

Torn Between Patriarchy and Imperialism: Palestinian Women

Dayan Hussein

dsh15@mail.aub.edu

On May 7th, 2021, Israeli forces have gone mad in Sheikh Jarrah, beating everyone in sight, demolishing the solidarity tents, using excessive force against unarmed civilians, and twisting facts in order to silence Palestinian. Indeed, what we are witnessing today is the genocide and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. To make things even worse, despite the fact that the UN resolution 3246 affirms the legitimacy of people's struggle for liberation from colonial and foreign domination, the international community remains silent when it comes to Palestinians' struggles. As a result, Israeli Forces keep on terrorizing Palestinians, particularly Palestinian women.

Women, as always, are the key of dominance and power. With that in mind, Palestinian women are subjected to frequent assaults and discrimination by the Israeli forces, and sadly, these surges in political abuse contribute to an increase in domestic violence. This brings us to the double oppression Palestinian women have to endure and resist under Arab patriarchy and foreign occupation and colonization. For Palestinian women, these conditions have brought significant setbacks.

Palestinian women continue to struggle for their rights, which have been restricted by two main interconnected forces: The Israeli occupation and patriarchal dominance within the Palestinian community. As a result, Palestinian women face two major limitations to their rights: those emerging from within their own community, and those imposed as a result of colonization, conflict, and civil unrest. This brings us to the first and most significant barrier to women's liberation: a widely held belief that declares the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and liberation to be the most significant; The view that nothing is more important than this existential struggle, and that, in any event, women cannot be liberated unless all Palestinians are liberated, is almost universally held by both women and men (Shingo, 2011). Seen in this light, it becomes evident why Palestinian women's rights are deprioritized.

On a domestic level, women are prone to oppressive personal status laws, which retain discriminatory provisions related to marriage, divorce, and child custody. Women's inheritance, alimony, and job opportunities are also affected by more patriarchal laws and practices, limiting their economic autonomy and leaving them more vulnerable to poverty than men. Moreover, there has been little to no effort to incorporate Palestinian women's issues into key political structures, such as the struggle for Palestinian statehood or national reconciliation. In short,

Palestinian women face a complicated reality in terms of political participation and access to decision-making.

Furthermore, some segments of society seem to be growing more conservative and returning to traditional values; These traditional values further reinforce the patriarchal control on women's sexuality, promoting gender-based violence. For instance, in 2019, at least 18 Palestinian women have been killed by family members angered at perceived damage to their honor (Ayyub, 2019). Another study shows that about 15% of married women in Gaza reported incidents of sexual abuse by their husbands, with more than half of these experiencing it repeatedly (3+ times). To add insult to the injury, according to UN statistics, 50% of Palestinian women and 63% of Palestinian men agree that a woman should tolerate violence to keep the family together. This exemplifies how women are taught to expect less, to demand less, and to take up less space. Evidently, the issue of violence against women is not given a sufficient amount of attention in Palestine, either due to negligence or lack of understanding of the relationship between gender and violence.

Nevertheless, any discussion of Palestine's constitution, laws, and effect on women must take into account the constraints exerted by the Israeli occupation, which has a significant impact on Palestinian authority's operations, Palestinians' everyday lives, and the personal security of all Palestinians. As a result, Gender-based discrimination and insufficient access to justice persist, and civil society lacks the legal means and financial capacity to address such treatment.

When it comes to the Israeli occupation, it's essential to highlight the frequent threats and discrimination Palestinian women face by the Israeli military, which exacerbates political violence and leads to increased domestic violence. "The Israeli occupation and the resulting humanitarian crisis are deeply gendered and exacerbate existing gender inequalities. Women disproportionately endure the violence of occupation borne by all Palestinians, and often with gender-specific consequences," said Siniora, general director of the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling in Palestine.

Life under Israeli occupation has always meant living under continuous threat of violence; for many women, the fear of home demolition and property destruction is a daily reality. Backed by soldiers, police, and private security firms, settlers routinely evict Palestinians out of their homes and throw all their possessions into the streets. The resulting trauma from housing demolition, and the threat of eviction, mean that Palestinian women cannot enjoy the level of human rights and quality of life they deserve. Simply put, Palestinians are being evicted from their humanity by Israeli forces.

Israeli occupying forces also use sexuality as a weapon of political intimidation and domination. In fact, since the Intifada, women's committees as well as human rights activists, both Israeli and Palestinian, have been recording cases of sexual harassment and attempted rapes by Israeli soldiers at checkpoints, prisons, and beyond. In a nutshell, Palestinian women are

displaced from their homes, evicted off their families' lands, and forced to live in fear of bombs falling on their heads and military officers harassing them when travelling from home to school

Patriarchy intersects with settler colonialism; therefore, Palestine is a feminist issue! What is clear is that we are currently witnessing an era in which political violence dominates the public and private discourse in Palestine. Palestinian women, broadly speaking, are marginalized, exploited, neglected, and denied their human rights both within and outside their home. With tensions between Israel and Palestine being on the rise and war crimes being committed by Israelis every here and there, unfortunately, the status of women doesn't seem to be improving anytime soon. Finally, we raise the question of whether, after Palestine is liberated, the situation for Palestinian women will get any better? Or will Arab patriarchy remain a massive roadblock for women?

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