

# REVIEW OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

# 6

**Feminist Conceptualizations of War;  
Geographies of Thinking**  
*Dubravka Zarkov*

**Clad in Mourning: Violence, Subjugation  
and the Struggle of the Soul**  
*Stefania Pandolfo*

**Changing Family and Gender Dynamics  
During the Siege against Gaza:  
Spousal Relations and Domestic Violence**  
*Aitemad Muhanna*

**Crime, Gender and Punishment:  
The Paradox of Palestinian Civil Policing**  
*Penny Johnson*

**Reporting Gaza**  
“Humanitarian Crisis and Social Suffering”  
*Rita Giacaman*  
“Voicing the Needs of Women and Men in Gaza”  
*Rema Hammami*

**Honor Crimes and Audience Reception:  
Meaning Production and Gender Interpretations**  
*Benaz Somiry-Batrawi*

**Institute of Women's Studies**



# REVIEW OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

Volume 6 ❖ 2010

*An annual review of women's  
and gender studies*

**Institute of Women's Studies**

**Birzeit University**

Editors:

Penny Johnson (English)

Sawsan Wadi (Arabic)

Editorial Committee:

Islah Jad, Rema Hammami, Eileen Kuttab

© **Institute of Women's Studies 2010**

ISBN 978-9950-322-05-9

Published in 2010 by the Institute of Women's Studies, Birzeit University

POB 14, Birzeit, Palestine

Telephone: +972 2 2982959

Fax: +972 2 2982958

In Arab world, please use international code 970

For more information:

<http://home.birzeit.edu/wsi>

Price:

\$4 (local)

\$8 (international)

Design: Palitra Design

Print: Studio Alpha

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Editorial</b> .....	5
 <i>ARTICLES</i>	
<b>Feminist Conceptualizations of War; Geographies of Thinking</b> .....	12
<i>Dubravka Zarkov</i>	
<b>Clad in Mourning: Violence, Subjugation and the Struggle of the Soul</b> .....	25
<i>Stefania Pandolfo</i>	
<b>Changing Family and Gender Dynamics During the Siege against Gaza: Spousal Relations and Domestic Violence</b> .....	40
<i>Aitemad Muhanna</i>	
<b>Crime, Gender and Punishment: The Paradox of Palestinian Civil Policing</b> .....	53
<i>Penny Johnson</i>	
<b>Reporting Gaza</b> .....	60
<b>“Humanitarian Crisis and Social Suffering”</b>	
<i>Rita Giacaman</i>	
<b>“Voicing the Needs of Women and Men in Gaza”</b>	
<i>Rema Hammami</i>	
<b>Honor Crimes and Audience Reception: Meaning Production and Gender Interpretations</b> .....	69
<i>Benaz Somiry-Batravi</i>	



## EDITORIAL

In her reflection on the roundtable with women ex-prisoners that brought to a close the Institute of Women's Studies second annual conference (March 23-25 2010), Rema Hammami points out not only their courage in resisting humiliation and mistreatment in prison, but the dilemmas they face – including isolation and censure – as they attempt to build their lives and futures after prison. It is an important reminder that violence can also be embedded in social indifference or failure to understand and learn from the experience of those who have been subjected to colonial or other forms of violence.

The Institute's conference was an attempt to break this isolation in practice and in analysis – to connect, understand and address the operations of violence in its many aspects through an exploration of the conference theme, "Formations of Violence in Palestinian Reality: Colonialism, Power Structures and Gender Relations." As Talal Asad reminds us (quoted by Johnson in this volume), external and internal violence are not separate categories but there is a "historical space in which violence circulates." That space in our context is clearly colonial. Conference organizers thus aimed for an integrated approach where colonial violence, national violence and domestic violence could be brought together, while not ignoring their specificities.

Keynote addresses by Stefania Pandolfo, Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley, and Dubravka Zarkov, Associate Professor at the Institute for Social Studies in the Hague (Netherlands), took us beyond the bounds of Palestine and brought us back again with new conceptual approaches to, and questions about, gender and violent conflict, in the case of Zarkov, and destruction and trauma, in the work of Pandolfo. Pandolfo returned to a key text of Frantz Fanon to look at such trauma among Moroccan youths and Zarkov presented an exposition of feminist conceptualizations of war as they developed over time, in different locations (whether the west or the global south), and within various forms of war and conflict.

Other papers published here in the English section include Aitemad Muhanna's important exploration of how husbands and wives in poor and vulnerable households in Gaza respond to the violence around them, particularly the effects of the Israeli siege, and how family and gender dynamics are affected. In "Reporting Gaza," two presentations of household surveys conducted after Israel's war in Gaza show the sustained and gendered consequences of colonial conflict and siege on Gazan families. Rita Giacaman of Birzeit's Institute of Community and Public Health (ICPH) presented "Humanitarian Crisis and Social Suffering in the Gaza Strip: An Initial Comparison Between Women and Men," using findings from ICPH's summer 2010 survey, while Rema Hammami of the Institute of Women's Studies presented and analyzed voices of women, men and young people from focus groups conducted in the context of a UNIFEM/ UN Gender Task Force Household Survey in March 2009. Also in this section, Penny Johnson looked at the "paradox of Palestinian civil policing" when the Israeli occupation does not acknowledge civilians and where such policing is embedded in larger security structures.

In keeping with its commitment to publish graduate student research and writing – and in keeping with the focus on violence in this issue of the *Review* – we are pleased to publish excerpts from Benaz Somiry-Batrawi's master thesis which examine audience reception of both Palestinian women and men to a 2008 documentary film on "honor" crimes.

The majority of papers by Palestinian academics, researchers and NGO activists exploring the multiple effects of violence are found in the Arabic section of the *Review*. Islah Jad opened a window to a subject that is all too frequently treated only with sensational clichés in the Western press in her empirically rich exposition on "Women of the Hamas Movement and Positions towards Martyrdom Operation by Women." Jad is one of the few researchers to conduct sustained research on women in Islamic movements in Palestine.

Although critical in both significance and size, both Jerusalem and Gaza have often been marginalized in local research and policy initiatives in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and the experiences and analysis of Palestinian

women living inside the green line are often not heard by those of us on the other side. A number of speakers gave conference participants an opportunity to hear these voices, some of whom are published here. Among them, Sama' Aweidah of the Jerusalem-based Women's Studies Center offered a vivid portrayal of "The Israeli Occupation and its Effects on Palestinian Women in Jerusalem." Despite the much regretted absence of researchers living in Gaza, the conference also managed to provide a focus on Gaza and the multiple effects of violence, particularly Israeli siege, sanctions and war, on men, women and children there. Aside from the presentations in English noted above, Hadeel Qazaaz, on behalf of the Women's Affairs Center (a key women's NGO in Gaza), provided the voices of Gazan women in her presentation, "Women of Gaza: Teach Us Some of What You Have." As the title indicates, Qazaaz focuses on the agency and capabilities of Gazan women as they struggle against almost impossible odds, rather than casting them solely as victims. Providing yet another key perspective, Himmah Zu'bi from Mada Al-Carmel, a Palestinian research center based in Haifa, analyzed "Economic Violence Against Palestinian Women in the 1948 Areas: a Case Study of Displaced Women from Saffuriya."

Fatena Wazzaefi from the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs shared with the conference the Ministry's view in "The Palestinian National Plan to Combat Violence and the Palestinian Authority," opening up an important policy dimension and stimulating audience discussion, another goal of the conference. Khadija Hussein of the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens Rights provided a sobering and detailed examination of internal violence in the Palestinian context. Her presentation, entitled "Internal Violence: Practices of the Security Forces in the West Bank and Gaza," drew on the Commission's rich sources of data and monthly and annual reports.

Finally, the Arabic section provides a summary of three papers on gender-based violence in Palestine, including Ohala Shomar (Sawa Center) who reported the results of a pioneering study on sex trafficking entitled "Trafficking in Women and Forced Prostitution in Palestine." Najwah Yaghi presented a 2004 study of gender-based violence by Miftah (the Palestinian Center for Democracy), while Afaf Zebdeh discussed her research on domestic violence in the Tulkarem District. A statistical presentation by Ashraf Hamdan of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) on PCBS's 2005 domestic violence survey is represented in the *Review* by several PCBS tables.

Given that there has been only one national survey of domestic violence, the perceptions of many Palestinian women and men that domestic violence is on the rise, particularly among communities in highly insecure circumstances, can not be verified yet in hard statistics. And the prospects of unified action by polity, society and communities are troubled. Some of these complications come from the crisis in the Palestinian national project – undermining the solidarity which



society and the polity needs to address such issues. But international developments since 1990 also pose a challenge if we consider the many effects in Palestine of what Lila Abu Lughod calls the “active social life of Muslim women’s rights” where international discourses on the status and “rights” of Arab and Muslim women circulate through media, institutions and governments, sometimes figuring in justifications for military intervention and certainly often informing funding priorities of international agencies. How do we find our own way to both understand how violence operates in Palestinian families and what can be done to prevent it? The IWS conference points to an integrated framework where pervasive colonial violence is addressed and challenged, as well as other forms of gender-based violence.

## **Women, Resistance and Colonial Violence: Reflections on a Roundtable with Women Ex-Prisoners**

**Rema Hammami**

For the closing session of the conference, a round-table was held with three women ex-political prisoners. Through the telling of their stories the women brought into focus, in often moving ways, the multiple and complicated ways that both national oppression and resistances to it are profoundly gendered. Each one began with a reflection on what motivated them to participate in resistance activity; then reviewed their experience of arrest and interrogation by the occupation forces; followed by their lives in prison and finally, their reception in their communities upon release.

While Reema Abu Aysheh (24 years old), Bara’a Malik Muhammed (16 years old) and Najwa Abdul Ghani (28 years old) described their particular journey in distinct and often personal ways, there were also strong commonalities in their experiences. First was the way in which their gender was treated as a useful vulnerability by their interrogators – with sexual threat and social shame used as a strategy by interrogators against all three women. Thus to confound them, the women in various ways had to defy the interrogators’ racialized and gendered assumptions. At the same time, the interrogation experience remained a powerfully transformative but contradictory life marker – one expressed indirectly by all three as simultaneously traumatic and empowering.

In comparison, prison life was dominated by the warmth and solidarity of other women prisoners. For all three, the relationships forged in prison with women under the same extreme circumstances were ones that would remain powerfully significant for the rest of their lives. So much so, that the pain of leaving behind friends in prison in most cases made the experience of release an overwhelmingly sad rather than a happy event.

Perhaps the most moving part of the session was the women's discussion of their post-release experiences and "re-integration" into their local communities. While all three underlined how important family acceptance and support was during their interrogation and imprisonment – it became even more crucial upon their release. Bara'a and Najwa returned to their family homes and communities, while Reema found employment in Ramallah and moved on to forge a new career. But the contrast does not end there. While Reema found a new community through her work and political life. Bara'a and Najwa both felt isolated in, and censured by, their communities. Najwa's fiancée broke their engagement while she was in interrogation and went on to marry someone else. While Bara'a (who entered prison when she was just 14) hopes to finish her studies and go on to university, similar to Najwa, she has doubts that she will find a spouse, given the discomfort her community has shown towards her ex-prisoner status.

All three women expressed a powerful sense of identity as women ex-prisoners – but for Bara'a and Najwa the mutual solidarity and support between women in prison has not been replaced by a newfound community. All three noted that perhaps a first step to creating a supportive community as well as raising awareness of the specific needs of women ex-prisoners would be the creation of an ex-prisoners club of women given that the existing prisoners clubs are only for men.

The Institute of Women's Studies and Conference participants would like to express their gratitude to Reema, Najwa and Bara'a for sharing their remarkable but often painful experiences with us. Their courage and fortitude stands as a powerful example for all women in Palestine.





# ARTICLES

# Feminist Conceptualizations of War; Geographies of Thinking

**Dubravka Zarkov**

*In her keynote address at the IWS conference, Dubravka Zarkov, an Associate Professor in Gender, Development and Conflict Studies at the Institute for Social Studies in the Hague (Netherlands), presented a wide-ranging review and analysis of changing feminist frameworks in approaching gender and violent conflict. New theoretical and analytical approaches, she argued, were often generated by an interplay of the development of feminist thinking and the nature of the conflict itself. In studying World War II, for example, the focus of research was ordinary women's daily engagement in 'war efforts,' with the assumption that women's gains in war will hold in peace. In socialist revolutions, the focus was the impact of war on women and women's new roles in war with the assumption that women will transform the military as an institution. In anti-colonial wars, the focus of research was colonial violence against women (particularly rape) and the assumption that women will transform post-colonial societies. All of these contain conceptualizations of agency and emancipation. Since the late 1980s, both the questions raised by contemporary violent conflicts and the conceptualizations have complicated notions of war as transforming women's roles in a uniformly emancipatory direction. Zarkov notes the multiple and ambiguous positioning of women within Western 'war projects,' from the Falklands war through the two Gulf wars and the war in Afghanistan. An earlier optimism about women's capacities to transform militaries and societies is also thrown into question by new research on 'old wars' and by contemporary realities. New conceptualizations of intersectionality (gender plus race plus nationhood), men and masculinities, and subjectivities and agency complicate earlier assumptions about unitary experiences of women in wartime. The occupation of Iraq, and particularly violence against men in Abu Ghraib, foreground women's capacity to perpetrate violence. Zarkov noted four lacking or marginal questions in approaching the wars of the new millennium:*

- *There is no explicitly feminist political economy of war.*
- *No bringing together of (otherwise rich bodies of feminist knowledge on) gendered aspects of globalization, militarization, neo-liberal economies, and war and peace; those areas of feminist inquiry remain largely separated.*
- *There have been feminist calls for explicit critique of global capitalism, but only lately-in relation to war and violence.*
- *Feminist critique of new hegemonic war discourses – such as ‘new wars’ - is lacking, though in the last couple of years feminist have engaged with the discourses of ‘war on terror’.*

*Below, in an excerpt from her 2006 article, “Towards a New Theorizing of Women, Gender and War,” Zarkov presents a search for new theoretical and analytical approaches to gender and violent conflict by investigating feminist analyses of two specific issues: sexual violence against women as a gender-specific war strategy and women’s participation in war and violence. These two issues most aptly reflect recent debates about the limits and biases of classical feminist approaches to violent conflict and militarism and offer possibilities for innovative thinking. Zarkov’s complete article can be found in Handbook of Gender and Women’s Studies (Sage 2006), edited by M. Evans, K Davis and J. Lorber.*

## **Classical Feminist Studies Revisited**

Feminists in any academic discipline have always had to counter hegemonies present within their discipline’s theoretical and geo-political traditions, not only hegemonies along the line of gender. The hegemonic position of Western academia, for example, has offered an advantage to Western feminists and feminists living in the West, prioritizing their theorizing against the knowledge produced in other parts of the world. Thus, not surprisingly, much of now classical feminist scholarship on war and militarism produced in the 1980s has often foregrounded the experiences of Western women and Western perspectives on the women’s engagements in and against wars and militant movements in other parts of the world.

The equality-versus -difference debate underpins this Western bias<sup>1</sup>. This debate is a product of two fundamentally different feminist projects – liberal feminists’ struggle to counter discrimination and secure women’s equal access to all social spheres, especially those perceived as exclusively men’s, and radical feminists’ struggle to preserve the presumed (essential) difference between nurturing femininity and



violent masculinity and to build a society based upon the qualities of the former. It has produced a rich, complex, and diverse body of feminist knowledge about war. Studies focused on the relationships between women and war (especially the two World Wars) rallied around the idea that dramatic social transformations caused by wars and women's engagements in different 'war efforts' (be it in war industries or in the fighting) offer a chance for lasting change in gender relations and a long-term effect on women's emancipation and empowerment. Other studies addressed the same relationship using essentialized notions of feminine-cum-maternal care and peace-loving as their starting point.<sup>2</sup> Yet others analyzed women's participation in national militaries (both in the West and in the Third World) or in militant, separatist, and guerrilla movements, arguing that women's presence could and would eventually bring about transformation of masculinist institutions, such as the military.<sup>3</sup>

These studies have, on the one hand, made immensely valuable contributions to our understanding of the relationships between women, gender, and war, and of the construction of militarism through notions of femininity and masculinity and their impact on women's lives. On the other hand, they have also produced the key analytical frameworks and tools through which women's experiences and the relevance of gender have been approached, often assuming a direct conceptual link between women's agency and women's participation in armies, militaries, and wars as potentially empowering and emancipatory, especially when linked to anti-colonial or anti-fascist movements.

However, there is a huge 'but' in these conceptualizations. It concerns the nature of the army, military, or violent conflict in which women took part. Namely, when these were seen as oppressive, hegemonic, or unjust, feminists have seldom analyzed the lives of women who joined them, and women's agency disappeared from view. Such an attitude seems to have to do with the general feminist uneasiness at the time with women's participation in politics that can be characterized as right wing: nationalist, racist, or religious fundamentalist movements, communal violence, or terrorist actions. It seems that feminist discourse of men's oppression of women has been for long ill-equipped for perceiving women active in right-wing political groups and militant movements.

Nevertheless, there have been studies that analyzed lives of women belonging to, or associated with, movements, armies, and militaries whose definition could hardly be accurate without words such as oppressive or hegemonic. Study of German women in the Nazi movement by Koontz (1986) has been one of these exceptions, inspiring other studies, such as Cock's (1992, 1994) analysis of the lives of women in the White South African Defence Force (SADF), against the backdrop of apartheid.<sup>4</sup> Cock compared the role of the women in SADF in maintaining the racist and sexist social order of South Africa to that of Nazi women in Germany, who (like Nazi women in Koontz's analysis) contributed to the power of an oppressive state 'by preserving the illusion of love in an environment of hatred'

(1994: 154). She also compared the position of women in the SADF with the position of women in the MK, an armed wing of the African National Congress. Whatever the differences between the two, Cock asserts that in both the SADF and the MK, combat played a fundamental role for defining women's position within the military. Those women who participated in combat were – sometimes, and very selectively - allowed to participate in the heroic myths and historic narratives of their communities; others were relegated to insignificance (p. 159).

Classical feminist studies of militarism have defined combat as one of the most important factors that defined the position of women within Western militaries, marking an ultimate difference between men and women.<sup>5</sup> As an exclusive preserve of men, combat was analyzed as the core axis around which femininities and masculinities in most of the militaries and wars have been constructed. However, during the World War II, Russian and Yugoslav partisan women were fighting on the front lines, as is true for women in many liberation movements in the Third World. Therefore, the neat political, ideological, and theoretical constructions of combat as exclusively masculine crumble when perspectives and experiences are not Western European or North American.

These realities have become ever more complex in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, both theoretically and geo-politically. Theoretically, many of the basic feminist premises produced in the West have been questioned by the rising power of until then marginalized feminist groups within the West (Black, lesbian, migrant) and from the Third World. The post-modern turn in feminism, often coming from totally different perspectives and with totally different premises, further destabilized classical feminist theoretical assumptions. Sometimes the two met in highly prominent and visible feminists from the Third World working in Western academia, bringing in not only different theories but ultimately, different strategies for political action. New theorizing has resulted in undermining some of the classical feminist concepts conceived within modernist feminist discourses, such as agency, emancipation, and empowerment, and their relationship. New strategizing has made feminist knowledge produced by Third World feminists both more prominent in the West and more relevant to feminist analysis of Western as well as global realities, not only Third World realities.

These theoretical and strategic trajectories go hand in hand, indicating both the unsettling of Western feminist hegemony in the production of feminist knowledge by the growing presence of Third World feminists. There is also a growing demand within global feminist movements that new theoretical reflections and political solidarities be developed to suit the changing geo-political situation of the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>6</sup> Simply put, new wars opened new questions for feminism. Women soldiers participated in the Falklands and the Gulf war, stirring up old debates and posing new challenges to classical feminist studies of war and militarism developed in the early 1980s.

One of these challenges was how to analyze links between gender and other

social relations of power, and especially other social identities that seem to have gained in visibility and relevance in these wars. It was obvious, for example, that the British and American women soldiers fighting in the Falklands and the Gulf war became multiple symbols – of nation, racial identity, ideology, emancipation, and modernity – and as such, served the purpose of defining the Self and the Other.<sup>7</sup>

Wars in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s made the links between gender and communal identities even more painfully clear. They brought about yet another challenge to feminist theorizing: intersections of these identities with gender-based sexual violence against women as a war strategy. As I will argue, they also mark a shift from classical feminist focus on women's agency to women's victimization in war. In the 1990s, the increasing participation of women in communal violence and nationalist-cum-religious movements in India and South Asia has posed very different questions about the intersectionality of gender, collective identities, and violence, and stirred up some of the old debates about the concept of agency and its link to empowerment and emancipation.

## Studying Sexual Violence in War

In her analysis of war rapes in Bosnia and Croatia, Rhonda Copelon pointed out that war rape 'takes many forms, occurs in many contexts, and has different repercussions for different victims' (1993: 213). She asserted that each instance of rape has its own dimension that must not be taken for granted, but that specificity does not mean uniqueness or exclusivity:

The rape of women in the former Yugoslavia challenges the world to refuse impunity to atrocity as well as to resist the powerful forces that would make the mass rape of Muslim women in Bosnia exceptional and thereby restrict its meaning for women raped in different contexts. It thus demands recognition of situational differences without losing sight of the commonalities. To fail to make distinctions flattens reality; and to rank the egregious demeans it. (p. 214)

Although she never states it explicitly, Copelon's warnings come as a reaction to the fact that the rapes in Bosnia and Croatia were ranked by many feminists, in the region and in the West, as the worst in human history, as unique and exceptional.<sup>8</sup> This assumption of exceptionality can be challenged by more recent studies of the prevalence of sexual violence in African wars<sup>9</sup> and earlier studies of rapes in South Asian violent conflicts, and can be attributed to the ambiguous positioning of Bosnia both within and outside of the 'symbolic continent of Europe' (Bakic-Hayden and Hayden, 1992). Its symbolic inclusion into Europe made rapes there more visible and more relevant for Western feminist theorizing on war rapes,



compared to, for example, rapes during the Rwandan civil war. The violence in Rwanda remained for long time quite invisible theoretically in Western feminism, although it mobilized women's organizations and feminist NGOs across the globe.<sup>10</sup> The wars in Yugoslavia, in contrast, caused an enormous academic production in a wide range of disciplines.<sup>11</sup>

The symbolic exclusion of Bosnia and Yugoslavia from Europe affected the way relationship between women, gender, and war in the region was theorized and ultimately created a shift in Western feminist theorizing on war. While studies on sexual violence against women in wars contributed hugely to our understanding of the intersections between gender, sexuality, collective identities, and violence, feminist studies of Yugoslav and later, the Rwandan war in the late 1990s largely focused on studies of war rapes. Consequently, the concept of gender-based violence was reduced to sexual violence. More importantly, classical feminist studies of women and war shifted from a conceptualization of agency and empowerment to a theoretically and politically much more problematic conceptualization of sexual victimization.

This new prominence, centrality, even, of the raped female victim in feminist studies of war could be traced to specific theoretical and political perspectives within feminism. On the one hand, in classical feminist theorizing on war, it is a direct, albeit paradoxical, consequence of the centrality of the concept of agency and its relation to empowerment and emancipation. Informed by modernist discourses that split the social realities of women into private passivity and public activity, women's engagement in militaries and wars with arms in their hands was easy to conceptualize as emancipatory and empowering within a feminist framework of public agency. The victimhood of civilian women was thus a mirror image of such an understanding of agency. As already indicated, geo-politics has a role to play, too. Eurocentrism, racism, and Orientalism made sure that there have always been women and regions that have been seen as more empowered and emancipated than others. Thus, it was also very easy to perceive some of them entirely through the prism of victimization. Not surprisingly, women in the Balkan and African wars have been among the latter.

So how are we then to study sexual violence in wars in a way that neither jeopardizes the plight of women who have been raped, nor takes sexual victimization as the ultimate destiny of women in war? Following Copelon's suggestion of recognizing differences 'without losing sight of the commonalities', one could argue for comparative studies of sexual violence against women in different violent conflicts and other political and violent contexts, such as, for example, colonial violence, as well as for more critical exchange between studies of peace rapes and war rapes.

## Studying Women's Participation in Violent Conflict

Wars in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda were not the only ones relevant for change in classical feminist theorizing on women and war. Other wars have also challenged established feminist thinking. The NATO war against Serbia over Kosovo in 1999 and the wars in Afghanistan in 2001 and in Iraq in 2003, justified by the doctrine of 'humanitarian wars' and 'pre-emptive strikes' and the discourse of the 'war on terror' have further exposed, each in a different way, some of the limitation in classical feminist theorizing on violent conflict and a need for new approaches.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the 1990s, feminist conceptualizations of wars, violent conflicts, and militarization have been changing. After studying *women* in violent conflict and its aftermath, *femininity and masculinity* became much more prominent tools of analysis. Then studies of women's and girls' *experiences* of war were joined by studies focused on *representations* of femininities and masculinities in various war narratives, on the genderedness of narratives and practices, on links between gendered identities, violence, and military and (much less so) on the changing nature of warfare.<sup>13</sup>

The concepts of *women's agency* and *empowerment through war* became ever more important for the global feminist movement. Thanks to feminist efforts in 2000, the United Nation adopted Resolution 1325, which demanded inclusion of women's anti-war efforts in every step of the official political and social processes that transforms a society from war to peace. Resolution 1325 also asked for due attention to women's informal ways of doing peace-politics and for preserving gains that women acquired during times of conflict.

Theoretically, the analyses of women's agency in and against war continued through studies of women's anti-war activism, individual and collective resilience and survival strategies, and community work and leadership.<sup>14</sup> However, the old optimism about the long-term impact of changes in gender roles during war has been losing strength. El-Bushra's recent work is probably the most significant in this respect. She sends two grim warnings. First, while gender roles do change in violent conflicts (sometimes dramatically), and women do take greater responsibilities within household and community, institutional support that 'would provide women with decision-making power consistent with these new and more responsible roles have been slow in coming' (2004: 169). In other words, *gender relations* may stay intact, even when *gender roles* change. El-Bushra asserts that 'the ideological underpinnings of gender relations have barely been touched at all and may even have become further reinforced through conflict' (p,169). Second, she notes that analyzing how gender becomes utilized in preserving different political and economic orders is only one side of a coin. The other is that violent conflict and war are used to preserve gender orders. Theoretically, this point has been made earlier<sup>15</sup>, but there were no empirical studies to prove it. El-Bushra's work on

several states in Africa shows how violent conflict becomes a means of preserving, achieving, and re-claiming the lost prerogatives of dominant masculinity (such as property, control, and social status) as well as dominant gender hierarchies.<sup>16</sup>

## **Militarization and Women's Agency**

Much feminist work on the militarization of women's lives – be it through direct participation in the military or through professional and family associations – also continues to rely on the concept of women's agency and empowerment. But here too, the straightforward link of militant agency to emancipation and empowerment was undermined to quite an extent. First, women's presence in the military does not seem to either change the masculinist nature of these institutions, nor does it contribute to the general advancement of women's social position – quite to the contrary. Enloe (2000), for example, shows that defending the rights of women soldiers in the US military may affect negatively the rights of civilian women affected by the US militarism. For example, US feminists fighting for women soldier's rights against harassment, sexual violence, and gender discrimination did ally with the lesbian and gay movement fighting homophobia in the military, but *not* with feminists working with prostitutes around military bases or military wives. Still, Enloe insists that women's soldiering may, 'under certain conditions' advance the cause for all women (p.287). As a case in point, she gives an example of exposing the cover-up of a rape of a woman soldier by a male soldier in the US press. Such an exposure of a cover-up, Enloe argues,

can tear away the legitimising camouflage that has sustained that military as a symbol of national pride and security... [c]an make that military appear to many citizens for the first time to be little more than a men's club...[A] state official [...] may become confused. Although state confusion is not as invigorating to witness as state transformation, it can be revealing. And revelation can alter consciousness. (p.287).

This perspective is extremely optimistic, but also utterly unrealistic, and it further exposes the limits of some of the dominant feminist theoretical approaches to wars and militaries, women's participation in them, and their gendered implications.

Second, the wars of the 1980s and 1990s and those of the twenty-first century confirmed the fact that women soldiers and militants are here to stay, not only as enlightened freedom fighters in liberation movements of the Third World, nor in presumed democratic Western militaries fighting fascism and totalitarianism, but in wars gruesome and horrid, not only among oppressed, but also among the aggressors. These women and their actions may well be contributing to the



maintenance of national or international social orders based on oppression and exclusion. Their actions may well be part and parcel of male-defined ideologies and projects. But they are neither blind, manipulated victims of patriarchal social orders, nor are they empowered or emancipated in the way feminists usually define emancipation and empowerment.

As some of the old political and theoretical certainties of feminism crumbled, at least two things seem to have become evident: first, women's agency, emancipation, and empowerment are not necessarily linked only to liberating and progressive movements. Second, agency, emancipation, and empowerment may not be the best framework at all for studying women's diverse positioning within violent conflict, including women's participation in violence.

The region in which both of these points have been taken most seriously in feminist theorizing on violent conflict is South Asia. There, a body of knowledge has been steadily growing on women's diverse positioning within a range of very different violent conflicts.

In their work, Rajasingham-Senanayake (2001), Jeffery (2001), and Butalia (2001) suggest that feminist analysis of gender and violent conflict needs rethinking, as concepts such as agency and empowerment do not offer satisfactory frameworks any longer. First, radical right-wing politics are both appropriating feminist language and offering emancipation and empowerment. This practice seems to be especially true for the Hindutva nationalist movement in India. Second, some South Asian feminists argue that the modernist concept of agency is too reductive, as it recognizes only political and public activism, thus missing a much broader social and cultural context of women's engagement in violence outside of clearly defined political movements and public spheres.<sup>17</sup> Far from being either the starting points or the central concepts of feminist theorizing of women's soldiering or sexual victimization in war, agency and victimization should be, South Asian feminists suggest, only two among many other narratives of women's positioning within a violent conflict. Instead of assuming the presence of either agency or victimization, a feminist studying a violent conflict should rather ask when and how agency and victimization are prioritized in the experiences and representations of war, what other narratives of women's and men's positioning within the war there are, and how they are obscured or denied.

## **Conclusion: Challenges and Contributions of Feminism**

Two regional conflicts during the 1990s have inspired many feminists to study sexual violence against women – former Bosnia/Yugoslavia and Rwanda/Africa. One region seems so far to inspire many studies of women's participation in violent conflict – South Asia. In all of these regions women – and men – have been sexually violated, and have taken part, directly and indirectly, in violence. In the

wars through which the former Yugoslavia disintegrated, men have been exposed to systematic sexual violence, and women fought as volunteers and within regular armies. Women have been tried at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda for participating in genocide. In some of the African wars, girls and young women, as abducted or co-opted soldiers, commit gruesome crimes. But in the case of the Balkans and Africa, feminist studies have focused almost exclusively on raped women, while in the case of South Asia, sexual violence against women and their participation in communal violence have both attracted feminist attention.

Still, it is clear that these violent conflicts, with sexual violence against women and women's participation in violence, have challenged classical feminist thinking about women, war, and militancy, and have raised questions with significant theoretical and strategic consequences. Classical feminist studies contributed hugely to intersectional analyses of gender and collective social identities, although to a large extent, with assumptions about female sexual violability as the starting point, and studies of war were usually restricted to studies of war rape. Later studies have challenged the conceptualization of agency, empowerment, and emancipation, leading feminists to abandon the assumption that these make their presence only within progressive, liberating movements. Many have already noted that geo-politics and feminist theorizing about war seem to be related. If this is so, then the unsettling of the hegemony of Western feminism offers an enormous opportunity for rethinking some basic theoretical and strategic principles, for the benefit of better understanding of present-day global realities.

### *Endnotes*

- 1 Among classical works on war, militarism and masculinity see Elstain (1987), Enloe (1983, 1989), Huston (1982), Lloyd (1986), and Segal (1987), as well as collections by Macdonald (1987).
- 2 For essentialized difference between feminine-maternal-peace-loving-feminist politics and masculine-war-waging politics see especially Ruddick (1989, 1993) and Theweleit (1993). See also Cronberg (1997) on Russian women working in military industry.
- 3 Elshain (1987) suggests that women's participation in armed struggles could subvert essentialist representation of women as peace-loving. Yuval-Davis (1997) argues that demand for equality also demands participation in the military. Mazurana (2002) and Bosch and Verweijn (2002) argue that influx of women in the peace-keeping militaries could have a transforming effect.
- 4 See also Unterhalter (1987).
- 5 See also examples by Yuval-Davis (1985) for women in Israeli army and Sklevicky (1989) for partisan women in Yugoslav army during World War Two. According to Zwerman (1994) the same applies to women in clandestine armed organizations in the United States.
- 6 I especially refer here to works of Mohanty (2003) and Kaplan and Greval (1994).
- 7 See Seidel and Gunther (1988) for the Falklands and Farmanfarmaian (1992) and Forde (1995) for the Gulf war.
- 8 For a thorough overview of theoretical approaches to rapes in Bosnia see Helms (1998) and Zarkov (forthcoming).
- 9 For the prevalence and forms of sexual violence during violent conflicts in Africa and elsewhere and for responses

- by NGOs and human rights groups see especially Sajor (1998) and Turshen and Twagiramariya (1998). For the post-war sexual violence and its consequences see Meintjes, Pillay, and Turshen (2001).
- 10 Lately, more studies of Rwandan war are available in the West, although these are often from Western authors. See, for example, Enloe (2000) on rapes and Gervais (2004) on Rwanda's women personal, economic, and socio-political security after the conflict, respectively. See also Twagiramariya and Turshen (1998) on sexual politics and Mibenge (2005) on Rwandan tribunals.
  - 11 For a review see Zarkov (forthcoming).
  - 12 One could even say that these wars exposed the lack of feminist theorizing on war, as some of the most important debates on war and violent conflict, such as those on 'greed vs. grievance' or on 'new wars,' have been actually proceeding without much feminist input.
  - 13 For literary and cultural representations of gender and war see especially collections by Cooper et al (1989), Cooke and Woollacott (1993) and the study of World War I by Melman (1998), who re-defines both the war (including the decades that led to it, and the decades after it, that were an introduction to the World War II) and Europe (including its colonial and imperial domains of power). For the changing nature of war, see, for example Schott (1996).
  - 14 See, for example, Afshar and Eade (2004), Meintjes et al (2001), and Turshen and Twagiramariya (1998).
  - 15 See especially Connell (2002).
  - 16 Dolan (2005) argues the same.
  - 17 See Jeffrey (2001) on political agency and Manchanda (2001) on women's violent agency within the domestic sphere – through support of the militancy and violence of their family members, especially sons.

## References

- Afshar, H. and Eade, D. (eds) (2004) *Development, Women and War: Feminist Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxfam
- Cock, J (1992) *Women and War in South African*. London: Open Letters.
- Cock J (1994). "Women and the Military Implications for Demilitarization in the 1990s in South Africa. *Gender and Society* 8(2), 152-169.
- Cooke, M. and A. Woollacott, (eds) (1993) *Gendering War Talk*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Connell, R. W. (2002) 'Masculinities, the reduction of violence and the pursuit of peace' in Cockburn, C. and Zarkov, D. (eds) 2002, *The Postwar Moment: Militaries, Masculinities and International Peacekeeping*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, pp. 33-40.
- Cooper, H. et al (eds) (1989) *Arms and the Woman: War, Gender and Literary Representation*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Coppel Urrera, C. (2004) *Autonomy and the Female Body: Discursive struggles in the Zapatista Movement*, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, MA Thesis.
- Copelon, R. 1993, 'Surfacing Gender: Reconceptualizing crimes against women in time of war', in Siglmayer (ed), *Mass Rape - The war against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press pp. 197-218.
- De Haan, I. (1997) 'De betekenis van het vervolgingstrauma' in de Haan, *Na de ondergang. De herinering van de Jodenvervolging in Nederland 1945-1995*, Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers Opladen, Germany: Leske and Budrich.
- Dolan. C. (forthcoming) 'The Proliferation of 'Small Men' - Exploring the demand side of the Small Arms question' in Zarkov, D. (ed) *Gender, Violent Conflict, Development: Challenges of Practice*, Delhi: Zubaan
- El-Bushra, J. 2004, 'Fused in combat: gender relations and armed conflict' in Afshar, H. & Eade, D. (eds) *Development, Women, and War. Feminist Perspectives*, Oxfam: A Development in Practice Reader, pp. 152-171.

- Elshtain, J. B. (1987) *Women and War*, New York: Basic Books.
- Enloe, C. (1983) *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women's Lives*, London: South End Press.
- Enloe, C. (1989) *Bananas, Beaches, Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, London: Pandora.
- Enloe, C. (1993) *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Enloe, C. (2000) *Manouvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*, Berkeley, LA, London: University of California Press.
- Farmanfarmaian, A. (1992) 'Sexuality in the Gulf War: Did you measure up?' in *Genders* 13 (Spring):1-29.
- Forde, C. (1995) 'Women warriors': Representation of Women Soldiers in British Daily Newspaper Photographs of the Gulf War (January to March 1991)', in Maynard, M. and J. Purvis, (eds) *(Hetero) sexual Politics*, Bristol: Taylor and Francis, pp. 108-123.
- Gervais, M. (2004) 'Human security and reconstruction efforts in Rwanda: impact on the lives of women' in Afshar, H. and Eade, d. (eds) *Development, Women and War. Feminist Perspectives*, Oxford: Oxfam, pp. 301- 314.
- Helms, E. (1998) *Representation of wartime rape in Bosnia\_Herzegovina: Nationalism, Feminism and International Law*. University of Pittsburgh MA Thesis.
- Huston, N. (1982) 'Tales of War and Tears of Women', in *Women's Studies International Forum* 5(3/4):271-282.
- Jeffery, P. (2001) 'Agency, Activism and Agendas' in Jeffery, P. and A. Basu (eds) *Resisting the Sacred and the Secular: Women's Activism and Politized Religion in South Asia*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, pp.221-243.
- Kaplan, C. (1994) 'The Politics of Location as Transnational Feminist Critical Practice,' in Grewal, I. and Kaplan, C. (eds) *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 137-152.
- Lloyd, G. (1986) 'Selfhood, war and masculinity', in Pateman, C. and Gross, E (eds) *Feminist Challenges Social and Political Theory*, Boston: Allen and Unwin.
- Macdonald, S. (1987) 'Drawing the Lines: Gender, Peace and War. An Introduction', in S. Macdonald, P. Holden, and S. Ardener (eds.) *Images of Women in Peace and War*, London: MacMillan and Oxford University Women's Studies Committee, pp. 1-26.
- Manchanda, R (2001), 'Where are the Women in South Asian Conflicts?' in R. Manchanda (ed) *Women, War and Peace in South Asia: Beyond Victimhood to Agency*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London.
- Meintjes, S. Pillay, A and Turshen, M. (eds) (2001) *The Aftermath. Women in post-conflict transformation*, London: Zed Books.
- Melman, B. (1998) *Borderlines: Genders and Identities in War and Peace (1870-1930)*, London: Routledge.
- Mibenge, C. (forthcoming), 'The right to access to a remedy for victims of wartime sexual violence: A case study of Rwanda (1994 - 2004)', in Zarkov (ed) *Gender, Violent Conflict, Development: Challenges of Practice*, Delhi: Zubaan.
- Mohanty, C. Talpede (2003) "Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity Through Anticapitalist Struggle', *Signs*, 28 (2) 499-535.
- Pedersen, S. 1991, 'National Bodies, Unspeakable Acts: The Sexual Politics of Colonial Policy-making', in *Journal of Modern History*, 63:647-680.
- Rajasingham-Senanayake, D. (2001) 'Ambivalent Empowerment: The Tragedy of Tamil Women in Conflict' in Manchanda, R (ed) *Women, war and peace in South Asia: Beyond victimhood to agency*, London, New Delhi, Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 102-130.
- Ruddick, S. (1989) *Maternal Thinking*, Boston: Beacon Press.
- Ruddick, S. (1993) 'Notes Toward a Feminist Peace Politics', in M. Cooke and A.



- Woollacott (eds), *Gendering War Talk*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 109-127.
- Sajor, I. L. (ed) (1998) *Common Grounds. Violence against Women in War and Armed Conflict Situations*, ASCENT, Philippines.
- Sancho, N. (1997) 'The 'Comfort Women' System during World war II: Asian Women as Targets of Mass Rape and Sexual Slavery by Japan', in Lentin, R. (ed) *Gender and Catastrophe*, London and New York: Zed Books, pp. 144-155.
- Sarkar T. and Butalia, U. (1995) *Women and Right-Wing Movements. Indian Experiences*, London and New Jersey: Zed Books.
- Schott, R. M. (1996) 'Gender and 'Postmodern War'', in *Hypatia* 11(4):19-29.
- Segal, L. (1987) *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*, London: Virago.
- Seidel, G. and Gunther, R. (1988), 'Nation' and 'family' in the British media reporting on the 'Falklands conflict', in Seidel, G. (ed), pp.115-128.
- Sklevicky, L. (1989) 'Emancipated Integration or Integrated Emancipation: The Case of Post-Revolutionary Yugoslavia', in Angerman et al. *Current Issues in Women's History*, London: Routledge, pp. 93-108.
- Theweleit, K. (1993) 'The Bomb's Womb and the Genders of War (War Goes on Preventing Women from Becoming the Mothers of Invention)', in M. Cooke and A. Woollacott (eds), *Gendering War Talk*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 283-317.
- Twagiramariya, C and M. Turshen, M. (1998) 'Favours' to give and 'Consenting' Victims. The Sexual Politics of Survival in Rwanda' in Twagiramariya, C and M. Turshen (eds) *What Women Do In Wartime. Gender and Conflict in Africa*, London: Zed Books, pp. 101-117.
- Unterhalter, E., (1987) 'Women Soldiers and the Unity in Apartheid South Africa', in S. Macdonald, P. Holden, and S. Ardener (eds.) *Images of Women in Peace and War*, London: MacMillan and Oxford University Women's Studies Committee, pp. 100-121.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (1985) 'Front and Rear: The sexual division of labor in the Israeli army', in *Feminist Studies* 11(3):649-676.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (1997) *Gender and Nation*, London: Sage.
- Zarkov, D. (2001) 'The Body of the Other Man: Sexual Violence and the Construction of Masculinity, Sexuality and Ethnicity in Croatian Media', in C. Moser and F. Clark (eds), *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*, London: Zed Books, pp. 69-82.
- Zarkov, D. (2002) 'Srebrenica Trauma': Masculinity, military and national self-image in Dutch daily newspapers' in Cockburn, C. and D. Zarkov, (eds) *The Postwar Moment. Militaries, Masculinities and International Peacekeeping*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, pp. 183-203.
- Zarkov D. forthcoming, *The Fel/Male Body and the Productive Power of Violence: On 'Media War' and 'Ethnic War' in former Yugoslavia*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

# Clad in Mourning: Violence, Subjugation and the Struggle of the Soul

**Stefania Pandolfo**

*In this excerpt from her keynote address at the IWS conference, Stefania Pandolfo, Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley returns to a seminal work of Frantz Fanon to reflect on how a leading Moroccan sheikh and a Moroccan religious healer approach the “choking of the soul”: the debasement of life described by marginalized Moroccan youth as “slow death.” Her interweaving of psychological, political and religious concepts offers a productive framework to “reflect on the question of destruction and trauma,” whether in Morocco or in elsewhere in the region. Her forthcoming book, *The Knot of the Soul: Madness, Psychiatry, Islam*, will be published by The University of Chicago Press. Pandolfo is also the author of *Impasse of the Angels: Scenes from a Moroccan Space of Memory*, The University of Chicago Press 1997.*

## Fanon’s countermove

There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity, from where an authentic arising can be born. In most cases, the black man lacks the advantage of being able to accomplish this descent into a real Hell. (Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*)

I would like to begin my reflections in the shadow of *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952), Franz Fanon’s disturbing and resolute text conceived in the aftermath of anger and resentment, when, in his words, he could approach “these truths...without being burned.” Fanon’s text ponders the entanglement of subjugation, violence, trauma, and desire, in a quest for the possibility of thinking and struggle in the midst of entrapment and destruction, and in the utter proximity of death. I want to register the continuing relevance of that vision for us today, at a time when the forms of psycho-political imprisonment he describes and dissects are ever more present at the planetary level, and the possibility of imagining an exit seems to remain out of sight. We live in a time when walls and borders proliferate<sup>1</sup>, at once concrete standing partitions (to push back, and to shelter from the threat of “infiltration”), and phantasmal exclusions, symbolic obliterations, within the self and the nation.

This is a predicament exemplified here, in the 1967 Palestinian occupied territories, by the proliferation of colonial settlements, borders, check points, and areas of restricted access, in a shifting topology where inside and outside interpenetrate and overlap, and occupation becomes ever present, capillary, and yet invisible and unrecognizable.<sup>2</sup> In a recent paper May Jayyusi has argued that the result of such a strategy of power, rendered more acute after the Oslo accords, is that Palestinian existence is “entombed” or buried alive—it falls out of sovereignty and out of life, out of the legal responsibility of the Israeli state, into a radical abandonment, all the while being subjected to the violent operation of Israeli military force. She cites a poem by Mahmoud Darwish:

What will we do, before this death?  
Adjacent to our lives  
We live and we don't live

In this light, listening to the testament left by the youth who died, and to the testimonies of their families, Jayyusi understands the martyr operations during the second Intifada as efforts to break the entombment, force visibility in the mode of a “public witness,” when all forms of witnessing have become impossible. In a related sense, she sees the martyr operations as attempts at redeploying and re-signifying death, in its asphyxiating proximity and in a state of siege, and by that gesture regenerating the possibility of life and of community<sup>3</sup>. However painful and only thinkable within a space of unending violence, they are attempts at repossession (of both death and life), which, she argues, are mediated by the experiential vocabularies of an Islamic ethical frame of reference, where divine self-sufficiency can come to interrupt an unjust worldly rule, and where the question of the law (as externality) can be upheld to interrupt the instrumentality and atomization of “rights”.

My considerations are rooted in my ethnographic work in Morocco, and in the insistent questions raised by my interlocutors to me, as well as in the predicaments of their lives. I read Fanon side by side with a parallel reflection on destruction, trauma, and the possibility of ethical-political struggle in a contemporary Islamic tradition, in the context of a renewed problematization of the concept of *jihad al-nafs*, “the struggle of the soul” (but also struggle at such), in relation to the experience of oppression, violence, pain, melancholy, and what Fanon calls the “annihilation of being.” I will consider the figure of “spiritual murder” (*tadbih al-ma`nawi*) in a sermon by the Moroccan Shaykh Abdessalam Yassine, and reflect on the practice and thought of a Moroccan *faqih an-nafs* and *mu`ali*, an imam and a healer of madness, with particular reference to what he dubs as the predicament of *tadiyq al-nafs*, the choking of the soul. “Spiritual murder” and “soul choking” speak of the subjugation of the soul, and the oppression of the collectivity, when life shrinks, death is generalized in a

proximity that makes it unthinkable, and the divine message is no longer present in the heart. Not unlike in Fanon's own concern, the ethical-political question becomes that of shedding light on, revealing, interrupting, such a state of things: a disclosure that is a necessary shock, towards the re-instantiation of a life of the soul. It is in terms of my work with the Imam, in the concluding section of the paper, that I more specifically address the Fanonian question as that of a the struggle for a repossession of the imagination; a struggle that is not solely framed in terms of sovereignty, but as a transformation of pain in a space of mourning.

I have written elsewhere from the standpoint of those whose soul is "choked", attempting to register, and convey as much as possible the pathos of that experience in the singular trajectory of their lives, attempting to listen and letting my text, and myself, be transformed by the impact of their voice (Moroccan youths, torn between their attachment to a life and a place they experience as unlivable, and a drive to exit, migrate, at the risk of dying, debating whether such a life is worth living.) In this, I have kept pondering Jean Genet's question in his memoir-report on his Palestinian journey and the Palestinian struggle<sup>4</sup>, written in the aftermath of Shatila: what does it mean to tell the truth? To bear witness to the lives and deaths of others, to struggle, to pain, to revolution? To bear witness to the dead, the disappeared, including them in one's address, in the name of the living? Such was, for Genet, the (impossible) yet real task of the witness.

Fanon pronounces his phenomenological diagnosis of the annihilation of being in the form of a psychodynamics of "intrusion". Sovereignty and domination are located at the core of psychic space, and they are intimately related to desire and the scene of the phantasm. He describes the raced/colonized subject as constituted by the violent intrusion of the other, the colonizer, in the psychic space of the self, an intrusion that evacuates the self, and replaces it with the poisonous object of the other's fantasy<sup>5</sup>, an object with which the self will coincide. The intrusion is a seizure of the imagination and of the bodily space of the other; an occupation understood in spatial, almost military terms, as a shrinking of vital space, which snatches the self and pulverizes its corporeal schema, halting the work of the imagination and producing in its place a somatic hallucination. At the center of Fanon's argument is the "attack" of the Gaze, the look of the Other, the white person, but also the colonial system, the white mythology (with the central role played by the fantasy of the terrifying and sexually powerful African in European culture), and ultimately the white symbolic ("language" and "thought" as power-charged European assets<sup>6</sup>). But most important for this discussion, the attack of the gaze is also an encounter with a drive to destruction as such: a force of disintegration that is both in the Other, and is found at the traumatic core of the self, in as much as the core of the self is born in the Other, and is inhabited by desire.

Fanon, a psychiatrist, analyzes the intrusion as a psychotic invasion, in a phobic and paranoid universe where the inner and the outer mirror each other and coincide, and the subject's unconscious aggressively performs the logic of the



colonial state. The moral law, Fanon says, Kant's universal imperative, is falsified in the colony, it reveals its other side, as destructive "carnivorous power" and perverse enjoyment<sup>7</sup>. In the colony the symbolic order is maimed, for the seizing of the imagination, the intrusion, swallows both space and time, and abolishes at once the possibility of culture and of the unconscious as the site of mediation and symbolic transformation. The raced subject, Fanon says, is "clad in mourning", a kind of living death. It is precisely this asphyxiating proximity of death, of a death within, and of death all around, which, Fanon is saying, makes it a arduous yet fundamental task to "think" death, subjectivize it as a singular experience of being, re-socialize it, think the possibility of a collectivity, from it. Ethical violence, for Fanon, was aimed at reactivating the possibility of struggle.<sup>8</sup>

## Fanon and the Question of Trauma

At a time when the atomistic individuation and instrumentality of suffering invalidate the possibility of any simple reference to the concepts of trauma and witnessing, when the experience of pain can only be authenticated as standardized, psychological, and individualized suffering (through a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder, for instance); when the representation of traumatic events is a central piece in the construction of evidence and cultural reality, occupying the core of medical-juridical institutions, human rights practices and ever-growing media-markets, it seems important to carve a place for reflection and listening that might drift aside, in an "untimely" fashion, from the encompassing hegemony of these vocabularies.<sup>9</sup>

A return to Fanon's dissection of the colonial traumatic, and an engagement with a reflection on violence, death and struggle in the complex field of Islamic tradition, can provide an angle from which to ask again the question of trauma in its full political, existential and eschatological force; to reclaim the way in which a singular pain, an event of madness, addresses a collectivity, in both medical and theological terms. For at stake is an engagement with the alterity that makes the self. In that space it becomes perhaps possible to conceptualize and discern the work of what Walter Benjamin had called a "violence for the sake of the living." The question becomes: how can one repossess space and being, what Fanon called "ontological resistance", imagine exits that are not already inscribed in instrumental logics that further and reproduce exclusion and oppression? In a different tone than in Fanon's later writings, in *Black Skin White Mask* the emphasis is not on liberation (however ambiguous and never fulfilled is the space of freedom in Fanon's later work) but on entrapment and mourning. The ethical-political task is the pursuit of an "anamorphic" vision, a vision that reveals through the gesture of a backward glance; a vision capable of exposing the machinery of subjugation, and its relation with the alterity of desire. In a space

of mourning, it is the honing of a melancholic gaze that may become capable of interrupting the ideological secret of domination and race. Such a vision, Fanon suggests, is the Orphic gift of a descent into Hell.

## Spiritual Murder

Let me introduce now a political-spiritual figure of failed mourning in today's Morocco: the "spiritual slaughter" of the youth (*tadbih ma`nawi*) in the words of Shaykh Abdessalam Yassine. Shaykh's Yassine's figure of failed mourning belongs within an Islamic tradition in which the ability to visualize and vicariously experience death, and the related ability to engage in a spiritual struggle that transforms the soul, as well as the arenas of collective life, is pivotal for the possibility of ethics and political critique.

"Spiritual murder" is the destruction, or crippling, of this ethical faculty. It describes the subjugation of the soul and the oppression of the collectivity. The question becomes, for Shaykh Yassine, as well as many others, that of shedding light on, disclosing this state of things. In a sermon delivered in the aftermath of violent acts committed in Casablanca in April 2007, when five young men exploded themselves in various locations in the city, Sheikh addressed the predicament of the Moroccan, in the larger context of a historical-theological diagnosis. His sermon was offered in the mode of urgency, and in the committed style of ethical-religious admonition. He began by imploring God for help and forgiveness in these troubled times: "Morocco is burning [*al-maghrib rah taythraq*] Casablanca is burning [*darlbaida tathraq*], violence [*al`unf*] is consuming the youth, the youth self-consume [literally: are eating their souls/selves – *shababu ya`kulu nafshahu*] and are setting themselves on fire." (Sheikh Yassine never uses the term *istishad*, martyrdom, in the sermon; he uses expressions indicating "setting ablaze" or "burning", or throwing oneself into the fire.) He continues:

"Some [young people] flee into the sea [*haribin ila al-bahri*], to the water, at the risk of drowning and never reaching land; others flee into the fire, they choose to immolate themselves with fire." They prefer to die, he continues, "rather than enjoying the gifts of an unjust regime: homelessness, unemployment, impoverishment, and lack of guidance and ideas, the lack of thinking [*tafkir*]."

"In these days of anguish and trouble, some youth astray [*mudallal*] are exploding themselves in the streets of Casablanca. Fear is everywhere, people are hiding from the authorities, in the basements, many are on the run, and those who can find in themselves enough strength and courage [*lli fi nafsihi al quwwa wa as-shaja`a*] choose to commit suicide [*intihar*] rather than being

tortured and murdered in prison. They prefer to shed their blood on the streets and the sidewalks of the city, rather than having their blood shed in the torture centers of the regime.”

“These youths are astray” [*had shabab mudalla*], declares the sheikh after a long pause. They need education, a spiritual, moral education, they need to form their character. And he reflects on the meaning of that word, “mudalla”, from “dalla” and “dalal”, “error”, in the theological sense of having lost the path to God. And yet, he says, who should be called accountable for their deaths? For the death of those youth who commit suicide and take their life [*yantahiruna wa yaqtuluna anfusahum*]. Aren’t the modern Pharaohs accountable?

“They massacre our sons” [*yudhabbihuna abnākum*], repeats the Sheikh, echoing a Quranic passage (Qur’an 14:6), the modern-day Pharaohs, they are slaughtering them right now. But while at the time of Pharaoh the slaughter was literal, he adds – Pharaoh literally slit the throats of the new generation; now the slaughter is spiritual in nature, it is a moral slaughter (*tadbiḥ ma`nawī*).

But what does this mean? In as much as the Sheikh also denounces the “literal violence” of the modern (Pharaonic) state, the torture, interrogations, disappearances and murders, why is he insisting that today’s violence is moral or spiritual? This is the key moment in the sermon, when the Sheikh at once lends voice to the experience of the youth and provides a reading of the specific phenomenology of violence of present times. In calling the massacre “symbolic/moral” he is engaging with the political-spiritual question of the debasement of life, a life-death that is for these youths a living death, or in the words of the Moroccan youth I talked to in my research, “a slow death” (*al-mawt al-batī*). The “slow death”, in their words, is the choking of life, a death by lack of place, a way of become a spirit, an *arhwah*, while still alive, a living dead. This, in the reckoning of the youths I spoke to, happens through the shutting of all doors, the flattening of the horizon, a desensitization, which is metonymically embodied in the use of drugs, that “send off the soul”, and render the body insensitive and rigid like a piece of wood or like a corpse.

Sheikh Yassine’s question, in calling the massacre “moral”, is whether such “choked life” is capable of engaging with the thought and the experience of death, the necessary path to vision and regeneration, and to the possibility of emancipation – death understood as a spiritual practice of awakening in Islamic tradition. For, as the 12<sup>th</sup> Century *faqīh al-naḥs* Abdu Hamid al-Ghazali put it, “Death cannot be understood by those who do not understand life.” It becomes clear, then, that for Sheikh Yassine a moral/spiritual murder is much more destructive than a literal one, for it turns the living into undead, incapable of experiencing either life or death, and forecloses the subject’s capacity for ethical self-transformation. In this reflection, he comes remarkably close to the considerations of Fanon on subjugation, death, and the possibility of regeneration

in the assumption of death in life, as a crucial dimension of responsibility. For, under the present circumstances, it is impossible for the youth to discern between a life, which is death-form, and a meditation on death which is an opening to the possibility of life.

“Spiritual slaughter”, Sheikh Yassine explains, is caused by the injustice of a tyranny that concentrates all wealth and power in the hands of the few, in a situation in which it becomes both self-evident and justified that only some have access to humanity. The slaughter, or *tadbih*, destroys the possibility of imagining the future, as well as of relating to the past. It freezes time, and reduces life to a flat surface without exits. The only “exits”, under the rule of “soul murder”, are suicide and self-immolation, if one has the strength and courage to pursue them. But these are flights, says Sheikh Yassine, and constitute a religious transgression, a *ma`siyya*. Courage, itself a kind of awareness, is also a temptation. Sheikh Yassine rests on that indecidability, embraces the ambiguity of his diagnosis, condemning but also measuring the immensity of the question, and the difficulty of the answer.

## The Battlefield of the *nafs*

I pursue this question of “soul murder”, and its implication for a possible ethics of struggle (*jihad/jihad al-nafs*) through an analytic description of the therapeutic practice of a Moroccan Imam<sup>10</sup>, not a traditional healer, indeed also not a Sufi, but an active member in the local Islamic revival.

In my reading I attempt to show how in the specificity of his practice he instantiates a mode of bearing witness that is at once singular and collective, acting at the level of the singular body, and of the unbearable pain of the community. This double movement testifies to a re-politicization of thinking, where the lament of the personal voice recapitulates and addresses the pain of a collectivity.<sup>11</sup> The Imam reflects on the nature of a drive to destruction, and on the question of evil (through the Islamic figuration of *Shaytan*) as a heterogeneity and a struggle ever present within the community, a struggle which, fundamentally, is also internal to the *nafs* [the soul/self] itself. His sermons and therapeutic interventions are aimed at a trans-figuration, at the possible repossession of what, reaching to classical Islamic theories of the passions, the soul, and the heart, the Imam names an “affirmative imagination” [*suwarān ijābiyya*]. In his discussion of anger, melancholy, and pain, he postulates a political-ethical work of the imagination, one that is capable of generating “action” from within a space of trauma.

The Imam practices a renewed form of Quranic healing and spiritual-political practice known as *ilāj shar`ī*, [divinely sanctioned healing].<sup>12</sup> In the conversations we had about the theological-ethical framework of his therapeutic intervention, the Imam made an explicit connection between his active investment in *ilāj*

*shar`ī* [divinely sanctioned healing], understood as a renewed instantiation of the practice of faith, and a larger effort towards a political critique of the condition of the self/soul in a state of material and spiritual dispossession, of subjugation by an oppressive state apparatus, and of utter hopelessness, at the limit of despairing life and trust in God.

The Imam spoke insistently in terms of a question, one that gave impetus to his work and shaped every aspect of his life. The question concerned the possibility of ethical existence in the vicinity of destruction, trauma and madness, and in the shadow of spiritual dispossession. He asked it at the intimate level of his encounters with the sick and the afflicted (*musāb, marīd*), from a place at the limit of life and the law. His was a political and yet intimate calling which, the Imam once told me, was the reason why he chose to embrace the life of a religious scholar and healer, giving up his career as a student of law at the University of Rabat.

In our conversations, the Imam addressed a condition in which being is threatened with extinction, paralyzed, and in turn manifests itself in “petrified forms of pain” engraved in the human soul. Upon our first meetings the Imam made it clear that he embraced the practice of healing and the persona of the healer differently than it was often understood in Morocco. While healing had traditionally been associated with a charismatic authority, the authority he claimed for himself was that of a scholar and a religious guide, a *murshid*:

“The person who aspires to be a healer [*al-mu`ālij*], if he wants to cure—must be a person who is entrusted with a religious task. A healer must be a learned scholar of the Qur’an and of the Hadith, or he or she must be a spiritual guide [*murshid*], capable of giving religious advice.”<sup>13</sup>

In his practice as a healer, the Imam attended to those who addressed themselves to him or were brought by their families because of severe psychopathological symptoms. In some cases it was their first attempt at a cure; but most often they, arrived at his door after a long therapeutic quest across healers and sanctuaries for the mad, visits to psychiatrists, and in some cases after a hospitalization. He listened, asked questions (always including in his address the family members who had come with the sick, for he saw sickness as a knot in a larger history of obliterated connections), proposed a cure that consisted of herbal remedies that he prepared himself and Quranic recitations, the practice of *ruqya* (literally “spiritual elevation”), in which specific passages of the Qur’an bearing an effective relation with the person’s condition are read to the sick. At the outset, in the Imam’s analytic description, the work of the healer is that of a political-spiritual diagnosis. The space of the cure addresses an affliction which is singular, but which is also a symptom that speaks of a collective condition, and a history: healing, and



the sickness itself, are a kind of bearing witness. The illness, the madness, decries the hypocrisy of a social life devoid of care and equity, the violence of the state, and the rule of injustice and corruption. It is a de-forming mirror that “reveals” a state of terror that has broken the subject.

The event of madness is treated by the Imam as a traumatic awakening of the collectivity as a whole. It is a “disclosure”. Illness is not an individual condition, even though it affects a person in a singular way. What becomes manifest, says the Imam, are the agency of evil and the reality of destruction (Shaytan, the Quranic figuration of the problem of evil), which work simultaneously at the level of the oppressive structures of the “Pharaonic” state,<sup>14</sup> and in the intimate struggles and intractable heterogeneities of the human soul/self [*al-nafs*].

The event of madness is thus also the disclosure of a system of terror, injustice and abuse. The Imam describes and contrasts two opposed forms of sovereignty, in what is at once a “medical” and a politico-spiritual diagnosis. On the one hand, there is the just sovereignty of God, to which human beings must submit, and in which they find agency and deliverance. On the other, there is the unjust tyranny of the Jinn— and Shaytan behind the jinn (and the forms of government that resemble its rule), which subjugates and enslaves those who fall under its power by reducing them to a state of moral impairment. Through his discussion of sorcery [*sibr*] as a prime cause of madness, the Imam describes a society at the edge of heresy, calling for the urgent need of spiritual renewal. The scene is set of a world of injustice and abuse, predicated on falsity, which is at once a description of theological failing, the risk of eternal damnation, and of political corruption in the mundane, historical world. The image of the jinns who bring “information” to the “false healer” is reminiscent of the *mukhābarāt*—the infamous secret police, and its routine recourse to torture and assassination, in the secret basements of police stations. (Echoes can be heard here of the actual reality of torture and secret detention experienced by many youth in recent years).

Untruth [*kadhīb*], injustice [*zulm*], and oppression are the characteristics of the world of the jinn: they are *also* dispositions located in the human soul. The prime cause of sorcery [*sibr*], and hence madness, argues the Imam, is, *al-ikrāh* [coercion] the absence of justice, the impossibility of an equitable recourse by the oppressed, as well as the condition of intimate terror and intimidation in which the person is thrown by that state of coercion: “Human beings exist in justice [*ādami wajūdi al-`adl*]. And justice is violated by way of coercion [*ikrāh*].” The second cause of sorcery, and hence madness, is the envy [*al-basad*] generated by the delusion of commodities.

The event of madness, in other words, “shows” the obverse of the subjugation of the subject in the everyday unfolding of social life. Sometimes, as psychoanalyst Piera Aulagnier has written, madness is the only path open for the subject, and “people said to be crazy, in the ordinary sense of the term, show us what was necessary to do in order to survive.”<sup>15</sup>

In the discourse of the Imam the heterogeneity of evil is clearly at work in a double movement between the collective register of what might be called a “prophetic diagnosis” (anamorphic visibility) concerning the state of subjugation of the society as a whole,<sup>16</sup> and the battlefield of the *nafs*, where the longings and passions—desire, the alterity that makes the self—are inspired by, engage with, and are transformed into the destructive force of Shaytan. In his words:

I said that *al-nafs* is the yeast, the fertile land that Shaytan cultivates and tills; but he does not cultivate grapes, figs, and pomegranates! He cultivates desires, cravings and longings [shawqān] and with them blasting and bombs. From the moment of their manifestation they make an impression in the *nafs*, leave a mark, and set it ablaze.

It is not an external demon that strikes the person, but an *internal enemy*, a capacity for evil that is at once internal and external to the *nafs* [soul]. What is important to grasp in this duality, and in the notion of struggle itself, is that the Imam is speaking of a positive challenge, the challenge of a radical heterogeneity that sets the rhythm and pulsation of a form of life. Evil in this sense is a revealing element, which at once dis-figures the status quo, providing an always-precarious angle of visibility, and sets a flow of subjectivity in movement, in the punctuation of an ethical life. On that border, a folding of the inside and the outside, of the soul with its intimate enemy, of the personal and the collective, is found *jihād al-nafs*, a central figure of the agonistics of the soul: “spiritual effort, or exercise,” but also “jihad,” in the sense of war. To understand the struggle of *jihād al-nafs* solely in the sense of the refinement, or the perfectibility, of the soul, reduces the stakes of what for the Imam is an actual struggle, fraught with danger, and with the never resolved risk of a radical loss. Ethical being is precisely that intimate struggle, with a heterogeneity that can never be resolved, and with a violence that is forever lurking

For the Imam, it is only when the struggle subsides, when the *nafs*, and the heart, become inert, and are turned into stone, that ethical being ceases to exist, and all “activity” stops. This is what happens in acute melancholy [*al-ka’āba*: sorrow, grief, depression, gloom, melancholy], the condition the Imam calls “*tadyiq al-nafs*,” “soul choking.”

## Soul choking, pain, and the imagination

Well aware of the double-edged resonance of the concept of *amrād nafsiyya* (“spiritual afflictions,” a term that translates, in other contexts, as psychological and mental illnesses), the Imam argues that the “maladies of the soul” are not located in the body but are often manifested as, or lie at, the origin of physical illnesses. The Imam points to the passion of anger [*al-ghadab*], and the sentiment

of grief [*al-ka'āba*] as prime causes of illness—a malady of the soul that also affects the body, and that can lead to madness, melancholy, or suicide. He says:

*La taghdab!* Restrain from anger! It is anger and grief [*al-ka'āba*] that are the first cause of illness for the soul/self [*al-nafs*]. The Prophet only became angry when the *hudūd allāhi* [God's boundaries] were violated. Hence the foundation, the root of everything, is faith and the certainty of faith [*al-imān wa al-yaqīn*]. If the foundation is strong we call it in our *sharī'a* "*al-yaqīn*," conviction, trust. When something happens, in the world, in your life, a calamity, a loss, you do not become angry. Faith and trust can contain the drive of anger. Our trust in God tells us: this is the power of God [*adar allāhi*]. And my own volition is from God: "*irādati min allāh*."

He goes on to reflect on why people today are incapable of experiencing the ground of faith. What is happening today, in Morocco and other parts of the Muslim world, he says, is similar to what happens to "people in the West": "They want to be whatever they wish, but life, our life span, is decided by God. They end up clashing with the real [*al-wāqi'* - in other words, they dwell in illusion]. They are hit by reality and in the end become sick. They are overwhelmed by grief or despair."

The Imam's psycho-somatic and spiritual-physiological approach stresses at once the desiring soul's risk of straying (*al-dalal*: from the path of God, and from ethical existence) in the context of contemporary life, the reality of exclusion [*al-hirmān*], dispossession and grief, the temptation of evil, as a struggle internal to the *nafs*, and the affective impact of the Imagination, of "images," on the heart. In contrast to the privileged status of *al-'aql* [the intellect] in Western thought, in the Imam reading the heart [*al-qalb*] is the critical site. Faith and imagination play a fundamental role.

When the Drive of Anger comes to dominate the body [*musaitira fi al-jism*], in the heart and in the flow the circulation of blood speeds up, becomes faster and faster in the veins and the arteries of the person, and that human being comes out of normal, customary life [*yakhruj al-insān 'an ma'lūfi*, comes out of the traced path], exits the real world [*al-wāqi'*], and this causes crimes to happen, or rebellion, or sin; the crimes may be theft, robberies, killings, illicit sex, or gathering of wealth through falsity and usurpation.

Faith [*al-imān*] is the basis, when associated with conviction [*al-yaqīn*]. Yet there can only be faith, trust in God, if there is activity in the sense of humanly shared ethical action [*al-'amal*], which is sorely lacking in a community mined by social exclusion, injustice, and by a form of death-in-life. Or, in a related sense, faith

and the authenticity of ethical action are inaccessible in a community where the intimate proximity of Islamic ideals has been lost, where there is no equity and where the power of commodities and the lure of consumption make vanish the call for the values of reciprocal help and support, the sense of justice, and the remembrance of death in daily life as the foundation of ethical action. In such a world, says the Imam, the heart that receives the affects and visions of the *nafs*, in its worldly desires, as well as in its incurable sadness and grief, is all too often no longer the heart of a Muslim<sup>17</sup>. It is thus that the *nafs* becomes prey to the whispering and the terror of Shaytan, and sends its harmful imaginings to the heart—visions of dissolution and destruction, of irretrievable loss. The heart is affected, and participates in destruction, until the self begins choking, all sense of life vanishes, and the person gives into destruction and self-annihilation: “What is the cause of suicide [*al-intihār*]? It is from the choking of the *nafs* [*tadyīq al-nafs*]. And what is the cause of choking? It is Shaytan. Shaytan whispers in the ears of the person, “You will die, death is your only perspective, and the human being chokes.”

*Tadyīq al-nafs*, the oppression, or choking of the soul, is the result of an unbearable pain that paralyzes and sculpts in the soul and in the heart, as if in stone, images of destruction that shut the door to all possibility of imagining a horizon, erecting the high walls of a claustrophobic space. Soul choking describes a world of living death, where the proximity with death is such that there is no longer a relation, “death” can no longer be “imagined.” It is Fanon’s point. The Imam explains:

Hence the *nafs* sends to the heart negative and hopeless images of the future, and the heart forms an image of life as life-burned [*hayāt mudrama*] life-destroyed, and starts imagining that nothing good can happen in the future, only oppression and disaster are foretold, that all that there is pain and torture [*al-`adhāb*], poverty and exclusion, dispossession and destitution [*hirmān*]. Only that will be. And so that person [*insān*] lives a burning moment, God protect us from Harm [...]

And these images that the *nafs* receives in the form of a devilish whisper, [*al-waswās*], colonize and murder the heart, which in truth is not the heart of a Muslim. If the heart is deserted by faith, the person accepts those images, welcomes them, and they set it ablaze. And choking, the oppression of the soul [*tadyīq*], instills terror in that person [*tayīq b-l-insān*]. And he can no longer aspire to something that might bring renewal, something affirmative, other than his own dying, and thinks incessantly of the way in which to bring about the limit of death. This is suicide.

In the logic of the Imam’s description, in this sense, the imagination turns into an agent of destruction because it is itself captured, snatched, by an invasion of

media images, images of a desire haunted by the commodity, by the sense of failure and impossibility, because its capacity for spiritual work is disabled. The soul/self registers those realities, bears witness to them in its pain, in the “impression” they make on the heart, but that registering does not lead to forms of engagement, to “thinking,” to ethical and political action [*al-`amal*]. Pain is internalized as a wound, incorporated as despair, and the imagination reinforces the subjugation of the subject, which manifests itself as a death drive. Soul choking is the Imam’s depiction of such acute melancholy, a melancholy described by some of the youth with whom I discussed this question<sup>18</sup> in terms of another figure of despair: *al-qanat*, the melancholy-boredom, loss of all hope, which empties the self, and “sends it off” into nothingness.

We say of a person *qnat*— he or she fell into despair. A human being, when he falls into despair, all doors are shut for him, he can no longer see or distinguish anything, and abandons himself to drugs. *Lhag wāhed l-hadd*, he has reached a limit. His head is full; he sees only one thing, hanging himself; his *rūh*, his soul-spirit, doesn’t stay in place, is no longer there, he sent it off with the drugs... And as for what is on his mind, only one thing: death.

It is in this sense that the Imam stresses the concept of an affirmative imagination, “affirmative images” [*suwarān ijābiyya*],

The Messenger of God opposes despair, opposes grief. Islam opposes gloom [*al-`ubūsiyya*], struggles against sadness. Today many Muslims, turning their faces in a petrified sadness, are pervaded by gloom.

Beyond this struggle of images is the concern with enabling once again *al-`amal*, the possibility of ethical action—activity, work, movement, and the fact of having a job, an active role in society, which, the Imam says, is the condition of possibility of faith: *Imān bidūni `amal lā yumkin*, he says; “it is impossible to have faith without work.” Yet fulfilling this obligation under conditions of hardship, such as those that characterize life in his neighborhood, as in many similar locations in Morocco and the Muslim world, cannot be taken for granted. In the midst of our discussion of imagination and the passions, the Imam cites a much debated Hadith: “*Kāda al-faqr an yakūn kufran*,” poverty leads to *kufr*, it is close to being *kufr*.” Because, he adds, “poverty causes exhaustion and hardship, disaster and ruin.” [*ya`ni `an yakun taba`n, wa shaqa`n, wa khusran*]. In the words of F. Esak, “You cannot truly submit to God if you are under the yoke of hunger. Such submission is a form of coercion.” The subjugation and annihilation of being is an ethical, but also a political question.<sup>19</sup>



For the Imam the two questions are related. Traumatic becoming is a form of awakening, not a consolation philosophy. Yet prior to the possibility of reinstating ethical action and bearing practical witness to faith, it is necessary to guide the *nafs* to reposition its relation to the experience of pain, and to the “infracton”, the invasion (Fanon) that caused the soul to choke. It is a question of transforming pain: from a harbinger of destruction to an exercise for thinking/remembering, an exercise where the bodily imagination plays a pivotal role.

The point is that inhabiting pain in this second sense, bearing witness to pain without succumbing to it, can engender an opening of the soul. Pain, in this sense, crosses a limit, beyond the paralysis of being, the impossibility of movement; it transforms. Such an opening onto death as a way of “seeing” and “tasting” (al-Ghazali) is a different modality of melancholy from the closing up of the horizon, the generalization of the death drive in the affliction of soul choking. Inhabiting pain through the bodily imagination, connecting to others in that space, is both unbearable and expansive. And yet the two modalities are contiguous, and can never be completely set apart. The unbearable remains, can never be overcome. And the bereavement of acute melancholy always risks choking the soul, and making being inert.

The possibility of ethical struggle is situated precisely in that tension, as a work of the imagination in a space of mourning, and in the proximity, and the engagement, with destruction and violence. It is an engagement that is not instrumental, remains unresolved, and cannot be reduced to an external telos, for the ethical work is the struggle itself. In this sense, perhaps, the Imam can tell us something about the temporality of a moment when the exits are not in view.

### Endnotes

- 1 Samera Esmeir, “The Age of Walls”, *Al-Ahram weekly*, 14-20 January 2010.
- 2 As I revise this paper I hear the echo of questions raised in *Birzeit* in the aftermath of my presentation, as well as in other presentations and the larger debate on violence and occupation that ensued. In relation to this paper, I am thinking in particular of the presentations by *Islah Jad*, “Women of the Hamas Movement and Positions Towards Martyrdom Operations”, in this volume, and by *Penny Johnson*, “Crime, Gender and Punishment: The Paradox of Palestinian Civil Policing”, in this volume, as well as *Lina Miari’s* insightful discussion of my own presentation, and *Samera Esmeir’s* concluding comments. I would like to thank the members of the Institute for Women’s Studies for their welcome, and for the transformative discussions, and in particular *Islah Jad*, *Eileen Kuttab*, *Rema Hamami*, *Penny Johnson*, *Lina Miari*, and *Amira Silmi*, as well as *May Jayyusi* and *Samera Esmeir*.
- 3 *May Jayyusi*, “Subjectivity and the Public Witness: An Analysis of Islamic Militance in Palestine” (Unpublished paper for the SSRC Beirut Conference on the Public Sphere in the Middle East, October 2004). In this sense, and despite her explicit reference to *Agamben’s* analytic framework of sovereignty, *Jayyusi* is actually making a very different claim. The martyr’s gesture in her reading is not an unspeakable

- utterance of “bare life”, but an act, a gift, committed to the regeneration of the symbolic. Her reading seems to me closer to the Iranian Ali Shariati understanding of *shahadat*, as gift, regeneration of the possibility of truth and relationship.
- 4 Jean Genet, *Un captif amoureux*, Paris: Gallimard, 1986.
  - 5 Fantasy in the psychoanalytic sense of an unconscious phantasmatic construction that at once covers and reveals a drive.
  - 6 Lacan, Seminar 11, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, “Of the gaze as petit objet a”.
  - 7 This point is discussed by Achille Mbembe in *On the Postcolony* (University of California Press 2001), and from a different angle by David Marriott, *Haunted Life. Visual Culture and Black Modernity*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2007.
  - 8 David Marriott forcefully argues this point in, “Afterword: Ice Cold”, in *Haunted Life*. See also “On Racial Fetishism”, in *Qui Parle*, vol. 18, Number 2, 2010, pp. 215-248.
  - 9 See for instance, D. Fassin and R. Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma. An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, A. Young, *The Harmony of Illusions. Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*.
  - 10 A slightly different version of this section of the paper was published in *Umbr(a). A Journal of the Unconscious*, special issue *Umbr(a) Islam*, 2009.
  - 11 N. Seremetakins calls this “antiphonic witnessing”, *The Last Word*, The University of Chicago Press, 1991; see also A. Feldman, “Memory Theaters, Virtual Witnessing and the Trauma Aesthetic”, *Biography*, 27(1)2004, p. 163-202, and S. Pandolfo, “Testimony in Counterpoint. Psychiatric Fragments in the Aftermath of Culture”, *Qui Parle* 17(1) 2008, pp. 63-123.
  - 12 Literally “*shari`a* healing”; but here the term *shari`a* should not be understood solely in the sense of law, and *fiqh* jurisprudence, but more precisely as being on the way of God.
  - 13 All quotes from the Imam in what follows are fragments of conversations we had in Rabat, Morocco, between 2005 and 2010.
  - 14 The association of Pharaoh with the oppression and violence of worldly power is found in the Qur’an: “Remember when Moses said to his people — Recall how God saved you from the people of Pharaoh who subjected you to torture and atrocities”(Qur’an 14:6). The figure of the Pharaonic state (as an allegory of modern oppressive regimes) is recurrent in the writings of Sayyid Qutb, and in Morocco, Shaykh Abdessalam Yassine.
  - 15 F. Davoine and J-M. Gaudillère, *History Beyond Trauma*, NY: Other Press, 2004, S. Fairfield translation, p. xxii.
  - 16 The terms is Shaykh Abdessalam Yassine’s, *al-minhāj al-nabawī* (The Method of the Prophet) 1989.
  - 17 Note that when the Imam speaks of “the heart of a Muslim” he does not treat “Muslim” as an identity or a “religion”, which would then be followed by the qualified “faithful”. It is an active position vis-à-vis God and the community, and the heart who is incapable of taking that position is no longer Muslim.
  - 18 See S. Pandolfo, “The Burning. Finitude and the Politico-Theological Imagination of Illegal Migration”. *Anthropological Theory*, 2007.
  - 19 There is an important debate on the question of poverty and oppression in Islam. See for instance Farid Esack, “Qur’an, Liberation, and Pluralism. An Islamic Perspective on Interreligious solidarity against oppression”, in *Liberating Faith. Religious Voices for Justice*. R. Gottlieb ed., 2003. Esack stresses that there is a requirement of socio-economic justice which is beyond all ethical possible adjustments.

# Changing Family and Gender Dynamics During the Siege against Gaza: Spousal Relations and Domestic Violence

**Aitemad Muhanna**

*In her contribution for the IWS conference, Aitemad Muhanna makes a powerful argument that the prolonged Israeli siege against Gaza since 2006 has triggered crises in both masculinity and femininity, but that nonetheless, both women and men resist directly challenging ideologies of male domination. Her sensitive analysis of women and men's voices—and their presentations and representations of their gendered selves – as they struggle to survive in vulnerable circumstances and to negotiate spousal relations offers new insights into the context and causes of domestic violence. Aitemad Muhanna received her Ph.D. from the University of Swansea in 2010, under the title of “We Need to Return to Our Respected Domestic Position: Gender Relations and Women's Agency During the Second Palestinian Intifada.” Aitemad is currently a Research Fellow at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London.*

*It would be haram law ana armala (a mercy for me if I were a widow), rather than to see my husband with all his afiato (physical well-being), unable to do anything.*

Um Mohammad, 29 years old from the Shuja'iyya neighborhood

*Believe me, I would accept my husband's violence if he was actually a real man respected by his children and others. He does nothing useful for us and at the same time makes daily troubles against me and the children. He is also not respected by his family and kin.*

Um Husam, 48 years old from Beach camp

These words from women in Gaza illustrate the high level of frustration of women in poor and vulnerable Gaza families towards their out-of-work husbands. Prolonged Israeli oppressive policies against Palestinians in Gaza, particularly since early 2006 when Hamas won the legislative election and took control over Gaza, have destroyed the formal and the informal economy of Gaza; as a consequence, most Gazan men lost their ability not only to provide for their families, but even to

maintain their masculine image in front of their wives and children.

The Palestinian socio-economic and political context clearly influences not only the practice of masculinity, but also its culturally opposite term, femininity. The events of the Second Intifada have dramatically weakened the material, social and psychological basis of both masculinity and femininity – a man is valueless and unable to secure his family, and a woman is humiliated by being forced to leave her children and her respected position as domesticated wife and mother, to act as a beggar for humanitarian aid in the public sphere. The crisis of femininity is not simply a by-product of the crisis in masculinity. Both are rather a consequence of the decomposition of the system of political economy, whereby the public and the domestic spheres have lost the structural basis for their functioning. Thus both men and women are victimized, as each lost the normative structural basis of gender enactment (Abu-Nahleh, 2006).

This research paper will focus on one particular question: How is the current crisis of masculinity and femininity reflected in the presentation and representation of gendered selfhood? Exploring the answer to this question through qualitative data and analysis of focus groups and in-depth interviews conducted in Beach Camp and the Shuja'iyya neighbourhood of Gaza city, also leads to an understanding why women and men resist challenging the ideology of male domination, despite the deep dislocation of the structural gender arrangements within the family and in the wider society. My window to the crisis of gendered identity during the prolonged period of the siege against Gaza will be the husband-wife relationship and the gendered presentation and interpretation of domestic violence.

## Across Generations

During the war and conflict situations in contemporary Palestinian society before the Second Intifada, while many men were sacrificing for the liberation of their nation, their women acted as the main sustainer of the family – and hence the nation, constituting the moral aspects of female and masculine selfhood. (Massad, 1995, Peteet 1994, Johnson and Kuttub 2001). Thus, domestic roles and responsibilities were never devalued by women because they were seen to serve the wider national goal of liberation.

In the context of gender relations within the family, women strive to present the masculinity of their men as consistent with the moral image of masculinity, regardless of the actual practices of gender within the family. For example, my historical analysis of intra-family gender relations under the Israeli occupation shows that most women in Gaza, across generations, presented their dissatisfaction and unhappiness to live with powerless husbands who are socially stigmatized as *mahkomeen*, controlled whether by their mothers or by their wives. This, for

women, undermines their moral sense of femininity. I argue that this form of representation among women - who suffer not only from the joblessness of their husbands during the Second Intifada but also from husbands whose income and decisions were controlled by mothers, fathers or older brothers during their absence in the Israeli labour market before the full closure of Gaza borders - is a dynamic used by women themselves to balance, as argued by Henrietta Moore the fantasy of masculine identity with the fantasy of their power and agency (Moore 1994: 66). In the situation when the material sources of the gender order decompose, women as well as men develop symbolic presentational dynamics aimed at stabilizing the gender order and its symbolic meaning of masculinity and femininity.<sup>1</sup> Two main interlinked elements played a critical role in the the process of women's wielding of power within the household and in the local community in Gaza: women's life cycles and the changing socio-economic and political structures in the historical context of Gaza society.

Throughout a woman's life cycle and across generations in the Gaza society, women contributed to the reproduction of the extended household, as a strategy to wield personal power through their position as wives and mothers. The first generation of married women in the post-1948 period was dominated by men (fathers and husbands) who were physically present around the household, and controlled the production of household resources and public decisions, although women participated in agricultural production. Older women practiced their power, as the transmitter of the family's wealth and honour, through family and kin relations, and through the arrangements of kin marriage. This was the stereotypical form of gender relations in the patriarchal traditional peasant family in Gaza before the Israeli occupation (Rosenfeld, 1960 & 1968).

The second generation of married women were the wives of the wage labourers in Israel who became more dominated by older women rather than by their absent men. The older women (the mothers-in-law) at this period (1970s till into the late 1980s) acquired social authority from their men to replace them during their absence in Israel. This form of household gender relations weakened the patriarchal traditional structure of Gaza household, even though the image of patriarchy remained a dominant discourse in the society.

The third generation of women is the mothers of the growing children of today, who mostly married in the early to mid-1990s. For them, the early phases of marriage witnessed the relative political and economic stability of the Gaza society that followed the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. It appears that the third generation of women - the housewives - continued to be domesticated, but also enjoyed higher levels of autonomy compared with other historical periods. This autonomy was largely achieved by the nucleation of households - where

1 See my thesis, chapter 3 on 'Family Structure and Gender Relations in Gaza under the Israeli occupation' (83-134).



women attempted to exercise control over their children and family unit – which largely took place under the Palestinian Authority in the period 1993-2000. This group of women were reliant on their husbands' income as the only source of livelihood.

We will see below how the economic crisis of masculinity and the moral crisis of femininity in Gaza family – losing their self-respect as a domesticated respected wife and mother '*musatata*' – are presented by both women and men in order to maintain a meaning for their social existence, while the other economic and social meanings of gender identity are distorted.

### **Husband-Wife Dynamics: Between Tolerance and Violence**

The inability of men to challenge the material aspects of their masculinity crisis is reflected in two contradictory behavioural dynamics: either by being sympathetic husbands, cooperating with their wives for the household's survival, or by being violent, careless and passive. The former group of men appreciate what their wives do to provide for and to protect the family, and they act with them in a tolerant way. Those men believe that the provision of the family is their gendered social and moral obligation that is structurally restricted by the closure of the borders and the destruction of the Gaza economy. Nevertheless, those cooperative husbands admit during the focus groups discussions that what their wives do to provide for the family is a feminine domain that cannot be undertaken by men. The latter group, as presented by women interviewees, responds to the crisis of their masculinity by acting unsympathetically, especially those who live in extended families. This includes being more violent with wives, leaving home for long hours, not providing any childcare and relying on the extended family members to support wives with childcare and in some cases, practicing control over the rare sources of income or aid that wives collect for the survival of the family. Those men became more violent, mostly against their children.

The impact on husband-wife relations of the Second Intifada is characterized by high levels of diversity. Younger husbands who live with extended families are, for example, less cooperative with their wives than middle aged husbands. Younger husbands feel secure in not being cooperative at home because they rely on their mothers or sisters. Middle age men, both in Shuja'iyya and in the Beach camp, with less education, are more tolerant and cooperative than young educated men. Young men with better education seem to find it hard to accept and to cope with their wives acting as the primary provider.

A husbands' health status also appears as an influencing factor in wives' presentation of their husbands as cooperative. A husband's sickness may not be serious, but it may be symbolically used by women to justify their husband's helplessness. Wives' presentation of their sick husbands as cooperative and

tolerant, also enhances the women's moral sense of femininity, as they sacrifice for their married life and children. Men, on the other hand, present their sickness as a reason for their cooperation with their wives, in a way to justify their helplessness in family provision.

## Cooperative Husbands

The empirical data shows a remarkable number of young and middle aged wives (ages 20 to 39) who admitted that their husbands have become more cooperative and tolerant with them since the husbands became jobless. They are 6 out of 15 women in the Beach camp, and 7 out of 16 women of similar age in Shuja'iyya. Most of the 13 women with cooperative husbands live in nuclear households or households that are separate but attached to the husbands' parents. One possible interpretation of why wife-husband relations are more cooperative in nuclear households is that men are more encouraged to cooperate with their wives, if their cooperation is not visible by other family members (mothers and adult brothers).

I tried to compare husbands' and wives' presentations of the meaning of husbands' cooperation. Some women affirmed that a husband's tolerance and cooperation is situational and their husbands are not happy with how they behave. Husbands, as women describe it, feel compassion for their wives who humiliate themselves by moving around searching for coupons, while husbands cannot handle this task. A number of young wives attribute the cooperative and tolerant characteristics of their husbands to them being sick. The largest group presents the cooperation of their husbands as a response to wives' appreciation of their husbands' manliness, enhancing their masculinity and not making them feel down or inferior for not earning income. Only three women mentioned that their husbands' cooperation is a sign of recognition and valuation of their wives' important and respected role in family survival.

Women's presentations of their husbands' cooperation reflect the interplay of the crisis of femininity with the crisis of masculinity. Women try to emphasize that their husbands' cooperation does not undermine their manliness, and is not in contradiction with their domestic authority. This discourse used by women enhances their sense of femininity, by which they maintain themselves as respected wives, despite their mobility searching for livelihood sources. They also refer their husbands' cooperation to the moral aspect of an ideal wife who stands beside her husband in hard times, and does not make him feel down. Samia, in her mid-30s and living in a nuclear family, presents her husband's tolerance and cooperation by saying:

*Despite all I do, the final decisions are still taken by him in consultation with me. The man is the man and the woman is a woman...should we*

*reduce his value because he becomes jobless? Money is not everything, if he does not work today, he will work tomorrow. That he is around for me and the children is enough. He treats me well. He has never beaten me since he became jobless. He shouts a lot but I know how to calm him down.*

Samia presents her husband as cooperative and tolerant. She does not allow him to do anything at home in order not to make him feel inferior. This technique made her husband very calm and very tolerant with her. He trusts her and since he lost his job, he has never prevented her from going out. Salwa, 35 years old from Shuja'iyya said:

*My husband is actually not happy to see me leaving home three to four times a week to look for coupons. He tried in the beginning to prevent me, and when I asked him to go out to look for work, he stopped interfering in my mobility. I told him: do you think I am happy with this shahtata, humiliation, or do you think I want to leave home to have fun? Then I cried. He felt sympathetic towards me and he calmed down because he realized that he is not able to do anything for the family.*

Awatif (29 years old), Manal (32 years old) and Randa (35 years old) are housewives from Shuja'iyya. They all asserted that their husbands became tolerant and cooperative after they got sick. As it is mentioned earlier, many men got physically and mentally sick from their prolonged joblessness. These women consider the cooperative stance of their husbands is a result of their physical powerlessness and their inability to do any work, even if it is available. They don't expect they would be cooperative if they were able-bodied

*Men realized their crisis of masculinity* not only by the lack of jobs available, but also by their inability to work and/or to manage their household. They try to hide this crisis by avoiding contestation with their wives. This is explained by Awatif: *'my husband avoids any encounter with me that may make me scandalize him as a useless husband'*;

*Husbands use their sickness, as a legitimate social reason to justify their subjective weakness.* This makes them leave all family decisions to be controlled by wives. Both women and men, however, describe this relation as cooperative in order to romanticise the husband-wife relationship, and to hide the negative psychological effect of the masculinity crisis. Men are given a legitimacy not to act their socially constructed gender, because they are sick, and women are valued as they self-sacrifice for their family headed by a sick husband.

None of these responses evaluate the changes in gender relations as positive, or as transformative. Um Husam from the Beach camp is 32 years old, and she is the only wife interviewed who presents the current changes in her relation with

her husband as transformative. She says: “... *Even if my husband goes back to work and earns income, I am not going back to my previous life, just satisfying the master of the family. I feel now what freedom means.*”

Men, on the other hand, present their cooperation with their wives very carefully in order not to be perceived as diminishing their masculinity. In men's focus groups, most men presented their cooperative enactment as being situational as well as moral. They tried to challenge their helplessness by providing moral support to their wives who also feel victimized by their husbands' joblessness. However, men insist in their self-presentations that their helplessness in family provision is not personal, but purely situational. In a focus group with men in the Beach camp, Abu Hasan, 29 years old with 6 children, formerly worked in fishing and his wife used to help him from home. He asserts that his wife never left home to visit associations before the Intifada, but he has to encourage her now to search for coupons because there are no other options for living. Abu Hasan presents himself as a cooperative husband by not interfering in his wife's mobility or in managing the family expenses. He said:

*My wife doesn't do anything wrong by leaving home to search for coupons while we (men) are unable to earn income. I would not let her to leave home and to humiliate herself in a normal situation, but what can we do. El umour mesh be Idna, things are not in our control.*

I asked Abu Hasan about what he is doing while his wife goes out to search for coupons. He replied:

*I in fact don't do anything at home. I do not really want my mother, sisters and wife to see me at home doing nothing. I leave home during the day, but I feel secure about the family because my mother and sisters are there with the children. If I stay at home, I would shout and maybe beat my children. So it's better to leave home. I spend my day with my friends: we play cards and chat.*

Other men in the focus group support Abu Hasan, and one said: ‘yes, we (men) all avoid staying at home to control our behaviours with the children and wives’. Another critical point in the analysis of men's cooperation is men's realization of the importance of women's bargaining skills, which the men are unable to or cannot develop during situations of scarcity. Women learned bargaining from an early age through intergenerational relations within their families. Jobless husbands know that their wives have to present themselves as inferior and docile in order to receive humanitarian assistance. Husbands also know that their wives have to present their husbands as helpless and unable to feed the family. With the absence of any other sources of survival, men accept that women have to act in ways that undermine

their sense of femininity in order for their families to survive. This is also recognized by women because they believe that it is only women who can bargain and deceive, not men. In this context, inferiority and superiority is instrumentally negotiated, by which the socially and historically constructed concept of inferiority, attached to women, is used intentionally to accomplish the purpose of household's survival. This is openly expressed by Awatif and mentioned by many other women in the focus groups:

*Men can't do what we do. Men are in general very straightforward in their communication and negotiation with the outside world. This is not worthy in the current situation of scarcity we live in. We women are mudardahat, subtle. We give each the proper speech that fits him or her. We don't care if we speak with someone from Hamas or Fatah, unless they meet our purpose of assistance. We are not rigid and we are very patient.*

It is noted that men's presentation of their cooperation with their wives is paradoxical. They explicitly and implicitly assert that what their wives do is inferior, and it is only done by women. At the same time, they present their wives as dedicated, self-sacrificing and deliberate. Most men confirmed that their wives try to meet their children's demands without letting the men know, in order to avoid their anger and to maintain peace within the family. This discourse of presentation by men has structural and subjective implications. They first try to assert that their helplessness in family provision is not caused by their lack of manliness, but it is rather caused by structural constraints out of their control. Second, they try to emphasize that despite their joblessness and helplessness, wives still respect and appreciate them, and do not transcend the image of male domination. A middle-aged man, who had worked in Israel as a contractor, expressed the political and moral effect of the Second Intifada on husband-wife relations, by saying:

*What is happening with us as men has never been imagined. Does anyone of us expect marato el musatata, his respected wife, to be a beggar for a coupon? We used to see women of our mothers' age trading in the market, we used to accept our wives to go out to do shopping for themselves and for the children; we also used to accept our wives to go out to work as teachers and nurses. But we have never expected them to humiliate themselves for a coupon. But neswana, our wives, are really deliberate and they deserve respect. They do not even let us feel bad about ourselves. They bear this burden because they know that it is not lack of manliness not to earn income, but it is the closure which is out of our control. The international humanitarian aid turns us to be*



*beggars. They don't know that this would not affect our morals as men and women. This situation is not staying forever, then we will be back to work and our wives will be back to their respected norm of life, looking after their children and husbands.*

As this material makes clear, the new cooperation that men offer to their wives is limited and symbolic. The change in the gender division of labour during the livelihood crisis has not affected men's and women's perception of their masculinity and femininity. Only two women, for example, mentioned that their husbands share in domestic work, and those live in nuclear families. In contrast, men and women, as it appears in the narrations, try to enhance the different gendered image of each other. Men's tolerance and cooperation is a symbolic discourse used by both men and women to meet the challenge of the crisis of masculinity and femininity, and to re-stabilize their gendered image. This argument is supported by many wives' determination not to let their husbands share in the domestic work or in teaching the children, instead only wanting their husbands to keep calm and to be kind to them. Wives also do not want their husbands to lose their manliness in the public sphere by staying at home.

## **Violent and Despondent Husbands**

The common characters of the husbands described as violent by their wives, are laziness, passivity, selfishness and carelessness. With the absence of male sources of livelihood and the social legitimacy of married young wives' mobility to search for means for their children's survival, many men have left the household livelihood burden on women's shoulders without interfering positively or negatively. This reflects men's realization that the only source of survival available, at their current time, is the 'inferior' tasks women do. Both cooperative and violent men respond in reactionary ways to their crisis of masculinity, according to the interviewed women. It appears that those men who were deemed powerful in the established hierarchy due to their employment and education before the Second Intifada, and who were more bonded with the established patriarchal norms and practices, became more violent with their family members.

The violent reaction of husbands is more common among husbands who formerly had permanent jobs as skilled labourers in Israel for many years. The power of those husbands was mainly shaped by their ability to earn good income from their work in Israel. The wives of these husbands complained about their husbands' refusals to accept low-income jobs available through the job creation programs offered by international agencies. These jobs are seen by husbands as humiliating, due to their low wages and low status. Wives who used to live in better situations before the Second Intifada mostly described their jobless husbands as

becoming more violent. As described by wives, their husbands cannot forget that they have become jobless after they have been earning so much they could '*play with money*'. Other groups of women who described their husbands as violent are the wives of highly educated husbands who are university graduates.

The majority of women who face violence today are wives who did not experience violence from their husbands before the Intifada. Most of these women are in their early thirties and they give as excuses for their husbands being violent, that their joblessness and helplessness are *nafsian*, psychologically, unbearable. Only three women who experienced violence from their husbands throughout their marriage life utilized the male-bread winner crisis to build up their power to resist their husbands' violence. Young married women suffer more from their husbands' violence than middle aged married women. This is explained by some wives by the fact that middle aged women rely to some extent on their teenage sons to earn some income and to protect themselves from their husbands' violence. Young married women's children are very young and helpless.

It is important to note that the husbands' violence does not affect wives' mobility to search for coupons, or other sources of family survival. Wives' access to mobility to search for livelihood sources helps them to protect themselves from their husbands' violence, by not demanding anything from their husbands and by managing their daily household basic needs by themselves. This argument is supported by many wives who say that their husbands mainly become violent when any member of the family demands money. Women therefore prefer their husbands to stay outside the home for longer hours to avoid any demands from children and wives, and as a result, avoid tension and violence.

The discussion and analysis during the individual interviews as well as the focus groups with both men and women also suggest that wives who live in nuclear families are less safe from violence than those who live in an extended family. Almost all women emphasized that their husbands' violence is a by-product of their feeling of helplessness, and the loss of their sense of manhood. Violence by husbands is mostly reflected in insulting and shouting with less physical violence. The verbal violence is continuous—reflecting the ongoing frustration and depressing mood of jobless husbands. Violence is mostly practiced against children, more than wives. This is explained by some wives by saying that jobless husbands feel embarrassed to treat their wives, who feed them and their children, violently. Husbands, as a result, express their anger and frustration against their children (young and teenage), assuming that the children are morally obliged to bear their fathers' violence. Women who were hit by their husbands mentioned that they were hit while trying to protect their children from their fathers.

Except for a few cases of women who tried to resist their husbands' violence, the majority of wives justified their husbands' violence and tried to endure it for the sake of the stability of their children's lives and not to live in daily tension. Women perceive their husbands' violence as not being a matter of gender, and

they repeatedly present it as behaviour conditioned by the husbands' joblessness. Amira is 37 years old with 6 children. Her married life has been a misery because she has been oppressed by both her mother-in-law and her husband. Amira's mother-in-law became calm at the time of her son's joblessness and she stopped interfering in her mobility, but her husband became more violent. Amira attributes her husband's violence to his joblessness, which makes her unhappy with what she has to do. She says at the end of her interview:

*I pray day and night for my husband to find a job, and for me to go back home and to stop going out. Whatever I brought to feed my children, my husband steals it to buy his cigarettes. He doesn't care about his children. He sometimes beats me if I come from outside without anything in hand. If he worked, he would not be violent with me.*

Hala, 30 years old from Shuja'iyya, tells:

*If I stop going out to bring coupons, my children would not find food to eat. My husband is a university graduate and he was working in Israel. Our relationship was calm before the closure. Since my husband lost his job, he has become careless and violent. He shouts against his children for no reason. I understand this and I try to absorb his anger. I asked all my children not to demand anything from their father in order to avoid his violence. I don't know what to do with him. If I shout at him, all his family will blame me. So I try to stay silent till he calms down.*

Although some of the wives interviewed said that their husbands practiced violence against them before their joblessness, almost all of them consciously or unconsciously ignored the historical gender aspect of male domestic violence. It appears that violence against women was natural or normal before joblessness, while the current violence is situational. Wives' justification of their husbands' violence due to joblessness can probably be interpreted psychologically. This would entail linking women's interests and desires towards maintaining the symbolic image of their husband's masculinity when men have lost the structural sources of masculinity through the destruction of the socio-economic and political system. There are other structural reasons why women intentionally accommodate their husbands' violence: 1) the diminishing of the effect of informal social support systems based on family and kin relations, by which women do not have anywhere to go in case of their husbands' violence (Johnson, 2006); b) the deinstitutionalization of the Gaza society and the absence of the enforcement of law (IWS, 2008). A third moral subjective reason is that if women in a situation of masculinity crisis resist their husbands' violence, they are scandalized as bad wives, who do not stand beside their husbands during their crisis. Women in this

context do not want to lose everything, at least, do not want to lose the symbolic gender image of being a good wife.

## **Crises in Representation**

The empirical analysis of husband-wife relation during the second Intifada asserts that in a war and scarcity situation, masculinity and femininity are negotiated more than contested among poor and vulnerable people - men and women - who have lost their actual sources of economic and social power in order to maintain a meaning for their selfhood. For men to be more violent (symbolic or real violence) or to be tolerant, and for women to justify their husbands' violence are all "...a sign of a struggle for the maintenance of certain fantasies of identity and power" (Moore, 1994:70). Gender or non-gender-based violence, as Henrietta Moore argues, is a result of the subject's crisis of representation, both individual and social, and it is a means to resolve this crisis (ibid: 69). Violence against women, within this analysis, is not by itself the threat. The actual threat is the conditions that deprive both men and women to properly present themselves, in a way that maintains their self-respect and human dignity regardless of the changing gender roles.

Within the specific context of war and conflict in the Gaza society, I disagree with the mainstream feminist discourse that still analyzes domestic violence as simply and universally a manifestation of male domination and patriarchy. Liz Kelly for example argued that gender-based violence against women is 'one of the most extreme and effective forms of patriarchal control, which simultaneously damages and constrains women's lives' (Kelly 2000:45). This argumentation is not relevant to the Gaza context, especially during the second Intifada. My research findings show that male violence against women is not a form of patriarchal control, and it does not constraint women to practice their agency. Men's violence against women in Gaza during the current crisis is rather a reflection that the perpetrator of violence – jobless and helpless men- is threatened and experiences thwarting or frustration (Moore 1994:67).

Women's narrations in my research reveal that, in a relatively stable situation under the prevailing gender order, men were less violent against their women because they were properly able to sustain their willing masculine subject in relation to women's practice of their willing feminine subject. In this context, there is no reason for men to practice violence against women because they both negotiate domination and subordination, as it is socially constructed, to achieve their personal and familial goals.

My argument does not deny that male violence against women in the Gazan family, especially in the war situation, harms or damages women's selfhood, but we have also to admit that the emasculation of women's male intimates is also harmful for both men and women, while women in Gaza may still present their

gendered selfhood to others. In this specific context, even if women had the agentic capacity to resist the violence practiced against them by their powerless husbands, they would be reluctant to do so because women in Gaza still perceive their self-sacrifice and endurance of hardship for the sake of others, including those who have historically subordinated them, as a distinctive moral constituent of their femininity. Although Gaza poor housewives contribute to the persistence of the ideology of male domination, they also give a model of women's agency that resists the colonial forces distortion of the moral aspects of the Palestinian subject, a male and female. This is illustrated in women's enhancement of their distinctive moral feminine subject as reproducers of care and love, which rescues the meaning of Gaza family, as a connected and collective unit, from being lost.

### References

- Abu Nahleh, L. 2006. "Six Families: Survival and Mobility in Times of Crisis." In *Living Palestine: Survival, Resistance and Mobility under Occupation*, edited by L. Taraki. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
- Johnson P. and Kuttab, E. 2001. "Where Have All the Women (and Men) Gone? Reflection on Gender and the Second Intifada." *Feminist Review*, no. 69: 21-43.
- Johnson, P. 2006. "Living Together in a Nation of Fragments." In *Living Palestine: Family Survival, Resistance, and Mobility under Occupation*, edited by L. Taraki. New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Massad, J. 1995. "Conceiving the Masculine: Gender and Palestinian Nationalism." *Middle East Journal*, vol.49, no. 3.
- Moore, H. 1994. *Passion for Difference: Essays in Anthropology and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Rosenfeld, H. 1960. "On the Determination of the Status of Arab Village Women." *Man*, no. 60: 66-70.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1968. "Change, Barriers to Change, and Contradictions in the Arab Village Family." *American Anthropologist, New Series*, vol. 70, no. 4: 732-752.

# Crime, Gender and Punishment: The Paradox of Palestinian Civil Policing

**Penny Johnson**

*In her conference presentation, Penny Johnson reflects on how Palestinian civil policing could occur in a context where Israeli colonialism does not acknowledge civilians and where Palestinian civil policing is both embedded in larger security structures and neglected in resource allocation. She considers events at the 2009 Nablus Shopping Festival in the light of oppositions between normality and resistance, and raises the question of whether policing is producing gendered categories of crime. Penny Johnson is the English-language editor of the Review of Women's Studies.*

Among the over 200 Palestinians killed in Gaza during Israel's first wave of air strikes on 27 December 2008, were 42 police recruits standing in formation for their graduation ceremony. In a 31 December letter raising concerns about the Israeli army's "targeting of civilian objects in the Gaza Strip," the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem noted that:

Participants in the course study first-aid, handling of public disturbances, human rights, public safety exercises and so forth. (B'Tselem 2008)

Although international humanitarian law and the laws of war (where the civil police are considered as separate from the army) would clearly distinguish these trainees as non-combatants and "civilian objects," the Israeli army treated them as military targets – as was the case with the Palestinian police in a number of incidents during Israel's 2002 incursion into West Bank towns. Indeed, in the context of Gaza, this is consistent with Israel's treatment of almost all male Palestinian deaths as militants. As was later revealed in the Israeli press, the bombing of the Gaza police graduation was planned months before and was "internally criticized" but then the IDF's international law division finally gave the go-ahead (Feldman and Blau 2009)

This tragic incident immediately raises a question on the paradox of Palestinian civil policing: can there be Palestinian civil policing when Israeli violence does not distinguish "civilian objects"? We are forcefully reminded that external and internal violence are not separate categories but that, in Talal Asad's useful phrase, there is a "historical space in which violence circulates," (Asad 2007, 15) That



space in our context is clearly colonial. This is somewhat obliquely acknowledged in the Palestinian National Authority's 2008-2010 Palestinian Reform and Development Plan that sets the policies for Palestinian security reform. It is:

*“our responsibility, within the limits placed on the Palestinian security forces by Israel’s occupation, for bringing the rule of law to the occupied territory and combating violence”* (PNA 2007, 7) [emphasis mine]

If the limits placed by the Israeli occupation are a clear statement of colonial effects, there is a more ambiguous colonial subtext in the emphasis on “combating violence,” which, in one meaning, echoes the role of the Palestinian police as defined in the Oslo accords as protecting Israeli security and preventing Palestinian violence against Israel. As Lia, a Norwegian security expert who has written two volumes on Palestinian policing, aptly noted:

“a fundamental anomaly in Palestinian policing in that the Palestinian Police’s main duties, according to the signed [Oslo] agreements, was the protection of Israeli security and colonial interests in the Occupied Territories.” (Lia 2007, 3)

At the same time, Palestinian women, men and children need – and even demand – safety and security in their communities, the prevention of crime, and the prosecution of criminals. Indeed, this demand is heightened by the colonial violence that surrounds it and has been more clearly voiced since the internal violence of 2006 and 2007 and in the widely circulated discourse of *falataan amni* [security chaos]. Herein lies one aspect of the paradox of Palestinian civil policing which aims to *produce normality (ie public order) in highly abnormal conditions*.

But we have another question: can Palestinian policing be civil when it is embedded in larger security structures and the politics of security? The Authority’s security plan included the goal of reducing the previous multiplicity of security services (at twelve or more) to “three branches that deliver high quality policing, national security and intelligence services.” (PNA 2007, 12). The plan thus promises to distinguish the “civil police” from both the national and general intelligence services. In fact, the situation on the ground, where at least six services operate today is much more complex (indeed a better word is messy). These services are accountable to various formal and informal parties within the PA and outside it, including US Security coordinator General Keith Dayton, who trained the Presidential Guard and oversees the training of the National Security Forces, a proto-army gendarmerie. Fortunately mapping these intricate relations of power is not my focus but I would like to raise three points, that relate to civil policing.

- 1) Although under different authorities, civil policing (under the Minister of Interior) works with and seems to be sometimes under the command of the National Security Forces (under the Prime Minister and General Dayton) when it comes to missions such as curbing militias, or even organized crime.
- 2) Under the same umbrella of a rather weak Ministry of Interior, preventive security and civil policing are living uneasily together in more than an administrative grouping and perhaps less than a partnership. A police criminal investigator in the southern West Bank who scrupulously follows police procedure (even though one of his manuals is in Chinese!) nonetheless acknowledged to researchers at the Institute of Women's Studies that "preventive security was useful for doing things the police cannot do."<sup>1</sup> While he was referring here to the (perhaps violent) interrogation of suspects, another thing the police cannot do (which plainclothes preventive security can sometimes do) is move freely in Areas B and C in the West Bank.<sup>2</sup> As a NSF commander remarked in an interview:

All the criminals and wanted persons just move to B or go to the hills in Area C. All law violators can escape. The Israelis are concerned only about one thing – Israeli security – and not about Palestinian security.

And of course Palestinian policing cannot combat the cause of the majority of crimes committed against Palestinians, acts by the Israeli army or settlers, from murder to the destruction of property. It is also worth considering if this overall lack of control shapes policing attitudes to spaces and persons that can be controlled.

- 3) The goal of three clear branches of policing and security is complicated also by another triangulation between Palestinian Authority goals, donor interests, and Israel's power. While the US took on "hard" security, the EU was mandated to take care of "soft" security via support of the civil police. The huge imbalance in power and resources between the hard and soft security sectors is gendered in the sense that the focus of hard security on curbing, assimilating or arresting young male militants is, in budget, policy and practice, at the expense of initiatives for the civilian population. Thus, the civil police, with

- 1 The two interviews cited with police and security officers do not include dates or names to protect the anonymity of the interviewees.
- 2 Since this interview, there seems to be some uneasy improvement in "security coordination" in the West Bank probably for reasons of pursuing offenders against Israeli security, but also including pursuing local criminal suspects.

the urging of the EU, instituted a potentially important Unit for Family and Child Protection – but to date its resources are painfully limited and there is only one unit operating to date (in the Bethlehem district).

Of signal importance, the security services' crackdown on militants, especially given dependency on American and Israeli power, counterposes both in the public mind and in practice *resistance and normality as opposites*, with a number of negative consequences for civil life and civil order. Consider an incident at the July 2009 Nablus Shopping Festival – a minor event, one could say, albeit with a major *knafeh* (Nabulsi cheese pastry yes, the largest in the world), and a “local” civil event which intersected some of the world’s most powerful forces. The Festival, inaugurated by Prime Minister Fayyad (and with President Abbas lighting a torch for it at Arafat’s grave) was slated as the “culmination of development initiatives from the international community as well as the fruition of ongoing efforts under US Major General Keith Dayton.” An estimated 500 members of the National Security Force, as well as the police, were deployed in Nablus for the week-long festival. Responding to requests from Dayton, Israel eases restrictions at the Huwwara checkpoint and other points of entry into Nablus.

And then, before dawn on 27 July, three masked Palestinian militants burned down the stage. Despite NSF and police presence in the area, there was no attempt to stop them. As one news agency noted, quoting official sources, “though local officers observed the crime, they were unable to pursue the arsonists because of existing security arrangements with Israel.” (Maan, 27 July 2009). These arrangements, it seems, forbade Palestinian police or security activity while Israeli forces were operating in the area. So one large strike against normality. But there were others – some analysts claim that the security forces “refused to stop Fatah operatives because of lack of orders from their commanders,” inferring both that there was some sympathy for the militants and that the commanders perhaps could not operate without Dayton, who was not in Nablus that morning. So a second, more ambiguous, strike. And then, why did masked militants want to burn down the stage? This was likely an assertion that militants still control Nablus, but it was also a fiery statement that the situation was decidedly not normal, and that resistance would continue. Significantly for our concerns, the attack also had a culturalist dimension: hip-hop artists and other performers at the Festival, the militant act asserted, were not welcome in Nablus.

Here, political conflict over the control of Nablus becomes posed as resistance versus normality and then is expressed in cultural conflict. I would argue that this is a dynamic seen elsewhere in Palestine and one with disturbing gendered and generational implications. Policing public order is not a neutral activity: it defines both a public and a normative public order. The culturalist and gendered dimension of this can be seen most clearly in the initiatives for morality policing in Gaza today, where women are banned from riding motorcycles and an unmarried

young man and woman may be stopped from riding together in a vehicle. The latest version is a March 2010 ban on men in salons cutting women's hair. These versions of public order – ostensibly to protect women's morality – may well in fact produce more violence as young women's behavior becomes a question of public order and punishment for deviations whether by police, families or others is in itself a form of violence.

So back to our question in this very complex situation, can Palestinian policing be civil, and if so how is it operating? The culturalist examples above point to policing as shaping new forms of public order, rather than simply preserving existing order. As, our Norwegian security expert points out, in times of transition “the police often play a more autonomous role as an actor in shaping the social and political order.” (Lia 2006, 3). In the last four years, the separate civil police forces in the West Bank and Gaza have been extending their activities and are largely seen by the public as making the streets and the population safer. Yet those very streets can paradoxically again be seen as sites of growing moral danger. Participants in a focus group in Doha/Beit Jala agreed “*The streets are not safe. The shebab have no morals because they have no responsibilities.*” One mother said:

I trust my daughter, she can say anything. She is 16 years old and I won't let her outside. I am frightened for her. The shebab might talk badly to her.

New forms of violence – here “bad talk” – circulate and a mother trusts her daughter but won't allow her outside, another paradox of these times that challenges optimistic views of public order.

But what about more conventional definitions of violent crimes?

## Gendered Crime

Let us briefly consider the most violent crime – violations of the right to life, here by Palestinian perpetrators. What are the leading causes of homicide and femicide in the last five years (since the re-introduction of police) and are homicide and femicide increasing?

2007 stands out as the year of homicide – mainly male deaths – with the Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights recording 585 deaths (as opposed to 345 in 2006), of which 503 were in Gaza and 343 in Gaza the result of internal fighting. An overwhelming majority of all deaths, 65% were of young men aged 19-35 (PICCR, 2008). The murder of women and girls did not rise so drastically at 45 deaths, although crimes registered as “honor” killings rose from 14 in 2006 to 18 in 2007, a majority of which were in Gaza. In 2007, murder was gendered, but even more so for men than women.

As internal fighting ebbed in the next two years, can we see more “normal” patterns of deadly crime and how are they gendered? A few points to consider:

Killings by Palestinian perpetrators rose from 191 cases in 2008 to 236 in 2009; one reason was a rise in internal fighting largely due to shoot-outs between police and security services and militants in incidents in Qalqilya and Gaza. While these deaths were all male, female deaths also increased from 19 to 29.

Thus, in the last two years, females are victims in roughly one in ten cases of killing by Palestinian perpetrators.

Killings of women “on the background of honor” – which have tended to be at 10-14 annually since statistics have been available – were significant cause of female in 2009 (9 deaths out of 29) although less so in 2008 (at a surprisingly low of 3 out of 19). Neither figure is as high as 2007 where such crimes accounted for 18 female deaths out of 45. In none of the last five years were honor crimes a majority cause of female deaths, although more than a word of caution is required here in considering how such crimes are registered or concealed. Most other female deaths are clustered in “mysterious or unknown circumstances” in 2008 and 2009. Thus, the most obvious gendered aspect of femicides – so called honor crimes – is salient but not dominant.

For men, oddly enough, the gendered aspect is in some ways clearer. A leading, even majority cause of male deaths in the West Bank in 2008 and 2009 falls under family feuds and revenge, where almost, but not all, deaths are male. Family feuds are also a significant cause of male deaths in Gaza but more men died from internal clashes and misuse of arms in 2009. Another highly gendered cause of death, especially in 2008, is tunnel deaths from lack of public safety where all deaths are male.

What deserves our attention in these statistics is the surprising absence of homicides/femicides from more usual criminal motives, such as killings for economic reasons. Could our highly gendered categories conceal as well as reveal types and motives for crime? Certainly, one suspects that the categories may impose a reading of “family feud” sometimes when the victim of an ordinary crime for economic gain is a relative – making crime in a way a cultural phenomenon. This is also true, we know, of some crimes termed “honor” crimes when motives are inheritance or other motives of economic gain. More case by case research is needed to understand patterns of crime, gender and punishment in Palestinian society. But I raise a related question for investigation here whether Palestinian policing is not only pursuing criminals, but producing gendered categories of crime and punishment. Policing as a form of “organized suspicion” (Asad 2005, 285) also promotes new forms of behavior and attitudes which configure a new public order.

*References*

- Asad, Talal 2007. *On Suicide Bombing*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2004. "Where Are the Margins of the State?" in Veena Das and Deborah Poole, eds. *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*. Sante Fe: School of American Research.
- Lia, Brynjar 2007. *Building Arafat's Police: The Politics of International Police Assistance in the Palestinian Territories after the Oslo Agreement*. Reading: Ithaca Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2006. *A Police Force without a State: A History of the Palestinian Security Forces in the West Bank and Gaza*. Reading: Ithaca Press.
- Maan News Agency 2008. "The Police in 2008: A Decline in Homicide and Theft and a Rise in Number of Tourists." Bethlehem: Maan, 2 February 2008.
- Maan News Agency 2009. "Nablus festival stage torched as Israeli forces oust local forces," 27 July 2009.
- World Tribune 2009. "US-trained Palestinian security forces reluctant to face down Fateh thugs," 3 August 2009.
- Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights (PICCR) 2008. *Annual Report 2007*. Ramallah: PICCR, in Arabic.
- Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights (PICCR) 2007. *Annual Report 2006*. Ramallah: PICCR, in Arabic.
- Palestinian National Authority (PNA) 2007. *Building a Palestinian State: Towards Peace and Prosperity. Palestinian Reform and Development Plan 2008-2010*. Paris: PNA.



## Reporting Gaza

### Assessing Social Suffering, Voicing Needs

#### “Humanitarian Crisis and Social Suffering in the Gaza Strip: An Initial Comparison Between Women and Men”

*Rita Giacaman*

#### “Voicing the Needs of Women and Men in Gaza”

*Rema Hammami*

- **27 December 2008-18 January 2009. Israel’s twenty-three day high-tech war on the trapped Gazan population.**
- **2006 to present: Thousands of days of Israeli siege (and counting) and blockade.**

*How does Israel’s prolonged state violence against the whole Gazan population—1.5 million women, men and children – affect, whether differentially or in common, women, men and children? Given the Israeli blockade of Gaza, the IWS conference experienced the painful absence of researchers and colleagues living in Gaza. However, along with two other conference papers focused on Gaza (Muhanna and Qazzaz, both in this volume) the IWS conference heard two important reports on research projects conducted “beyond the aftermath” of Israel’s December 2008 - January 2010 war on Gaza.*

*Dr. Rita Giacaman of the Institute of Community and Public Health (ICPH) presented “Humanitarian Crisis and Social Suffering in the Gaza Strip: An Initial Comparison Between Women and Men,” using findings from the ICPH’s survey of 3017 Gazan households in June and July of 2009. The notion of social suffering is crucial, indeed central, as it allows us to move beyond the framework of humanitarian emergency with its nameless perpetrators and victims to look at the operations of power and the voices of the victims. “Social suffering results from what political, economic and institutional power does to people,” observes Kleiman, Das and Lock in their important series on the topic. As well as probing the direct effects of Israel’s*

*war, such as injury and displacement, the survey addressed the effects of sustained siege and the fears, insecurities and stresses of post-war times. In her presentation, Giacaman used female and male heads of households to explore gender differentials in the aftermath of war and the continuance of siege. While males were the majority of direct casualties during the 23 days of Israeli military operations, assessing post-war social suffering brings women into sharp focus.*

*Dr. Rema Hammami of the Institute of Women's Studies presented and analyzed voices of women, men and young people from focus groups conducted in the context of a UNIFEM/UN Gender Task Force Household Survey of 1,100 households across Gaza in the first week of March 2009, with ten focus groups conducted in May 2009. Hammami was a research associate in the conduct and publication of the survey as, Voicing the Needs of Women and Men in Gaza: Beyond the Aftermath of the 23 day Israeli military operations (UNIFEM 2009). She was also the principal author of Toward Gender Equality in Humanitarian Response: Addressing the Needs of Women and Men in Gaza: A guidebook for the humanitarian sector, (UNIFEM 2010) which analyzed the focus group results.*

*Both Giacaman and Hammami looked beyond the immediate casualties of the war to the deeper, and sometimes gendered, consequences on on psycho-social health and well-being. Below are selected findings from their presentations.*

## **“Humanitarian Crisis and Social Suffering: An Initial Comparison Between Women and Men”**

***Rita Giacaman***

*Overall findings: More stress, ill-being for female-headed households.* A representative sample of 3017 households (1% of total households within the Gaza Strip) were visited, with a response rate of 97% or 3012 households. About 31% of individuals in the sample population – representing about 471877 people in the total population – were displaced during the war. 39% of homes were completely (1%) or partially (38%) destroyed and at the time of the survey 74% of damaged homes had not been repaired. 72% of households relied on food aid. Quality of life was rated as less than good (out of five categories from very good to very poor)

by half of the respondents compared with 39% during the period before the war. There were significant differences between male and female-headed households as explored below. Human suffering attributable to the siege at the time of the survey (92% of individuals), latest war (85%) and internal Palestinian fighting (83%) was rated as 8 or more on a scale of 1-10, and with no differences between male and female heads of households.

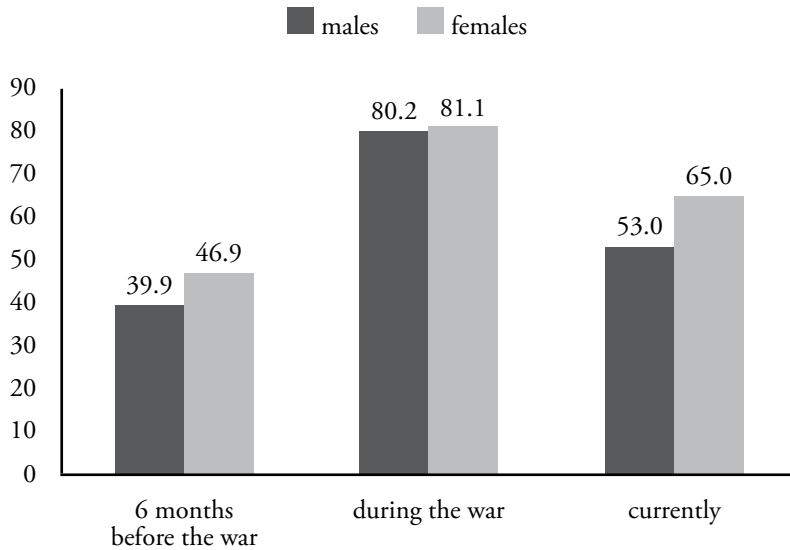
<b>Heads of Households by sex and selected characteristics</b>			
<b>House heads</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Scaled up for the Gaza Strip</b>
<b>Number</b>	1201 (89.7% of total)	144 (10.3% of total)	
Mean age	39.34	52.57	
Post Secondary education	28% of men	6.3% of women	
<b>Marital status</b>			
Married	98.9	21.7	
Widowed	0.2	64.3	
Outside the labor force	10.2	90.0	
<b>Standard of living</b>			
Poor by STL scale	12.7	22.1	
Well off by STL scale	20.6	11	
Reliance on food aid	69.4%	92.3	
Disabled (at least one disability)	2.2	9.8	
One or more chronic disease	10.7	40.6	

*Standard of Living, Disability, Chronic Disease:* As many recent studies have noted, a majority of Gazan families fall under the poverty line as measured by income or daily expenditure. In order to understand the differential effects of immiseration, the ICPH survey constructed a Standard of Living Scale which allowed comparative measurement among households. More female headed households (22.1%) were poor by the Standard of Living Scale than male headed households (12.7%), whereas more male headed households (20.6%) were well-off than female headed

households (11%) Almost all (92.3%) of female-headed households relied on food aid, while about two-thirds (69.4%) of male headed households did so. Female headed households were about four times more likely to have a disabled or chronically-ill member, with 9.8% of these households registering at least one disability compared to 2.2% among male headed households, and a highly significant 40.6% registering or more chronic diseases compared to 10.7% among male headed households. In common with other studies in both the West Bank and Gaza, ICPH found that female-headed households were smaller than male headed households( with an average household size of 3.61 for females compared 6.08 for males), with the female head most frequently a widow at 64.3% of female heads compared to 6% for male heads.

*Quality of Life:*

**Less than Good Quality of Life  
Heads of households**



While male and female headed households were quite similar (at 80% for male and 81% for female in rating their quality of life as “less than good” during the war, more female headed households reported their quality of life as less than good before the war (46.9%) and after the war (65%). About 40% of male headed households (39.9%) reported their quality of life as “less than good” before the war and 53% currently (post-war). But as Giacaman stressed, both did not return to pre-war levels.

*Distress and Human Insecurity:*

<b>Distress scale - household heads by sex</b>		
	<b>Male heads (% of group)</b>	<b>Female heads (% of group)</b>
<b>Least distress</b>	15.3	2.1
<b>Low distress</b>	38.1	32.2
<b>Moderate distress</b>	34.2	39.2
<b>High distress</b>	12.4	26.6

The ICPH survey asked a series of questions to household heads in order to gauge distress among respondents, such as “To what extent do you feel unable to control the important things in your life? To cope? To what extent do you feel worried? Anxious? Lonely? Angry? Responses were calculated on a scale with almost half of respondents reporting moderate to high levels of stress. There were, however, strong differences between female and male headed households. Almost two-thirds of female heads (65.8%) reported moderate to high levels of stress, while slightly less of half of male heads (46.6%) did so. A fairly significant proportion of male heads (15.3%) reported the least distress, while a very small proportion of female heads (2.1%) did so.

Female and male headed households were closer in their overwhelming feelings of insecurity, fear and threat. Respondents were questioned on a range of fear and threats, from fear for themselves or their families in daily life, to fear of not being able to provide daily necessities, with 84.6% of male heads reporting moderate to high insecurity and 81.2% of female heads. More male headed households at 42.8% reported high levels of insecurity, as opposed to 34.3% of female-headed households.

Giacaman ended her presentation by noting that “despite this extreme violation, the large majority reported an increase in social solidarity – both family and community solidarity –from the onset of the war till the time of the survey compared to the period before the war. This is another reminder of the resilience of the Palestinian people.”

## “Voicing the Needs of Women and Men in Gaza”

*Rema Hammami*

*Overall context:* The recent 23 day military bombardment by Israel exemplifies the extent to which Gazan men, women and children suffer from a profound and comprehensive lack of protection. The war led to the death of 1,366 people (of whom 430 were children, 111 women) as well as the injury of over 5,380 people (including 1,870 children and 800 women). The Israeli military offensive also led to large-scale internal displacement of civilians. This was made more traumatic by the fact that civilians could neither leave the field of war, nor find secure and safe haven within it from aerial bombardment, even in United Nations installations. However, the war should be seen in some sense as the culmination of a much longer and systemic context of violence that Gazans have lived in. Physical insecurity, lack of ability to protect one’s family, lack of access to basic rights of movement (even for critical medical cases), vulnerability to internal violence, added to deep economic crisis are the dominant experience of all Gazans for almost a decade.

At the same time the causes, experiences of, and vulnerability to human rights violations and abuse are multi-layered. All Gazans regardless of age, gender or socio-economic status collectively suffer the effects of violations generated by external (albeit responsible) actors such as siege, sanctions, and military violence at the hands of the government of Israel. Within Gaza, however individuals are differentially vulnerable to a range of violations generated by internal actors. Rights can and often are violated due to reasons of political affiliation, gender, age, poverty and family or clan membership. Violators of rights can include, governmental authorities and their allied institutions (including everything from ministries, courts, the police, medical and educational staff); paramilitaries; local informal leaders; the extended family; individual family members and finally – humanitarian actors and organizations.

Both publications from this project are available on-line from UNIFEM so below are highlighted one specific issue – war widows and their children – and voices from the focus groups that explicate the transference of the violence of war and siege to the next generation, children.

### Protection Issues Facing War Widows and their Children

I have a problem with my husband’s family, his brothers went and wrote down our name to get assistance and they collect and keep all the money that should be for the wives and children of martyrs... Everytime there’s some help that comes, my husband’s family takes



it. I even hid my husband's car to keep it for my kids when they get older – but they found it and took it.

*Abir, war widow, age 35 and mother of, five children*

My father-in-law takes my husband's pension, he got people to put pressure on me to write him down as my executor, its 600 (US) and he only gives me and my children \$100 of it. On top of it, he and my husband's family take all the other assistance that we're supposed to get that charities give to wives of martyrs and their children.

*Fathiyeh age 58, war widow and mother of ten children*

My father-in-law takes all of the money that's supposed to come to me and my children and gives us only 100 shekels a week, 100 shekels can't begin to cover our needs... When assistance comes for us he makes sure he escorts me to the bank and after I've signed all the papers he takes the money and puts it in his pocket. I can't do anything about it, I'm scared from problems and scandal and more than anything I keep quiet so that I can keep custody of my children – they never stop threatening that they can take my children from me at any moment. My husband had a small shop, his family sold it and pocketed the money – my husband and I had sold all my gold to but that shop and now his family have taken everything.

*Asma, age 26, war widow and mother of five children*

The Israeli military action has created more than 800 new widows who along with their children face a range of new protection issues and challenges. Culturally and politically, war widows and orphans are extended formal material and moral support from political groups and the governing authorities, as well as informal support from the society at large. At the same time, in the extremely resource poor environment of Gaza, they are vulnerable to many of the same challenges faced by divorced women in terms of access to family property and child custody. The majority of war widows interviewed in focus groups faced major challenges to their rights from their deceased husband's family upon his death. These include fights, threats and manipulation by father and brother-in-laws to get control of pensions, martyr payments from the government, and existing bank accounts as well as movable assets (businesses, cars) and immovable property (housing). In no cases were physical violence used, but more prominently were threats that the widows would lose custody rights to their children. Many women were also put under pressure to marry brothers-in-law (another ruse to keep deceased husbands assets in the extended family), though all refused. A common refrain among war widows was that the hardest thing they faced was lack of protection, especially mentioned by women who did not have a son of legal maturity.

In these cases, the law as well as public opinion is with the widows and their children. For instance, one young widow consulted a religious leader who guaranteed her rights. The problem in these cases is social; widows do not want to bring shame on their children or the memory of their husband by going public (including to a court) with their problem. In addition, their children's belonging in the kin framework of Gaza is to their deceased father's family, if only in name. Thus, many widows prefer the long term security of good relations with their spouse's family for the future of their children, rather than material rights for them in the present. The majority of war widows, two months following the loss of their spouse, had left their husband's home if it belonged to their husband's extended family (which is theirs by legal and cultural right) and moved in with their own parents. Only one woman whose husband's home was separate and owned (bought or built) outright by him, remained living in it after his death. None of the women considered opening a legal case against their in-laws.

### **Findings on Psycho-Social Needs and Access**

My nine year old son has become out of control, he swears and lies and won't listen to anyone.

*Hanan, age 33, mother of five, home destroyed*

My son whose in third grade is most effected...he has nightmares and sleepwalks and can't stop remembering the war and what happened to us.

*Samira, mother of five, home destroyed*

My fourteen years old daughter witnessed the bombing and the killing of her father...she was turning over bodies in front of our door to see which was her father..In the beginning she wouldn't drink or eat..My three year old wets herself – when she wants something she promises that she won't wet herself..

*Saida, age 46, widow, mother of twelve, Shuja'iyya*

My youngest son is in kindergarten, he's in a really difficult situation, I speak to him and he doesn't reply, at the daycare he won't play with the other kids or on the swings – he won't interact with anyone.

*Asma widow, age 26, mother of four*

In contrast to the findings of the March 2009 UNIFEM survey, where it was found that men and women both saw themselves as suffering the most in terms of psychological effects of the war, two months later both seem to have shifted

their focus to the problems faced by their children – in particular their young children. Across Gaza, women and men both say the most affected groups are young children generally. The situation is said to be most acute among children who had lost an immediate family member as well as children living in front-line areas. While respondents didn't specify their ages when talking about young children it can be inferred from the material that they tend to be children from four to ten years of age. Men and women cited young children as the main family members suffering psychological effects from the war. However, the children cited as most critically suffering traumatic affects are those who have lost an immediate family member with many of them witnessing the event due to the nature of the war in which bombing did not distinguish between a battle area and civilian homes. Children of all ages who had lost a family member were cited as facing major problems. War widows were extremely concerned about their children's psychological health. The other categories were children who had been in areas where bombing or fighting was focused – these included; Jabaliya; the eastern villages of Khan Younis, areas of Gaza City, as well as Beit Lahiya.

That they focused on the needs of their children does not mean that women were immune to their own situation – many women also answered that they themselves continued to very affected – and that they suffered sadness, anxiety, and continuous fear of “a second war”.

# Honor Crimes and Audience Reception: Meaning Production and Gender Interpretations

**Benaz Somiry-Batrawi**

*Feminist media studies is a particularly dynamic field which has moved beyond earlier (although valuable) studies of media stereotyping to examine how audiences dynamically engage with media production. In this excerpt from her master's thesis at the University of Leicester, Somiry-Batrawi examines Palestinian audience reception to a 2008 documentary film by Palestinian filmmaker Bouthaina Khoury. Her complete thesis also examines a early version of a dramatic fictional film produced by the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counselling (now entitled *Mina u Fina*); her thesis in full is available from [www.arabwomanmedia.net](http://www.arabwomanmedia.net).*

## **Introduction**

Many civil society organizations in Palestine use television for the promotion of different concepts including democracy, justice, the rule of law, media, community development, and gender. This thesis aims at studying honor crimes presented in both drama and documentary film genres and the reception of television audiences: analysis of meaning construction and gender interpretations. It examines how audiences produce and interpret meanings, and whether or not interpretations are related to the audience's gender.

Honor crimes attract media attention on a national level, but the impact of media intervention has yet to be evaluated. Existing literature in the Arab region mainly focuses on textual analysis and not the relationship between the audience and the text. Therefore, this study will introduce new knowledge to the existing literature, provide women organizations and other relevant civil society bodies with a modest resource related to the impact of two educational films, and provide audience feedback on the impact of a drama film and a documentary, and assist in audience-text research projects.

## **Feminism and Media Studies**

The interest of academic feminism in studying TV and drama series in particular began in the mid seventies when feminists criticized drama content and its stereotype and emptiness. The three schools of feminism; liberal, radical and social agreed to consider media as the principal instrument to convey stereotypical, patriarchal and hegemonic values about women and femininity (Van Zoonen, 1996). This model is known as the Feminist Transmission Model of Communication. The common strategy for the three schools was to reflect the ideal world for women through media instead of reflecting the rejected reality. Good media served the feminism agenda, while bad media reinforced the status quo (Van Zoonen, 1996). As a result, feminists suggested the elimination of magazines, novels and soap operas from bad media, and replaced them with alternatives in good media. However, women continued to read and enjoy 'unfeminist' genres. Moreover, the suggestion to remove unacceptable media meant that feminists or supporters would be denied the access to understand and explain developments. Criticism about this feminist transmission model brought about cultural feminist media studies. Feminist and cultural studies used the gender concept and looked at it within Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding /decoding model. "The analysis of meaning production as cultural negotiation at the level of institutions, texts, and audiences builds on this model" (Van Zoonen, 1996:44). The concept of negotiated meaning and the stress on reception practices imply recognition for gender construction as a social process in which women and men are dynamically engaged. Furthermore, womanhood and manhood are both socially constructed where "audiences do not only take media as expressions of dominant culture, they also use media to express something about themselves, as women or as men," (Van Zoonen, 1996:46) and this will be further elaborated in this study.

### **What is a "honor" crime?**

The issue of honor crimes or 'femicide' as defined by Shalhoub-Kevorkian, (2004:21) "refers to any act of violence that gives girls or women the cause to for their lives under the banner of honor, being accused of conduct that implies engagement in a sexual behavior or act". This concept as well, is derived from the voices of the victims and refers to "the status of entering a death zone that stretches on a range from the feeling by the victim -or her aid- that she is under the threat of being killed, to the loss of the victims' life" (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2004:21).

The phenomenon of honor crimes has worrying indicators in the Palestinian society. In 2007 only, approximately twenty six women in West Bank and Gaza

Strip were killed under the banner of honor crimes.<sup>1</sup> “While between 2004 and 2006, forty-eight women and girls were reported killed, the youngest was twelve years old and the oldest was eighty five. Police investigations documented thirty-two cases of the forty-eight as ‘honor killings’, thirty victims were Moslems and two were Christians” (Palestinian NGOs against domestic violence against women, 2007:9)

As with any other Arab individual, a Palestinian individual does not live independently from social-cultural context. Marriage, divorce, inheritance, honor and other issues are collective matters that help to maintain or gain wealth and power. Therefore, there is a strong belief that an individual act of conduct can bring shame to the family, clan, tribe or the whole community. “Individuals have to conform to and promote the enforcement of social norms and honor codes that define what is considered to be honorable or dishonorable conduct” (Palestinian NGOs against Domestic violence against women, 2007:22). Men are expected to enforce such norms and traditions and protect family and male honor from shame. Women are expected to conduct themselves honorably.

Producers of the two films, subject to research in this dissertation, encoded preferred readings in their texts in order to break the taboo of honor crimes (Khoury, 2008) and to stimulate families’ sympathy to act rationally when tackling honors issues (Odeh, 2008). Audiences in turn, would make sense of film texts by reading, decoding, and interpreting the embedded messages based on cross cutting factors as gender identity, level of education, age, locality, and occupation in the overall Palestinian social cultural context.

## **Description of the Documentary Film “Maria’s Grotto”<sup>2</sup>**

The 45-minute documentary film directly addresses three stories of honor killing in the Palestinian society with a fourth story as a historical background. The historical story is about Maria, a Christian female from the West Bank village of Al-Taybeh, who was shot dead by revolutionists in 1936 because she was wrongly suspected of having an affair with a shepherd from the same village.

The second story is about Hiam, a 33-year old Moslem female, also from the Al-Taybeh village who, along with her unborn fetus, was poisoned and killed

1 In 2009, according to the Independent Commission for Human Rights, the number of these killings was 9, five in Gaza and four in the West Bank (excluding Jerusalem) – Editor’s note.

2 This film was produced and directed by Bothayna Khoury, an independent film maker, in 2008. Because of its sensitivity and critic, the film faced a considerable resistance by the community after the first public screen in Al Qasaba Theater in Ramallah city. Therefore, it was used in this study after long negotiations and after one scene was re-edited as a result of public pressure on the director.



by her brothers for carrying an illegitimate child. Her family accused Mahdi, a 38-year-old married Christian, who was arrested for six months.

The third story is about an anonymous female survivor from a village, who was stabbed seven times by her brother in reaction to rumors about her sexual conduct. The woman goes on to marry and have a son but discusses irreversible wounds to her body and soul. Her brother also explains his regrets and the pressure he was put under.

The fourth story is from Al-Lod, a Palestinian city inside Israel, where Abeer, a young female rapper in her twenties, is considered to behave inappropriately. Her extended family prohibits her from singing on stage with men, although her mom and sister support her. She abides by their demands, but does continue singing.

The last scene of the film is dark and depressing. Most characters are shown to be leaving their villages and the singer is struggling to achieve her dream.

## **Sampling and Focus Groups**

A total of twenty-three men and women, all above 18-years old, was selected and formed into groups. Each group spent half a day viewing the film. Three viewing groups were constituted, varying not only in gender but also in terms of age, level of education, occupation, religion and locality. The variation was important to determine how different audiences make sense of what they are watching.

After watching the film and filling in the questionnaire, the discussion and comments related to the film began quickly. Participants later were asked to offer interpretations for specific issues such as the main messages that the film tried to convey in general, the realism of the stories, and the emotional impact of watching the film.. The definition of 'honor', its connectedness to sexual behavior, and the wide-ranging sympathy with the three main characters in the documentary film was intriguing. Participants brought up relevant stories from their social contexts during the discussions which continued after the allotted time.

## **Maria's Grotto: Meaning Construction and Gender Interpretations**

The documentary film<sup>3</sup> depicted four victims; Maria, Hiam, the Survivor who appeared in anonymity, and Abeer. All participants felt sorry about Maria's murder, while most of them considered Hiam as an ideal victim, with the exception of two men who asserted that if she got pregnant out of marriage then she deserved to

3 See above- film description

die. *"We have been raised this way; females are not like males who have the right to do anything. If she makes such a mistake, she should die"* commented a man from Tubas village with a Bachelor's degree. The same man insisted the Survivor *"should also die"* although the group agreed she was a victim. Abeer got the admiration and respect of all participants except for one participant in the men's group who saw her importing cultural perceptions by singing rap songs. This man, who comes from Beit Reema village who holds a BA degree, strongly rejected Abeer's choice *"she judged her society by using foreign values and tools; she should not forget who she is"*. Women participants sympathized and defended the victims while male participants investigated the causes of the violence or threats, and scaled victims in accordance to who deserves more compassion<sup>4</sup> and why.

## Victim Identification

Women's opinions differed in the case of this film. One woman identified with all victims, a second identified with Abeer, and the third identified with none of the victims. In the mixed group one woman from Ramallah city who holds a Master's degree said, *"I could see myself in Abeer, there are dreams and ambitions that an individual wants to achieve but the society constrains her from achieving them"*. Similarly 50% of the men identified with the victims, two men identified with all, two others with Abeer, one with the Survivor, and the remaining 50% could not identify with any. The man with an elementary school education from Beit Dajan village said *"I could see myself with the Survivor, I imagined her being my sister, a man should seek the truth before doing anything, as our society is not merciful"*.

50% of the male participants could identify with the victims in the documentary film, while in the drama film none did. Literature stresses that men interact more with facts. The remaining 50% of the men still seem to find it difficult for their masculine identity to identify with any female victim and see the 'honor victims' as a woman's issue.

Women identified with the victims but could not relate to any other characters in the film, while most men had different opinions. One man related to Mahdi, the suspected perpetrator. Two men related to the Survivor's brother *"I related to the Survivor's brother because he tried to kill her to clean the shame, he did the right thing, and should not regret his act"* said a resident of Tubas with a Bachelor's degree from the men's group. Two men related to Abeer, four related to no one. In the men's group, a resident of Bir Zeit village with a Bachelor's degree wrote,

4 For gendered compassion please see Birgitta Hojjer (2004) The discourse of global compassion: the audience and media reporting of human suffering. *Media, culture and society*, (26) 4, pp513-531. Retrieved March 14th., 2008 from personal communication: Dr. Simon Cottle.

*“I can’t relate because situations and people become different”*, while two men wrote no answers.

Compared to the WCLAC-produced drama film about 50% of the men could relate to some characters in documentary, while in the drama almost none did. No female participants related to any character in the documentary, but 70% related to the drama. Every man in the 50% could relate to someone who is similar to his social and cultural context more deeply than to characters with similar ideological discourse and ethical conduct.

## Sympathy

All women showed sympathy with all victims without specifying, while most men were more specific about their sympathy. A woman in the mixed group who holds a Master’s degree and lives in Ramallah said *“I felt sympathy with every victim, in addition to Mahdi and his family”*. Five men sympathized with all victims, one man specifically with Maria, another with Abeer, and a man in the mixed group from Beit Reema village said *“I sympathize with Abeer ‘the rapper’ she has a different life vision than others, whereas the society interferes and limits the freedom of people”*. While two sympathized with the Survivor, one did not feel any sympathy towards any of the victims and one man did not answer the question. It is clear that women empathized with all victims, regardless of the causes and motivations. Whereas 50% of men evaluate the victims based on a scale that differs from one case to another. Apparently men’s sympathy are conditional when comes to honor issue.

## Opinions About Perpetrators

In the documentary, Mahdi, accused of adultery and fathering an illegitimate child – later proven innocent – was clearly shown on screen. The face of the Survivor’s brother was, upon his request, covered on screen. All male and female participants except two, concluded that Mahdi was unfairly treated. He had been assumed guilty and his house and business were burnt to the ground. Two men saw him guilty to some extent, *“I think he had to do something with Hiam, otherwise would not be a suspect”*, said a participant with a Bachelor’s degree in the men’s group from Birzeit village. Another participant, a Master’s degree student from Beit Reema village, in the same group commented, *“He deserved what he got, when tribal law proved his innocence and the paternity test showed no relation to Hiam’s pregnancy, he should have asked for compensation from her family”*.

The Survivor’s brother, who used to beat her aggressively when hearing any

rumors about her sexual conduct, ended by stabbing her seven times. Women and men almost agreed that he should have sought the truth before beating her. Women condemned his behavior with no excuses. One woman in the mixed group who is from Gaza and holds a Bachelor's degree said *"After hearing his regret, I do not give him any excuse, but I can imagine all the pressure and internal emotions that he went through"*. Most male participants tried to justify his angry behavior by blaming the pressure that came from his community when rumors spread about his sister. *"In the beginning when hearing about beating his sister I hated him, but when I heard his remorse, I felt sympathy with him because he was self critical"* said one man in the mixed group from Azmout village with a Master's degree. Women did not, and could not find excuses for abusers, while men were searching for reasons to "protect themselves against the myth of violence as specific male characteristics" (Hojjer, 2004:526).

### **Personal Experiences**

Women showed no personal experience, the woman from Gaza city said *"No, thank God, I do not have any"*. Three men out of eleven said they had a personal experience, the man with an elementary school education said *"my female neighbor was accused of having a relationship on the phone, but it turned to be just rumors, a man should not rush before doing any act"*. One man said that he once was asked for an advice from woman who was harassed. A man from Azmout talked about standing up for his beliefs *"The community in my village was very conservative ten years ago, and I was a communist, people did not accept me and tried to harass my father when going to pray in the mosque"*.

### **Most Effective Scenes**

Several scenes affected the participants. One woman was affected by all the scenes, another woman from Ramallah city with a Master's degree talked about *"the fetus that was dropped from the equation with no fault"*. Three men spoke about the anonymity of Hiam and her fetus, two spoke of Mahdi's mother-frantically searching for her son in prisons while knowing his home was burnt down, two spoke of tribal reconciliation, one spoke of the Survivor discussing her trauma. One man was affected by all scenes, one was mostly affected when Mahdi's family left emigrated, and one was affected when the Survivor said that no one listened to her complaints. In the mixed group, a man wrote, *"I was mostly affected by the collective pain"*. In regards to the effective scenes, men were more moved than women as the scenes touched multi dimensions of their lives.

## Conflict Resolutions

Mahdi emigrated to avoid the negative attitude of his community. The Survivor, who went on to marry and give birth, also relocated. Abeer decided to continue rapping despite her community's rejection and threats. Two women accepted Mahdi and the Survivor's resolution of the conflict. One of these women said *"If it happened to me, I couldn't face the community, I would take the easiest solution by leaving and not confronting the community on a daily basis."* Three men did not agree with Mahdi's solution. One man said, *"when a person walks in the right direction, and does not do anything wrong from his point of view, I see here traditions and habits are not essentials"*. Another man said, *"I would neither surrender by killing nor challenge the society by staying, if it happened to my sister, I would take her immediately and leave to another place where I could live anonymously."* The rest saw Mahdi and the Survivor's solutions as predictable and acceptable under the society's pressure.

All men complemented Abeer's decision to challenge her community, but two questioned her negotiating tool and said that she should have used other acceptable tools to confront negative phenomena in her society. A man in the mixed said *"she can use another tool like a documentary film in order to convey her message, we should understand the society we are living in. There is not only one tool to reach people"*. Regardless of their gender, participants viewed solutions from within their social-cultural perspectives and their abilities to confront the society. Most men and two women referred peoples' behaviors and attitudes to the pressure of society and the deeply-rooted traditions but not religion, taking into consideration the double burden on women rather than on the privileged men.

## Honor as a Moral Category

In the Palestinian social and cultural context, "the notion of 'honor' is viewed as a collective rather than an individual concern, which makes preserving or cleansing it from shame a responsibility of the community as manifested in social pressure" (Palestinian NGOs against domestic violence against women, 2007: 45). Again, women define honor as a matter of high values and decent conduct. In the Palestinian society 'honor' is mainly linked to sexual behavior which women find it unacceptable. The participant from Gaza summarized her opinion by saying *"Looking at 'honor' only as a sexual behavior is a symbol of backwardness"*. The majority of men participants related 'honor' to values and conduct and connected it to loyalty for home. *"For me 'honor' means not to be a collaborator with Israel, or not to be corrupt. 'Honor' means a lot more than sexual connotations"* explained a male participant from Al-Bireh city with a Master's degree. Two men, who are originally from villages in the north of the West Bank, connected honor to sexual

conduct. A man with a Bachelor's degree residing in Toubas village said, *"This is how I was raised, even though I have been living in the city for ten years now, when I go to my home village, I act like them and be one of them"*. The man from Beit Dajan with an elementary school education said, *"to be called, a collaborator with Israel, or a thief, is considered easier than being called a whore, this is honor, not a game"*.

## Opinions Re-Assessment

None of the women had reassessed her opinion, while three men had changed their minds regarding specific points. The male Master's degree student from Beit Reema village, studying for his Master's degree changed his view, *"After watching the two films, I changed my mind, if the extended family one day decided to kill one of its females, I will stand against them, they cannot do so"*. The man from Al-Jalazoun camp also reconsidered his view *"Considering all the discussion, I am now very sure that honor killing is not a solution, on the contrary the community will always remember the issue and shame will stay with children and grandchildren"*. The man from Al-Bireh said, *"I found that we still have long way to go in order to bury the honor killing phenomenon, a third party has to intervene"*. Women already have a background and formed opinions and felt they did not need to reassess their views, while some men were informed by the discussion and commented immediately on how the discussion affected their views.

It was clear that documentary film raised a heated discussion among participants creating varied and contradicting meanings, and consequently different decoding positions. Audiences expressed the reason behind it, as characters were real as well as the stories, and they felt the characters living among them.

## Major Differences among Male and Female Interpretations

As stated earlier in this study, determinant factors in meaning construction and messages decoding are gender, locality, academic background and the social-cultural context. Discussions in the focus groups revealed a high degree of consensus about the main meanings of images and narratives, and showed the level of cleverness people bring to the readings of such representations.. Janice Radway, 1984-1987 concluded that women practice an act of protest in the patriarchal culture when reading romance, this study shows that women practice an act of protesting when constructing meanings and interpreting honor crimes texts that are against the mainstream culture. Consequently, regardless of determinant factors, women were against femicide under any circumstances, while men were more yielding. Some women equally condemned both individuals involved in an illegitimate sexual relationship, while two men asserted that only females should be condemned.



Despite their understanding of the right for life, the majority of men, except for three, asserted loudly that they could not defend it when a woman's sexual conduct is brought to question. Because honor is a collective matter, if the clan gathers and decides to kill a female for disgracing the family's honor, no one can question their decision. "*I cannot do anything to stop it if she is an adulteress, I am from a village, the traditions and norms dominate our acts and if a female does it, she should be killed*", the man from Tubas village said. Men and women, except two men, sympathized with the victims in both genres, but the degree differed from one victim to another. Men's sympathy was related to the extent of victim's misconduct. Men were mostly affected by documentary genre, while most women felt both had the same effectiveness. Three women revealed personal experiences after watching the drama while three men talked about personal experiences after watching the documentary. Men and women differed in their opinions on conflict resolution/narrative, but agreed that social pressure is the culprit. All participants, except two men, connected 'honor' to decent conduct, good morals, honesty and nationalism.

In conclusion, religious and civic law are not the only determinant factors when it comes to meaning construction, interpretations and message decoding of honor crimes, but audience bring other resources to bear on their interpretations and discourse such as traditions, norms, and social order that are considered the most determinant factors in this process. Not one man in the discussions stated that women should not be judged, have the absolute right to own and control their bodies, and the right to live without the fear of death as punishment.

## **Messages Decoding - Ideological Questioning and Opposition**

Gathered data show a high degree of consensus about the fundamental messages of the two films; fighting violence against women (Khoury, 2008) and raising awareness about the right for life (Odeh, 2008). Most people tend to show considerable skill and a shared cultural understanding in interpreting multifaceted messages conveyed by the style of genre (Kitzinger, 2004:178). Although messages may be read in the same way, the decoding term may differ when a reader takes a position. One man expressed denial when watching the incest scene in the drama film by saying, "*the case is extreme, the director is exaggerating, incest does not happen often in the Palestinian society*". In the case of Hiam and her unborn child, two men understood the right to life on cognitive level, but opposed it ideologically (Hojjer, 1998) saying that she deserved to die for getting illegitimately pregnant. All participants agreed that honor crimes are a complex issue, and solutions such as public awareness campaigns and parenting courses should be introduced to stop such crimes.

**References**

- Hojjer, B. (1998) Social psychological perspectives in reception analysis. In Dickinson, R. Harindranath, R. LINNE, O (Eds.). Pp166-184, London: Arnold. Reprinted in *Approaches to audiences* reader of the (MA in Mass Communications by Distance Learning) Center for Mass Communication Research, University of Leicester, United Kingdom.
- Hojjer, B. (2004) The discourse of global compassion: the audience and media reporting of human suffering. *Media, culture and society*, (26) 4, PP513-531. Retrieved March 14th., 2008 from personal communication: Dr. Simon Cottle.
- Kervorkian-Shalhoub, N. (2001) *Women's killing in the Palestinian Society: Investigative and Analytical Study Palestine Ramallah: Women's center for legal aid and Counseling.*
- Khoury, B. (22/2/2008) Interview with the researcher.
- Kitzinger, J. (2004) *Framing Abuse- Media Influence and Public Understanding of Sexual Violence Against Children* London: Pluto Press.
- Morely, D. (1980) *The Nationwide Audience* London: British Film Institute.
- Odeh, S. (23/2/2008) Interview with the researcher.
- Palestinian Non Governmental Organizations Against Domestic Violence Against Women. (2007) *Honor crimes in Palestine from 2004-2006* Ramallah: Forum.
- Palestinian Non Governmental Organizations Against Domestic Violence Against Women (March, 2008) *Honor Killing Crimes: Forum Report of 2007* Ramallah: Forum.
- Radway, J. (1987) Reading the romance. In *Reading the romance: women, patriarchy, and popular culture* Pp.10-15, London: Verso. Reprinted in the *Approaches to Media* reader of the (MA in Mass Communications by Distance Learning) Center for Mass Communication Research, University of Leicester, United Kingdom.
- Wimmer, R. and Dominick, J. (1997) *Mass Media Research*. California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Zoonen, L. (1996) Feminist perspective on media. pp.31-52 in Curran, J. and Gurevich, M. (Ed.). (1996). *Mass Media and Society* London: Arnold.

