize that freedom of movement does not necessarily lead to other kinds of freedom such as freedom in decision-making) (Kazi, 1987, p. 28). Kazi's words about the limits of women's freedoms would come to be quite foretelling and those are discussed further in Chapter 3 (*Literature Review*).

One of the main outcomes of occupation, exile and the national liberation movement was the new place women held in Palestinian society within the OPT as the bearers of national identity and culture through their roles as mothers and wives (Abdo-Zubi, 1987). On the other hand, a broad women's movement was finding its feet; committees and unions began to take shape, starting with the PLO-created General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) in 1965. Over the following years, women's committees affiliated with the four main political groups¹³ were created and formed the official women's movement, albeit under the umbrella of the political parties rather than the less organized autonomous previous groupings. These groups did not remain locked within the OPT, but rather spread to the camps with the political branches that were set up by the main parties there as well.

Within that movement, what Peteet (1991) terms as feminist consciousness – “women's awareness of their subordinate position within a cultural and political system and the articulation of a specifically female perspective on the social process” – began warring with members that

¹³ The Four main political groups were: PLO/Fateh, PFLP, DFLP, and PCP – at the time, women political activists from the main political parties came together to form specifically women's organizations in order to broaden the struggle for national liberation and to enhance women's role in this process – Glavanis-Grantham (1996 p. 172).

operated based on a female consciousness – “women’s awareness of their rights within the prevailing division of labour and dominant ideology” (p. 89).

According to Peteet (1991), young activist women became involved in the Resistance spurred by a sense of concern for their “communities and as nationalists” (p. 94). It was no easy thing for a woman to join the Resistance – she faced a struggle with her parents, male siblings, the Resistance and ironically the community itself. However, join they did and once engaged within it, were faced by the true extent of the “ideological constructs” (p. 95) that kept them within the domestic sphere. Prior to this activism, the “feminist” had remained buried beneath the broader nationalist movement, with women unable to see themselves as separate from their communities, their families, their men and their nationality.

This division among the women remains today – and was very evident during this research and the respondents who saw “the feminist” as separate. Glavanis-Grantham (1996) in referring to the women’s movement states that since its inception “the contemporary Palestinian women’s movement in the Occupied Territories was built on inherent and objective contradictions and limitations” (p. 173, in Afshar, 1996). The author states that as a women’s movement, it gave expression to the feminine and not the feminist – and in many cases its programmes were indistinguishable from those of charitable organizations that promoted income-generation projects that were an extension of women’s domestic duties. Therefore, the movement’s “recruitment along gender lines” brought forth the contradictions of it being an inherently political and nationalistic movement (p. 173). Additionally, the nationalistic rhetoric hid beneath it the underlying political and ideological differences that each women’s movement, and its parent political organization, had.

Kuttab (1992) goes further, saying: “the women’s committees today as they are currently constituted are elite groupings of women that do not represent the interests of the majority of Palestinian women, whom they have left as prey either to liberal western ideology or to Islamic fundamentalist ideology” (as quoted in Glavanis-Grantham, 1996, p. 174). While these authors are discussing the movement within the OPT, referring back to Peteet’s 1991 in-depth ethnography of Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, it is clear the picture is no different. As earlier mentioned, the women’s movements (and parent parties) had bureaus in the camps in Lebanon; therefore, the same divisions – whether within the committees or with the broader lower class Palestinian population – were apparent there as well.

IV. Exile in Lebanon (1948-Present)

Palestinian refugees’ exile to Lebanon is a period that spans 64 years to date, and involves decades of events that cannot be summed up in anything less than an independent paper¹⁴. Therefore, to narrow the scope, through this focus on exile in Lebanon’s refugee camps the aim is to:

(a) Draw attention to the conditions that Palestinian refugees live in and the limitations to both men and women’s lives, which should contextualize statements in Chapter 5 (*Discussion*) by the research participants about, for example, why they don’t feel able to participate politically; and,

¹⁴ Jaber Suleiman’s paper on this period (*Marginalised Community: The Case of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon*, 2006) and Elia Zureik’s extensive work (*Palestinian Refugees and the Peace Process*, 1996) are excellent sources of information and I have relied heavily on their breakdown of Lebanese and Arab states’ positions vis-a-vis Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

(b) Provide some more information on which political structures this research discusses when referring to women becoming more politically active in their immediate communities – the camps.

When Palestinians went into exile (post-1948 and post-1967), they acquired refugee status in their new host countries, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was established to provide refugees with employment, health and education services. Some 400,000 refugees settled in Lebanon¹⁵. Following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and all through the 1980s, somewhere between 280,000 and 325,000 Palestinians flooded into Beirut's camps, with more flooding in from Jordan after Black September¹⁶. These “non-ID” refugees¹⁷ remain unregistered with UNRWA, as they are technically registered in Jordan, and years later – due to Lebanese political decisions to leave this file unresolved – remain living in a state of limbo where they are unable to register children in school, marry legally, etc. Everything is done informally (Danish Refugee Council, 2007).

Lebanon, as a host state, was the least welcoming of the refugee inundation, which was seen as potentially disruptive to the country's fragile religious and political balance. For space and time considerations, this research will not delve into the situations lived by Palestinian refugees in other host countries (Syria, Jordan, and Egypt mainly), suffice to say that after years of visiting the numerous camps, the situation in Lebanon is the most dire (Suleiman, 2006).

¹⁵ For 2012 statistics of Palestinian refugees (registered):

<http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/20120317152850.pdf>

¹⁶ Black September is the name given to the war of September 1970 in which Jordan quashed the PLO in Amman and exiled the group, which subsequently moved to Lebanon. The conflict resulted in thousands of deaths and displaced.

¹⁷ Numbers vary from 2,000-5,000 – however due to lack of identification, it is difficult to assess the exact numbers and situations.

As a state with 18 recognized religious sects with its own historical religious conflict, the influx of a new and unrepresented group into Lebanon was a potential pitfall. Halabi (2004), in her essay on Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, states:

Lebanon's political system is based on a quota system that divides power equally between Christians and Muslims. The naturalization of Palestinian refugees was, and still is, perceived as disruptive to this fragile demographic balance, although several exceptions were made to naturalize Christian Palestinian refugees at times when Muslims showed higher birth rates (p.3)

Hence, the refugees were treated with what Pappé (2006) calls “a deliberate ethnic policy” that restricted their mobility to small, unsanitary camps (p.144) and denied them rights to many forms of employment. Today, 12 densely-populated camps remain out of 16 original ones created by UNRWA and on limited land base. As populations have grown, the living conditions have deteriorated over the years in terms of living conditions, human or civil rights. All refugee camps in Lebanon suffer from serious problems. The camps are governed and administered by the various political factions¹⁸ and the “popular committees” and it is within these spaces (as well as the offices of the Palestinian representative in Beirut and recently re-opened Palestinian embassy¹⁹) that Palestinian refugee women have expressed a desire to participate more equally and engage in decision-making processes that impact their daily lives. According to an International Crisis Group report in 2009:

¹⁸ Please refer to Annex B for a list of the political parties and women's unions affiliated with them.

¹⁹ A PLO official was appointed as representative in Beirut in October 2005 and offices were opened. The Palestinian Embassy in Beirut reopened in August 2011. There were deliberate marked steps in improving Palestinian-Lebanese relations – and more specifically, a political move signaling to armed Palestinian groups in the camps that official channels were now open and arms should be handed over: <http://www.lpdc.gov.lb/About-Lpdc/BackGround.aspx>

Also: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2011/Aug-18/Abbas-inaugurates-Palestinian-Embassy-in-Beirut.ashx#axzz1m6qqG6u2>.

The Cairo Agreement of 1969²⁰ put the camps under control of the PLO, and banned Lebanese security forces from entering. The agreement recognised both the Palestinians' right to wage their struggle against Israel from Lebanese soil and the refugees' political and socioeconomic rights (to work, reside, move and so forth). It also endorsed the principle of camp self-management through the establishment of local administrative committees (known as popular committees) and the creation of the Palestinian Armed Struggle Organisation (al-Kifah al-Musallah), the organisation responsible for law and order as well as security coordination with Lebanese authorities (p.9).

An article in *The Electronic Intifada* (2010) adds:

Although the Lebanese government withdrew from the Cairo Agreement in the late 1980s and theoretically reclaimed its rule over the camps, the state has refrained from exercising its authority. Politically, the camps have been ruled by popular committees, while security committees have been serving as an internal police force (para.5).

However, skirmishes between refugees and members of Lebanese political parties continue to this day, albeit sporadically. A conflict between the Lebanese army and a radical Palestinian group, Fatah al-Islam, broke out in May 2007 in Nahr Al-Bared refugee camp in Tripoli causing the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), to enter a refugee camp for the first time since the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). The confrontation lasted three months, 47 civilians were killed, 30,000 displaced and the camp was completely demolished (ICG, 2009). Predominantly however, conflict is more limited to ideological rhetoric at this point. Violent infighting between the numerous Palestinian political factions (Fatah, Hamas, Jund al-Sham and others) is a daily occurrence in any of the camps, and the sporadic war between Lebanon and Israel commonly results in camps being destroyed (e.g. Sabra in 1982 or several casualties and camp destruction in Israel's 2006 July war with Hizbullah) and Palestinian youth being recruited

²⁰ On Monday, 3rd November 1969, the Lebanese delegation headed by Army Commander General Emile al-Bustani, and the Palestine Liberation Organization delegation, headed by Mr. Yasser Arafat, chairman of the organization, met in Cairo to draft a set of principles and measures outlining the relations between Lebanon and the Palestinian revolution. The details can be found at this link: http://prn.mcgill.ca/research/papers/brynen2_09.htm

to fight. This is a brief portrayal of the various, ongoing conflicts that have extended over 64 years and encompass the lives of the women – and others – living in the camps. Costandi (2002) states that “Palestinians were a mercurial presence in Beirut, they were at once ... existing yet not, recognised yet disenfranchised, welcomed yet barely tolerated” (Costandi, 2002, p. 40).

Unfortunately, today, the reality is not very different to the decades past that Costandi refers to.

Over the past 64 years that the Palestinian refugees have lived in Lebanon, several events came to shape their relationship with the Lebanese and contributed to their increased isolation and marginalization. However, as Suleiman states, “one should resist the temptation of laying the burden of Palestinian refugees’ problems on the shoulders of Lebanon alone as a host country” (2006, p. 3).

These events that have unfolded between the Palestinian refugees and this particular host country have not only involved Palestinians and Lebanese pitted against each other but a myriad of actors from both sides – in particular Israel and its allies within Lebanon and Palestine, and including international intervention from Arab states, the United States and others. Zureik states:

The position of the Arab states toward the Palestine question in general, and the refugees in particular, cannot be divorced from the ongoing interplay of Arab politics in the region ... The absence of democracy and an egalitarian economic order in the Arab world and the episodic flare-up of regional and ethnic conflicts which challenge the legitimacy of ruling regimes have all contributed to Arab governmental intolerance of minorities in their midst (1996, p. 15).

Today, the position of Palestinians in Lebanon remains untenable. The Lebanese government continues to severely restrict Palestinian movement within and into the country, even for those who are registered with UNRWA and carry valid travel documents. They are denied access to public education and face severe employment restrictions, specifically in over 70

professional fields, “such as law, medicine, and engineering, even though these occupations are open to professionals from other countries as long as Lebanese counterparts are treated in a reciprocal manner by the same countries” (Zureik, 1996, p. 17). Their work is predominantly in the informal economy, with low wages and not covered by existing unemployment and welfare legislation (Zureik, 1996). While this research was being conducted in August 2010, the Lebanese government passed a law removing some of the employment restrictions. However, an informal poll by this researcher with some respondents on this issue was faced with cynicism as to whether the law would actually be applied, which professions the Lebanese Labor Ministry would allow them to work in, and whether Lebanese employers would agree to hire Palestinians²¹.

V. **War of the Camps (1985-1989) and the First Intifada (1987-1991)**

One of these most significant periods in Lebanese-Palestinian history is the War of the Camps (1985-1989), a sub-conflict within the longer running Lebanese Civil War, in which the camps were besieged by the Shiite Amal militia. As previously mentioned, Lebanese-Palestinian and Lebanese-Israeli (as well as Syrian-Lebanese-Palestinian) relations have been highly volatile. Over the years, there have been Lebanese political groups and their affiliated militias who have covertly or overtly allied themselves with Israel in their fight against the PLO (Peteet, 2005). For example, the Amal Movement, led by Lebanon’s current Speaker of the Parliament Nabih Berri (first elected to head Amal in 1984 and has been Speaker since 1992), was once such movement.

²¹ The law states that: “Palestinian refugees registered with the Lebanese authorities and the UN agency for Palestine refugees (UNRWA) — ‘will be given work permits from the Labor Ministry to be used exclusively to work in the private sector.’ Furthermore, the law states that ‘beneficiaries of this law are exempt from paying fees for their work permits, paying taxes, and conditions of reciprocity normally exacted on foreign workers.’” There are also still 30 professions Palestinians are banned from. <http://electronicintifada.net/content/two-steps-back-palestinians-lebanon/9027>

In 1982, after the PLO was exiled from Lebanon, and the Multi-National Force of international peacekeepers had left, Amal took control of West Beirut where two camps are situated. Backed by some parts of a disjointed Lebanese army, Syria, and indirectly by Israel, Amal militants waged a war with the Palestinian militants in the camps for control of the area (Fisk, 1996). The number of deaths varies, with the Lebanese government placing Palestinian casualties at around 3,800 and 6,800 injured. However, due to the unregistered number of refugees, this number is likely higher. Additionally, in September 1982, at the height of the Lebanese Civil War, anywhere between 762 and 3,500 Palestinian and Lebanese civilians were killed by a Lebanese Christian Phalangist militia in what became known as the Sabra and Shatila massacre.

Suleiman states:

It is important to note that the Palestinian refugee population was subjected to continuous homelessness and displacement from one camp or temporary shelter to another on account of the continuing Israeli invasions (1978, 1982, 1993, 1996) and incursions against Lebanon, as well as because of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1991) including the 'war of the camps' (1985-1989) and its repercussions. A survey of 4,470 displaced Palestinian families in nearly 90 sites was conducted by two Palestinian NGOs in 1988. The survey found that the majority of these families were displaced because of the ... 'war of the camps', and that 75 percent of them have been forced from their houses three or more times (2006, p.5-6).

Several of the women interviewed stated that family members were killed by Amal movement militants. Due to the nature of the fighting in a ground conflict, women were experiencing hand-to-hand combat with Israeli soldiers, they died as the men died, and lived on the front lines together. That is not to say that they didn't experience criticism and struggle from their communities. In fact, some women combatants faced an intra-group conflict, being labelled

“loose” by their communities, and being shunned by their families. They also quickly realized, both in the camps and the OPT that military activism does not equal greater political clout.

The War of the Camps is a particularly significant time-period for this research because the participants interviewed lived through this conflict and to them, *this* is the conflict that created a shift in their social-political roles and that they identify with as a “different time”. In fact, according to one respondent, “I know it’s horrible to say this, but despite the fact that we were at war and people were dying, I sometimes wish we could return to that time. Things were different. People were different, the community rallied around each other again and for women, we had a much greater freedom and role to play” (*Janine, 46, Housewife, Individual Interview*).

The aftermath of this war in Lebanon corresponded with the First Intifada (1987-1991) in the OPT.

In December 1987, after more than 20 years under military occupation, the Gaza Strip and West Bank erupted in a spontaneous popular uprising that became known as the first intifada (an Arabic word for “shaking off” that quickly entered the international political lexicon). Palestinians from all walks of life—youth, merchants, labourers, women and children—staged massive demonstrations, economic boycotts, tax resistance and strikes to protest the military occupation of their land and to demand national independence. From the start, Israeli armed forces responded harshly to the protests, which were marked mostly by the involvement of unarmed Palestinian children and youths who threw stones at the occupying forces. Between 1987 and 1993, over 1,000 Palestinians were killed and tens of thousands were injured as unarmed protests across the occupied Palestinian territory were met with force, including the use of live ammunition, beatings and sometimes the lethal use of tear gas. Thousands of Palestinians were detained, thousands were transferred to prisons in Israel and many were deported from the Palestinian territory (UN, 2008, p. 27)²².

²² <http://unispal.un.org/pdfs/DPI2499.pdf>

While the Intifada²³ did not physically spill over into Lebanon's refugee camps, the effects were felt by the people, who in their own right were in the midst of continued fighting with Israeli soldiers and Lebanese militias. Refugees in Lebanon also held demonstrations in the camps, in solidarity with those in the OPT; women frequently organized and participated in the demonstrations. This period, whether inside the territories or in Lebanon's refugee camps, highlights an unprecedented "social and political transformation occurring within Palestinian society in general and in women's role and position within it" (Glavanis-Grantham, 1996, p. 175).

²³ The Second Intifada – also known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada which took place from September 2000 and ended roughly around 2005 – is not discussed in this research. However, that is not to diminish from its relevance. The Second Intifada differed from the First in its inception and the atmosphere it took place in. While the First Intifada was at the height of Palestinian democratic activism, and was led by a mass-movement of civil society that mobilized men, women, and youth, the Second came following a breakdown of the Camp David talks and in the wake of Oslo Accords disillusionment. Political groups were fragmenting due to the Oslo Accords and as the women's committees follow the main parties, they were unable to mobilize the women. With the more closed atmosphere of closed-door political negotiations that excluded civil society, the Second Intifada marginalized many groups, including women. The official women's movement was marked with particular fragmentation in this period, among women who believed it was time to push for an emancipation program from the Palestinian Authority (PA) and those who feared such a project (Johnson & Kuttab, 2001). Penny Johnson & Eileen Kuttab's 2001 article "Where Have All the Women (and Men) Gone? Reflections on Gender and the Second Palestinian Intifada" is a very comprehensive and strong article for more reading on this issue.

CHAPTER III – LITERATURE REVIEW

I. Introduction

As Chapter 2 (*History*) indicated, Palestinian women's engagement in the liberation movement produced a new gender discourse and awareness of power structures within the Palestinian community. This chapter highlights the discourse most relevant to this particular research and when viewed from a post-colonial feminist lens. The literature chosen stems from the use of that particular lens, and hence, the use of theorists writing within that discipline, as well as, the fact that discussions with the participants highlighted themes that fit within these theories (such as internalization by the women of patriarchal traditions as norms; the encroachment of western liberal practices threatening Palestinian right of return; the devaluing of the women's participation in the liberation movement; the need for global connectivity, among others).

The literature begins with Foucault's theories on power and control. These are particularly relevant as an overarching theme due to the theorist's focus on "biopower" (1995) and the formation of truths and norms – something which is very important when discussing patriarchal and colonial power structures and their effects on Palestinian culture. Hardt and Negri's works on *Empire* (2001), *the Multitude* (2004) and the effects/uses of "the two faces" (p. xiii) of globalization are also crucial to this research for two reasons:

- a. The effects of globalization – and in this case, globalization is being used as a "western liberalization" or neo-liberalization hegemonic power – on the Palestinian community (politically, culturally, economically) will be highlighted. This work ties in with Foucault's biopolitics through the formation of *Empire* and everyone's place within a global social order. This will be expanded upon further below.

- b. The other side of globalization – and in this case, globalization as a unifying tool for communication – will also be highlighted. However, I have chosen to leave this section for the conclusion, because this was something that came up organically in the discussions with participants. Therefore, I prefer that the reader be led to the conclusions via Chapter 5 (*Discussion*), after learning more about the women’s lives and connecting with them.

The second section focuses on the overarching theories that frame the discourse on women and conflict; such as the breakdown of patriarchal power structures in times of war and upheaval; the loss of political gains post-conflict; the victimization of women by international organizations and the media; and lack of documentation and hence, devaluing of women’s roles.

Finally, these theories are then further narrowed down in the third section to focus on Palestinian women and their roles in the conflicts and the recurring three issues that the women are faced with:

- a. The conflict between Nationalism and Gender;
- b. The Feminist versus the Feminine; and,
- c. The effects of occupation, conflict and exile – particularly the detrimental effect on documentation and historic value to the women’s roles.

II. “Biopolitics” and the problematic of Empire

One of Foucault’s (1982-83) most prominent theories is society’s constant surveillance of the individual and the subsequent construction of that individual by this panoptic gaze; what he termed the “three axes...: that of the formation of forms of knowledge and practices of veridiction; that of the normativity of behavior and the technology of power; and finally that of

the constitution of the subject's modes of being on the basis of practices of self" (1982-83, p. 61). His works on the constant scrutiny and creation of social constructs, and what he terms "the biopower" exhibited by society in governing the individual have found resonance in this research. Foucault terms biopower as: "The form of power that regulates social life from its interior, following it, interpreting it, absorbing it, and rearticulating it (as cited in Hardt and Negri, 2001, p. 24).

Power is not merely a relation of domination by one person or group over another. Rather, power circulates, or functions in the form of a chain. Individuals are always simultaneously being subjected to and exercising power: They are not only its passive recipients; they are also its agents (Foucault, 1980, as cited in Rubenberg, 2001, p. 11).

The Palestinian people – whether in the OPT or in the refugee camps – are under constant surveillance. There are numerous power structures that layer their lives (occupation, religion, statelessness are a few examples), and when it comes to Palestinian women, the multiple layers of oppression and reconstruction represent an intersectional analysis framework, where Palestinian refugee women suffer from the additional oppression of their gender under a patriarchal system, as well as the religious edicts of their society, their refugee status and their continued statelessness (Indra, 1987; Khalidi, 2008). According to Indra (1987), refugee women:

In addition to suffering the disabilities of being a refugee are further constrained by being women; they often lack the class and cultural resources to make their concerns heard, and they are constrained from protesting by both traditional gender roles and by altruistic considerations of the marginal psychological statuses of their men. They thus suffer from two levels of gender inequality; that of their host country context and that of their source culture (p. 4).

Hardt and Negri (2001) define the problematic of Empire as "determined in the first place by one simple fact: that there is a world order. This order is expressed as a juridical formation"

(p. 3). According to the authors, Empire is the “new sovereign, supranational world power” that has superseded the power of the nation-state and has unified the imperialist powers and has structured them all under one common notion of imperial right “that is decidedly postcolonial and postimperialist” (pg. 9).

We believe that this shift makes perfectly clear and possible today the capitalist project to bring together economic power and political power, to realize, in other words, a properly capitalist order (p. 9).

Within this new global form of sovereignty and the way this machine called Empire is set in motion, continuous ideals of justice and right are constructed and reconstructed, a global intervening authority continuously called for to resolve global crises (Hardt and Negri, 2001).

This authority is not a central figure such as that embodied in Hobbes’ *Leviathan* or following on from Foucault’s work, the policing bodies in a “*disciplinary society*” (Hardt and Negri, 2001, p. 23). The authority has now transformed into a “*society of control*” (p. 23), where people police each other; the “society in which social command is constructed through a diffuse network of *dispositifs* or apparatuses that produce and regulate customs, habits, and productive practices” (Hardt and Negri, 2001, p. 23). Where values of right, wrong, moral, immoral, and rules of social integration are enforced through fluid networks, such as networks of information or communication, which dictate and reinforce social norms.

A “network power,” a new form of sovereignty, is now emerging, and it includes as its primary elements, or nodes, the dominant nation-states along with supranational institutions, major capitalist corporations, and other powers. This network power we claim is “imperial” not “imperialist” (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. xii).

This is what Foucault terms the *formation* of biopower: “Power can achieve an effective command over the entire life of the population only when it becomes an integral, vital function

that every individual embraces and reactivates of his or her own accord” (Hardt and Negri, 2001, p. 24).

Additionally, this “imperial command is exercised no longer through the disciplinary modalities of the modern state but rather through the modalities of biopolitical control” (2001, p. 344). Hardt and Negri state, “some call this situation ‘governance without government’” (2001, p. 14), a global system based on the notion of imperial right that places each subject within a hierarchical structure, where “every movement is fixed and can seek its own designated place only within the system itself, in the hierarchical relationship accorded it” (2001, p. 14).

Empire is emerging today as the center that supports the globalization of productive networks and casts its widely inclusive net to try to envelop all power relations within its world order – and yet at the same time it deploys a powerful police function against the new barbarians and rebellious slaves who threaten its order (2001, p. 20).

However, when focusing on a society in conflict or one that has endured conflict, the space presented by the breakdown of the social constrictions and the emergence of a new social consciousness, can be used to rebuild the individual and community within a new construct, a more equal one, with more agency, and with less of the victimization inherent in Foucault’s individual.

III. Women and War

Turshen (1998) states, “War ... destroys the patriarchal structures of society that confine and degrade women. In the very breakdown of morals, traditions, customs, and community, war also opens up new beginnings” (1998, p. 20, as cited in Karam, 2001, p. 8). Meintjes (2001)

argues that as men and women are drawn into conflict, gender relationships invariably shift (p. 64).

It is important to highlight that there is a tendency in literature to generalize experiences of the two genders during wars. El-Bushra and Mukarubuga (2010) for example, agree that gender roles are affected by conflict. However, in their article the authors state that women are the mainstays of the household and community integrity and that “it is largely women who take on the role of shielding their families and communities from the shocks, stresses, and disruptions of unstable change” (p. 16). Nonetheless the authors add that as conflict escalates, this role is strained by the stresses and various demands placed on the women.

This thesis focuses more on the breakdown or blurring of traditional gender roles – mainly because the lived experiences of Palestinian women as described in previous literature and in the course of the fieldwork pointed to this shift. However, whichever thread one follows, eventually there is a convergence of theories that highlights the heavy dependence on women and their active roles in war – and the subsequent repression and silencing that takes place in the post-conflict period (El-Bushra & Mukarubuga, 2010; Kaufman, & Williams, 2010; Handrahan, 2004; Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen, 2001; Abdo, 1991, 1994; Peteet, 1991, 2001).

Handrahan (2004), argues that whether during or post-conflict, women’s rights and their abilities to voice their security problems are neglected. She states that men and women experience conflict differently. In post-conflict situation, she argues that the re-shaping of identities also takes place in a male-dominated setting so women’s identities are constantly being shaped by the male counterparts and their power struggles. According to Handrahan (2004):

While men suffer tremendously during war, there is nonetheless a positive identity aspect for men who defend ‘their’ women and homeland. Male participation in

conflict presents a necessary component of citizenship, ethnicity and communal belonging ... War makes the man (p. 432-433).

Citing the examples of Algeria, Iran, and Mozambique, and the reversal of roles for women in the liberation movement, Abdo (1991) states:

Historically, women's active participation in liberation movements, those of socialist and/or nationalist forms, has been marked by a split in identity. Women's revolutionary identity has often clashed with their 'womanist' or feminist identity. Most often, though to varying degrees, feminist research has shown that the victory of the socialist or nationalist revolution is not necessarily a victory for women (p. 19).

Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen (2001) state that the post-period is too late for women to transform societal structures. Change needs to take place during war-time, when women are given the responsibilities and independence usually enjoyed by men – and then retained in the wake of the conflict. These works are especially relevant in that they provide helpful guidelines when looking at women's involvement in politics, decision-making processes and the change in social gender relations during war-time situations, especially in resistance or liberation movements. Thus, these authors' theories on why women have not retained the "gains" (2001, p. 19) of conflict in the aftermath are relevant, in that I am focusing on an area where Palestinian women have historically been thrust into activist roles since 1917, in protest against the Balfour Declaration, the colonial British mandate, and during the First Intifada. The long-term nature of the conflict means that there have been ebbs and flows in which women have been politically and socially active, which have corresponded with Palestinian society generally having to deal with shifts in livelihoods, exile, Intifadas or conflicts, as well largely absent from these domains. With similar studies highlighting the importance of conflict on political participation and representation (Enloe, 2000; Bop, 2001; Cockburn and Zarkov, 2002; Handrahan, 2004 to name

but a few), the question remains then, why is it that women's experiences show the opposite as true?

Before delving into the broader issue at hand, it is important to reiterate here that this research is seen and discussed through a post-colonial feminist lens. The authors that shape this framework advocate a feminism overcoming a patriarchal order, indeed, but also the overthrowing of a colonial structure – as Fanon (1963) stated in his discourse on breaking down colonial structures in Algeria and which would apply here – “a whole structure being changed from the bottom up” (p. 35) – that has produced yet another dimension of oppression. As Mohanty (2006) states: Questions of political consciousness and self-identity are a crucial aspect of defining Third World women's engagement with feminism” (p. 77).

Additionally, when focusing on the case study of Palestinian refugee women, there is also the layer of statelessness that is added to the oppressive factors facing the women discussed (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009; Indra, 1987). Indra describes this well:

One of the key contemporary challenges facing the world today is to bring women into positions where they can more effectively define and shape women's perspectives, more forcefully call attention to women's experiences, and contribute to the evolution of a social world-view which incorporates the perspectives of both women and men. In a microcosm, the universe of refugees should reflect these same concerns. And yet, while refugees today claim a great deal of attention, women refugees do not ... This challenge arises from the indisputable fact that from the process of defining a refugee to the final phase of resettlement, both the overall discourse, practice, and research concerning refugees today remains primarily a male paradigm, even if in a superficial way it appears to be a universal and general one (1987, p. 3).

Numerous authors have focused on this issue and questioned the reasons why women's gains during conflict fail to be reflected in the post-conflict, or post-revolutionary, societies. Some have stressed the lack of sufficient organization during conflict; the fact that even in the

worst cases of upheaval, women remained in their caretaking roles within a patriarchal order; the detrimental role of international organizations; and patriarchal society's devaluing of women's activism as accidental. Hale (2001), whose work focuses on women in post-war Eritrea, writes:

It does not bode well for any group of liberated women in a post-revolutionary situation that, to date, no liberation or revolutionary war, no matter how progressive its ideology regarding the emancipation of women – from Russia and China to Algeria, Vietnam, Cuba, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guinea-Bissau, Angola, Mozambique, South Africa and the Palestinian *intifada* – has empowered women and men to maintain an emancipating atmosphere for women after the military struggle and brief honeymoon are over (p. 123)²⁴.

Abdo (1991) argues that feminist literature in and of itself fails to understand the dynamics between the women's movement and the liberation movement and consequently, fails to address the intricate nuances that "make up the liberation movement" (p. 20).

Most studies on women and national liberation movements have focused on two major images: that of the woman-victim who participated, gave and sacrificed during the movement but who after liberation was victimised by the patriarchal structure of the state; and that of the strong woman fighter in the forefront of the armed struggle ... In the first instance, analysis tends to locate blame within the structure of the 'liberated' state and ignores the structure of the movement itself. The second, which glorifies women's militant contributions, fails to problematise the complexity of their struggle (p. 20).

Karam (2001) states that studies on women in war have focused on the "gendered nature of war" and on the "largely androcentric structure and male-dominated culture in soldiering, whether state-sponsored, paramilitary or guerrilla movement" (p. 6). Women are not seen as perpetrators of wars and this "motherist" position, as termed by Jodi York (cited in Karam, 2001, p. 6) essentializes them as being inherently peaceful beings. The portrayal as mothers awaiting

²⁴ Even in South Africa where women's success in moving from active participation in the liberation struggle to active participation in government, "the success has come with the price of a women's movement that has lost its strong leaders to government, and women politicians who lack the support of a strong women's movement. Thus, in the moment of greatest victory South African women lack the mass movement that propelled them to success, suggesting that the struggle is not done with yet" (Geisler, 2000).

their sons' and husbands' return from war places women in the innocent, victim sphere and removes their agency as equal participants in wars, resistance/liberation movements or revolutions. According to Karam (2001), it is "particularly post-conflict, that notions of victimhood and what women have suffered seem to be rallied as legitimate excuses to limit women's agency in the peace-building processes" (p. 7). Women's voices are rarely heard in international crises; they are visible only as victims, as the phrase "womenandchildren" (Enloe, 1990; Indra, 1987; McKay, 1998, p. 353, as cited in Karam, 2001, p. 19) rolls off the television screens, or recurs in newspapers in a further distorted gendered framing of war and places women in a sphere of innocence and limits their roles. Bop (2001) writes:

Although the media repeatedly provide information that describes the tough conditions women endure to survive, particularly in refugee camps and on the roads of exile, they constantly ignore the actions women take as principal actors. The image conveyed, which endures in the onlooker's memory, is that of women as losers and victims (p. 19).

According to Enloe (2000), militarization is never gender-neutral. The author states:

Perhaps international politics has been impervious to feminist ideas because for so many centuries in so many cultures it has been thought of as a typically masculine sphere of life. Only men, not women and children, have been imagined capable of the sort of public decisiveness international politics is presumed to require (p.4).

Del Zotto (2002) adds that international relations theory is focused on the ultimate survival of the state "through a balancing of powers constructed through an implied male agency" (p. 141). The individual actors within a conflict are therefore ignored and universalized into a sea of humanity. Del Zotto cites J. Anne Tickner's (1996) argument that when women are "acknowledged by political realists they are seen as victims, rarely as agents" (p. 142). Representations of women during conflict by mainstream media, "in their relentless pursuit of

speed and simplicity” are a reinforcement of the “masculinist interpretation of conflict” (Del Zotto, 2002, p. 142).

Handrahan (2004) argues that much of the losses for gender equality are a result of the international community’s “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell, 1987, p. 280, as cited in Handrahan, 2004, p. 431). With the exception of the United Nations’ Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and a few other feminist NGOs, she writes that the international community continuously fails to recognize the role that “fraternity, male group identity, plays in relation to the conflict” (p. 432). She adds that it is “*taken for granted* that it is men who fight, men who lead troops or guerrilla movements, men who negotiate peace, men who wear blue helmets, and men who head UN agencies (p. 432)

The loosening of rigid and patriarchal gender schemas is closed not by the national male leadership, but by the male international development community, whose own sense of patriarchy-as-normal is quite intact ... This may be evident in the aggressive refusal by the international development community, as a whole, to seriously consider gender issues in post-conflict reconstruction ... The lack of ‘gender mainstreaming’ seems *not* to result from an inability on the part of the international community to know better ... but rather suggests its *inability* to consider *its own* patriarchy and the damage this does within international development paradigms (2004, p. 436).

According to the author, the post-conflict community is focused on “male power systems, struggles and identity formation” (p. 433). The author writes that while war breaks down patriarchal structures, this gender liberation is “short-lived as the national patriarchy begins to reassert itself after the war and expects women to return to ‘the way they were before the war’, that is, to their subordinate positions” (p. 436).

The post-conflict environment, like conflict, is vividly about male power systems, struggles and identity formation (Cockburn & Zarkov, 2002) ... This ‘international

fraternity' – the community of decisionmakers and experts who arrive after a conflict on a mission of 'good will' – holds the upper hand, morally, economically and politically. Its members are there to 'enforce' UN mandates, international laws and norms. As individuals, they have significantly greater financial power than local people. Morally, they are the 'saviours'. They have been brought in because local males have 'failed'. The model of 'civic virtue' is then also evident within the ranks of the international 'fraternity'... The internationals also bring with them varying ideas of gender norms, which they may attempt, consciously or unconsciously, to impose (p. 433)

Bop (2001) emphasizes that women's leadership on the "political and social levels, rights won in periods of conflict, is the most extreme and longlasting (*sic*) of their losses" (p. 30). One of the reasons she argues – and which is very relevant pertaining to the Palestinian case – is that women's rights very often take second place to the nationalist agenda. According to the author, authorities in the post-conflict period rarely ever express interest in changing existing power relations in favour of the "socially subordinate" (p. 30). Too often, women's interests as a group against patriarchal ideology are tied to national liberation and are never articulated as part of an independent movement. Bop also pinpoints the broader issue of a Maoist concept of "principal and secondary contradictions" (p. 31), which many liberation movements – and definitely the Palestinian one – subscribe to. This concept focuses the power struggle onto the "country and the foreign invader" (Bop, 2001, p. 31) and all other struggles (any inequalities within the "Us" group) take second place and are delegated to a distant future. The author states, "Women members of the groups and parties who accepted this system of ideas and practices may have committed a historical error by agreeing to give second place in their strategies to transforming social relations between the sexes" (2001, p. 31). In fact, Bop argues that gender issues during conflict and post are "virtually ignored" (p. 31). According to Handrahan (2004) often, the shifts

in societal gender roles during wartime are “unconscious and additional to more pressing problems” (p. 433).

However, while these questions about possible shifts in gender roles may be downplayed by the society as a whole during war or liberation struggles, they should be a pivotal concern for women. Peteet (2001) argues that nationalist movements “inspire and give legitimacy to women’s movements” (p. 147). However, the author adds, “they do not necessarily promote gender equality or restructure gender relations” (p. 147); the defeat of the PLO in Lebanon (in 1982) gives researchers a chance to examine what happens to women’s movements “once the larger nationalist movement is absent” (p. 147). Peteet sticks to her argument that marrying the two movements (nationalist and feminist) is necessary, but adds that setting out the terms from the outset is even more important; being too dependent on the larger nationalist movement for funding, legitimacy and organizational ability are ultimately unbeneficial. The author (2001) adds:

The emergence and consolidation of states can marginalize women’s former spontaneous activism. With militant national liberation movements, a different process unfolds. Rather than distancing the domestic sector and women from the sphere of formal politics, the movement may recruit them as part of a strategy of mass mobilization... In the Palestinian case, a number of questions need to be considered. Was participation in the national struggle challenging women’s domestic role and the patriarchal structures of control, or had the national struggle simply been grafted onto women’s traditional roles in reproduction and production? Had the domestic sector itself taken on nationalist political meaning, in addition to its reproductive and productive functions? Had there been a transformation in relations between men and women and between women? (As cited in Joseph and Slyomovics, 2001, p. 142).

In an attempt to answer some of these questions, there is a key dynamic when looking at women’s involvement in war in general. Peteet (1991, 2001), Abdo (1991, 1994), Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen (2001) speak of the “feminist consciousness” of women during war-time, in

that often the regression to pre-war social structures are due to women's individual or collective failure to conceptualise or internalise the changes in their role. Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen (2001) argue, "Without a conscious translation, there can be no effort to defend women's opportunities and gains in peacetime" (p. 9). They also focus on the detrimental effects of dispersed community and a lack of documentation on making women's "potential visible" (p. 8). Women who have mobilized in numerous conflict zones fought together as soldiers, lived in refugee camps, and worked toward accomplishing leadership goals, have found it difficult to take these struggles to a national level due to an inability to sustain support networks post-conflict (p. 10).

Reintegration after war is a difficult situation for both men and women and sustaining empowering types of social cohesion is difficult within the survival phase of post-conflict.

Handrahan (2004) elaborates:

For women whose male relatives survive the war, domestic violence tends to increase when male combatants return home. Women and female leaders who have managed homes and/or the community during the absence of the males may experience conflicting emotions as their decisionmaking and authority become secondary to those of the returning men. Men may be shocked at how 'empowered' the women have become as a result of the war. Excessive care and attention heaped on the male soldier as a returning 'hero' may create internal pressures for him to live up to a standard of glory incongruent with the horrors he has witnessed and/or committed. Regardless of what a female non-combatant may have survived and whatever heroic acts of courage she may have committed, a woman is expected to devote her attention to the returning male 'war hero', and there is a tendency to minimize, if not outright deny, her war experience. The woman was not a fighter, and hence is not a hero. She can expect little comfort or recognition after the war (p. 435)

In this research, engaging social transformation with feminist narratives of war is meant to expose the masculine-dominated war narratives and allow for a participation of all members of a society, be it in a refugee camp, under occupation or otherwise.

IV. Forgotten Revolutionaries – Palestinian Refugee Women in Lebanon

Palestinian women have been unable to gain key political rights despite prolonged, significant and ongoing involvement in the national liberation movement. However, as Chapter 2 (*History*) highlighted, these periods have not been continuous and homogeneous. Depending on which community one looks at, whether Palestinians who remained within the OPT after the creation of the state of Israel or those who were expelled, the differences in the development of the social-gender relations vary with some underlying constants.

The research for this thesis was conducted in a society that was exiled and has been resident in the camps in Lebanon since 1948. Abdo-Zubi (1987) stresses the need for increased research to be undertaken within this Lebanon-resident community, with focus especially on the changing social-gender relations, the status of women and their participation in the national struggle among other aspects (p. 58). Additionally, Abdo (1991) stresses that Palestinian women's involvement in the liberation movement, especially in the case of the First Intifada, "provides a unique case for a potential and real Arab feminist movement in contemporary Arab and Middle Eastern history" (p. 20).

i. Nationalism versus... Nationalism

Looking back at the pre-1948 period, according to Abdo-Zubi (1987), when it comes to Palestinian women's involvement in the political sphere, under Ottoman rule, political involvement for peasant women and women from the wealthier classes was either severely limited or prohibited. However, throughout the 1920s and 1930s in the Mandate period that followed the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, "political resistance by the Palestinians [men and

women], both peasants and proletarians [to the disruptive economic and social consequences of British rule], was widespread” (p. 20).

The author here makes a key point in pinpointing the differences between the struggles of women in capitalist economies and those under colonial rule. Women in capitalist economies are struggling to overcome the oppression of their own societies within the context of what role they play in a system of “production and reproduction” (p. 20). Women under colonial rule are resisting their subjugation as members of an entire oppressed people. They are fighting for the “liberation of the nation as a political entity from the colonial power. The specific concerns that women have as women are subordinated to the general concerns they have as members of an oppressed people” (p. 20). This continued linking of the feminist struggle (and women’s changing roles throughout the two Palestinian Intifadas and in exile) to the national struggle and its consequences is one of the key issues that I have addressed in this research. In another article, Abdo (1991) highlights the importance of also differentiating between what she terms:

...Two forms of nationalism: the institutionalised, state form of nationalism and the nationalism of a liberation movement ... national liberation movements provide a space for women’s emancipation. By taking an active role in their national liberation, and simultaneously bringing their concerns to the forefront of the agenda, women can contribute substantially to freeing the movement from its patriarchal structure (pg. 22).

Abdo (1999) states that given Palestinian women’s contributions in the First Intifada and the national struggle in general, especially their efforts in building Palestinian civil society, they expected “a strong participation in the decision-making bodies of the new political structure of the PA [Palestinian Authority]” (p. 42). However, the author adds, they were largely disappointed in that respect. One of the reasons for this, according to Abdo, is the continued entrenchment of

“patriarchal traditions” (p. 42) which views women as the reproductive carriers of the nation and the assumption that any women’s liberation struggle is purely in service to the overall national one. Abdo (1999) here cites Lisa Taraki’s (1997, p. 19) argument that “‘Palestinians are politically advanced but socially traditional’” (p. 42). Giacaman and Johnson (1994) describe the women’s movement within the OPT and without as one that has historically been going through an internal struggle to maintain the gender-based focus rather than a national one, and the struggle to gain recognition from the “patriarchal character of the Palestinian Authority” (p. 25). In fact, according to Jad, Johnson and Giacaman (2000) the struggle for national rights and freedom from occupation means:

Any focus on internal human rights issues has been criticized, and sometimes punished, by the Palestinian Authority as sabotaging the national cause and serving Western imperial powers. In this climate and under these conditions, the women’s movement has the difficult task of building a women’s agenda that confronts both the problems of democratization and occupation (p. 140, as cited in Joseph, 2000).

Abdo (2002) concurs, adding, “Dissociating the women’s nationalist agency from the patriarchal agenda which dominates most of the nationalist discourse is still an ongoing daily struggle for women who refuse to be the ‘victims’ of nationalism” (p. 592, as cited in Al-Samman, 2009, p. 333). Abdo again is here referring to an oppressive, institutionalized nationalism, differentiated from the emancipatory potential of “national culture produced in the course of struggle...[which] depends on the extent of women’s active involvement as well as their success in pushing women’s issues to the forefront of the national agenda” (1994, p. 151).

According to Joseph and Slyomovics (2001), “the gender system in the Middle East and North Africa is shaped through and works through the institutions of patriarchy which affect much of the social order” (p. 2). Much of this patriarchy is manifested through family relations

and patrilineality where privilege is accorded to the males in the family; privilege including inheritance, citizenship, power, etc. Therefore, with the advent of the liberation movement, women who wanted to join the activism faced the most difficulty from their families (especially their mothers – Sayigh, in Abdo and Lentin, 2002), and their communities. The militarization of Palestinian society and politics holds a number of consequences for women, the most important aspect being that within a heavily patriarchal structure, “nationalist entitlements – such as positions in the Authority – are primarily given to males who are part of the militarized hierarchy of the major political organization, Fateh” (Jad, Johnson and Giacaman, as cited in Joseph, 2000, p. 139).

According to Peteet (2001), the Palestinian leadership “consistently failed to grasp, or perhaps grasped only too well, the long-term social implications of an autonomous women’s movement” (p. 141), and so were very careful about their support. They remained, according to the author, “quite ambivalent on the issue of gender equality” (p. 137). Rubenberg (2001), in her research on Palestinian women’s activism in the OPT states that “in general, women’s activism in a given locale depended on the amount of male activism” (p. 214). The author states that the disillusionment of women’s participation stemmed from three categories: “[1] concerns related to patriarchy, including honor and shame; [2] frustration with the priorities of the existing organizations; and [3] disillusionment with national politics altogether” (p. 214). It is interesting to note here, and this will be discussed further below, that the data gathered in this research on Palestinian refugee women also highlights the same three points with regard to women’s lack of political activism and participation in the camp in Lebanon.

ii. The Feminist Consciousness

As previously mentioned, an important aspect of the works of authors like Abdo (1991, 1994), Peteet (1991), Giacaman and Johnson (1994), is that of the awakening feminist consciousness for Palestinian women actively involved in the conflict. But what exactly does this mean?

According to Abdo (1994), during women's engagement with the liberation movement from 1967 onward, there was a marked "transformation in women's consciousness and organized activism, particularly those in the intifada" (p. 155). Prior to that, women activists had failed to "articulate women's emancipation with national emancipation ... [and had] continued to give priority to the national struggle at the expense of their own" (p. 156).

In the First Intifada, there was indeed a "heightened feminist consciousness among Palestinian women activists. This consciousness seems to find expression in releasing and bringing to the fore the frictions and contradictions between Palestinian women's struggle for their emancipation and their struggle to free the nation from colonialism" (Abdo, 1991, p. 22).

In Lebanon's refugee camps in the 1980s, Peteet (1991) specifically focuses on the effects of the conflict on the "consciousness" of different Palestinian women. In her ethnography, the author states that through exile and involvement in the Resistance in Lebanon's Palestinian camps, the women began to realize the implications of their involvement in the armed struggle alongside the men. Further conceptions of emancipation and gender equality had begun to take root.

The construction of gender and gender relations was a conscious process among women who were vividly aware of the historical moment. Women leaders were acutely cognizant that wartime continuous crises were periods of cultural ambiguity. Patterns of expected behaviour were suspended as people mobilized to resist their conditions ... To exploit the situation to their advantage, at such times women strove

to introduce new norms of female potential and meaning to gender relations. The problem was to sustain those changes, forged in the heat of the moment, long enough to inform long-term structural and ideological transformations (Peteet, 1991, p. 7).

During the 1980s, women gained awareness and began questioning their own society's internal structures of domination. This cognizance of the constraining nature of gender and the ideologies of the society they inhabited, this awakened "feminist consciousness" (Peteet, 1991, p. 71-72), was not a uniform occurrence among all Palestinian women. However, their experiences of exile and discrimination had awakened a "specifically Palestinian feminist perspective [that] emerged in the context of a contradiction between women's national consciousness and a structurally grounded and culturally-sanctioned limit on female autonomy that prevented women from a practice of the former" (Peteet, 1991, p. 72). This intensified the distinction between women who spoke of women's rights in a context that placed the resistance, political mobilization and employment as "initial steps" to achieving full gender equality and those who spoke of women achieving their rights – without seeking to change social roles assigned by gender. Those who had achieved a "female consciousness" wanted the freedom of rights within their domesticity – the right to choose a husband, work before marriage and go to school. Those who had achieved a "feminist consciousness" were the women who had taken their political consciousness from the level of ideas and notions to organized action. The transformation of the political consciousness from idea into action, according to Peteet (1991), is what leads to social transformations and a "practice-centered view of history and society emerges, where women are creative forces in its making" (p. 70). In her ethnography of these women, this theory seemed to hold true and Peteet (1991) poignantly wrote:

Within a limited temporal and spatial framework, women and men related to one another as near equals. Camaraderie between men and women was a consequence of facing the same dangers and trusting one another's military abilities ... Women spoke of an "euphoria," "a new sense of who I am and my strengths," and "carrying the same load as men." Thus women's heightened consciousness of their abilities unfolded through action, an action motivated by national consciousness and the conviction that women have a right to participate. Most important, the military experience awakened women to their potential equality to men. The belief in women's unsuitability, both physical and emotional, for training and combat was contested as they proved themselves as committed and able as men. Their strengths were made apparent to themselves and others (p. 150-151).

iii. Effect of Occupation/Exile on Palestinian Culture and Its Women

However, through exile, the lack of continuity of engagement due to survival needs, disillusionment, and lack of documentation of accomplishments, this feminist consciousness and activism were interrupted. With the departure of the PLO from the camps in 1982 after being exiled from Lebanon by the government, there remained no institutional structure to support the struggle for gender equality. Refugees were focused on survival and the consequences of being left behind in a hostile host country. In addition, the influences of British rule, Zionism, continued occupation and exile had taken hold and left effects in the form of the break-down of the traditional Palestinian family structure and economic restrictions on Palestinians. Forced to live under occupation and with limited means of making a living, Palestinian traditional values have been emphasized and the reproductive role of women became, and continues to be, ever more important. Abdo-Zubi (1987) states:

Turning the family into only a unit of reproduction has put pressure on women to function mainly as reproducers and nurturers, and has largely deprived them of their political role...the honour of the family rested with the one thing the family could control, the behaviour of the female member (p. 38).

As the population was exiled and settled in camps in neighbouring countries, the situation was no different. Men became resentful as women began to shun domesticity and impinge on a domain – the political – that had traditionally been viewed as masculine. As a consequence, domestic spheres gained greater importance. According to Gluck (1995), “The condition of exile only increased emphasis on women’s domestic and reproductive roles” (p. 7);

A refugee woman who had been an activist in the 1936-1939 revolt complained: “The Palestinian used to be much more advanced in his own country and women were more independent and freer ... but after 1948 this changed: in the camps the Palestinian became ultrastrict, even fanatic about the ‘honor’ [sic] of his women. Perhaps this was because he had lost everything that gave his life meaning and ‘honor’ [sic] was the only possession remaining to him (Gluck, 1995, p. 7).

Abdo-Zubi (1987) writes that during the first two decades of exile in the camps, with refugees living in conditions of widespread unemployment and poverty, the family became the “only effective agency of socialization and social reproduction in which its members could reproduce themselves as social beings” (p. 53). With the arrival of the “revolution” in the form of the Palestine Liberation Organization to the camps in the late 1960s, Palestinian refugees – men and women alike – were able to gain a new meaning to their lives. For women, there has been debate among authors over the level and nature of their involvement in the resistance. There is no dispute over their participation in the various organizations at leadership levels – that was held predominantly, if not exclusively, by men – especially in the early days (Al-Khalili, 1977, Peteet, 1986, as cited in Abdo-Zubi, 1987). Women’s involvement remained largely in the nurturing spheres of the resistance which created what Peteet (1986) has termed the “domestication of politics” or “politicization of the domestic sphere” (as cited in Abdo-Zubi, 1987, p. 56). In addition, this was a phase when women’s reproductive roles also became highly politicized as

they were viewed as the child-bearers who were directly contributing to the resistance (Peteet, 1986, as cited in Abdo-Zubi, 1987, pg. 56). According to Yuval-Davis (2000):

Women are ... seen to be cultural reproducers of the collectivity, the ones responsible for keeping oral traditions of cooking, dress, and general folklore going from generation to generation. In many cultures, the nation or the homeland is constructed as a generic mother, whose welfare and honor the men of the nation have to defend and when necessary to sacrifice their lives (p. 13).

While these nuances are crucial, it is also important to differentiate between the women themselves in terms of social class, the different struggles they had to face socially and the opportunities provided to them based on their social status. Domesticity was politicized by the women themselves often because it was the only way they could contribute. Poorer women in the camps often shared domestic labour, especially between mothers and daughters in one family. For middle-class women, the poorer women in the camps became their “‘shock absorbers’, mediating the impact of political commitments on domesticity” (Peteet, 2001, p. 144), i.e. by being employed to take on the domestic tasks of child rearing, cooking, cleaning in the households of activist women. Therefore, the domestic burden was literally shifted onto other women.

However, as argued by Abdo-Zubi (1987), this emphasis on the reproductive role of women does underestimate the role that women played over the years in the struggle – especially the younger generation. While there was resistance from the older women in the camps to the participation of younger women, which continues to this day and has increased in the face of attempts by colonizing forces to erase their culture (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009, p. 59), some women did become involved in the predominantly-male dominated spheres of the resistance, including active fighting. However, according to Al-Samman (2009):

One of the challenges facing female revolutionary fighters is the resistance of the male-dominated political establishment to female attempts to break out of gender-assigned private domains. Full participation in the public political arena is often sought, yet never attained unless it is defined in combative, masculine terms. It becomes imperative, then, for female fighters to negotiate alternative forms of national participation that at once acknowledge and heed feminine national agency ...For a female fighter, the struggle is almost always personal as much as it is national since national commitments will not erase her personal transgressions as far as family and society are concerned (p. 334).

Peteet (1991) states that despite some political participation in the 1950s and 60s by women in exile, these groups “leave less record of their achievement; indeed they are not seen as actors or participants on the stage of history but as, by and large, passive bystanders...as recipients of social change, certainly not as pivotal in the momentum of history” (p. 39).

Sharoni (1995) states:

Although some women were eager to spend hours discussing the applicability of feminist perspectives and interpretations to the Israeli-Palestinian context, others rejected the imposition of what one Israeli-Jewish woman termed ‘text-book feminism’ upon their particular struggles...there has been a growing consensus...on the need to document and theorize about women’s political struggles from within their own movements” (p. 2).

The author adds: “We need to treat the daily experiences and struggles of Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish women as a particularly important location from which theories can emerge” (p. 7).

The above authors have all provided an invaluable basis for this research. Currently, there is a need for research of/in Lebanon’s refugee camps and the women in them when it comes to political activism. Peteet (1991) in her ethnography of Palestinian women refugees and their situation post-1982 wrote: “It is futile to discuss whether or not women’s issues were assigned a secondary status” (p. 217), as the struggle at the time was focused on survival. However, through

looking at works by the above authors, the research has shown that over six decades later, there has been some, but not enough, change.

Refugees are still struggling to survive and will continue to do so until a just solution is found to the Israeli occupation. According to Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen (2001), for women anywhere who are trying to gain equal rights, “the real opportunity for planting the seeds for transformation is during wartime, in conditions of conflict” (p. 10). The research conducted will highlight that those seeds have been planted – Palestinian refugee women are ready, willing, and able to begin nourishing those seeds for sowing. Despite the protracted nature of the Palestinian refugee status and the fact that communities – patriarchal ones – have been established, there is no doubt that they remain in a state of conflict, in a state of daily flux due to the social, political and economic uncertainty they live in. Women are fighting to be able to enter the workforce outside the camps.

Therefore, now, perhaps then is the time to raise the issue of community development to include all members of the society. Kazi’s (1987) argument on the importance of Palestinian women continually involving themselves in the struggle for liberation – which is ongoing – becomes ever more significant following testimony provided by the above authors on the futility of change post-conflict. Kazi states that Palestinian women, “by giving national and patriotic meaning to women’s reproductive and domestic roles ... may be actually helping the patriarchy to further institutionalize gender-based division of labour and social control” (p. 38). Therefore, it is necessary, today, for Palestinian women – whether in the camps or within the OPT – to dispel the one-faceted belief of themselves as “the mainstay of family and the vessel of Palestinian culture” (Gluck, 1995, p. 10). It is necessary for them to untie their cause from that of the nationalist project, document their struggles and achievements and step forward beyond the

female consciousness into an indigenous feminist one that can create real change and turn their “reveries of emancipation” into reality.

Just prior to Peteet publishing her ethnography in 1991, Maryam, a female cadre in the Resistance and member of the General Union of Palestinian Women, tells the author:

Women are enrolling and displaying an eagerness to learn. The problem is the way we, as a union, are teaching them ... Are we offering courses solely so that a women can learn a skill and work, or do we want to raise her consciousness of her abilities, of her potential and teach her about the Revolution? ...I don't want these women to finish their relationship with the Resistance once the course is over. I want them to come back to us ... we should do a research project to find out what exactly women need and how we can help them. It will only take six months – what is six months? We're not going back to Palestine for another sixty years! (Peteet, 1991, p. 168-169).

Sixty-four years later, it is important to take a closer look at where these women are and what dreams they have for an equal society.

CHAPTER IV – RESEARCH METHODS

I. Introduction

For the purposes of this research, this researcher has focused on one case study – that of Palestinian women living in one Lebanese refugee camp – exploring their political rights and gender relations within that camp. The choice of a Palestinian refugee camp as the case study for this research stems from several reasons, primarily my familiarity with the area and the subject matter, as well as with the people themselves. My own background as a Palestinian refugee also eased my inclusion into the community for the duration of the research.

There are ethical concerns with regards to naming this camp; mainly recognition. There is only one centre in this camp that deals with women's issues and it is where the interviews took place. The subject of this research is a sensitive one and the participants have been promised full anonymity. Therefore, suffice to say it is a sizeable refugee camp with a presence of a women's NGO working on issues of empowerment, and ease of access as a result of collaboration with the NGO. It is one of the oldest of the 12 refugee camps; it is also one of the most over-crowded and poor. Established in 1948 by the League of Red Cross societies to accommodate the influx of refugees fleeing their homes, it has now expanded to incorporate Lebanese, Syrian, Bangladeshi and many other nationals who find it cheaper to live at the outskirts.

This camp in particular suffered heavy losses during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and many of the residents were displaced or lost their homes, especially during the War of the Camps. The research was conducted over the period of one month (August 2010) through two focus groups (approximately 10 women in each²⁵) and individual interviews with 16 women²⁶.

²⁵ Please refer to Annex C for full participant information (names have been changed to ensure anonymity). This number is an approximation; some women had to leave half-way through due to time constraints and others arrived late for the same reasons. This made it difficult to maintain a structured environment; however, seeing as

All the meetings were held in the women's centre – as neutral a place as could be found as the participants went there on a quasi-daily basis. It would have caused problems with their families and neighbours if the research had taken place in their homes. I had asked the person acting as a guide and “gate-keeper” to ask where the women would best prefer to be interviewed and they requested the centre because they went there regularly and did not need to explain why they were going. The interviews were semi-structured to unstructured and included an opportunity to identify issues that the interview subject felt had not been captured by the questionnaire. Those interviewed were women who had participated in the focus groups and contacted by the women's centre. More details will be given in the section below specifically on the interviews.

II. NGO Collaboration

There are several small humanitarian organizations within this camp and in the surrounding neighbourhoods working on socio-economic development. One of the organizations based here is run by the residents of the camp. It was first started with the help of local women, with a specific purpose to serve Palestinian women and children in the refugee camps in Lebanon. The first project was an early childhood education center with the purpose of providing women with free time in order to improve their economic situation, free time for the women, and a safe space for children in daycare, nursery school and kindergarten. Since then, the organization has grown to become a women's, youth, young girls' and elderly centre, with computer training programs and a rehabilitation and elderly care program.

how the research was focused on the women's lives in the camps, this aspect was yet another facet of the data collected.

²⁶ I had hoped to interview a minimum of 20 women (those who had participated in the focus groups). However, as aforementioned, timing was difficult due to constraints on the women themselves as a result of family/duties and because Ramadan started two weeks into the research which caused problems in accessing the participants.

I had not originally thought of collaborating with a local NGO since my research was focused on the camp residents rather than the organizations and their work. However, a series of events led to my coordinating with this particular organization. I first came in contact with its founder when I was volunteering at a Canadian charity organization. She had been asked to visit Canada and raise awareness on the plight of Palestinian refugees. Again for ethical reasons, I cannot describe the Canadian organization because it has a very specific mandate that only operates in very few camps in Lebanon, one of which is the camp where the research was conducted. However, in the course of my work with the Canadian organization, I met the centre's founder and we discussed where she believed there was a lack of attention and research. I had also found a report that this founder had put together with an international medical organization, in which an overview of women's situations this camp was discussed and where "political exclusion" was mentioned as particularly lacking in attention. It seemed like the perfect launching point for my research and I contacted the organization to request help in entering the camp. Her enthusiasm for the project and the help provided by her and the centre's supervisor were invaluable.

Due to the staff's knowledge of the sensitivity of the topic, allowing me access through this NGO and providing a location to hold the meetings and contacting the participants was extremely helpful. The project would have been infinitely more difficult and in some cases, dangerous, without their aid. Some of the members who were not involved in contacting participants were involved in the study themselves because they were residents of the camp, adding another dimension to my data.

While aware of the potential problems of collaborating with an NGO, such as bias in selecting participants, I didn't face any issues of interference or attempts to steer/manage my

research. In terms of the NGO's neutrality, it was established very early on that this was an important issue for the NGO and there was eagerness for the research to take place efficiently and for ethical considerations to be taken into account. As stated by Mercer (in Desai & Potter, 2006) when collaborating with an NGO it is important to try and remain aware of "what the NGO project is trying to achieve within the limitations of the local environment" (p. 100). In this case, I was aware that this particular NGO could not carry out the topic of research in an in-depth manner themselves because they *had* to maintain a neutral status in order to ensure the safety of the women who visit them and so that they will still be allowed to visit. If the husbands/families of the women who visit the centre become aware that there are political discussions taking place there, then many members would simply not be allowed to attend. Neither I, nor the centre wished to disrupt the status quo or cause any concern for the women in the camp.

That is not to say that there were no limitations to this method of research. In general, the main issue I faced was being bound by the centre's schedule (the centre mainly remained closed during the day in Ramadan so my schedule had to change to night visits). There was also a lack of consistency in getting the women to commit to individual interviews; however, that had more to do with the time-limits the participants had rather than any shortcomings on behalf of the centre's staff in gathering them.

III. Focus Groups

i. Benefits

The use of focus groups as a social science research method has, according to Lloyd-Evans (2006), a "well-established history of application in the field of development, particularly in seeking to understand community dynamics and viewpoints" (quoting Laws et al, 2003,

Morgan, 1997, in Desai & Potter, 2006, p. 153). Within a development context, focus groups are also used as a way of maintaining a more equal power dynamics between the researcher and the participants, especially if the research is being conducted in the Global South or disadvantaged groups like refugees or IDPs. While in some cases focus groups have been used as the sole research method, “they are more commonly employed as part of a multi-method approach to field research” (Lloyd-Evans, 2006, p.153). In this particular research they were used in addition to individual, semi-structured interviews that will be discussed in-depth in the second part of this section.

Primarily, however, I will attempt to explain the various reasons for conducting two focus groups at the start of the research. Many of these reasons fall into research conducted by Lloyd-Evans (Desai & Potter, 2006, p. 153) and will expand on them in an attempt to explain the perceived advantages and drawbacks of using this research method. There were a few aims behind the use of focus groups at the start of the research period, mainly:

- A more “effective and rapid way of engaging with community groups” (Lloyd-Evans, 2006, p. 154) and a way to observe the participants’ dynamics and interactions in their “safe-zone”;
- To determine the level of interest that the participants had in this particular subject;
- To allow this researcher to determine which particular topics within this conversation were of more interest and importance than others;
- To allow this researcher to re-frame the questions that would be used in the individual interviews that followed in a language that the participants themselves would use;
- Logistics of saving time with reading, signing of consent forms and information letters.

As previously mentioned, the particular topic of women's political development within the refugee camps has not been touched upon in depth for quite some time and I was especially interested in finding out whether this topic was of importance to the women themselves. To what extent it featured in their daily lives, how they thought about it, whether they had thought about it/discussed it and whether there was space for development in this issue?

- **A more “effective and rapid way of engaging with community groups” (Lloyd-Evans, 2006, p. 154) and a way to observe the participants’ dynamics and interactions in their “safe-zone”;**

Due to the limited time and resources at my disposal – and, more importantly, at the participants’ disposal – I needed a quick and effective way to access the community and gain the participants’ trust in order to later interview them on an individual basis. According to Lloyd-Evans, focus groups “in the context of development research, can offer [exactly that] effective and rapid way of engaging with community groups” (2006, p. 154).

Finding a neutral location where everyone could feel comfortable would have been impossible had I not been working with an established and trusted women's NGO in the camp. This gained me a level of trust I would not have been able to achieve independently and put participants – and their husbands/families – at ease. The refugee camp is a very enclosed community with “outsiders” being viewed with suspicion. This is especially the case when it comes to the women-folk in the community. There is a strong patriarchal hold over the women in the camp and control of their movements and who they see/speak to (from families, husbands, and other women in the community). This issue is further expanded upon in Chapter 5 (*Discussion*).

In this case, the women's centre was the safe-zone where the women go on a quasi-daily basis for their social interactions. Gaining access to the women in their homes on an individual basis would not have been possible to the extent that it happened had there been no safe-zone where they could talk about this controversial issue without fear of reprisals. It gave me an opportunity to see the women in their domain and in their daily interactions, something that they most likely would not have expressed through the individual interviews. This is something that Bloor et al. have termed “retrospective introspection” (as cited in Lloyd-Evans, 2006, p. 154) – a way to explore “taken-for-granted assumptions in everyday lives” (p. 155).

- **To determine the level of interest that the participants had in this particular subject;**

The response to the specific question of “is the topic of Palestinian refugee women's political development relevant to you?” was very encouraging, within both focus groups. Due to time restrictions on this research, I wanted through these focus discussions, to take a collective “snap-shot” of the views on political involvement for a people whose lives are controlled by the political currents of an entire region. I also wanted to access the groups' “beliefs, understandings, behaviours and attitudes that might be overlooked in in-depth interviews” (Lloyd-Evans, 2006, p. 154) with regards to whether they felt political involvement was an essential part of gender equality.

My previous knowledge of Palestinian refugee life and interactions within the camps had hinted at a genuine interest and need for women to be more represented within political life. The women interviewed voiced their wishes for greater freedom in general, as well as political agency, that their political rights should improve and their voices heard. This came through quite

clearly, especially in the first focus group, which will be discussed further in the following chapter.

- **To allow this researcher to determine which particular topics within this conversation were of more interest and importance than others;**

Politics in general is such an essential part of refugee life, and is such a male-dominated sphere, that the gender roles within the camp emerged simply with the mention of the word “*Siyassah*” (politics). The word itself is a controversial and divisive one because of the divisions within the society itself. Also, some of the women expressed that politics was “not for women”, echoing statements handed down to them by their mothers and the “elder women” in the community, who would “mock” the women discussing political issues. The discussion meandered to touch upon socio-economic obstacles that were stopping the women from becoming politically involved and that opened up new questions for this researcher.

Interestingly, some women in the groups became uncomfortable and withdrawn when the discussion delved too deeply into political details. However, the interesting outcome was that when one participant objected to how political the discussion had become, others in the group jumped in with their own encouragement and defiance.

From here, the discussion veered toward the importance of the socio-economic obstacles that were standing in the way of women’s political development – and which will be further analyzed in the following section – such as patriarchy, the ineffectiveness of UNRWA, the lack of civil rights, etc. This also supported my next objective.

- **To allow this researcher to re-frame the questions that would be used in the upcoming individual interviews in a language that the participants themselves would use;**

“The stories and anecdotes that invariably come from group discussions can provide rich material for devising questions for in-depth interviews or for defining research objectives” (Lloyd-Evans, 2006, p. 156). The women’s own categorizations of the spheres that governed their lives allowed me to request that they then pose the questions that would follow in the individual interviews themselves and help in formulating them. It allowed me to understand what it was that needed to be asked to garner the most comprehensive answers and in which way to frame the questions to get the best responses. This is a community which has seen many researchers and interviewers; whether for social science, medical or other research, humanitarian assistance or for quick sound bites for the latest news stories. I had mentioned in my proposal that this research method would be new and would allow the participants to express themselves freely and make their voices heard. I genuinely needed their help in understanding the community and the relations within it and I believe this particular way was the best to show that.

While I had a pre-set list of questions, which predominantly did not change, some questions regarding the economy and the desire to work were added when the focus groups demonstrated the importance of these issues to the women. There were questions that I had started out with, which I expanded on or replaced with ones I had never even thought to ask because as an outsider, I would never have been able to understand their relevance to the topic at hand, in the short space of time I had. For example, issues like the *extent* of social constrictions, UNRWA’s role or lack of medical attention emerged through these group discussions and stemmed from their day-to-day experiences. I feel that had I not used these focus groups I would have ended up with a result that barely skimmed the surface of their lives.

With regards to the question of how the broader conflict had changed/formed their identities and what does the future hold for them; this was not a question that was received too well because many of them had never really experienced the broader conflict other than it making refugees of their grandparents and also because it appeared to be a somewhat obvious and moot question. The uncertainty of every day and the lack of control over their lives were more relevant questions to the participants themselves.

- **Logistics of saving time with reading, signing of consent forms and information letters.**

As well as saving me time with regards to reading out the information for the research and getting consent forms, having the women see their peers signing these papers and also allowed more trust to be built.

- ii. **Drawbacks**

Despite the aforementioned benefits of this research method, focus groups also have limitations and drawbacks, which can be especially highlighted by the setting in which the research was conducted.

Having this many women in one place meant that there would be some participants who would not be comfortable talking about a sensitive issue among their peers. While groups can be “participatory and empowering as participants find strength in numbers and feel in control of the research process” (Lloyd-Evans, 2006, p.155), there are always those within a group who are more dominant and have more “powerful ‘voices’” (p. 155). The risk in this is that those who feel they have a ‘controversial’ or ‘opposing’ view to the rest of the group can be silenced, especially

in a community where everyone knows each other and with a sensitive subject. Seeing as how this research was about having the women's voices be heard, that proved to be somewhat ironic and the most I could do as a researcher was to recognize that I was using a method considered to be somewhat non-feminist while exploring feminist research topics (Wilkinson, 1999, in Lloyd-Evans, 2006, p. 153), and try to encourage discussion. Some of the participants themselves were also prompting the quieter voices in the groups and encouraging discussion of a topic that was obviously of importance to them.

As a researcher, I had to also always keep in mind that the results of the groups were not something to base my overall conclusions on as they were representative of a particular collective and not of individual motivations and understanding. That was what the individual interviews were for. Even then, there had to also be recognition of the fact that I could not group these women into one cohesive and consensual body. It was the broad strokes that I was looking for and I could see how easy it would be for a researcher to draw conclusions based on the opinions of the more powerful voices in the groups.

From a more logistical side, it also meant that there were many side-conversations going on, whether on the topic or otherwise, that I couldn't follow and were distracting in general. It was difficult to maintain a controlled setting, with the background noise, the amount of people attending and the fact that the participants left and returned and others joined in half-way through. Many participants could not stay the entire time due to commitments at home, such as children or husbands, and fear that their families would ask too many questions about why they were gone too long. While this was a very disconcerting process that caused quite a bit of panic for this researcher to start out with, I quickly realized that the data I was collecting was all relevant. The fact that the women were not fully in control of their time was yet another indicator

of how much their lives were not their own. It served as a reminder that these were their daily lives and that I should simply take the opportunity to be allowed into this community to see them.

In terms of gathering participants for the groups, I was very dependent on the centre's timetable. I would have been unable to contact the participants myself, as they didn't know me and it could have caused them trouble at home with their husbands/families. Therefore, I tried to set out as many detailed guidelines for the supervisor of the centre as to whom I hoped would be called. Overall, she was very organized and helpful in sticking to the research guidelines. This proved to be somewhat more difficult as the Holy month of Ramadan started half-way through the research and the women from the focus groups could not commit to individual interviews and alternate participants had to be found. The consistency suffered through this process.

In conclusion, however, these groups were an invaluable source of information and an extremely effective access method to the community. This was more-so apparent when I joined them in gatherings during Ramadan. It was at this point that I felt included in the community on a deeper level. The women were more comfortable around me; it was more of a social gathering than interview processes and it gave me a perspective that I feel would have been missing had these group gatherings been omitted.

IV. Individual Interviews

The second research method used was individual interviews with the women who were involved in the focus groups. The participants already had an idea of the subject matter and had expressed their broader viewpoints within the group discussions; the one-on-one interviews, which ranged between 30 minutes to an hour, gave me a chance to get to know them better and

dig deeper as to what they thought of this topic. As previously mentioned, the interviews were conducted in an office at the women's centre²⁷.

i. Benefits

The semi to unstructured nature of the interviews allowed for in-depth discussions and more specialized knowledge of individuals in the groups. This allowed me to take the conversation where the participants needed it to go – in terms of discussing problems with being employed and family histories and tensions that all contributed to what they viewed as oppression. At the same time, I was able to remain within a semi-structured sphere in asking the questions I had set out before the research started and which we had improved as a group during the focus groups.

According to Willis (in Desai & Potter, 2006) “the main concerns revolve around the two main issues of representativeness and accuracy” (p.150). This research was not much different. However, while there is always concern about the representativeness of the interviews with regards to the community as a whole and to drawing certain conclusions, the qualitative nature of the information was very helpful in gaining a more comprehensive view of the women's lives in a very short space of time. In terms of accuracy, that was more of a concern and is discussed below under the inevitable drawbacks this method faced.

Lastly, the privacy afforded us by holding these interviews in the centre allowed for a more in-depth discussion of sensitive issues, such as the nature of the marital relationship, family history, buried desires to work and lead political revolutions which would never have been

²⁷ The second half of the individual interviews were conducted at a separate location – somewhat larger and also belonging to the women's centre – close to the headquarters, but mainly used for night gatherings during Ramadan and workshops.

expressed at home. It created camaraderie and I was able to establish more of a rapport with many of the women.

ii. Drawbacks

It seemed that when we were on a one-on-one basis, some of the women were committed to providing a rosier picture to what had been described during the group sessions. I found some contradictions with what was said in group settings and during the individual interviews, in terms of how many women were involved politically in the camp. Additionally, and this is to be expected as they are not a homogeneous group, the information to the same question often drew very opposing answers from different women. Furthermore, some women were more reluctant to talk on an individual basis, about this particular topic – the group settings seemed to have empowered them and put them more at ease. However, having heard them express different opinions in the focus groups (and as I became more trusted later on, I heard contradictory stories) I feel like the data was richer as a result.

The main drawback of the interviews had more to do with the conditions under which they took place rather than the questions or interactions themselves. The conditions were very chaotic; interviews were conducted in very small rooms, with barely a window to shed some light. The noise from the surrounding camp was very loud and the heat was oppressive due to lack of electricity or ventilation, with the frequent skittering cockroach making an appearance. Some of the women had children with them, who they couldn't leave at home and this placed time constraints on the interview and interruptions from the children. A couple of children were also somewhat older (9 or 10 years old) so I got the feeling that the women were more careful in

their speech around them. Unfortunately there was no way to interview the mothers without their children.

Once Ramadan started, two weeks into the research, conducting the interviews became significantly more difficult. I had to visit the camp at night, which is not the safest area, and time constraints on how long the women were able to stay out were even stricter. Power outages are extremely common in the camps, the residents mainly get about 6-8 hours of power a day, which meant some of the interviews were conducted in complete darkness. While my presence in the camp at night opened a completely new level of trust and acceptance that was unattainable during the day, there certainly were challenges involved in discussing these serious topics with people in a pitch black room. Also due to Ramadan and familial commitments, I couldn't get as many participants as I wanted for the interviews. While I had over 20 women in the focus groups, I could only interview 16 of them individually due to time constraints.

V. Data Transcription

Transcribing the data took approximately four months; this included the focus groups and 10 out of the 16 interviews in full. After transcribing the 10th interview, I listened to the rest and only transcribed what I thought to be new and relevant quotes. The reason I stopped transcribing word for word after interview number 10 was because I had already begun to notice a repetition in the responses being given, so in the interest of saving time I proceeded to look for any new data within the rest of the interviews. There is a noticeable difference in transcribing the focus groups and the interviews. The broad, sweeping statements of the group discussions set forth the over-arching themes which I then picked out in the individual interviews. For example, the focus

groups provided the headings such as “Patriarchal Society” or “Failure of Youth”, which have been used in the following Chapter (*Discussion*) to breakdown that section and analyse the data.

CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION

I. Overview

If you look at the popular committees in the camp, women are not allowed to join in or be members. Even if a woman wanted to join in and be included, they [the organizations' leaders] give her something quite simple, quite meaningless and possibly even deliberately exclude her from certain things. This is because of the patriarchal nature of our society. This is a boy and this is a girl and there is differential treatment between the two. A girl has to work to cook, clean and provide food for her family, her brothers and sisters, she has to stay at home, if her brother wants something, she has to get up and get it. The parents especially have a huge effect on empowering the male over the female in the house. From childhood and rearing, this is what we have. And this is the control of patriarchy in camp politics. This is not just in the camps by the way; if you look at it from an entirely Arab perspective. As a Palestinian woman, if I am educated, and I move to Europe, I can reach anything. Why is it then that in any Arab country I cannot? Especially if as a Palestinian woman, I have a history of military struggle – Mariam, 45, Fatah Women's Union – Women's Affairs, Focus Group 1.

Patriarchy appears to pose the biggest impediment to women's advancement in Palestinian society...Compared to men, the position of women inside and outside refugee camps is a disadvantaged one, whether in the economic, political, or educational spheres (Zureik, 1996, p. 24).

There are three categories that Zureik pinpoints in the above quote in which Palestinian refugee women are at a disadvantage: the economic, the political, or the educational. The analysis of the data gathered for this thesis had originally followed a similar path to Zureik's study. It delineated the responses of why Palestinian refugee women's political rights were lacking under the analytic spheres of economic, political, and social²⁸, where they are disadvantaged and that prevent them from full political participation.

The process of breaking down the responses and placing them under these three categories had originally come from the data gathered during the focus groups; the women in

²⁸ Educational certainly enters into the social sphere and was one of the issues the women raised as lacking in their community.

those groups seemed to be listing the economic, political, and social reasons why they felt unable to participate in the camp's political life – whether through political debate, political affiliation or membership in a particular party, and subsequently promotions within that life.

However, the attempts to divide the responses into each sphere individually proved to be difficult, and after a while, seemed to be forced by this researcher. There is always a temptation to categorize experiences and especially into those three, readily defined areas. The simple breakdown emerged as follows:

Social – My family/community won't let me engage in politics because it's not a woman's place.

Economic – I don't have the time or free hours or money to eat never mind engage politically.

Political – I don't see any one working for the real Palestinian cause and I've become generally disillusioned with the whole process.

On the other hand, the fluidity and complexity of the reasons or experiences lived by these women defied these efforts to organize responses around these three broad categories and within them. Attempts to place “early marriage” under the social only served to remind that it had also been expressed as an economic reason. Families were marrying their girls off at younger and younger ages not only because of community expectations and continuation of traditions, but also because it would make life more financially manageable. The woman would be her husband's financial responsibility. Similarly, the dominance of Muslim fundamentalism was not just a social phenomenon taking place in the camp, where religious groups were providing religious guidance and social assistance, but a heavily political decision taken by political parties to place themselves in opposition to other, secular groups. These topics blurred the boundaries of where

they were being placed – so consequently, this Discussion section is now organized and analysed based on themes raised by the women to show their complexity.

This researcher has placed greater emphasis on certain topics based on the amount of times they came up in the focus groups/interviews and on how many respondents mentioned them. For example, “patriarchal society”, “political party division”, and disillusionment with politics were the phrases most often used by the most respondents as to why they felt unable to participate politically in their community. There are some categories that were interesting to include and helped in portraying a general picture of dynamics in the camp, as well as helping to support the more general statements made; i.e. early marriage and the rising importance of religion were phenomena taking place in the community that supported why the respondents felt they lived in a heavily patriarchal society. This researcher has also underlined some phrases in the respondents’ quotations that were particularly relevant or pertinent to the section they are under.

The data supports the academic literature highlighted in the previous sections on the dichotomies between nationalism versus gender rights, feminine versus feminist, and the effects of the occupation/exile on Palestinian identity and social relations, and how these are manifested in one community dealing with the effects of a liberation movement, continued exile and occupation. The research shows that the respondents are still struggling amongst themselves with the dichotomies of:

- a. Feminist ideas of women’s roles that can equal those of men (particularly in a situation where they feel they can contribute as much if not more, like finding work, and politically do a better job than the men who they feel are corrupt) versus traditional roles that have been passed down from generation to generation;

- b. The fact that they have to contend with a situation in which they are stateless and reside in a country that has afforded them very few rights as a population. Therefore, the women suffer from the consequences of the men themselves not being able to attain jobs or land and have only their control over the women; and,
- c. The struggle for a nation for all Palestinian refugees, and their community, where there is the view that their values and rights as a nation are being obliterated (particularly with the lack of historical knowledge to guide them), versus their struggle for equality and personal rights.

Therefore the analysis and subsequent discussion will maintain those categories as the overarching frameworks.

II. Political Disillusionment and the Challenges of Women's Political Participation

Heavy attention has been paid to political disillusionment because of the research primarily focused on political rights, and also how often it was cited together with the changing dynamics in the camps. People's disillusionment with their political leaders has caused a shift from the communal to the individual – people no longer feel united in a common cause and are therefore feeling an extreme sense of malaise that is permeating their interactions with each other. While this information is not new²⁹, it does bear addressing in-depth here because this is an altogether different community not situated in the OPT and not under direct occupation.

The importance of this will be highlighted further below; however, briefly, the conflict that comes with occupation is not present in the refugee camps in Lebanon – therefore, the sense

²⁹Palestinian people's general disillusionment with national politics has been addressed briefly in Rubenberg's most recent 2001 research on Palestinian Women: Patriarchy and Resistance in The West Bank.

of communal closeness and shared oppression is not as directly and heavily felt. The protracted refugee situation that is not being countered by a unified political struggle has led to a malaise in the camp, with manifestations that have particular impacts on women. Quite simply, because of camp residents' fears that the political divisions have resulted in what respondents called uneducated thugs taking the place of principled political activists, women are increasingly restricted in their movement and political participation (or even expression). The presence of Hamas and parties that promote Islamic fundamentalism has created a religious oppression for the women, which is severely limiting their abilities to work, express themselves freely, leave their homes, etc.

There is a communal rejection for women to sit with the men in the political organizations. From the women's brothers, husbands, fathers, because they know themselves that when they are sitting around the camp holding weapons and joking around with the guys, youths really who now make up these organizations, they can't accept that the women would do the same. Even when I walk past them, I walk faster or take another way, because it's not the same respect that used to exist before. They look at the women differently, their gaze is disrespectful. If things were different in that case, then things might change. During the wars it was different. People needed each other and were united and saw each other as equals who were fighting for a cause. Now, where or who are we fighting? Each other. I remember at one point when college students used to be members of these organizations, now it's just men who don't have anything else to do – Kaouthar, 44, Supervisor at the women's centre, Individual Interview.

However, at the same time, this shift from community to individual, from what this researcher has heard and seen, has caused a backlash with the women themselves who are beginning to focus on the advancement of their gender rights. A backlash against a highly oppressive society, disillusionment with their political class, and financial difficulty is pushing the women to focus on personal (rather than collective) rights and advancement. These women are struggling with the realities of having to live in a protracted exile situation where allegiance

to a nationalist cause and putting ideas of gender equality on the backburner are beginning to take second place to the desire to build a more comfortable life within the camp in a more equitable society.

This research began with the main aim of exploring *why* Palestinian refugee women remain so minimally active in the political sphere, and at low-ranking levels – particularly considering their historical participation in the liberation movement. Questions focused on whether politics/political expression and participation were important to them? How much did they feel like it was part of their identities? Did they feel able to express their political views? Join organizations? Advance politically and reach decision-making levels?

The research confirmed that the women I spoke to are minimally active in political life and if they are, not in any way at a decision-making levels and with minimal chances of reaching those levels. The data helped highlight the underlying issues as to why women had become progressively less politically involved since the end of the Intifadas and Camp Wars – as well as why the gender roles within this particular refugee camp had reverted or and stagnated as traditional ones. Additionally, the brief foray into these women’s lives also helped highlight the pockets of “resistance” by the women to these socially-designated roles. There remains a backlash by some women who did achieve a level of political feminist consciousness and who cannot accept that their political involvement at one point bears no mark on their roles today.

It is hoped that these nuances will be highlighted through the discussion. In keeping with the main aim of this research – allowing the women’s voices to be heard – this researcher has tried as much as possible to follow an ethnographic portrayal of their lives. Consequently, through this chapter the aim has been to predominantly privilege the women’s voices and intersperse them with analysis as an added value rather than explanation. Some women have been

quoted more than others because they were more vocal, less afraid of discussing this topic, and willing to express their opinions; however, this author has tried to provide a wide spectrum of opinions and quotes to provide as representative a picture as possible. As aforementioned, the respondents' names have been changed to maintain their anonymity.

III. "AL-MOUJTAMA'A AL-ZOUKOURI"³⁰

i. Family Relations/Structure

A daughter in this society is a worry. So instead of parents understanding a teenage girl going through normal teenage years and guiding her through them, they choose to remove that worry and pass it on to someone else: her husband! The adult female in this community is always treated as someone in their teenage years, hormonal and unpredictable. This is the idea that's rampant here. A daughter is for marriage, whereas a boy is free to do what he wants because people think that however you throw a male, he'll land on his feet. This is so ridiculous. There are many dangers in our society that a young male can fall into. But this is a very patriarchal society and they see the woman as something that needs protection from her own self – Kaouthar, 44, Supervisor at the women's centre, Individual Interview.

Similar to Zureik's study in 1996, this research highlights that patriarchy remains the main obstacle to any advancement in camp life, whether within the spheres of education, employment inside/outside the camp, political involvement, or other aspects. In particular, the patriarchal nature of the community within which these women live is the main hindrance, in the participants' opinions, to involvement in the camp's political life. As to the women who were already involved on some level, it was the main impediment to advancement to higher positions of leadership despite their active military engagement in the camp wars.

³⁰ Translates to "Patriarchal Society" – this is the response most often given to questions of why women felt political expression and participation were beyond their means.

Additionally, even within the domestic sphere, women are no longer power-holders in that domain. Previously discussed literature (repeated below) highlighted the political power women once held in the home (Divine, 1985).

Within the women's homes, political activity in the pre-1948 era became a norm, as their fathers, brothers and other male relatives became engaged in the early stirrings of a liberation movement. As wives, sisters, mothers of urban political leaders, upper-class Palestinian women were expected to give aid and support to their male relatives' political careers. Political struggles first took place in the living rooms of Palestinian families of these elite families.

While these political struggles and careers are still taking place in the living rooms of Palestinian families (now of varying socio-economic or political status), women's involvement in political discussions or providing advice is no longer accepted, according to respondents to this research, and at least in the community studied. Generally, politics is not something a woman is allowed to discuss and her husband/male relative will no longer debate political issues with her; it has become, decidedly, a socially masculine space that belongs to the men, and perhaps is the only remaining sphere where they feel powerful.

According to Mariam, 45, who is a member of Fatah's women's union and has been from a very young age, there the percentage of women represented in the *lijan* (popular committees) is very low:

There are maybe one or two women representing every woman in the camp, even though there are more women than there are men here. And women in the camps are more involved in issues relating to the camp, organizational issues. We organize demonstrations, teach, etc... There should be more representation and in higher positions. A woman is able to do much more than the men. As a woman, she is able to be present and deal with many more situations than a man... here in the camp. I see it as selfishness from the men in this society that women are not allowed to be more involved. I see the way they think as "why should the woman be better

than me?” type thinking. Women haven’t been given their rights. At all. It’s very frustrating – Individual Interview.

ii. **Not a Woman’s Place**

Even speaking about politics is taboo for women. You’ll find many people who don’t approve if you start expressing your opinion – especially the older women. They don’t approve of this. They hear us talking about politics and they tell us, ‘this isn’t for you, what, you think you’re politicians now?’ They say you can’t talk about this stuff. It’s not your place. Leave it to the men to discuss – Layali, 39, Housewife and member of Fatah Women’s Union, Focus Group 2.

While there are numerous obstacles that stand in their way, such as political division of what was once a unified cause, economic hardships and social stagnation, these issues are dominated by the community’s view that women should not be involved in politics (unless in a minimal way which will be discussed further below) because it is “not a woman’s place”. The largest obstacle today remains the patriarchal and exclusionary community they inhabit. This is manifested through control over their movement and freedom of expression, participation in socio-economic and political life by the men and even women – often matriarchs – in the camp.

I think it is the mother who has the bigger role in limiting these types of behaviours... for example, I have children and I treat them all the same. It is deliberate, whether from making their beds, cleaning the stairs, to a summer job. I tell my boys that I have to work, their sister has to work, my son has to work to provide things for his school and my daughter is working to provide for her first year of university. The husband works till late so the mother has more contact with her children. It is our responsibility to raise our children, us the women in the camp, to raise them in an equal way. I mean there is a difference between men and women in their nature but it doesn’t mean that a man has to come home and expect dinner to be ready, his clothes ironed and ready...I mean why can’t a man take care of these things himself? In our society, this patriarchal viewpoint still has control – Mariam, 45, Fatah Women’s Union, Individual Interview.

In their own words, several women expressed the difficulties of overcoming this “patriarchal society” in order to simply leave the house, never mind engage in political activities or work to make some much-needed money. The use of the words “patriarchal nature of the society”, it is to express the institutionalized, deliberate exclusion of women from spheres other than the domestic one. According to several of the participants, the camps are run by the *lijan*, which in turn are run exclusively by men and where women are deliberately placed in spheres that reinforce their domestic roles. Rubenberg, whose research focused on Palestinian women’s political participation in the West Bank, describes patriarchy as:

...The privilege of males and seniors and the mobilization of kin structure, kin morality, and kin idioms to legitimize gender and aged domination ... Additionally, patriarchy defines a specific kind of discourse and practice as well as a distinctive mode of economic and political organization (Joseph, 1994, as quoted in Rubenberg, 2001, pg. 13).

This was similarly echoed by Leila during our first focus group encounter:

I will talk to you as a social researcher who has gone into people’s homes and asked a lot of questions. You will find that in our society, the girl is not allowed to do anything with her life. She’s not allowed to go out, to come and go, to work or to go to school because of pressure. And this pressure is from the father or the husband. The two put pressure because to them, in the way they think, a woman is for the home, for the kitchen. The males are the privileged in our society. Our society, in the camp, this way of thinking and control is still ongoing. It could also be from the mother, especially if she is afraid of her husband, so she controls what the girl can do and won’t allow her to go to school or work. Therefore, I don’t think that in camp society, a woman is able to reach higher positions in any domain unless the way of thinking here changes and advances. They have to know what’s outside in the world, they have to think that if my daughter can reach higher positions she can ‘terfa’a rasi’ – (make me proud). This is the kind of thinking that we need for people here – Leila, 20, Student and freelance researcher, Focus Group 1³¹.

³¹ Leila at the time was working as a researcher for Médecins Sans Frontier so did not have much time and therefore, I was unable to discuss this issue further with her though I would have liked to.

Matriarchs within the community will generally reinforce this ideology by repeatedly stating that a woman's place is with her children at home. Some of the women interviewed expressed that no matter how much a woman tries to balance her roles as a house-wife and activist/worker, the home will suffer. And seeing as how a woman's primary role is to care for her children and husband, then that is where she should remain. When asked why they think or believe that, several respondents who expressed this view stated that this is how it always has been; "it's just how our society is, how it has always been"³². This edict of domination has been internalized and reinforced over decades from one generation to another, until it resembles a truth, a norm, causing individuals to accept their socially designated roles.

I think politics is a man's domain. If a woman is allowed in politics then she would wreck the world (laughs). Politics is for men. I'm anyway against organizations. They don't treat people well, they're corrupt, they fight with each other... there's not much that inspires confidence – Samia, 46, Housewife, Individual Interview.

That is not to say that there are no women who are politically involved in this camp. Each political party still has a women's organization that is run by women. However, these organizations do not deal with political matters other than organizing demonstrations when asked, teaching women's classes about the history of Palestine, the organization and first aid. As for promotions within these organizations, Hoda, 47, Fatah Women's Union, has more to say on this:

³² This quote was taken from focus group discussions where several women, within the general debate, expressed this view. This ensued in a somewhat chaotic argument between the older women and some younger (in their 20s and 30s) who did not take well to being told that this was how society just is, but rather expressed their belief that this was how "this patriarchal society wants us to believe". It would be difficult to pinpoint the quotes to specific people seeing as how it was a general discussion in a group.

In this camp, there are limits to the levels a woman can reach. Not like on a more general basis in the territories³³ [OPT] where she can rise. In general in the organization, the way it is supposed to work is that a woman starts out as a member, and then she becomes in charge of a group of women, then in charge of all the women, then in charge of an area, then a “Saha” (town) then an Iqlim (district). She can develop. Here, no, we have a limit of being in charge of the women in the camp... maybe. Things aren't running the way they should. You don't have promotions based on merit here where people are given their dues and those who work harder are recognized over those who don't. You're just supposed to take the money and be quiet. A man has much more possibilities of getting promoted. Men's work schedules are different to that of the women's too. They are able to work longer hours. He is allowed to stay 24hours, to go outside and stand guard and stay out. We can't. This affects other men who are in competition for higher ranks, but as a woman it doesn't affect me because I'm not allowed to stay out that long. The community doesn't accept that. Imagine me staying out 24hours and sleeping at the office like the men? No way would the community accept that. My reputation would be ruined. They would think I was doing something wrong. Now even when we're working within our boundaries, there's talk. They talk about how we work in an office with men. Even though when I have my meetings with the other women there isn't a single male present. But the community doesn't see that, all they see is that it's an office with men – Individual Interview.

Hoda has been working with Fatah for 13 years. Prior to this however, her story was very different:

I used to be against women working in this field. I used to say, no how can a woman work in an office full of men. Then something changed in me. I don't know what happened. One day, while the intifada was going on, I just couldn't sit at home any longer. I felt like there was more of an accepting atmosphere for me working, and I thought that there has to be more than this. We can't just sit while this is happening. I took off and haven't looked back since. I don't find things taboo anymore. I don't have those limitations in my life anymore. I have my freedom and I feel like I'm doing something; I have to get my rights, I have a cause – Individual Interview.

³³ The view that women are more politically involved in the OPT and have more of a space to get promotions was echoed by several women. There is a strong sense of nostalgia for what is perceived as more freedom of movement and expression in “al-dakhel” (The “Inside” as Palestine is referred to by refugees) because of a sense that there is an active resistance against Israeli occupation and continuous contact with the Israeli army where there is a more active role for women to take.

Whereas Hoda's involvement bespeaks a political consciousness spurred through increased engagement, it is interesting to note that Hoda's husband, who she has been married to for 15 years, has been a member of Fatah for 30 years and has encouraged his wife to become more politically engaged – within certain parameters. In her words, Hoda states that her husband “is very happy with my work”.

IV. Feminist versus Feminine

Speaking with Hoda served as a reminder of the divisions within the Palestinian women's movement mentioned in previous chapters where some women, through their political involvement had achieved a feminist consciousness that exceeded their nationalist ideals, while others remained within the society's socio-political parameters. As previously highlighted in Chapter 3 (*Literature Review*), Peteet (1991), when discussing this phenomenon in her ethnography of refugee camps, states that this awareness of the feminist rather than the feminine was not a homogeneous occurrence amongst all the women. Within some women, the experience of conflict awakened a new sense of empowerment – particularly if they had fought alongside the men. If they could fight like the men, bleed like the men, and die like the men, then they had the same rights as the men – in every domain. Feelings of nationalism – the desire to achieve statehood – often warred with the feminist consciousness and the desire to put thought to action and break socially-dictated gender roles (Peteet, 1991; Abdo, 1994).

Among some women, the feelings of nationalism were clear and they did not war with the feminine awareness within them. They spoke of rights such as having the right to choose whom to marry, work, and go to school.

To be able to join the Resistance women had to face a struggle with their parents, with the society in general, and within the resistance itself. When they attempted to assert their national identity and commitment by taking part in Resistance activities, they confronted the full brunt of cultural rules governing women's behaviour ... If political activism awakened women to their subordination, it also awakened them to their potential equality with men. Women fought and died just as men did (Peteet, 1991, p. 95).

Throughout the interview with Hoda, it seemed like she was struggling against her upbringing in a heavily patriarchal society and her involvement in an organization that further pigeon-holed her into a limited sphere against a desire to do more. On the one hand, she said:

Our [women's] role doesn't end with a state. Organizing, planning, working doesn't stop. Even if Palestine is freed... women should reach high, high positions and I am the first of them. I have been demanding this from the organization. I don't want to be in charge of a group of women forever. I want to be something more; do more. When someone works hard.... life is like a school. You go from class to class and you work at it. For example, I have a group of women I am in charge of, but is that it? Every few weeks we have a meeting and then I go home? I need to go higher. And life is like that. You have to fight to get it – Individual Interview.

But then when asked what she felt were the reasons why this couldn't happen in the camp, she added:

The biggest reason or obstacle rather, is society. Society isn't letting women advance. Khalas [enough], these are our traditions, our environment. It's different from the West. Arabs are different. In the West they're the same [men and women are equal]. It's nicer to have men be more advanced. If a woman is exactly the same as the man, then who is going to be in charge of the house, the children? I'm old fashioned in some things.

As witnessed by Hoda's statements and others' statements further below, the traditions and teachings that are being passed on from one generation to the next have progressed to the level where women's interactions with the men is watched by neighbors and families and gossip

has the power to ruin a reputation, destroy honor and even stop women whose families are in dire need of money from working. The social stigma that accompanies a woman's activities has caused many women to prefer to remain at home for the gross majority of the time rather than face gossip that could risk a woman's reputation. The patriarchal assignation of the gender roles – the diktat that a woman's domain is the home – are being continuously reinforced by the individuals in the camp and internalized and enforced by the same individuals in a self-regulating manner.

Foucault (1980) demonstrates that power is not “the domination of the King in his central position... but that of his subjects in their mutual relations: not the uniform edifice of sovereignty, but the multiple forms of subjugation that have a place and function within the social organism” (p. 96). Power is not something that is central to one person, nor is it the domination of one person or group over another, but rather what Foucault states is the opposite of Hobbes' Leviathan (1651) where power is instilled in a single entity, sovereign or group. It is rather the cyclical subjugation of individuals of one another: “in other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application” (p. 98).

Two exchanges that took place over the course of this research in particular highlighted this division. During the first Focus Group, as the debate among the women focused heavily on the political, one respondent said she had to leave, adding: “I don't really like talking about politics, I'm not used to it”, to which another woman, who remained, said: “Well you should get used to it, you'll have to eventually. We can't stay living like this.”

The second exchange took place during the second focus group:

Layali: If we're given a small hand and a little more space, there's nothing we can't do. The ability is there and the willingness is there. We just want our freedom to do

it. If you look at western countries, women have their rights and they have their freedom to fight for them. In Arab countries, this is not the case.

Samia: Yes, but Layali, why?

Layali: Because this is backward thinking in our region.

Samia: No but freedom is interpreted in a wrong way. It's morally wrong. For many, this means "I can do whatever I want and go anywhere I want" and this is causing the father or the brother to stop his sister or wife, mother from doing anything at all that they have a right to, if they do it in the right way that won't dishonour the family. Also, a woman's work affects her life at home; her children, her husband, her housework. No matter how much she tries to balance it, it's going to be affected. She has to leave her children at home to go to work. A child needs a mother. I think that's the woman's main role. The man is the one who is supposed to work – but our men aren't able to work because they're Palestinian, so we have to.

Layali: I don't agree with you. If my house is in order, my children are at school, my husband is taken care of, why shouldn't I work? I sit at home all day basically alone. My time would be put to much better use working. If you can organize your life and balance everything, then why not do it? Millions of women around the world have done it. It's a relief for you too you know. You can feel the good tiredness that comes from working.

Samia: It doesn't matter how much you organize things, your child will still suffer from lack of time with you. What if he's at home alone and causes a fire or something?

Layali, 39, has been married for 23 years. She has two girls and one boy and is a housewife who is also a member of Fatah's women's union:

Politics makes you stronger. When you know about what's happening around you in society. You feel strong that you can talk to people about things, even defend your rights. When you know politics, you can gain your rights even with just talking. In our community, we don't have a society here in the camp that is accepting of this. My parents are first among them. But I bugged them and bugged them for years until they relented. I'm the only one in my family who has that revolutionary spirit. I love politics, I love learning things and expanding my horizons. They have tried to stop me so many times but I just don't listen. It got to point where I was even prepared to work in secret. They didn't accept it because of a fear for my reputation. It's a domain where men and women work together and they didn't want my reputation in the community sullied. The idea didn't sit well that there would be men in the offices. But it doesn't work like this anymore...at the end of the day,

we're free to think and talk about what we want. At the end of the day, we need to speak; no one can shut us up anymore. There is more to life than this – Focus Group 2.

Layali and others, like Mariam, have been pushing their organizations to allow the women who are politically active more space and opportunities to grow. Particularly, they have been pushing for military training and a more politically-based education similar to the one that the men are getting.

It's been almost 10 years since we've had any military training for women. Inside the occupied territories they still have military training for the women though. The ones we used to have here and the one I was involved in was called "Sa'iqa" (thunderbolt) training. We did the same activities as the men; training to crawl, run, climb ropes, jump, slide over rough terrain, how to survive in rough conditions...you're staying in a tent so you need to know how to survive; sleep on rocks, thorns, military life is rough. Also through that we learn how to use weapons. Whether Kalashnikovs, bombs or guns ... all kinds of weapons. – Mariam, 45, Fatah Women's Union, Individual Interview.

That however, is not progressing very well. While Mariam believes that there is a possibility or space for the women's voices to be heard or for them to advance politically, she doesn't think this will happen unless there is a more united female front fighting for their rights.

A significantly large female front one for there to make a difference. You need more women's unions, organizations...and we definitely need international support and coordination or discussion between the women in international organizations and those here. Women here enjoy being involved more but there are obstacles...if not her brother, her father, if not her father, her mother, etc. The society here in general... there are a lot of internal obstacles. There's also a lot of internal destruction. The new generation that's coming up, they don't have a united cause to fight for anymore. Each organization follows a different nation and each organization embodies whatever that nation is giving it.

V. Nationalism versus Gender Equality

Women need to be given their rights whether there is a state or not. We have a lot of violence against women in the camp. And she cannot speak out to outside or inside security forces to say that she is being abused by her husband, brother or whoever. When it comes to women's rights... As Arabs, women at one point had more rights than now. When the Resistance was present, women – even though some were in the home – had a louder voice and a more prominent presence – Alia, 25, Housewife and part-time work from home selling dresses, Individual Interview.

There is the belief among the camp community that “these are our traditions, this is our culture” and any change from that is an imposition from the “West” and especially Israel and the United States, who are attempting to erase the Palestinian people through a deletion of these sacred traditions and religious beliefs. This is the effect of an occupation; a political situation in which refugees fighting for the right of return feel that they are fighting against colonialist ideals. According to some respondents, ideas of equality between the sexes were often viewed as a “western political agenda” that is attempting to integrate the Palestinian people with the “more westernized, more morally loose” Lebanese society, in order to do away with the right of return. Therefore, this has created a backlash among the refugees to do everything possible to maintain the religious and traditional practices designed to protect a woman’s honour.

The placing of the burden on the woman and her “reputation” and “honour” has been expressed by several Arab feminist authors (in particular Sayigh, 1979; Abdo, 1994; Rubenberg, 2001; Peteet, 1991; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009) who have discussed the issue of “*Ard*” or “honour” with the Palestinian people’s loss of their land and livelihood. Within Palestinian society – more specifically rural society – land ownership signified power and honour. The loss of this land through occupation and subsequent exile meant that the only possession remaining in the hands of the refugees were the women – the carriers of the future generations that would

continue the traditions and culture. Therefore, a woman's reputation and the need to protect that "Ard" became a power tool within the hands of the disenfranchised men.

According to Kaouthar, 44, the placing of so much pressure on the woman – prohibiting her movement and her wish to be active within the political sphere – has become about the "failure of the men". Palestinian refugees in general have been deprived heavily of their rights. Following exile and loss of livelihood and honour, there continued – and continues – to be a severe level of deprivation of political, social and economic rights that has been heavily felt by the men and youth of the camps.

Living in active war is better than living in this type of psychological warfare that we are under. We are being kept in this situation deliberately. If you're hungry, do you go and think of how to hold a demonstration for your right to ...let's say power, or do you go and try to find work so you can eat? I need to eat first before I can stand up to something else – Mariam, 45, Fatah Women's Union, Individual Interview.

Some of the women voiced the opinion that if the men couldn't get jobs or do anything to move forward, then how would the women?

All these issues limit from women's political success inside the camp. And outside the camp it's pretty much impossible because as Palestinians, we don't even have the minimum of rights anyway. You'll see many young men and women who study law and they are bright, able...but they can't practice it. They can't work as lawyers in Lebanon, so what's the point then? If I am that person, that's the end of the line for me then. So these limits that the Lebanese legal system bind us with play a big role in keeping the woman exactly as she is, in her place, not moving inside the camp. – Kaouthar, 44, Supervisor at the women's centre, Focus Group 1.

This view of second rate citizenry stems from decades of the women's self-identification as a people with a cause of statehood that dominates their individual rights as women. As mentioned in the literature, this view often is a consequence of nationalist movements that

through their own gendered processes and institutions place women's liberation in opposition to the communal good – or “the integrity and identity of a nationalist movement” (Moghadam, 1994, as quoted in Rubenberg, 2001, p. 217; Peteet, 1991; Abdo, 1994). However, with the ongoing political division and growing disillusionment of people with their political leaders, this seems to be changing.

i. **Division of the Cause and “Fashal Al-Shabab”³⁴**

Of course if we [women] advance politically we can change things; but when I look around at the organizations, I don't find one person working for the sake of the Palestinian people – Janine, 46, Housewife, Focus Group 1.

It's the occupation. That's the biggest oppressor overall – the occupation and its consequences and politics. The politics of occupation is “divide and conquer”. The occupation has divided Palestinian society from the inside and has created a war amongst the Palestinians themselves. So the thing that has most affected the Palestinian people is they have been disengaged from the inside. There is no longer one word that even unites this society. Even families have been divided from the inside because each member now belongs to a different political side. A father can no longer control who his children support or his family. Each person has an allegiance to a different side. They have infiltrated the Palestinian family and divided it from the inside. – Salma, 48, Nurse at Red Crescent, Focus group 2.

Palestinian political unity has been divisive since the Oslo Accords. However, with the death of Yasser Arafat there came a severe fragmentation of a many respondents called our unified cause – the unity of the Palestinian people no matter where the location. The infighting between mainly Fatah and Hamas, as well as the smaller political organizations, has created a sense of disgust within the camp community. Family members have been pitted against each

³⁴ Failure of the Youth (young males usually aged 17-30) – Kaouthar went on to describe the young men who belong to the camp's political organization as “thugs who sit around getting high all day and whistling at girls passing by because they are bored with no jobs and nothing to do.”

other as each person chooses a side and follows each party's ideals, rather than a cohesive vision.

Hamas and Fatah are going down two completely different roads and people no longer feel allegiance to a cause but rather a political party. The bickering between the parties has created a competitive bidding war within this camp, and others, as to who can get more people to join by paying more or playing on religious ideologies. This has left a sour taste in the mouths of camp residents and a feeling of division and a lack of faith in their leadership. As Kaouthar put it:

“Now it's not accepted [for young women to want to be politically active] because like I said, they're all divided and have no idea what it is they're fighting for” (Focus Group 1).

This infighting has also left residents uncared for and with basic needs, like electricity, running water, food, and security, not being met. During a focus group meeting, one woman asked her fellow respondents: *“who's in charge anyway? Of making sure we have electricity?*

Which group?”

Eventually it all falls on our heads. One day they're fighting and the next they're allied, it's us who suffer the consequences on a daily basis. – Layali, 39, Housewife and member of Fatah Women's Union, Individual Interview.

You know I like politics, I like being involved and I go on demonstrations and join in when protests are called. But I don't like to give my allegiance to any one group. I go on demonstrations whenever any of the groups ask. In the end I support my cause as a Palestinian. Several group members have asked me who my allegiance lies with and I tell them with Palestine and whoever can keep the true cause alive. – Janine, 46, Housewife, Individual Interview.

Can a woman reach a higher level in a political organization? In the camp? No. Not at all in any way. There's a sense in the community that what is it exactly or who are we giving our children to when it comes to the political organizations? It's like for me, if I want my son or daughter or even myself, if I want to join an organization, I want to know that I will get somewhere through this work – I mean

that we as a Palestinian people, will get somewhere. But with the organizations we have now, I know we won't. There's too much infighting, too many kids joining just to carry a weapon and get paid a monthly allowance. It's not because of a cause that they are there. It used to be more acceptable for a woman to be politically active and fighting because we were in a state of war and there was a united front fighting for a cause ... There's no more respect in the treatment of women who were comrades in arms. Things are more complicated now. Even the modernization and openness that's taken place in our generation has been accompanied with a feeling that there's more "danger" for the girls in the community. To explain, in the past for example, there used to be the scouts in the camp, the UNRWA schools were more tightly controlled and organized, students had somewhere to be and were taught ethics, love of Palestine, school was truly their home away from home... now schools have such chaos and even education is lacking the strength it had before. The scouts are no longer there, students aren't as disciplined. The girls, when they would go to scouts, the parents who were somewhat more accepting and open knew where their daughters were going and who they were with and they trusted the institutions. Now it's not like that. The teachers themselves in UNRWA need discipline and ethics training. The UNRWA schools are chaos now. Naturally, parents don't like this and don't trust where their daughters are and what they are being taught. Also, in the past the girl herself was more ethical. When they were fighting side by side with the men, they forgot their femininity and the intentions were pure. The women who were involved militarily and politically, they even looked different physically. You could tell that this person is very committed to this life, this cause. Now the girls themselves are different and that is due to a specific social upbringing and dissolving of the whole social morality. We don't have a political upbringing anymore from childhood. All these things are important. If all of a sudden I decided that I would make my 14-year-old daughter wear a veil even though the previous 14 years of her life, she's been dressing up, going out and living a completely different lifestyle, I can't just all of a sudden say you have to wear a veil and change your entire lifestyle. She won't accept it. If I want her to accept that premise, I have to prepare her from birth. There has to be a basis, a certain nourishment of this idea from childhood. It is the same with politics. If now out of nowhere a girl comes to her parents and says I want to join a political organization, they won't accept it because that political nourishment and upbringing that used to exist before is no longer there. Even a brother who is politically active won't accept if his own sister said she wanted to join him. For the community to accept the presence of women in politics there has to be a basis for it, a social preparation and communal acceptance that stems from political nourishment and upbringing – Kaouthar, 44, Supervisor at the women's centre, Individual Interview.

When the Resistance was here, and during the Camp Wars, it was ok for everyone to meet and join in and fight and gather. There was a huge shift in relations not just

gender-based, but person to person. You know people laugh at me but I say that I love war but I don't like people dying. During war, people forget differences; we all become neighbours, people care about each other and worry about each other. During the camp wars, the first round, we lost so many young men. There were several wars; the one month, the six month...each time according to how long we were besieged. We had a loss of men so we had many young women take up arms and join in – me among them. It was inconceivable that we wouldn't; I couldn't imagine sitting in the bunker and knowing my brothers were fighting out there alone. I went out and some the men saw me and were upset. They felt usurped in a way, like “what is our role then, what are we doing here?” I told them no, it's my right, like you to defend my home. But then more and more came out and now, it's more accepted if there are women fighters during a war. The community became more accepting of a woman carrying weapons. But only in war (laughs). In the political organizations now, women's roles are trivial. Differences between women working with Hamas and those working with Fatah – although I have a brother in each organization, I feel like the women in Hamas are more committed. In Fatah, if a woman dresses a little sexier, with some make-up then she can reach higher positions, whereas if she's wearing a “shador” like the women in Hamas, she won't. There's discrimination there. There is also an incredible amount of corruption. If you go into a house belonging to a Fatah leader, you think they're living in palaces. They live at another level than us. I haven't tried to become more involved in politics because of the level of corruption all round. It's not encouraging in any way. I can defend my rights in front of my husband and my family, even if my husband threatened divorce, but I don't feel like there's anything that is worth that. If I want to join an organization now, who would I be against: my brother or my cousin? Or my other brother? When we return to a united Palestinian people, with a united cause like when Abu Ammar was alive – yes, there was corruption then too, we're not stupid – but not to this level and not this blatantly. If they ask me to go to Palestine and fight I would, but it means I offered something to my people, my land. But when I look at them fighting over the most trivial of things, then I think it's not worth it. If you open the borders today you'll find everyone leaving to return to Palestine, even if it means dying. Although for me personally, I wouldn't live there. I would stay in Lebanon (laughs). I was born here, this is my home, I don't know Palestine, even though my sister has been and has told me how beautiful it is. I've seen pictures and I know about it through talks, and maybe if I live there for a while I might feel a sense of belonging after a while. But when I think about it, I tell people I would visit, but I would come back. It's not easy to leave somewhere that you've known your whole life, that you feel a part of as much as any other person. We have Lebanese friends who I know more than I know my family in Palestine.

This loss of communal affiliation has created a sense of individualism in the camp where brother has been pitted against brother and neighbours who were once closer than family – after six plus decades of living so close to each other – feeling mistrustful of one another. This individualism has slowly trickled through the community and fragmented a social group that was once heavily interdependent. Now with the presence of several organizations in the camps that have differing ideologies, as well as the lack of economic opportunities, youths are joining due to boredom, economic necessity, and as a way of releasing their anger.

Many of our young men are uneducated. Men who were politically active before were educated, knowledgeable, and believed in a cause with principles. Politics is no longer educational; it has become about “fashal al-shabab”... young men, they fail at school, leave their parents’ homes and join any organization that asks in order to vent the anger inside them or to make some pocket money. Parents in the community don’t want their daughters around these youths. The organizations, they don’t care why people join, what matters is that they have a public that they can instil their ideas in. Whether these are good or bad ideas is not for me to say. Even this centre, now the women come here because they like it here but when they first came here, it was because there were free activities, free food, free whatever. That is what people are looking for now in the camp. They are distracted with material things. They will give their allegiances for a round of bread. It’s no longer over true allegiance for cause. And the parties know this; the members therefore don’t have the same respect for the individual’s role in the political structure especially not the women, so they won’t reach high positions. There’s no logical progression anymore to the structure. To this day, I haven’t heard that a woman made it big in Fatah or Hamas or any of the other groups. They have social positions but not political ones – Kaouthar, 44, Supervisor at the women’s centre, Focus Group 1.

Rubenberg (2001) in her study of women’s situation in the West Bank raises this issue of political disillusionment. She states that the “narrowing of the boundaries of political debate in Palestinian politics, combined with the PA’s reinstatement of kin structures and kin relations, also acted to shift women’s location and definition of their activities away from the public arena and back to the private domain of the home, family and clan” (p. 228).

During the course of this researcher's discussions with the women, there was a sense of deep frustration that is accompanying the women's words. The political situation that Palestinian refugees have found themselves for over 60 years has taken a heavy toll. However, while some women have retreated into the home, others have channelled their disillusionment into grassroots activism and centres for women. This grassroots activism, however, is no way politically-oriented (and in fact any mention of political activism would result in a centre being shut down), but rather a more active pursuit and advocacy towards women's social and economic rights. This activism, in the close quarters of a refugee camp, is not without its pitfalls and dangers.

When the centre first opened, the men were really suspicious and difficult. The men were not accepting of us. They would ask their wives or daughters, what is this centre? What do you go do there? What's the point? They were also suspicious that its members had political leanings or allegiances. When they realized that it is apolitical they became somewhat more accepting. Then, when they also realized that there were no men in the centre that helped a little. Mainly though it was when they understood that the women were dealing with social issues and not political ones; that's when they loosened up. But, in the beginning, some of the men would use the centre as a bargaining chip with the women. Like if a man has a fight with his wife or is unhappy with her, he would forbid her from coming to the centre because he knew how much it meant to her. My husband used to do the same thing. This rarely happens anymore. But if they found out that we were even discussing politics and political rights, the centre would be shut down. I have to be so careful of what I say to the women who come here. If I start talking about them working and going into politics, this will cause problems at home and will shut down the centre. What I can advise them, however, is that they have a right to love themselves and take time alone to spend on themselves. I have to indirectly explain that their primary and only roles do not have to be only mothers and wives – Kaouthar, 44, Supervisor at the women's centre, Individual Interview.

ii. **Muslim Fundamentalism**

This [her wearing a veil] has been for five years only...and I wish it weren't obligatory or I wouldn't have worn it! – Mariam, 45, Fatah Women's Union, Individual Interview.

Abdo (1994) highlights the effects of Muslim fundamentalism on the women's movement and its impact on the Intifada. While she adds that it is important not to overstate the level of this impact – and in this, the author is in agreement – it is important to also refrain from ignoring its effects. To say that the spread of fundamentalist Islam has been the root of the patriarchal nature of the society in the camp would be simplifying the matter drastically and would be feeding into Orientalist interpretations of Islam as a homogenous religion where women are not afforded rights. This researcher would argue that it is the patriarchal (re)interpretation of Islam as a religion in the Arab world where men and women have a socially-designated role within a patriarchal system, is what has helped subordinate women to men.

In the case of Palestinian society – and particularly in Gaza – Muslim fundamentalism has found fertile ground due to “marginalization and extreme poverty, and in the absence of a political solution to these hardships” (Abdo, 1994, p. 165). Abdo adds that “a state of despair (*ihbat*) set in which proved fertile ground for a religious movement” (p. 165). When discussing political Islamic parties, in this context, that discussion is focused on Hamas. Abdo adds:

In terms of the effects of the religious revival on women, the issue is more complex. Hamas is not presenting itself as a religious movement only, it is also a political movement. In order to affirm itself on the ground and achieve recognition as a political power, the movement does not hesitate to use force. To appear a dominant movement, Hamas tries to reinforce religious symbols on the street. Most obvious is the veiling of women (p. 165).

Abdo's research was in 1994. Today, in a refugee camp where marginalization, poverty, and *ihbat* are embodied in the very words “Palestinian refugees in Lebanon”, it would be remiss of the researcher to understate the applicability of the phenomenon of Muslim fundamentalism.

Hamas' presence in the camp is firmly entrenched and supported. Of the respondents interviewed, a significant number lean towards Hamas – and interestingly enough, do not aspire to higher political positions that cross traditional gender roles or that are not based in social work. Hamas has placed itself firmly in opposition to Fatah's rampant corruption, providing much-needed social services that Fatah and UNRWA are failing to provide, and providing religious zeal in the place of anger toward the lack of a political solution. As mentioned, youths are joining political organizations to earn money, not out of political ideological allegiance. As for enforcing religious symbolism on the streets, walking through the camps, this researcher was surprised with the presence of new posters that were not present 10 years ago preaching about the moral imperative for a woman to be veiled – as well as *how* she should be veiled³⁵.

With Hamas gaining power in the camp, the environment is no longer interspersed with the secularism that once existed with the PLO's resistance. Palestinian society has never been a purely secular one, nor has it been homogenous in faith. However, stepping into a refugee camp in Lebanon today, radical Islam is the dominant religion.

I have a boy and a girl. Because of the way the community around me treats my son, so much better than my daughter, I've gone completely the other way. I treat her in a better way and give her whatever she asks for. I know that it's not the right way, but he gets so much more than her from everyone, I want to break that rule. You find here that as soon as a woman gives birth and it's a girl, people are like "Oh too bad, she had a girl". If it's a boy then she's a heroine. I don't understand why they do this. I was so much happier when my baby girl came, even though I know how difficult it will be for her. I even can say that I hate Muslim societies because the people in them turn them into something that has nothing to do with Islam itself. Sometimes I prefer Christian societies because of the behaviour toward women... I don't want to get too much into religious issues though – Soha, 28, Housewife/part-time work, Individual Interview.

³⁵ The posters quoted the Koran and showed illustrations of how tightly a woman's veil should be bound so that no hair or neckline can be seen.

VI. Effects of Occupation and Exile

i. Education & Early Marriage

Now women try to get their daughters married off at a young age because the economic hardships have very negatively affected them ...especially if someone has several daughters, they are getting engaged at 16, 17, 18... This woman could have reached a position where one says: 'wow' look at her education level, or to actually lead a movement or organization, or a leader in any domain. It's not for lack of ability or will – Aalia, 30, Housewife, Individual Interview.

Women are trying to find jobs because, more than anything, they need to feed their families, but also because it is an avenue for independence that they feel is more accessible to them and which would produce more immediate tangible results. Economic hardships are seen as a major obstacle to overcome for some women before they felt able to focus on political rights. The effects of living for over 60 years in a situation of exile with minimal ability to make money and provide the basics – for example running, fresh water – had obviously taken their toll.

Predominantly, the economic aspect came up as a means to continuing education, or for those who had finished university, the ability to put their degrees to use. Several respondents stated that continuing education would serve toward political organization and thought. This lack of ability or motivation for basic and continuing education was seen a “binding” limitation that has seen women remain/revert to domestic roles.

My father told me that I was smart and that I should learn what I wanted but he also said don't ever dream that I will allow you to work. So I said to him, why then should I learn? I quit school and stayed at home. I know how to read and write and I join in whenever I can. I would have liked to have been a nurse. My mother used to support me. I used to be in a football club and a dabké (traditional Arab dance) club. All in secret of course (laughing). My mom used to say, “oh my God if your father finds out”...but I ignored her. I used to be very strong-headed, out of all my siblings. I had a brother who passed away in the camp war; he used to tell me to go. My dad would say no but I listened to my brother. He was my age and more open-

minded. More open to life and believed women are equal to men and were able. – Janine, 46, Housewife, Individual Interview.

A Palestinian woman in general has her activities, her interests and her education and she is becoming more involved than before in numerous activities. The way people think about women has been changing. Before, a Palestinian girl couldn't go to school, her place was for marriage and nothing else (asked when she means when she says before?). By before, I mean at the time of Palestine. Before 1948, most girls were meant for marriage and were not allowed to be educated. After the invasion and the Nakba, people started putting more clout on education even for girls. Now this decreased after 1982 (the Israeli invasion of Lebanon) and the wars that happened in that time but in general, whether we're talking about inside or outside (inside Palestinian territories or outside – called kharej and dakhel), when it comes to Palestinian women and their voices, we are owners of a cause and have rights. – Nahla, 44, Focus Group 1.

The problem is that people in the community are inheriting different ideas. Today a mother marries off her daughter early. And this is because the mother herself was married off early and doesn't really know how to proceed otherwise; she is the one who is in need of guidance because she doesn't know how to deal with her children. In consequence, she will act in the way her parents acted. She was married early so she doesn't know otherwise and she arranges for her daughters to get married early too. This is the real problem we are facing. We are becoming an ignorant people because of this cycle and it's our real problem. You tell me that a woman has not reached higher political positions; I will tell you that a woman hasn't reached anything in any domain here. Unless she puts in so much effort because of her own willpower. There's nothing that helps us here. No mechanisms in place to help advancement, whether politically, socially, culturally, emotionally, anything. In addition, economically, this is a way to lessen the pressure on a family. If I can't have a comfortable life here, the answer is to get married. This is what it has come down to. And the day after I get married, the one question I am asked continuously by my peers is whether I am pregnant or not? This is the only aim here. The first month of a marriage, if the woman is not pregnant, then the people in the community her neighbours all start looking for the problem. Why isn't she pregnant? The gossip starts; they talk to her mother, her mother-in-law, her husband, her... Ok, so you have the first child and even though you can barely feed yourself and your child, then why have the second? And the third, and fourth, and fifth? Ok so now you have a pile of children, and as soon as your daughter hits 15 years old, you marry her off because of the financial situation. As soon as your son turns 15, you send him out to work so he can help pay the expenses so his education is gone. And so on. – Kaouthar, 44, Supervisor at the women's centre, Individual Interview.

Several respondents stated that education used to be important to the Palestinian community as a whole. One of the biggest adjustments for Palestinian people when they were exiled was the economic consequences of a divided population and the loss of land. A heavily agrarian society, the loss of land for the Palestinian people meant the loss of their livelihood. The agrarian population began entering into wage labour and the social traditions of women remaining at home had to be abandoned. Palestinian people – men and women – could not afford to remain jobless. Despite religious and strict social control it was essential for families to allow women to enter into waged employment. This certainly provided women with freedom of movement (Kazi, 1987, p. 28). Kazi adds that at the time, education became – and remains to this day – “the most significant element of Palestinian society” (Kazi, 1987, p. 29).

However, today, with no available work, and women’s families not allowing them to work, the level of high school drop outs has risen drastically. Women as young as 13 and 14 opt to leave school, with the backing and often forceful prodding from family, in lieu of getting married and leaving a cramped situation.

As a Palestinian people in exile, we have ambitions – whether young, old, women, men – we have an ambition to return to our land. We also cannot deny that we have a percentage of boys and girls who have not continued their education but we also have a large portion of Palestinians who have reached very high levels of education and specializations, whether doctors, engineers... however, it is not possible to overstep the politics of the country. For example in Lebanon, a Palestinian person cannot work in several different occupations. We’re not allowed to work as doctors, engineers, a pharmacist cannot open a pharmacy...even labourers who work in Lebanese companies do not have insurance, they are not given the same wage as anyone else even though the Palestinian works harder, they have no rights. This obviously has an effect on Palestinian women. – Nahla, 44, Focus Group 1.

ii. **Unemployment and working women**

Palestinian women have a history of names to draw from – Hanan Ashrawi, Leila Khaled – it is evidence that we can reach these positions, but I really think the economic situation has limited our options. We're too busy trying to make sure our children eat...and let's not forget that the men don't have jobs either. Educated men aren't finding jobs, so women have to pick up the slack. Women are finding more positions to work in than men. All these distractions have limited her ability to give her attention to political issues. In spite of that, however, and in spite of the minimal role we have been given, women still contribute much to their societies. The evidence is this centre. We are here, we have a voice, we are in a women's charity organization, and most organizations are kept alive by women not men. We're getting there, just very slowly. Very slowly (laughs) – Mariam, 45, Fatah Women's Union, Focus Group 1.

There are women moving forward and there are women moving backwards. They get to a time when it becomes too much. Their heads will explode if they stay at home. Whether they want to work or not, eventually they have to go out. The women specifically are suffocating in their houses. Especially now, life in the camp is so difficult, people are suffocating. The buildings, the heat...I, myself, am sick of my house....the sun isn't coming into the house anymore because all the houses are on top of each other. You have to leave at least until the electricity comes on. – Layali, 39, Housewife and member of Fatah Women's Union, Individual Interview.

As witnessed by the above statements, one of the major reasons for the decrease in education levels and early marriage is the lack of jobs accessible to any Palestinian in Lebanon. There are hardly any jobs available for the men in particular, and jobs in construction or garbage collection have been saturated by immigrants from Syria or South-East Asia. Professions within the legal or medical spheres are not accessible to Palestinians.

However, the situation is slightly different for women. Conversely, this drastic economic lack is causing a shift in gender relations. According to several respondents, some who were working and others who weren't allowed to, not only is there a desire by the women to work, but it has been easier for them to find jobs in the service industry (cleaning homes, seamstresses, and

even work from home). This has created several familial tensions to come to the fore. The main tension has stemmed from the men in the camp because they feel usurped; if they don't have land, they don't have a job, so then what do they have?

If you wake up early in the morning and come to the camp, you'll see how many women are leaving to go to work. They clean houses or whatever work they can find. And of course this changes dynamics within the house and the marital relationship – Maliha, 30, Individual Interview.

If it's the woman bringing money into the house, the relationship changes completely. The man no longer has "woujoud"³⁶. That's not a good thing. It depends on the woman. Even if she is bringing in money, she needs to be able to balance and make sure her husband's role is still valid. There has to be equality, especially in our case because our husbands and children, their rights are taken away as well. – Samia, 48, Housewife, Focus Group 2.

I used to work then I stopped. In social services, outside the camp with an organization. Doctors used to come from abroad to perform eye surgeries for people here and they would have events for children, parties. I used to help them get everything organized. There were people who would come from "Hearts of Mercy" from the U.S. to help the people here in the orphanages and they would send donations to people. I used to help with the translation of letters back and forth. I worked there for 3 years. My whole life changed. My world turned upside down. It was the first time I'd worked and when I left the house...I felt like I saw so many new things. They took us on trips; I met so many new people. I saw my life through another perspective. When you think you're tired and you see some people outside...it makes you thankful for what you have. I love work and I love people. I'm a very social person and I like to visit people and help them. Then the work changed; they brought in a new director and the atmosphere changed so I returned home basically. But my whole personality changed. Any opportunities I have I like to work. I became stronger...at first it was just my life for my children but then I worked and I became a different person. I advise any woman to work. If she feels like she's tired and depressed – go work, you'll feel so much better. At least she meets new people, has different conversations. And whoever doesn't want that, well, let them stay buried. – Layali, 39, Housewife and member of Fatah Women's Union, Individual Interview.

³⁶ *Woujoud* translates literally as "Presence". In this case, it is meant in the sense of a man's role, his presence as provider of the family has been usurped.

Working at the airport was a big accomplishment for me. Fair enough, it's not ground-breaking work but for me, it took a lot to get to that point and I was so proud of myself that I did it. And it took me eight years to convince my husband to let me work. Eight! He wouldn't agree. I asked if we could buy a car – I love to drive and I got a driver's license so he wouldn't have an excuse. He kept saying that a woman's place is at home with the children. In the end, after eight years, I convinced him. I never spoke to my parents about this and when my husband allowed me, my parents got angry. They said that we gave her to you on the basis that she wouldn't have to work. I told them that I wanted to, he didn't. They were suffocating me anyway. After that, my whole relationship with my husband changed. I felt like I had more of a voice, more of a say in things. I had more power. I became a person who existed and had a personality. Even the comments I give my husband, he takes into account now. I can help him now, to analyze and solve things with him. Before, he didn't used to listen to anything I would say. Never felt like I had an opinion. I started talking differently and he started listening. It's not nice for a husband to be the "lord" of the house. No difference between me and him; especially inside our house. Outside, society treats him as the man and he's the head of everything. Inside the house, we have a more equal relationship now and it's getting more so every day. All because of work – Soha, 28, Housewife/part-time work, Individual Interview.

Soha continues to face pressure every day from her family and the community around her to stay at home. Changing camp demographics have also caused people's fears to escalate and the communal cohesiveness to deteriorate. Dire economic conditions for many Lebanese citizens and foreign immigrants in Lebanon have led to them moving into the camp or at its direct outskirts³⁷ because of cheaper rent and livelihood.

It's not like it was in the past. We all used to know each other; we were relatives all scattered in the camp. Now you have people from all over, Syria, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh... they all come and live here. The community became more dangerous. Even our camps aren't ours anymore. We had cases of girls being taken and raped. People started to fear more for their children, whether boys or girls – Salma, 48, Nurse at Red Crescent, Individual Interview.

³⁷ There is no clear delineation of refugee camps in Lebanon. The 60-plus years of exile and the need to expand to house the growing Palestinian population means that camps have merged with the poverty-stricken Lebanese neighbourhoods surrounding them.

The other day I was on my way to work. I was waiting for a cab outside the camp and a car pulls up next to me; the man inside was like “get in”. I moved away obviously, and he kept driving beside me until he got out of the car and demanded that I give him my phone number. I refused and was trying to stop a cab to take me to the airport but he kept saying that none of these cars will stop and if one does, I’m going to beat up the man in it. I was really afraid but I can’t tell my husband about this because he will forbid me from going to work again. He would say, see you’re getting exposed to things that I don’t want you to face so no going to work. He gets jealous, overprotective, etc. I prefer to solve my problems alone. – Soha, 28, Housewife/part-time work, Individual Interview.

Additionally, due to everyone’s dire economic situation, if one woman (or man) finds a job, jealousies among the neighbours will cause gossip. According to Alia, people in the community would start rumours about what a woman was doing outside the camp, and if she arrives home after sunset, her reputation is ruined.

I’m working from home, selling evening dresses. I got bored of sitting at home and not doing anything. And we need the money. My parents and husband were ok with it, seeing as how it’s work from home and I didn’t have to leave. And as long as it didn’t interfere with raising the children and taking care of my husband. There’s always going to be a little time taken away from them but it’s easier than leaving and working out of the house. There are some who work, but there isn’t that much work anyway. To find work, you have to leave the camp unless you’re part of a charity organization or centre like this one. They started talking about me working. Out of jealousy I know but it hurt. I mean why? Why shouldn’t I work? Everyone has a right to make a living. Of course I have a right too. And what’s very upsetting is that the ones who talk about me are working themselves, so then why would you look at others like this? I’ll tell you why. People are empty – they have nothing better to do. They’re bored and just want to gossip about each other. It’s like a sickness; a contagious one – Alia, 25, Housewife and part-time work from home selling dresses, Individual Interview.

I tell people here in the community that we’ve gotten used to waiting for handouts. I don’t understand why we’re not working harder to pull ourselves out of this mess rather than waiting for charity from everywhere. This idea that the woman’s place is in the home, as you heard one woman say yesterday in the focus group – she said

she's against a woman working – ok I agree that a woman who has children has to take care of them. And if I have everything provided for me, I can just kick back and relax my whole life, fine. But what is the wrong in contributing to my family? To my society? Why shouldn't I work and develop? What's wrong in having just 2 children instead of 10 because I know that's how many I can provide for? Why not leave a few years in between children so that the older one can help me in teaching his younger sibling? And even if I have everything provided, why wouldn't I want to work for myself? It doesn't have to interfere with my children and house. My children leave at 7am and come back in the evening, ok so what should I do in the meantime? Going to work is more than making money, it's also about meeting people, going out in the world, allowing it to influence and nourish your personality. Exchanging ideas and experiences...these things make a person grow. It makes you think differently, find alternative solutions to problems. As opposed to sitting at home and not talking to anyone and living in my ignorance. Saying it's wrong to work because it interferes with child-rearing and home-life means that you're not organizing your life right. It doesn't mean it's wrong for a woman to work. There are billions of women working and having families and living just fine. We're less, unable to, because we're refugees? Come on. It's been 65 years. – Kaouthar, 44, Supervisor at the women's centre, Individual Interview.

CHAPTER VI – CONCLUSION

We can talk. We have that power and that power only. We can speak out and connect with others. We don't have monetary means to change things, we don't have social structures that support it, and we don't have a community that accepts it. But what we do have is a voice. When anything happens on the inside (OPT) we have demonstrations, we speak out and hope that people hear us. That's what we can do in any other situations as well – Layali, 39, Housewife and member of Fatah Women's Union, Individual Interview.

I think the women within these centres themselves have to work harder with the women in the camps – and the mothers especially – to raise awareness and create the social and political nourishment. When a mother is educated on the principles of a political organization and is convinced by it, she won't have a problem with her children joining in. It's a grassroots upbringing or nourishing that starts with the new generation that's coming up now. Once there's a change in the home, there'll be a change in the community and a bigger change in the organizations themselves. Rather than sitting at home or locking ourselves up in our own little community and perpetuating ignorance, it is possible to interact with others, to read, to learn without having to pay anything. When I have this level of cultural awareness I can benefit my community, my family, my society in a much better way and it's like a snowball – Kaouthar, 44, Supervisor at the women's centre, Individual Interview.

I. Globalization: Two Sides of the Same Coin

This research states that the political rights of Palestinian refugee women in Lebanon have regressed drastically and they are socially, politically, and economically living in a heavily patriarchal society that is oppressing all its members. The hope is that this research has been able to provide a snapshot of some issues these women – and men – are dealing with in their everyday lives, as well as some of the historical context and discourse that surrounds this community. It is also hoped that the research has given a clear indication of how successful Empire has been in introducing a new discourse within Palestinian society – particularly the discussions on the failure of youths and the divisiveness of the cause. While this is not a new phenomenon, the

extent is at a new level over the past decade or so in the refugee camps and its encroachment into people's homes and psyche is extensive. Even within the OPT, and in neighboring states where Hamas once was, broader participation as a whole is decreasing as the physical erasure of Palestinian land against international law, with walls, enclosures and confinement in forgotten camps enables this capitalist-dominated project. Opportunity is overtaking principled resistance.

Connell (2011) in discussing the concept of Empire, states that "Capital has become wholly parasitical on the creativity of its labour force" (p. 139). The author analyzes Negri's works on Empire in particular, emphasizing his later works that take on a post-modern thesis with regards to old class structures. "The old class dynamics have gone. The dialectic has been broken" (p. 140).

However, how must one move forward? It is the belief of this researcher that this is not a missed opportunity. As the quote directly above states, the previous struggles have been diminished. New ones must take their place. There remain pockets of "resistance" as it were, and through this research it is hoped that the reader has been able to hear the voices of these women who constitute the pockets of resistance to the hierarchical ordering within Empire. In Lebanon's camps, there is a space. There is the willingness and desire by the women and the organizations already present to create a more egalitarian society in a situation of exile to which no one can predict an end.

Additionally, there is a huge opportunity that has presented itself this past year: The Arab Spring. While the situation in the region is still very uncertain, there is an opportunity for the rising movement of women from the Middle East and the North Africa to connect with each other, on a global scale and utilize the connective tools provided by globalization, to draw attention to this particular issue: the political rights of women in transition societies.

Foreign Policy magazine's May/June 2012 issue focuses on Arab women and their empowerment after the Arab Spring. A poignant quote in the issue states: "The Arab uprisings may have been sparked by an Arab man – Mohamed Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor who set himself on fire in desperation – but they will be finished by Arab women"³⁸. One hopes that the momentum will continue for women and this statement bears fruit.

II. The Multitude

One of the key aspects of the new global order called Empire is the restructuring of the production of labour, or what Hardt and Negri (2001) call "the question of production in relation to biopower and the society of control" (p. 27). Whereas Marxist theory considered "the problem of power and social reproduction on a superstructural level separate from the real, base level of production" (2001, p. 27), within Empire what is being produced through the globalized networks of communication is a new nature of productive labour – immaterial labour or "general intellect" (2001, p. 29), which can perhaps be the "center of potential revolt" (p. 29). It is within this productive sphere that the authors introduce the concept of the Multitude – "the living alternative that grows within Empire" (2004, p. xiii).

To simplify, one might say:

There are two faces to globalization. On one face, Empire spreads globally its networks of hierarchies and divisions that maintain order through new mechanisms of control and constant conflict. Globalization, however, is also the creation of new circuits of cooperation and collaboration that stretch across nations and continents and allow an unlimited number of encounters. This second face of globalization is not a matter of everyone in the world becoming the same; rather it provides the

³⁸ "Why do they hate us? The war on women in the Middle East" by Mona ElTahawy. Foreign Policy Magazine, May/June 2012 (193).

possibility that, while remaining different, we discover the commonality that enables us to communicate and act together (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. xiii).

Not to be confused with the masses or the people which relegate the diversity of individuals into a single identity – or “one”, the Multitude should be described as “the many” (2004, p. xiv); a segment of society that is working toward “an open and inclusive democratic global society” (p. xi). Similar to Hardt and Negri (2004), the conclusion to this research argues that contemporary globalization can provide the tools necessary to create “new circuits of cooperation” (ibid) across the globe that work towards eliminating the inequalities evident in today’s world system. Somewhat more specifically, the paper argues that globalization is merely the mechanism that highlights aspects already present in today’s world – not creates them. For example, as with modernity, the advent of globalization has disseminated modernity’s Eurocentric and exclusive social ideals and in turn, this has caused a backlash in the form of alternative knowledge or world systems that are more inclusive. According to Lemert (2005), we live in a world today where inequalities and biopolitical methods of control within a Eurocentric modern system can no longer be hidden or blindly accepted. The author has stated that:

Globalization fits, precisely, as that social circumstance in which it is no longer possible to hide the truth about the system. Whatever the gains to the well-off in the core state and its uneasy allies, the reality of global communication is the reality that even those without a home, much less access to the network, can in principle get the word as to the truth of things they see dimly (p. xiii).

Therefore, it goes to say – if one is in agreement with the above theories – that possibilities of alternative systems can be created using globalization itself. Hardt and Negri’s (2004) focus on the project of the multitude can be expressed as a re-development of Foucault’s

top-down biopolitics into a bottom-up project of emancipation; the return of the individual in society to a collective consciousness, or “the common” (p. xv). The method used to produce grass-roots biopolitics based on true democratic values, according to the authors, is the creation and recreation of information and knowledge distributed globally through communication networks of people working toward an alternative global system – one of “transformation and liberation” (p. 99).

III. Palestinian Refugee Women and their Reveries of Emancipation

Applying this global theory to the issue of Palestinian refugee women and their political emancipation, Palestinian refugee women are oppressed under several hierarchical layers of a patriarchal and colonial structure that has been institutionalized, reinforced and perpetuated on a daily basis and that has placed them within a domestic socio-political sphere. Political organizations, local social organizations, religious edicts, and social relations are reinforcing oppressive power structures that construct, and reconstruct, female identities in a variety of ways until these structures become truths and norms.

Rubenberg (2001) states, “The technologies of power operate as a lattice or web concurrently oppressing women and producing oppressive behaviours by women, making plain that women are not simply power’s inert victims” (p. 256). This social order “assumes a life of its own” (Rubenberg, 2001, p. 256) and these power structures become a fixed norm. And within the social order of the camp then, the reinforcement of kinship and the place of the female within that *hamula* (extended family) female within the discourses of honour and shame; an emotional, weak gender who must be protected; the female as the mother of future generations.

Empire is the new imperialism where economic priorities and the citizenry as modes of production are taking precedence over ideals of resistance that the refugee community used to embody. The political malaise that has encompassed the refugee camps are synonymous with the malaise that had enveloped the region prior to the Arab revolts – and continues to do so in many states. Hamas itself, through the institutionalization of the movement and its involvement in governance, has shifted its ideologies in order to govern and engage with regional powers. In this, one can perhaps see the effectiveness and success of Empire in producing a new discourse within the Palestinian cause, based on capitalist success rather than a principle of political resistance.

This shift has begun to clash with decades-long ideologies within Palestinian society that resistance is not only a means to an end goal of a state, but they have also been framed in opposition to an encroaching colonial political agenda of integration and erasure as an identity. As we have also seen from the women's voices, the matriarchs of the community are a particularly, directly oppressing force. The domestic sphere, and the maintaining of traditions, is their sole power source. The ideologies that these older women try to enforce have been socially framed within as Palestinian traditions and “norms” that are struggling against western, liberal ideals. This clash cannot last and the cracks are beginning to appear in communities such as the refugee camp discussed in this research.

Due to the protracted nature of the exile, and due to external factors, Palestinian refugees have fallen into the trap of institutionalization. International organizations have had an influence with their own assumptions of “patriarchy-as-normal” (Handrahan, 2004, p. 432) in the context of protracted conflict, political or NGO leadership, or negotiation that all serve to reinforce gender inequality. The networks of information that continuously transmit the image of the

refugee, and particularly the female refugee, as a victim without agency (Indra, 1987) has globally reinforced this role.

How then does one fight Empire? Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2009) in her portrayal of the Palestinian women in the OPT asks that very question “How does one confront Empire? How do we attain political change in the context of an increased hegemonic power and oppression?” (p. 207). In this context, by referring back to the alternatives living within Empire: The Multitude.

The transformation of the political consciousness from idea into action, according to Peteet (1991) is what leads to social transformations and a “practice-centered view of history and society emerges, where women are creative forces in its making” (p. 70).

In her ethnography of these women, Peteet (1991) poignantly writes:

Within a limited temporal and spatial framework, women and men related to one another as near equals. Camaraderie between men and women was a consequence of facing the same dangers and trusting one another’s military abilities ... Women spoke of an “euphoria,” “a new sense of who I am and my strengths,” and “carrying the same load as men.” Thus, the women’s heightened consciousness of their abilities unfolded through action, an action motivated by national consciousness and the conviction that women have a right to participate. Most important, the military experience awakened women to their potential equality to men. The belief in women’s unsuitability, both physical and emotional, for training and combat was contested as they proved themselves as committed and able as men. Their strengths were made apparent to themselves and others (p. 150-151).

In the heady days of the First Intifada, Abdo (1994) states, “To maintain and develop the popular struggle, Palestinian women must face the challenge of inventing more adequate means of communication and organization ... Palestinian women need to seize the opportunity and act immediately, not only to affirm their presence in the Intifada: they also need to impose themselves at the higher levels of the Palestinian leadership” (p. 169).

Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen (2001) additionally state that women in refugee camps often – albeit not always – “create a ‘sense of community’ ... which in turn leads to the creation of new identities and relationships” (p.48, as quoted in Kauffman and Williams, 2010). These in turn lead to recognition among the women that they have rights under international law and that they are able to be “agents of change” that could lead to leadership post-conflict (p. 48).

The key concepts that continuously emerge are those that state the need for “communication and organization”, “practice-centered view of history and society”, “becoming agents of change” – in other words, tapping into, communicating and organizing with the lived experiences of the multitude; the sharing of the global commons in order to document resistance and alternative subjectivities and truths.

The women in this research discussed their increasing access to work. This can be used as further empowerment. Globalization itself has provided the very tools for women, such as the facilitative effect that technology has had on the connectedness of women around the globe, to create new knowledge. Scholte (2005) has spoken of the “respatialization” (p. 16) of the globe, where the effects of globalization on geography and connectivity – collapsing the former and increasing the latter – have meant a reconfiguration of space and time between people across the world. This effect has created what Held and McGrew call the “transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions” (as cited in Scholte, 2005, p. 17). According to Doumato & Posusney (2003):

Because of its impact on a country’s economy, politics and culture, globalization is a process crucially interrelated with the evolving role of women in Middle Eastern

societies, with implications for their opportunities to work and organize, and for shifts in societal attitudes toward gender (p. 5)³⁹.

Kauffman and Williams (2010) state that once the decision to act has been taken, women usually fall under three categories of activism: as belligerents – where activism takes on a violent form –, within networks during conflict, or as accidental activists where they are thrust into political roles due to the circumstances. The *type* of activism taken is usually dependent on the situation that the women find themselves in, as well as their “perceptions of themselves” (p. 64).

In this particular case of Palestinian refugee women, the option that the women see for themselves is that of engaging in networks with other women across the region and the world – or becoming part of the Multitude as it were.

This study has had the intended goal of being used as knowledge to primarily be added to the global knowledge or what Hardt and Negri (2004) have termed “the common” (p. xv) used by the “Multitude” (p. xi) – that alternative, which Foucault (1980) has prescribed as the antidote for “subjugated knowledges” (p. 81). It has been intended to also inform relevant programs created by Palestinian women to forward their cause, and encourage further research – particularly with the men in Palestinian society.

Patriarchal structures do not solely oppress women, but also place men within socially prescribed roles that oppress them, and in this case the occupation also affects every person within the Palestinian community (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009). Further research can explore the

³⁹ It is important here to raise a critical point that the avenues of work open to Palestinian refugee women are at this point mostly, but not exclusively, within sub-sector domain. One here must tread a careful line as these jobs could further reinforce women’s roles within the domestic sphere. According to Gray et al. (2006), citing Enloe (1990), Moghaddam (1999) and Mason (1986), globalization “confines women to low-pay, low-status, often part-time jobs that reinforce their subordination and perpetuate the devalorization of women’s work in most societies” (p. 295). However, this researcher believes that employment for the refugee women in Lebanon would still open their world to new experiences, new encounters and could set the groundwork for a more feminist outlook that is not enforced from without.

attitudes and needs of the men in the camps and perhaps start a more comprehensive debate on change. There are also already programs (local and international) in the camps working towards women's emancipation by teaching women work skills. Ones that are targeted at women's political rights and Palestinian women's historic engagement should be introduced and local NGOs should be supported to prepare them. Even raising awareness on this issue, through workshops for men and women – as several participants suggested – would be pushing for change. Several women stated that educational workshops targeted at youths – both men and women – would be beneficial in raising awareness about women's political and other rights, such as the abolishment of violence against women (which is rife in the camp), and most importantly teaching the youths about the history of female involvement in resistance struggles.

Finally, Hasso (2001) argues:

Feminist subjectivities and possibilities will be circumscribed and difficult to maintain without the structural and cultural support provided by a stable, sovereign, and at least nominally democratic state and accountable feminist organizations that are responsive to diverse groups of women (p. 586).

While this thesis agrees that feminist subjectivities and possibilities will be indeed difficult, it is not to say that they will be impossible. There is not much that the Palestinian refugee community in Lebanon has faced that has not been difficult Palestinian women cannot continue to wait for a state before pushing for their rights. However, a just and fair political solution to the Palestinian refugee problem must be found – whether through compensation or right of return. It is hoped that this research has shown the untenable situation they currently live in and how it is, and should be, unsustainable for any of them – and any of us. It is possible to rebuild a more equitable society using indigenous forms of post-colonial feminism that fights

several layers of oppression (Abdo, 1991, 1994; Sharoni, 1995; Jayawardena, 1986) – for the end goal of emancipation from Empire.

We've been here 64 years... but still I encourage my children to believe in the Palestinian cause. I tell them that our land will not be freed just with guns; it will be freed with education and knowledge. Knowledge is more powerful than guns. You know if women were given a chance, we would get so much more done. They say a woman has half a brain you know? I think it's the other way around. A woman weighs things with her mind and her heart, whereas a man weighs it with just his mind. I feel like a woman is able to give more than a man, especially in the field of politics, she just needs to be given the chance – Janine, 46, Housewife, Individual Interview.

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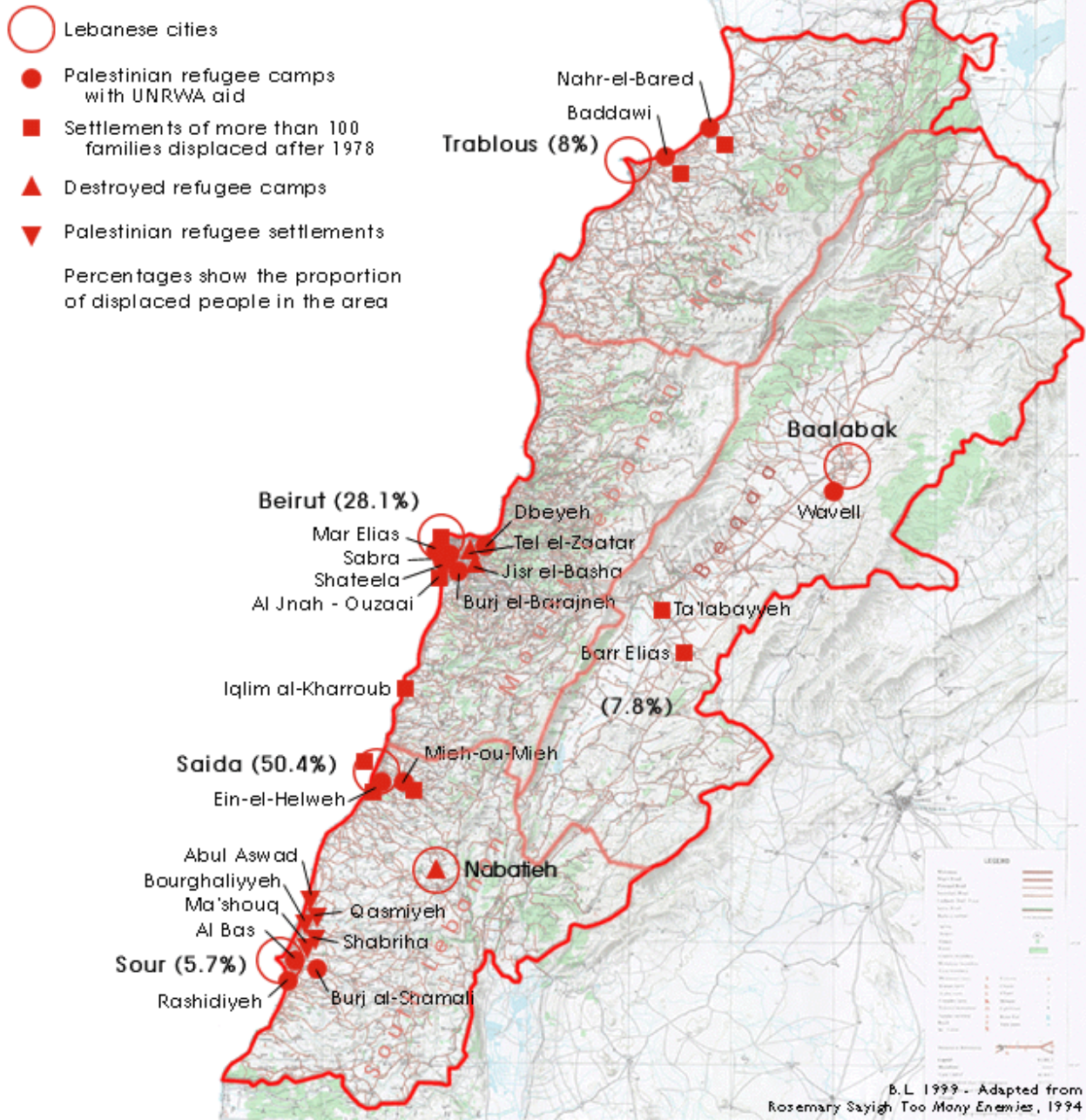
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ANNEXES

ANNEX A – Map of Lebanon with All Refugee Camps (as of 1999)



ANNEX B – Tables of Political Parties & Affiliated Women’s Organizations

* Taken from Rubenberg, 2001, p. 210-213 (these groups are not exhaustive and only go until 1989, which is what is relevant to this research).

Organization name	Year Founded/Founder	Descriptive History
Fateh	1959, by Yasser Arafat	Bourgeois, nationalist ideology. Largest and most influential organization in the PLO and, since 1994, in the PA (Palestinian Authority).
Palestine Liberation Organization	1964, by and as an appendage of the Arab League	Yasser Arafat became president in 1969 and transformed it into an independent Palestinian nationalist organization under whose umbrella all the major factions came together; Arafat in his capacity as PLO chairman was the architect of the 1993 Oslo Accords.
Palestine National Council		Legislative body of the PLO.
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)	1967, by George Habash	Pan-Arab nationalist; Marxist-Leninist; second to Fateh in terms of support; supports peace but not Oslo Accords.
Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)	1969, in a split from PFLP, by Nayef Hawatmeh	Marxist/Maoist; originator of the democratic secular state idea; supports peace but not the Oslo Accords.
Palestine Communist Party (PCP)	1982	Traditional Moscow-line communist party; eschewed guerrilla activities and implicitly (following Soviet policy) recognized Israel within the 1967 borders; transformed itself in 1991 into the PPP.
General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW)	1965, by the PLO	Founded as PLO’s women’s organization; banned by Jordan and Israel; remains active to the

		present; pro-Oslo; pro-Fateh.
Women's Work Committee (WWC)	1978	Nationalist/pro-DFLP; later renamed FPWAC.
Union of Palestinian Working Women's Committees (UPWWC)	1981	Popular movement, Progressive Bloc (PCP).
Union of Palestinian Women's Committees (UPWC)	1981	Popular movement, Action Front (PFLP).
Union of Women's Committee for Social Work (WCSW)	1982	Popular movement, Youth Movement (Fateh).
Federation of Palestinian Women's Action Committee (FPWAC)	Founded in a 1989 reorganization of the WWC	Popular movement, Unity Bloc (DFLP).
Higher Women's Council	1988	Coordinating committee for the four factions of the women's movement in the West Bank; changed its name to Unified Women's Council.
Unified Women's Council	1989	Established as a compromise with the GUPW, which objected to the original name as taking primacy over the GUPW (the official PLO union); lasted little more than a year before falling apart into factions.

ANNEX C – Participant Information

All information is as of 2010 and all names used in the text are pseudonyms. These are the total number of participants who were in the focus group discussions. The first 16 are those who I was able to interview individually.

	Pseudonym	Age	Marital Status	Children	Occupation
1	Mariam	45	Divorced (Married in 1983)	2 boys, 1 girl	Women's union of Fatah (women's affairs)
2	Hoda	47	Married (in 1995)	None	Supervisor in Women's Union of Fatah
3	Layali	39	Married (in 1987)	2 girls, 1 boy	Housewife, member of Women's Union of Fatah
4	Kaouthar	44	Married (in 1979) ⁴⁰	3 boys, 1 girl	Supervisor of women's center
5	Alia	25	Married (in 2005)	1 boy, 1 girl	Housewife – used to sell dresses from her home but quit after gossip caused problems for her, despite her family's dire need
6	Shereen	30	Married (in 1996)	3 boys	Housewife
7	Soha ⁴¹	28	Married (in 1999)	1 girl, 1 boy	Part-time work with advertising agency distributing leaflets
8	Janine	46	Married (in 1985)	2 boys, 1 girl	Housewife
9	Samia	48	Married (in 1988)	2 boys, 2 girls	Housewife
10	Sonia	38	Married (in 1997)	2 boys, 1 girl	Housewife
11	Manal	44	Married (in 1990)	3 boys, 1 girl	Housewife
12	Sahar	33	Married (in 1995)	2 boys, 1 girl	Housewife
13	Salma	48	Unmarried	None	Nurse at Red Crescent
14	Aalia	30	Divorced (married 1 year and 9 months)	1 girl	Housewife
15	Nahla	44	Unmarried	None	Housewife
16	Zouhaira	?	Married (in 1983)	4 girls, 1 boy	Housewife (Bedouin origin)
17	Sara	38	Married	Unknown	Housewife
18	Leila	20	Unmarried	None	Researcher with Médecins Sans Frontier
19	Malkia	31	Married	Unknown	Housewife (Lives in Syrian refugee camp and was visiting for the summer)
20	Shoukria	25	Married	Unknown	Housewife

⁴⁰ Kaouthar was 13 when her family forced her to get married. Out of all the participants, she was the youngest when she was wed – and is a self-declared feminist who now leads the way in her community in fighting for women's full rights.

⁴¹ Soha and her sister Manal (11) are both Lebanese women who married Palestinian men. Prior to moving into the camp, their family lived directly on the outskirts. In fact, Soha stated that she had to literally cross the street to go see her family at their old home.