

**The cause,
the history,
the women**

Palestine





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**ON LAND,
PALESTINIAN WOMEN
AND THE STRUGGLES
OF GENOCIDAL WAR**

Roula Abu Daho


On land, Palestinian women and the struggles of genocidal war

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"Peace to Gaza, peace... to every sorrowful eye shedding tears of pain and pride... to the resilient people who witness hardships day after day... Peace to Gaza beyond borders... to the child who perished in the bombings... to the mother struggling on and the young man whose blood boils with fervor... to Gaza, a people besieged... Peace to Gaza, peace."

As women around the world celebrate International Women's Day on March 8, Palestinian women carry their cross and walk the path of suffering in the face of a genocide targeting humans, rocks and trees in Gaza, Jenin and Tulkarm.

March is different in Palestine: it is the month of Land Day, commemorating the martyrs, the war of dignity and Palestinian women and mothers. Here, we do not celebrate the arrival of spring as more martyrs' blood is shed. This year,



the blood of Gaza, of its women and children, old and young, flows over all the land. There is no need for red roses: our red blood is our gift for freedom and resilience in the face of Zionist genocide.


For the last six months, the Zionist colonial occupation has been waging a genocidal war on Gaza. The targets of this genocide are not only the Palestinian people, over 32,000 of whom have been martyred and more than 8,000 have gone missing under the rubble, most of whom are women and children, but also the trees, rocks and every single aspect of Palestinian life. This is not just a passing war; it is a colonial genocide aimed at eliminating future opportunities for life and survival. There are no hospitals, no universities, no schools, no infrastructure, no water and no electricity... Gaza has been left in ruins, its air saturated with all kinds of gases and poisons emitted by the planes and cannons that bring death.

On the path of pain, the women of Gaza march as the unborn fetuses in their wombs are targeted. A woman gives birth alone as the bombs fall, but there are no scissors to cut the secret bond with her child. She carries the baby and the umbilical cord, dodging shells, until she

reaches the hospital, driven by motherhood's determination. She defies Gaza's subordination by birthing a new child as an act of resistance against genocide. Women are arrested, stripped, harassed and tortured, while the hypocritical world, despite boasting about women's rights, remains silent as death and destruction reign. All the treaties, agendas and women's conferences in faraway capitals in the Global North are hypocritically forgotten! Amid the roar of planes, women fight to survive and resist the killing machine and its attempted genocide, striving to forge the conditions for life and resilience. They resist the policy of displacement imposed on northern Gaza by the occupying army, where women remain as they attempt to rebuild their lives amid the rubble of their ruined homes, striving not just to live but to fight back against the colonizer who refuses to die and continues to oppress.

As for the women in displacement camps, they have chosen to stay amid bitter cold and driving rain rather than seek refuge again. There has been no other migration since the catastrophe of 1948. Palestinians have learned their lesson: we die here, we do not leave.


Media outlets circulate images of women



rushing away carrying their children and a few basic items before their homes are struck by shelling. These images show strong women, who have always been marginalized and underestimated by an imperialist international society and its liberal culture on the pretext of incapacity. It claims to defend women against a culture of violence, yet any violence in this vast world can be traced directly to the violence of the colonizer, who commits the most brutal acts of genocide and destruction against humans and the land.

But the women of Gaza are challenging the world of genocide, the world of the fascist imperialist North, through their resilience, resistance and survival. They are among the defiant women of the South and they are honored to belong to Palestine, its land and every grain of its soil.

Image after image of displacement, resilience and constant resistance to reclaim life are circulating. There is an image on social media of a woman watering some plants she sowed in front of her tent. Rather than beautifying genocide or the humanitarian disaster that has befallen her and her family, she plants hope and brings life to the land. Land and woman: the dialectical



relationship is intensified in Gaza, with a woman who refuses defeat and a land that grants life.

The colonial mentality we are facing in our existential battle is fundamentally shaped by demographics and conflict over land. It recognizes women as life-givers and has targeted them in war after war. Targeting women differs in intention from the daily bombardments; it is a deliberate attempt to annihilate women's lives and make it impossible for them to bear more Palestinians and tighten control over the land. How can this be denied when one of the founding slogans of the Zionist entity is "a land without a people for a people without a land"? Zionist colonialism sees this as an opportune moment to kill women and prevent the birth of new lives, just as it destroys life itself, no matter whether it is human, plant or animal.

As the genocide fails to progress through displacement or surrender, hunger comes to prey on the weak and exhausted bodies of war. Today, women search the soil for something to feed their children, even if it is only a small bite to keep their hope alive.

The path never ends, the woman can never put down her cross and the land has no respite

from the shudder as the shells land. This is the condition of Palestinian women on Land Day and the condition of Palestinian land on Women's Day.

But as our ancestors' wisdom dictates: "No one plows the land except its calves". We are the sons and daughters of this land, our blood and flesh are its water and fertilizer and we shall have nothing but victory and freedom.

Finally, as we pledge to the morning sun every day, we, the women of Palestine, vow not to yield. May the genocidal storm pass over our bodies, for we will remain here, steadfast above the rubble and beneath the debris. Like the phoenix, we will rise again and resistance is our choice to break the chains of colonialism and reclaim our freedom.

Nama Hassan from Gaza wrote the following words about the war in her diary:

"This is how we soothe war to sleep.
I want to hear the school bell.
Draw a line on the empty bread bag,
Clap loudly for the morning whistle.
Put water in a jar before it runs out.
That's what the teacher said.
Repeat the anthem of my homeland.
The chant in the tent goes unheard.
No books in my possession.
I wanted to make a pot of tea
Before winter came.
The words stir the embers.
Where is my mother?
I've grown up
searching for her in the rubble.
That's the first lesson."



24 Hours of Feminist **Solidarity** Action for **Palestine**

March 30, 2024



World
March of
Women



**COMMEMORATING
LAND DAY: THE
CONTINUATION OF
THE ZIONIST
DISPLACEMENT
PROJECT**


Jibreel Mohammad

Commemorating Land Day: the continuation of the Zionist displacement project

Jibreel Mohammad

Introduction

Did Rabin really want to go to sleep one night and wake up to find Gaza swallowed by the sea, or were those waking dreams stemming from a political unconscious rooted in the Zionist expulsionist instinct? Invaders and settlers map out their dreams in acts and crimes. The more Zionism senses the decline of its star, the more its criminal instinct emerges from its political unconscious to become the dominant force behind all its crimes. Zionists view killing the vanquished as their legitimate right, sanctioned by a holy book. Instead of conjuring images of the vampire Dracula, Netanyahu returned to his Torah and embodied the shield and sword of Joshua, son of Nun, who destroyed humans, trees, livestock and every living thing in Jericho. He had no need for Dracula; his heritage equipped him with the ability to commit crime. This is why he felt no shame or remorse when signing annihilation



decrees or when tying his personal fate to the death or deportation of an entire people.

This is the essence of Zionist expulsionist thought and Zionist practices intersect with all barbaric practices throughout ancient, modern and contemporary history, from the crimes of Joshua and the extermination of indigenous citizens in America through to the middle and southern regions of Africa and the slave trade in the Enlightenment era. This is colonialism driven solely by profit, power and control as it seeks to maximize its gains.


In this paper, we will explore displacement as a foundational concept of Zionism and identify the ways in which this idea is reflected in the practices of killing, displacement, land seizure and population replacement in Palestine. Drawing on historical evidence rather than hearsay, we will demonstrate the genocidal nature of Zionism and its political entity in Palestine and at the heart of the Arab homeland.

There is no space here to detail every crime of Zionist displacement, so we will focus on the history of displacement from the first time the Zionists set foot on Palestinian land to the present day, when the future remains uncertain.

The suffering of an entire people uprooted from their land is evident in images of people fleeing to the mountains and valleys. This is the image of the Palestinian people, who still carry the rock of Prometheus and strive to reach the peaks of freedom. The Palestinian people have proven themselves to be truly resilient and worthy of their dream of freedom. They have proven this each time a martyr falls or a person is injured and they persist in pursuing the summit of freedom despite the burden of human suffering. They have proven themselves to be deserving of this freedom and they will achieve it.

Commemorating the immortal Land Day


The uprising on March 30, 1976 was the culmination of a period of escalating land confiscation and displacement. As well as Palestinians in the 1948 areas, Palestinians from the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem were also suffering from escalating land confiscation. The visibility of the uprising in the 1948 areas, where six sons of Galilee and the Triangle were martyred, marked the beginning of a violent response from the occupying authority towards this section of the Palestinian population. It was the first time since the Nakba in 1948 that



bloodshed had occurred on such a scale. Thus, March 30 became recognized as a national Land Day, not only for the Palestinians of 1948 but for the entire Palestinian people. It even came to be commemorated in many Arab countries and is deeply ingrained in the consciousness of a whole nation.

The practices that triggered the Land Day uprising were driven by Zionist perceptions of demographic threat, especially in the Galilee region, which was predominantly inhabited by Palestinian Arabs in relatively large villages and towns, as well as the purely Arab capital, Nazareth. A significant proportion of citizens also persevered in the cities of Haifa and Acre.

The Zionist perception of demographic threat was expressed in the Kenning Document, which was issued by Israel Kenning, governor of the Galilee District at the time. The document highlighted the growth of the Palestinian Arab population in the 1948 areas, especially the Galilee region, extending from Nazareth in the south to the border with the Syrian Golan Heights and Lebanon in the north. His document proposed what became known as the 'Judaizing Galilee' project. It began with the seizure of thousands of dunams belonging to the villages of Arraba,



Barta'a, Deir Hanna and Sakhnin (known in colloquial Arabic among local farmers as the 'al-Mal lands') in Region 9 according to Israeli plans.

The Judaizing Galilee project did not include plans to deport the residents of Galilee. Palestinians in this area thwarted any attempt in this regard through their resilience and passive resistance over the decades spanning 1948-1976. As a result of their steadfastness, by 1948, around 160,000 Palestinian Arabs remained on their land within the Zionist entity. They were subjected to direct military rule until 1966. The number of Arab citizens within the 1948 areas on the eve of Land Day was estimated at around 600,000, residing in Galilee, the Triangle and a coastal strip stretching from southern Haifa to the outskirts of Jaffa and the Negev, in addition to cities like Haifa, Acre, Jaffa, Lod and Ramla and small villages on the outskirts of West Jerusalem (such as Abu Ghosh, Beit Safafa, Beit Nekuba, Ein Rafa and Beit Jimal).

Alongside Zionist violence, this period saw a national awakening in historic Palestine. This is apparent in the recognition by the United Nations General Assembly of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian

people two years before Land Day. There was ongoing communication between Arab forces in the 1948 areas and Palestinian forces in the West Bank and Gaza. Arab bodies were formed, such as the Land Defense Committee, which led the Land Day uprising. The Nazareth Front was able to break the Zionist Labor Party's monopoly over the municipality, as the Communist Tawfiq Ziad was elected mayor. This marked the beginning of a process to counter Zionist plans and the infiltration of Zionist parties into Arab circles, leading to the slogan "Sweep Zionist parties off Arab streets". This period also saw a resurgence of Palestinian identity among citizens of the 1948 areas, expressed through various forms of popular political, cultural and social organization.


But did the Zionist project cease its efforts to displace Palestinians from their land or was this part of the project to enact the slogan proposed by Chaim Weizmann and others as a vision for the Jewish state: "Israel Jewish as Britain British"? All evidence shows that plans to uproot Palestinians from their land were not set aside during the Arab-Israeli conflict. Although these efforts eased at times, they persisted at others and remained an integral part of the Zionist consensus. Israeli laws have all sought to affirm the Jewish character of the Zionist entity,

culminating in the Nation-State Law passed by the Knesset in 2018 during Netanyahu's government. The law declares that "The State of Israel is the national home of the Jewish people, in which it fulfills its natural, cultural, religious and historical right to self-determination".

This law came as the culmination of practical actions on the ground by the Zionist entity. Although the law does not explicitly mention the displacement of Palestinian Arabs, the establishment of a purely Jewish state cannot be achieved in practice without removing the non-Jewish population.

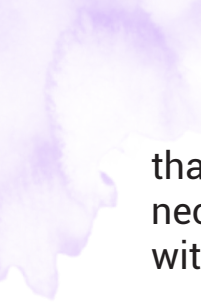
Displacement as a cornerstone of Zionist ideology

Zionist ideology is built on a fundamentally flawed idea, which serves as justification for all its campaigns in Palestine: "A land without a people for a people without a land". This notion is based on the assumption that the land of Palestine was empty, despite the existence of an indigenous population who had lived there and formed their identity over the ages. Their relationship with the land was continuous and had cultural and civilizational implications. Palestine had never been separated from its land. However,



the relationship between the Jewish community and Palestine was severed more than once, with the most significant disruption occurring after they were expelled from Jerusalem by Hadrian in 70 AD. Jews had no political power or religious authority in Palestine at that time. The Zionist movement, aligned with Western colonialism, then created the myth of the Promised Land as a moral incentive for Jews in Europe to migrate from countries accused of anti-Semitism.

These myths were used as the foundation for populist Zionism, while the founders of practical Zionism, including Herzl and Weizmann, showed no interest in them except insofar as they served their secular Zionist project. Zionism, according to Raef Zreiq, is based on the principle of “the negation of exile and the negation of non-Jewish existence in Palestine”. This entailed displacing or expelling Palestinians from Palestine to make it a national homeland with a Jewish majority, with Palestinians viewed as a barrier between Jews and the land of Israel. Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, on the other hand, explains that Palestinians in Palestine became surplus inhabitants to be disposed of in the Zionist consciousness. He dismisses the notion that the Zionist leadership was unaware of the existence of the original Palestinian population as nonsense. He argues



that the liquidation of Palestinians became necessary because Zionism desired a land without inhabitants.

Raz-Krakotzkin also points out that eliminating the history of the country's indigenous people is a prerequisite for identity formation. In schools, the history of the conflict is taught as a separate subject from the topic of Jewish settlement. Palestinians only appear in moments of crisis, as a barrier to the settlement process and Zionist redemption.

These thoughts emerged decades ahead of the awakening of new Jewish historians like Ilan Pappé, who exposed the process of ethnic cleansing in Palestine, among others. The issue has not been completely overlooked by Zionist intellectuals. Meanwhile, Zionist practices reflect the original intellectual trend towards displacement and ethnic cleansing, either through violent, direct means or non-violent, indirect means.

It is important to review the displacement and ethnic cleansing operations targeting Palestinians since the Zionist project was established in Palestine as a colonial settlement movement sponsored by Britain, which facilitated

all means of displacing Palestinians for the Zionist movement before it turned into a settler state.

In the beginning, there was displacement

The process of Palestinian displacement began with the onset of Zionist colonization in the late 19th century. The first displacement operation occurred in 1890 under Ottoman rule, with the arrival of Jewish settlers from Russia who established the first settlement in Palestine in the area of Rehovot.

The arrival of Russian settlers was sudden and shocking to the residents of the village of Ein Harod. They did not understand the Russian settlers' claim that they had bought the land and were now its owners. The villagers were told to demolish their homes and leave their village and land, which was still cultivated and its crops not yet harvested. They complained about their forced displacement to the Ottoman authorities, stating "The wealthy Jewish buyers... did not stop there. They began to expel us from our dwellings and prevent us from plowing and working the land".

After the initial displacement in Ayyun Qara during the 19th century, in the early 20th century,

the residents of the village of Zamarin were deported when the Zichron Yaakov settlement was established south of Haifa, leading to the complete disappearance of the village in 1943. Following the end of World War I, the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate charter under British colonization committed to a series of displacement operations targeting Palestinian farmers. Villages such as Afula, Tel al-Adas, Al-Fula and others in the Marj Ibn Amer region (22 villages) were evacuated. The residents of these villages pleaded with the British colonial authorities to allow them to return, but Britain set its military and police forces on them.

Besides Marj Ibn Amer, the settlers collaborated with the British colonial authorities to deport the Arabs of Al-Hawarith from the area of Khudeira and Umm Khalid in 1933.

The great displacement during the Nakba

The Zionist movement developed Plan Dalet to seize Palestinian land after the partition decision. This plan aimed to combine land appropriation with expulsion of Arab inhabitants, seeking to control as much Palestinian territory and displace as many Palestinians as possible, imposing a policy of fait accompli on the ground.



According to the plan, the 'Palmach' organization was tasked with launching intense, violent attacks on enemy bases within the country with military force of no less than one battalion. Additionally, they were instructed to attack enemy bases outside the country in the event of an enemy invasion.

Despite Israeli historians denying that the plan included the expulsion of Palestinian Arabs from their land among its undisclosed objectives, all historical evidence indicates that this was the case. Plan Dalet was inherently violent and led to numerous massacres with the aim of displacement. The number of documented massacres reached 34, including 24 in the Galilee region, five in central Palestine and five in the southern region. Seventeen massacres were carried out while British forces were present before 1948, without any significant intervention, and 17 more after the end of the British Mandate. Among the most famous massacres were the Deir Yassin massacre, the Tantura massacre, the villages of Balad al-Sheikh, Safsaf, Ailut and Arab al-Mawassi. However, the most heinous massacres were the Dawayima massacre and the horrific massacre in the village of Tira Haifa, where innocent people were burned alive in the fields.

Zionist gangs also used propaganda campaigns and psychological warfare, in addition to massacres, with the aim of deporting the Palestinian population. These campaigns reinforced the massacres in sowing terror among citizens of Arab cities and villages. Between massacres and psychological warfare, 850,000 Palestinians were displaced.

Displacement continued after the Nakba

Following the major displacement in 1948, only 160,000 Palestinians remained on their land, concentrated in four regional areas: Galilee, the Triangle, the Negev and what remained of the Arab population in the main occupied cities, such as Acre, Haifa, Jaffa, Lod and Ramla. Despite this, displacing those who remained was still on the Zionist agenda. This was evident from the plans put forth by the new Zionist government, which aimed either to eradicate, consolidate or control the Palestinian population.

Eradication was achieved through two methods. The first was to displace Palestinians from Palestine or to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, where they would live with earlier refugees. In the second, the remaining population in smaller villages was relocated to other villages.

This occurred in villages like Safuriya, whose inhabitants were displaced to Nazareth and Shfaram, as well as Mi'ar, Al-Bassa, Al-Burj, Deir al-Qassi, Sa'sa', Ein Hawd and some Bedouin villages in the Negev.

Outside the borders of the established state, the remaining inhabitants of the town of Majdal were expelled in 1950 following ceasefire agreements with Arab countries. In the same year, Israeli occupation forces expelled all the inhabitants of the demilitarized area in Uja al-Hafeer (Negev) to Egyptian territory.

A document published by the Israeli Akevot Institute revealed that after the Nakba, plans were made to deport the remaining Palestinians within the boundaries of the newly established Zionist state or to transfer the remaining inhabitants of some villages in eastern Galilee to other villages. In 1950, the Transfer Committee was formed to continue deportation, albeit under a euphemistic name. Besides deportation, the committee's objective was to facilitate land confiscation and settlement, as occurred in villages such as Mi'ar, Al-Burj and Al-Bassa in Galilee. Additionally, several Bedouin communities, such as the Bakara tribes south of Tiberias, were relocated to Jordan after the Nakba. The remaining inhabitants of



Majdal were also deported to Gaza after the ceasefire with Egypt in 1950.

Displacement as a result of the 1967 war

According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), researchers estimate the number of displaced persons as a result of the June 1967 war to be more than 300,000 displaced and homeless individuals, including approximately 120,000 Palestinian refugees. As part of the displacement operations, villages occupied in 1967 were annexed, such as the villages of Al-Latrun (Amwas, Yalu, Beit Nuba) northwest of Jerusalem, and the Moroccan Quarter in the city of Jerusalem was evacuated.

Internationally, displaced persons are defined as a group of residents of the occupied territories who were displaced during the June 1967 war. This includes residents of the three villages (Amwas, Yalu and Beit Nuba) that were evacuated by the occupying forces. Additionally, people displaced by the 1967 war can be classified into several categories, including those who fled out of fear of the new occupation (most of whom were concentrated in the Hebron area) and migrated to the east of Jordan, as well as

military and civilian employees of the Jordanian government who worked in the West Bank and were not allowed to return. There are also workers in Jordan, the Gulf countries and other countries.

Displaced persons also include individuals who, due to Israeli military and administrative orders, were prevented from returning to their permanent place of residence in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jerusalem despite having identity cards issued by the military occupation authorities and leaving with permits or Israeli travel documents that expired before they were able to return. Another category includes individuals who were forcibly deported outside the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jerusalem for explicit security reasons or other reasons.

An important category of displaced persons that is rarely discussed by researchers includes those who were forcibly displaced by the Zionist occupation authorities from the Gaza Strip to Jordan or refugee camps in the West Bank. In Jordan, a camp was established near Jerash in 1968, accommodating more than 3,000 families who had been forcibly displaced from the Gaza Strip. This camp is still called the Gaza Camp and its residents have no nationality and only hold temporary travel documents. The current

population of the camp is approximately 30,000.

The displacement of Palestinian families from the Gaza Strip, whether to Jordan or to refugee camps in the West Bank, was the result of the pursuit of all nationalist elements and members of the Palestinian Liberation Army who were directly involved in resistance activities after the occupation.

Despite extensive negotiations during the transitional phase after the Oslo Accords, these displaced persons could not be repatriated and the issue was deferred to the final stage. Although tens of thousands of Palestinian forces and organization members returned, only a limited number of those subject to deportation orders from the occupied territories were repatriated, amounting to no more than a few hundred out of over 3,000 individuals.

Displacement of Jerusalemites

The occupation continues to systematically displace inhabitants of Jerusalem, considering them residents rather than citizens and applying Israeli residency laws to them. From the beginning of the occupation of Jerusalem in 1967 to 2020, the occupation authorities revoked the residency of 14,701 Palestinians from East Jerusalem,

according to the Israeli Ministry of Interior. The occupation authorities rely on a series of racist regulations, laws and rulings to revoke Jerusalemite identities, the most prominent of which is the Law of Return (1950), which grants every Jew worldwide the right to immigrate to Israel and automatically obtain citizenship upon arrival. There is also the Nationality Law (1952), which sets out immigration regulations, affirming the right of Jews to come to Israel and facilitating their immigration. Article 14(a) states that Jews who obtain Israeli citizenship are not required to renounce their original nationalities, while Article 3 of the same law deprives Palestinians who resided in Palestine before 1948 of their right to obtain citizenship or residency in Israel.


Reviving old plans in the war on the Gaza Strip

Operation Al-Aqsa Flood triggered the criminal instinct underpinning Zionist racist and expulsionist ideology. The use of massacres expanded to encompass a systematic genocide, which was combined with a programmed deportation process starting from the northern Gaza Strip to its center, then from its center to its south, and then to Sinai. The idea of deporting West Bank citizens to Jordan also gained traction. This assault on the Palestinian presence on

Palestinian land was more than a mere reaction to Operation Al-Aqsa Flood; it was part of an organized, pre-planned process kept on the agendas of Zionist political decision-makers until suitable conditions arose for its implementation. With their extreme fascist government, the Israeli occupation authorities found the opportune moment to revive deportation plans, bringing them out of the realm of ideas and into the realm of operational implementation with the full force of tanks and aircraft, through acts of genocide and systematic destruction.


In the First Intifada in 1987, calls for deportation resurged and many Zionist politicians openly advocated for it, including figures like Rehavam Ze'evi. Parties advocating deportation openly expressed what the entire Zionist consensus was thinking, whether it was Avigdor Lieberman's party, Ze'evi's party or Kahana's party before them. The parties in the center or slightly right of center cannot be absolved of this thinking because the concept of a pure Jewish state is a strategic Zionist consensus.

In an article published in 1988 by Israel Eilat, a member of the group 'Lehi - Fighters for the Freedom of Israel', he expressed his readiness to engage in a civil war in Israel to oppose this



prevailing idea at the time, led by an academic from the University of Haifa, Arnon Soffer. This idea resurfaced internationally in 2017 after Donald Trump took office and introduced his 'deal of the century'. His administration worked on preparing a plan Trump claimed would bring an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict. There were theories that a portion of Sinai would be granted to the Palestinians. Although there has been rejection and condemnation of statements advocating for displacement from the Arab world and internationally, the official stances expressed by Egypt, Jordan and even the European Union and United States do not firmly oppose them. Therefore, the threat of displacement and forced transfer continues to loom over the Palestinian people in the light of local, regional and international power dynamics that tend to favor the Zionist state. Official Arab normalization with the settler state has not been significantly affected by the conflict. Israelis and Americans even dare to discuss expanding normalization with Arab countries amid ongoing ethnic cleansing, encouraging the settler state to pursue further ethnic cleansing.

As well as in 1948 and 1967, ethnic cleansing also occurred in the second decade of the twenty-first century in Syria, Libya, Iraq



and other Arab and non-Arab countries. Millions have been displaced from their countries under the weight of ruthless wars. The difference is that those who left the aforementioned countries can still return, but Palestinian displacement is a one-way journey. This has been the Zionist dream since their project was conceived.

Conclusion

Who will win the battle: the side afraid of their state reaching the age of 80 and drawing its iron sword to face destiny or the side that has become a symbol of resistance in the world, showing how effective it can be and sensing victory from afar? Who will win this land: the side that has destroyed everything and sent its soldiers to their graves or the guerrilla emerging barefoot from the depths of the earth, armed with faith in its Lord, its people and its cause as it fuels an explosive device, igniting the dreams of the fearful?

Who will prevail: the side that rushed to the airport carrying its alternative citizenship at the first hint of conflict or the side that, despite death and destruction, sneaks back to its home from the south to the north of the Strip? There,

a withered tree gnawed by termites symbolizes expulsionist Zionism, yet every day a resilient tree sprouts from the rubble, embracing the sun and dreaming of standing tall. This is a new equation in which the Palestinian struggle relegates ideas of displacement to the archives and museums and the people pore the map, imprinting their dreams upon it and painting a future whose price is blood and souls, which will never be lost in vain.





PALESTINIAN WOMEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE FIGHT FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY


Nidaa Abu Awad

A keynote speech to the 2019
International Conference on
Food Sovereignty

Palestinian women at the forefront of the fight for food sovereignty: a keynote speech to the 2019 International Conference on Food Sovereignty

Nidaa Abu Awad


Economic, social and political changes and the dominance of neoliberal policies and globalization have led to the loss of true sovereignty over food production and consumption systems in many nations and states worldwide, especially in the Global South. As a result, women have been disproportionately deprived of control over land and food-producing resources, stripping them of the ability to feed themselves and their families. This issue is compounded by a gender-based division of labor supported by patriarchal systems. This paper seeks to understand the role of Palestinian women in the fight for food sovereignty and the factors influencing this role. It examines the extent to which women's interests



and concerns are taken into consideration, in the absence of any studies aimed at producing knowledge about women/gender and food in general, and food sovereignty in particular, within the Palestinian context.

Food sovereignty is based on social relationships that are free from oppression and gender inequality, as well as other forms of inequality. The concept has political implications, as it requires fundamental changes to the power relations between male and female farmers and within their households (Bina Agrawal). Palestinian women engage in the fight for food sovereignty in three main areas: local capitalism, neoliberal policies and male dominance. In the Palestinian context, the anti-colonialist struggle is a key component of the fight for food sovereignty and against exploitation, which cannot be achieved without ejecting the colonial settlers. Food sovereignty is a relatively new concept that has not explicitly featured on the agenda of the Palestinian feminist movement but has been implicitly included in its programs and projects, such as agricultural cooperatives, and is embodied by the daily practices of Palestinian women farmers.

The literature acknowledges the diversity



of gender roles in local agricultural systems and in the struggle for food sovereignty, linking this diversity to the historical changes experienced by Palestinian farmers and peasants. Before the Nakba in 1948, rural women in Palestine played an important part in farming, agricultural production and exercising food sovereignty in partnership with men. They were closely involved in subsistence economies, preparing the land, weeding, harvesting, transporting crops, cleaning grain and grinding wheat. Women also had a special relationship with natural resources, including the land, water, trees and firewood. They transported spring water, collected firewood for their household needs, gathered animal dung to fertilize the land, kept seeds and passed down agricultural knowledge and expertise from generation to generation. Emphasizing women's key role in agriculture and food provision, the speaker (2019) quotes Hajja Zahiya:

“We used to work on securing our basic food needs first, as well as gathering agricultural supplies for the following year, such as seeds and natural fertilizer made from animal dung. We also worked to amass straw and barley for a whole year to feed the animals we owned for agricultural purposes or for selling milk and cheese. Any surplus beyond our needs was sold. For many

years, we allocated part of the land to our own food needs, while the rest of the land was used to produce goods for sale."

Despite its importance, a lack of land ownership and control over natural resources such as land and water, which affects most women in Palestine (>80%), did not constitute a significant barrier to their involvement in household agricultural work to provide food for their families. Rima Hamami observes that a lack of agricultural ownership among women does not necessarily go hand-in-hand with a failure to recognize the economic role played by rural women before the Nakba. Global changes have led to a shift in the role of women; in the Palestinian context, the most prominent changes are the structural changes imposed on Palestinian society by the occupying state. Many people were forcibly displaced and deprived of their lands and agricultural properties following the Nakba in 1948, transforming them from farmers and landowners into refugees lacking the basic resource required for agricultural work – land – and with it, their ability to supply their own food.

However, Palestinian women have constantly resisted the colonial domination of their land and defended their ongoing role in

agriculture. For example, Rima Hamami notes that refugee women's involvement in agricultural work was not completely severed when they were displaced. Some of them engaged in wage labor on agricultural land in Gaza in the 1960s, despite being deprived of the land and water required to produce their own food. Others traded agricultural products for farmers.

Women continued to play a role in the agricultural and food production sectors under Jordanian rule in the West Bank and Egyptian rule in Gaza. Small-scale traditional family farming for self-consumption was predominant. During this time, exports such as grapes, peaches and grains decreased and women's role declined to some degree.

After the defeat in 1967, the process of stripping Palestinians of their lands continued: land was either directly confiscated, especially agricultural land for settlement and military purposes, or indirectly confiscated on the pretext of creating nature reserves. As well as controlling over 80% of the Palestinian water resources needed to meet agricultural needs, the occupying state also controlled the importation of agricultural inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides and the transportation and exportation of crops. These



challenges had a far-reaching impact, harming the Palestinian people's ability to develop their agricultural sector and undermining their food sovereignty.

During this period, women continued to work in family farms and gardens. In some cases, they took practically full responsibility for agricultural activities after men moved away from working on family farms to join the Israeli labor market. The peak of the fight for food sovereignty occurred during the first Intifada, when agricultural unions and women's agricultural cooperatives were formed. These were often self-initiatives with support from feminist and grassroots agricultural networks, which sometimes received assistance from international institutions supporting the Palestinian people's struggle. Women's agricultural cooperatives were a unique experiment, where women worked to provide alternatives to Israeli products.

As Eileen Kuttab has documented, livestock cooperatives, crop cooperatives and food processing cooperatives were founded with the aim of enhancing the resilience of Palestinian families, resisting colonization and protecting the land. The products made by these cooperatives were primarily intended for self-consumption,

with any surplus distributed in the local market. Women and cooperative organizers exercised effective sovereignty over their production, determining what to produce, who would produce it, how and for whom, based on their experience and traditional knowledge. The experiences of cooperatives fluctuated along with the Palestinian struggle. During periods of national mobilization and activism, cooperatives became more active, especially women's cooperatives. However, these cooperatives have never received sufficient support to allow them to develop a strong, sustainable production model that would offer an alternative to capitalist production. Nevertheless, they hold considerable potential for achieving food sovereignty, especially if awareness of the importance of cooperative work and networking is reinforced among producers and consumers.





**LAND IN
THE ZIONIST
EXTERMINATION
PROJECT**


Wissam Rafidi

Land in the Zionist extermination project

Wissam Rafidi


Munir Al-Akash used the term 'cultural genocide' to describe the genocide practiced by white Europeans in their colonial project against the indigenous peoples of the Americas, Africa and East Asia. This form of genocide is not limited to killing but goes beyond that to the point of annihilating the cultural symbols and values that distinguish indigenous peoples in order to replace them with Western Christian cultural symbols and values. This is what the Lutheran and Catholic churches did in the Americas and Australia by forcing children to change their names to European and Christian names and join Christian schools where they could be brainwashed and transformed into devout Christians and prevented from practicing their own religious and social rituals, thus annihilating all cultural symbols characterizing their identity as peoples.

As a loyal child of the white European project, the Zionist entity also sought cultural genocide, as well as ethnic cleansing of the land,



population transfer and actual genocide. To this end, all names in Palestine were changed to allegedly biblical Hebrew names with the aim of obliterating their symbolism for the Palestinian national identity and laying the foundations for a new identity, which would be completely artificial with no roots to the place. This would suit the Western Zionist colonial project in Palestine, which has no roots to the land with the exception of religious imaginaries that have been culturally articulated and artificially transformed into components of an alleged national identity requiring cultural symbols to replace Palestinian symbols. Abdul Rahim Al-Sheikh discussed this in detail in his interesting study (Columbus Syndrome).

Cultural genocide does not take place in a vacuum but rather in a spatial realm that is the Earth in a holistic sense, so there is a correlation between cultural genocide and land. Indeed, the genocide of the population by killing is, in practice, the cleansing of the land of its main axis, i.e. the population. Therefore, once again, genocide, in the well-known sense, which has been taking place in the Gaza Strip for the last five months, is the genocide of the land by forcibly cutting it off from those who live on it and pursue their social and physiological existence through it.



Land has been the main focus of the existential conflict with the Zionist deportation project in Palestine. In 1948, through multiple massacres and sub-genocides forcing hundreds of thousands of people to leave, ethnic cleansing took place and severed the relationship between Palestinians and their land. Rather than just a place to live like any other place in the world, the land embodies the productive structure of the Palestinians in a sociological sense as agriculture was the prevailing production pattern at that time. Although it remains prevalent, small and medium capitalist production began to take shape in the main cities – Haifa, Jaffa and Nablus – as a result of Western capitalist penetration. These cities embraced what has been termed “urban modernity” in many studies, despite the confusion surrounding this term due to its association with Western capitalist hegemonic relations. Land is the target of a series of crimes: ethnic cleansing, genocide and cultural genocide.

What has been happening in the Gaza Strip for the last five months is a genocide. Despite its historical importance, neither the evidence from South Africa, a friend of our people, nor the International Court of Justice's decision were necessary to confirm what our people have been experiencing for five months in the Gaza

Strip: more than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed, 70,000 injured and more than 1.5 million deported. Eighty-five percent of institutions, homes and vital facilities, including hospitals, schools, universities, mosques and churches have been destroyed; tens of thousands of fruit trees have been uprooted and thousands of acres planted with vegetables have been razed. This must be recognized as an annihilation of the land and everything on it, including what it represents for work, production and normal living, with one specific goal: to deport those residing there by making it impossible to live, thus severing the relationship between Palestinians and their land. It appears to be an attempt to repeat the historical Nakba of 1948. Some Israeli politicians, such as the fascist intelligence officer Avi Dichter, have openly stated that they are seeking a second Nakba (catastrophe). This fascist policy pursues a Nakba of the land through its annihilation and aims to transform the Gaza Strip from a Palestinian land embracing Palestine's demographic, geographic, cultural and productive characteristics into a land for a Zionist colonial settlement project once its residents have been deported.

Despite the indescribable horror of this tragedy, our people are still alive in the Gaza Strip. They refuse to be displaced, seeking instead to

return to areas from which they were previously displaced by war, confirm their attachment to their land and refusal to leave it and reaffirm that land was and will remain a cornerstone of the existential struggle with the Zionist project. Land is the very essence of this struggle.

Free Palestine





**POLICY PAPER:
WOMEN'S
COOPERATIVES IN THE
WEST BANK**

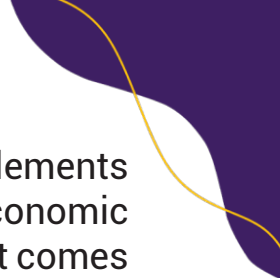
Abdulaziz Rebhi Al-Salhi

Policy Paper: Women's Cooperatives in the West Bank

**Drafted by Abdulaziz Rebhi Al-Salhi
for the Union of Palestinian
Women's Committees
December 2023**

Introduction and overview

Production processes in societies are related to the needs and resources present within the community, so societies adapt their economic systems and continue to evaluate these systems based on external and internal variables. The concept of production is linked to the notion of a political system that governs individuals, while society is supposed to monitor, regulate and participate in shaping the political system that governs the pace of society and the nature of the economic system. The concept of production is also influenced by the idea of growth and development adopted by political systems and



conflict may arise between different elements of society – including political and economic systems, groups and individuals – when it comes to identifying a vision of development that will serve the common good.

Development as a concept remains a controversial topic and there is no consensus as to what it actually means. This is a real issue because societies around the world have very different contexts and priorities. It is no surprise that development as a process has lost credibility, as Sylvie Brunel states in her book 'Sustainable Development': the aid that has long been associated with development declined considerably after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when public aid for development could no longer be justified as it had ceased to offer any strategic benefit. This is confirmed by the 30% decline in development aid between 1990 and 2000. Brunel goes on to explain that aid later became focused on countries outside the Soviet Union's influence and funding or aid operations became conditional within the framework of "development".

The processes of production and development require resources in both liberal and socialist contexts, giving rise to debate among academics and experts about the reality

of Palestinian development and production processes in the colonial context. Whereas other countries in the world have oscillated between the “free market” system and socialist systems since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Palestine remains entirely within a colonial context, with the occupying state depriving it of resources and targeting its production processes.

Despite the particularities of the Palestinian situation within this colonial context, Palestinians are not immune from sudden changes in the world, whether they relate to economics, production or consumption patterns. These changes affect many segments within society, especially women, who are among the most marginalized or “least fortunate”. However, these issues are complicated further by the colonialism that controls local resources in occupied Palestine, undermining production processes and making it extremely difficult to tackle the social challenges facing women.

The economic path adopted by the political system remains uncertain: will it embrace the “free market” or adopt a socialist economic system, or attempt to combine the two? This decision will undoubtedly influence the way in which cooperatives operate, as productive



cooperatives are able to exist in both capitalist and socialist economic systems, but their essence and goals differ. Since the Palestinian Authority was established in occupied Palestine, the Palestinian economic and political system has been unable to build a stable market or strong, consistent production patterns. This is primarily due to the nature of the economic system adopted by the Palestinian Authority and the occupation's control over all Palestinian resources, crossings and production processes under the Paris Protocol. Most of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is concentrated in the service sector, which accounts for 62.1%, while agricultural activity stands at approximately 6.6% and industrial activity represents around 10.6% of GDP. International donor agencies have worked to support Palestinians through development programs aimed at alleviating poverty, lowering unemployment and boosting individual rights, as stipulated by various international organizations. A report published by the International Support Monitoring Foundation - Palestine states that the total funding or "support" received by Palestinians from 1993 to 2014 amounted to approximately \$30 billion, with \$20 billion received between 2006-2014. This followed the end of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, the arrival to power of Mahmoud Abbas and the appointment of Salam Fayyad as Prime

Minister. This period has been described as the “institution-building” stage of the Palestinian Authority. However, in 2015, support fell to just \$450 million. In the 2010-2020 period, external aid to the Palestinian Authority was directed towards non-productive expenditure (paying salaries or funding emergency needs) and only 16% was allocated to development funding, which was intended for developing vital sectors and providing revenue for the government. This funding was primarily directed towards social sectors, but in a partial and unsustainable manner.

This paper focuses on the position of women in the production process and the market and explores the challenges they face, introducing a cooperative approach to economic production processes as an option for women. Amid the dominance and expansion of colonization, it is important to consider economic and social protection networks for individuals, especially the most marginalized and disadvantaged among them. More than other groups, women are among those facing increasingly complex struggles as colonization gains pace.

This conceptual paper analyzes cooperative production in the West Bank and Gaza, with a specific focus on women. Among the most





marginalized groups in society, including women, cooperative activity is more difficult as resources are limited and ownership of production means is almost nonexistent. Any conceptual model for cooperatives should focus on their relationship and/or status with regard to the predominant production pattern and market, as well as the administrative status of cooperatives, their relationship with the market and ways to improve this relationship.


This policy paper aims to examine Palestinian women's participation in the cooperative production framework within the colonial context and explores the perceptions, objectives and desired forms of their participation. It also discusses the main legislative and policy challenges facing cooperatives in general, as well as the complex difficulties specifically hindering women's participation in the cooperative sector. However, it is important to emphasize that the author does not believe that the cooperative production sector should be differentiated by gender; rather, it is vital that all segments of society, both men and women, from different academic and professional backgrounds, are involved in cooperative production.

Indicators relating to women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip face a series of challenges that place them among the most vulnerable, disadvantaged groups in the economy and society. At first glance, gaps between women and men are apparent in the indicators relating to women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. However, if we look at these gaps more closely, we find that the issue goes far beyond mere disparity. Besides differences in employment and work, women experience violence on several levels, including physical, psychological and economic violence. The issues that combine to constitute a crisis for women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip under colonization and hinder their progress towards a better future may be grouped under the following broad headings:

- 1- Limited job opportunities and income
- 2- Limited ownership of production means
- 3- Violence targeting women

Returning to the general indicators, the number of Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip was approximately 2.7 million, which represents 49% of the estimated total population



in mid-2023. By region, there were 1.6 million women in the West Bank and 1.1 million women in the Gaza Strip. The number of Palestinian women in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip has risen since 2022, when it stood at approximately 2.63 million out of the estimated total population in mid-2022 (the same proportion of the total population). It is relevant to note that more than one-tenth (12%) of Palestinian households are headed by women.

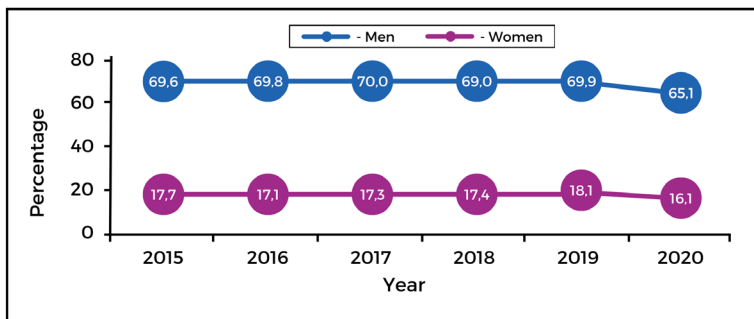
Women in the labor market

With regard to employment, according to official data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, despite a 1.4% increase in women's participation in the labor force in 2022 compared to 2021, the gap between men and women remains significant. Men's participation was still around four times higher than that of women in 2022. The labor force participation rate for individuals aged 15 and over in the West Bank and Gaza Strip was approximately 45% in 2022, with a very large gap between men (70%) and women (18.6%). In 2020, the participation rate was approximately 40.9%, with the rate for men standing at 65.1% and women at 16.1%.

The unemployment rate among women

participating in the labor force fell in 2022 to around 40.4%, compared to 20.3% for men. In 2021, it stood at 43% for women and 22% for men. National indicators also point to a wage gap between women and men: the average daily wage for salaried employees was 143.8 shekels in 2022, with women earning 105.9 shekels and men 150.6 shekels. This marks an increase from 2020, when the average daily wage for women was 98 shekels compared to 102 shekels for men after labor force participation rates for both women and men fell due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 1: Percentage of women and men aged 15 and over who participate in the labor force in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, 2015-2020




It is important to note that the wage convergence that occurred in 2020 was the result of most working women leaving the labor market, in both the formal and informal sectors, while

men remained. Therefore, women who continued to work in sectors that did not cease to operate earned wages close to those of men, despite the wage gap. This gap widened to approximately 50 shekels after the labor market partially recovered in 2022, reflecting a significant disparity in wages between men and women.

Approximately three-quarters of working women are employed in the service sector, while the remaining quarter is distributed among other economic activities. Around two-thirds of women aged 15 and over work as technicians, specialists, assistants and clerks, while the remaining third is distributed among various other professions, reflecting an imbalance in the distribution of labor across different activities and highlighting the gap between men and women.

There is an absence of protection for private sector workers, with 29% of workers in the private sector receiving a monthly wage lower than the minimum wage of 1,450 shekels. This gap is also apparent if we compare the genders, as the percentage is 29% for men and 30% for women. 25% of women employees in the private sector work without a contract and only 56% receive contributions towards retirement or end-of-service benefits. Meanwhile, more than half



of female employees in the private sector (52%) received paid maternity leave in 2021.

In 2020, data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics shows that the proportion of female workers in the agricultural sector was higher than that of male workers: the percentage of women working in agriculture was 6.8%, compared to 6.3% for men. The proportion of female skilled workers in agriculture and fishing is higher than that of males in the same field, constituting around 4.9% of the total female workforce, while male skilled workers in these sectors constitute only 2.8% of the total male workforce. Despite declining numbers of workers in the agricultural sector, the percentage of women has consistently been higher. In 2006, for example, the proportion of workers in the agricultural sector was 16.7% of the total workforce (12.6% for men, 35.1% for women). This fell to 10.4% in 2014 and 8.7% in 2015. In 2015, the percentage of male workers in the agricultural sector was estimated at 7.8% of the total male workforce, while 13.1% of the total female workforce was employed in this sector.

Women, property and asset ownership


With regard to ownership of agricultural holdings, there are a total of 140,568 holdings

in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (crops and livestock). The most recent agricultural census by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, which is taken every 10 years, showed that across the governorates in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the number of agricultural land holders stood at approximately 138,339 in 2021, of whom only 10,653 were women and 127,686 were men. This means that an average of 7% of agricultural land holders are female.

This situation extends far beyond the agricultural sector. Data from the Palestine Stock Exchange shows that women own 42% of all shares traded, while men own 57%. In terms of financial value, however, women's shares constitute only 9% of the total value.

A 2020 study for the Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development by the Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD), entitled 'In-depth Assessment of Women's Access to and Ownership of Land and Productive Resources in the occupied Palestinian territory', reported that 6% of women own land with housing located on it (individual ownership), 15% own agricultural land, 10.5% own livestock/poultry holdings, 6.9% own modern agricultural equipment and 15.8% own traditional agricultural equipment. The study





also reveals that 84% of Palestinian women do not own any type of land.

With regard to water resources in different geographical areas (Jiftlik, Flamiya, Nasariya and Tammun, and Al Baqee'a), a factsheet showed that there are 22 wells in Jiftlik, 14 of which are shared. The highest share of female ownership in one of the wells was 56.7%, while the lowest share was 0.27%. The remaining 8 wells are solely owned by men. In Flamiya, there are 4 wells, 3 of which are shared and one of which is solely owned by men. The highest share of female ownership in shared wells was around 61%, while the lowest share was around 28%. As for Nasariya and Tammun, there are 25 wells, 12 of which are shared and 13 are solely owned by men. The highest share of female ownership in one of the wells was 47%, while the lowest ownership share was around 0.025% of the well. In Al Baqee'a, there are 15 wells, only 4 of which are shared. One well has equal female and male shares, while the lowest share of female ownership was 0.16% of the well.

Violence against women

Discussions about violence against women in the Palestinian context are multifaceted. Palestinian women experience a series of different

forms of violence: they suffer from the complex violence perpetrated by the Israeli occupation, depriving them of basic rights such as residency, housing, mobility, healthcare and education. They often have to bear additional burdens, especially if their family members are arrested, martyred or injured by the occupation forces, leaving them as sole breadwinners or stripping them of their only source of income or home.


Meanwhile, women continue to be victims of social violence as a result of a male-dominated cultural heritage that marginalizes women and perpetuates discrimination against them. This discrimination takes various forms and is reflected in the gaps in the laws and policies in place in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics reports that 29% of Palestinian women who are currently or have previously been married have experienced at least one form of psychological, physical, social or economic violence from their spouses. Of these women, 18% have experienced physical violence at least once from their spouses, while 57% have experienced psychological violence from their spouses.

Discussion: why should we adopt a feminist cooperative production model?

The presentation of indicators relating to women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the preceding sections provides an overview of the issues hindering women's participation in cooperative production. This is a fundamentally structural problem. As the unemployment rate for women reached 40.4% and women headed approximately 12% of households, the poverty line for the reference family in Palestine in 2017 was approximately 2,470 shekels (US\$671), while the extreme poverty line for the same reference family was around 1,974 shekels (US\$536). According to monthly consumption patterns, the poverty rate among individuals in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 2017 was 29% (14% in the West Bank and 53% in Gaza), while 17% of individuals in Palestine experienced extreme poverty (6% in the West Bank and 34% in Gaza).

Meanwhile, average monthly spending per individual in Palestine was approximately 170 Jordanian dinars, with 220.1 Jordanian dinars in the West Bank compared to 91.2 Jordanian dinars in Gaza. The average monthly household expenditure was around 935 Jordanian dinars. Approximately 31% of this spending went towards



food, while official data reveals that the share of transportation and communication expenses rose to 18.5% in 2017 and the share of spending on education rose from 3.0% to 4.1%.

Coupled with high unemployment rates among female graduates (with a diploma or higher level qualification), which reached 61.3%, these indicators point to a greater burden on women who lack ownership of means of production and financial resources. Moreover, the political system in Palestine, civil society organizations, actors in the private sector and donors from various countries continue to face the dilemma of bridging the gaps and deficiencies present in the formulation and implementation of policies aimed at economically and socially empowering Palestinian women, enhancing their employment opportunities and incorporating them into the labor market. This state of affairs suggests that Palestinian women urgently need to reassess their livelihoods. In light of the financial deficit experienced by the Palestinian Authority as a result of the economic and political blockade imposed by successive occupying governments, Palestinian women can do little more than seek alternative means of protection, away from official discourse and policies.

It is important to bear in mind that both growth and industrial prosperity are measured by examining the balance of trade (the value of exports versus imports). Until 2020, the volume of trade to and from the West Bank and Gaza Strip amounted to US\$10 billion, representing a 10% decline on 2019 figures. This decline was due to a 7% decrease in exports, which stood at US\$2.5 billion, and an 11% decrease in imports, amounting to US\$7.4 billion in 2020. Consequently, the balance of trade is characterized by a deficit of approximately US\$5 billion. A survey by the Al-Manqabun platform, based on data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, revealed that the trade deficit reached US\$3.26 billion in the first half of 2023 alone. The industrial sector in the West Bank and Gaza Strip only contributed 12% to Palestine's Gross Domestic Product in 2021, representing a decline from 22% in 1994. This indicates that the economic system adopted by the Palestinian government, which is characterized by a "free market" approach, has caused the economy to sink into a trade deficit in favor of the occupying state.

While these indicators paint a grim picture of women's living conditions, they also serve as a key driver for change. They underscore the importance of collective action as an opportunity





for employment and income growth, prompting a transition to social work to provide a social and economic protection network and allow society to enter a phase of full-fledged cooperation. This conceptual paper aims to cast light on the growing opportunities for women to become involved in cooperative production in the Palestinian context as a form of collective resistance against colonization. It discusses cooperatives in occupied Palestine, especially women's cooperatives, and emphasizes the importance of expanding models of women's cooperatives in light of the aforementioned indicators and the scattered nature of national policies that seek to protect individuals, and especially women, in terms of production and consumption.

Cooperatives and the cooperative movement

The history of cooperatives dates back to the 18th century, when the first group appeared in Scotland in 1761. It was established by a group of local weavers and was known as the Fenwick Weavers' Society. Then, in 1844, a group of 28 craftsmen working in cotton mills in the town of Rochdale in northern England founded the first modern commercial cooperative, known as the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society or the 'Rochdale Pioneers'. This is considered to have

been the first modern cooperative society and it paved the way for the cooperative movement, underscoring the fact that cooperatives reflect the socioeconomic contexts in which they arise. The concept of cooperation, which was embodied by cooperatives in Europe, emerged as a result of the conditions brought about by the Industrial Revolution.

To further define the concept of cooperatives, we must emphasize that their essence lies in what differentiates them from individual and even collective production methods in terms of production patterns. It is important to differentiate between collective work and social work. Despite its importance over individual work, collective work may at some stage form part of a system of coercion and submission to its principles. Social work, meanwhile, can only be achieved once societies have entered a stage of full-fledged cooperation, which is directly linked to community development. The foundation of cooperation is work, so cooperatives are joint endeavors that draw on cooperative human values to fulfill their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations. Cooperatives are economic organizations built on self-effort, playing a tangible role in improving the economic and social conditions of their members and



society as a whole.

There are several types of cooperatives, including:

Cooperative type	Activity
Worker cooperatives	Businesses owned by employees. This is one of the most versatile cooperative forms, and can be used even by a small group of business partners running, for example, a bakery or bookstore. However, they can also run large industrial operations, including some of the world's largest co-ops.
Consumer cooperatives	Owned by the people who do business there. One particularly common business is in retail food sales.
Producer cooperatives	Owned by people who produce the same type of goods. Such cooperatives will often operate shared facilities for processing or distribution. These are generally agricultural co-ops, but this form has also been used by artists, massage therapists and others. It can have some similarity to worker cooperatives, but generally takes a looser form. These are also sometimes known as marketing cooperatives in which each farmer maintains a fairly independent path to market, but shares a name brand.

<p>Housing cooperatives</p>	<p>Owned by the residents. This can range from a single house to apartment complexes with thousands of units. It also includes co-housing projects, in which dozens of homes are cooperatively owned. Condominiums are a relative of coops, although with condos each member owns their own unit; in a cooperative, each member owns a share of the co-op that owns all of the property.</p>
<p>Credit unions</p>	<p>A type of consumer cooperative for financial services, where each depositor is a member. Members attend an annual meeting to elect a board of directors from local volunteers with expertise in finance. These unions can be small in rural communities or large with branches covering several local communities.</p>
<p>Purchasing/service cooperatives</p>	<p>A type of consumer cooperative focused on retail or purchasing, sometimes called shared-services cooperatives. They are owned and managed by independent business owners. These cooperatives can be small or large; for example, lawyers can join forces to purchase office supplies or insurance or other products and services. Municipal councils could also join forces to purchase their own electricity, water or communication facilities, etc.</p>

	These cooperatives have a shared goal: to improve efficiency and/or competitiveness in the market by purchasing or selling a wide range of goods or services in large quantities.
Social cooperatives	This type of cooperative has a social goal or offers a social service to its members. These cooperatives are owned and managed by workers, professionals or consumers and may be non-profit. For example, they may strive to improve working conditions (e.g. for women) or provide alternative health services to the community at an affordable cost.


In Palestine, the Cooperative Work Agency defines a cooperative as “a social economic institution established by at least 15 members, who voluntarily associate to meet their common needs and aspirations through their own contributions, joint ownership, democratic management and oversight, and operate on a cooperative basis”.

The first cooperative in Palestine was for tobacco cultivation in Acre in the 1920s. Cooperative production is considered part of Palestinian history and heritage; it has a long history in Palestine and was preceded by mutual assistance before formal cooperatives emerged.

In the general Palestinian understanding, cooperatives are often seen as groups for agricultural production or food preparation (pickles, cheese, jams, etc.) because most cooperatives are in the agricultural sector. This may be considered a natural development, as cooperatives resumed and became active in the West Bank and Gaza Strip after 1996. Their establishment was linked to the availability of funding sources, which focused primarily on agricultural production and food preparation. The following section presents the cooperative sectors operating in occupied Palestine.

Cooperatives in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

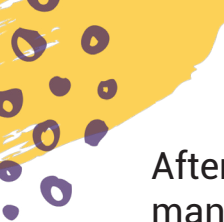
According to the Cooperative Work Agency, the number of active cooperative associations in the West Bank currently stands at 342. However, another conceptual paper published in 2021 reports that there were approximately 900 cooperative associations in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip at that time, with around 770-790 of them in the West Bank. However, the paper notes that this figure may be inaccurate because some cooperatives were inactive or in the process of registration. These cooperatives fall under the umbrella of six cooperative unions, including a general cooperative union.



Each sector has its own union: an agricultural cooperative union, a consumer cooperative union, a services cooperative union (or savings and loan cooperative union), an artisan cooperative union and a cooperative union for marketing cooperative products. The latest data from the Cooperative Work Agency indicates that these unions are divided into 5 cooperative sectors (housing sector, agricultural sector, consumer sector, savings and loan associations, and service associations), with the total number of active cooperative members in all sectors amounting to 39,370.

The agricultural sector is the largest in terms of the numbers of cooperatives, while the housing cooperative union is considered the largest in terms of invested capital. This is because it concerns construction and infrastructure, which are financially costly.

With regard to the legislative framework, there are laws in place to regulate the cooperative sector based on the historical context of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The first law regulating cooperative work was Law No. 53 of 1920, which was enacted during the British Mandate and was amended to create Law No. 50 of 1933 and the Cooperative System of 1934 in response to an increase in cooperatives in Palestine at that time.



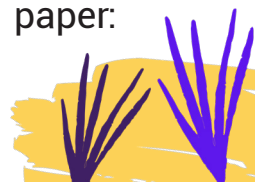
After the West Bank became part of the Jordanian mandate following the events of 1948, and the Gaza Strip came under Egyptian control, the law applied in the West Bank was the Jordanian Cooperative Law No. 17 of 1957, and in the Gaza Strip, the Egyptian law of 1933. This did not last long, however, as both the West Bank and Gaza Strip were occupied in 1967 and brought under military rule. Before it was occupied, cooperative societies registered in the West Bank since the British Mandate continued to operate under Law No. 50 of 1933 until the first Jordanian Cooperative Law No. 39 of 1952 was passed, enabling the registration of new cooperatives. Subsequently, Law No. 17 of 1956 was enacted. After the occupation of the West Bank, the existing laws were retained, with the addition of some military orders and oppressive measures aimed at preventing the expansion of cooperatives and tightening control over them on the pretext of security. The occupation authorities required members of cooperatives to obtain permission prior to any cooperative activity. In 2017, 70.7% of the cooperative societies registered in Palestine had done so since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, 23.5% during the occupation of the West Bank and 5.8% during Jordanian rule.

After the Palestinian Authority was

established, the legislative situation remained unchanged (Jordanian and Egyptian laws) until Law No. 20 of 2017 was passed following the approval of a presidential decree regulating Palestinian cooperatives. Through this law, the Cooperative Work Agency was founded in early 2018. Article 4 of the law stipulates the founding of the Cooperative Work Agency, along with a Cooperative Development Fund and Cooperative Training Institute. However, this law remains controversial as there is ongoing debate over certain issues relating to the law between the Cooperative Work Agency and cooperatives, which will be discussed later in the recommendations section of this paper. It is relevant to note that Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh dissolved and merged a group of local authorities in 2020, including the Cooperative Work Agency, whose powers, duties and employees were brought under the Ministry of Labor, despite the initial decree stating that the agency should remain independent from the Ministry.

The situation of women's cooperatives in the West Bank and Gaza Strip


First of all, it is crucial to clarify that gender is not a defining characteristic of the concept of cooperative production adopted in this paper:



cooperatives should include both men and women and both genders should participate in production processes, whether they are agricultural or industrial. However, in the Palestinian context, the features of cooperative associations are shaped by different needs emerging at different times:

- Women's unions and the formation of women's cooperatives: women's unions are considered to be arms of political factions that emerged in the early 1980s and their economic goals include establishing production centers for women.
- Funders and their focus on "women's economic empowerment": there are a number of officially registered cooperatives whose members are all women.
- Confusion between charitable associations and cooperative associations: some people accidentally register the wrong type of association, with some women's cooperatives that were meant to be registered as women's charitable associations.
- Urgent need for women's cooperative associations, especially as poverty and unemployment rise among women.

The COVID-19 pandemic may be viewed as a pivotal step in the transformation or revival of productive cooperatives in the West Bank



and Gaza Strip, especially those dominated or operated entirely by women. During the state of emergency, when production in Palestinian came to a halt due to restrictions on movement and facility shutdowns, women took on a more prominent role in production processes, especially in agriculture and food manufacturing. This highlighted the importance of having a cooperative production model that would serve as a nucleus for an economic and social protection network outside the prevailing economic system.

The Cooperative Work Agency confirms this, recalling the campaign of material and monetary aid to assist the local community by cooperative associations from different sectors at the start of the crisis, which raised one million shekels. This contribution, albeit small, helped alleviate the burden on families in need.

In a policy paper titled 'Cooperative Work Policies and Women's Empowerment' published by the Association of Women's Action for Training and Rehabilitation in 2018, it was reported that the number of cooperatives had reached 1,445 by the end of 2017, of which 690 had been dissolved or canceled. Among the active associations at that time (362 associations), the distribution by gender was 24% men, 10.8% women and 65.2%

mixed gender.

The Cooperative Work Agency's website notes that there were 47 women's cooperatives in the West Bank in 2020, distributed across various sectors. Approximately 12,000 women worked in these cooperatives, accounting for around 30% of all members of the cooperative sector of both genders. These associations employed a considerable number of workers.

However, the National Strategic Plan for the Cooperative Sector 2021-2023 indicated that the percentage of all-female cooperative associations was approximately 12.6% of the total number of associations in the West Bank governorates. The percentage of male-only cooperative associations was around 18.7%, while mixed-gender associations accounted for the remaining 68.7%.

In the National Strategic Plan, the Cooperative Work Agency states in its third strategic goal that "cooperative work encompasses new categories and fields of work" and sets out a series of outcomes to be achieved, including "coordinating and working with women's associations, youth associations, the Higher Council for Youth and Sports, the General Union of Palestinian Women



and cooperative unions to develop ideas for cooperative projects and initiatives in new areas". The links between the strategic plan and overarching national policies are underscored, with a particular emphasis on its alignment with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals set by the Palestinian government as development-oriented objectives. The plan is intended to contribute to achieving the first (eradicating poverty in all its forms everywhere) and second (ending hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture) Sustainable Development Goals. It identifies the contribution made by agricultural cooperatives, women's cooperatives and some artisan cooperatives in:

- Enhancing the competitiveness of products and accessing local and international markets.
- Increasing bargaining power and accessing inputs at suitable quality and prices.
- Enabling access to appropriate technology, knowledge or quality certifications for products to boost exports.
- Enabling access to water or necessary materials and equipment for production.
- Enabling access to funding to improve production and enable expansion.
- Improving the quality and quantity of agricultural and food products and playing a key role in food

security.

The plan also intersects with the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls): the third strategic goal in the plan is to enhance the participation of women, young people and vulnerable groups in cooperative work. Cooperative work currently contributes to achieving gender equality in the following ways:

- Increasing women's economic participation and providing them with job opportunities, especially among those working in the informal sector.
- Enabling access to local and international markets for women's craft products.
- Providing women with opportunities to access financial services and boost their savings through membership in thousands of women's saving and credit cooperative associations.
- Enhancing women's social role and political participation through awareness, training opportunities and involvement in managing cooperatives.

In addition, the strategic plan echoes the eighth Sustainable Development Goal (promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and





decent work for all). Cooperatives in all their forms, especially artisan and women's cooperatives, contribute to promoting decent work standards and ensuring justice and equality in all their work.

The Cooperative Work Agency clarifies that these goals and outputs can only be achieved through the participation of public agencies such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Labor, Ministry of Public Works and Housing, Ministry of National Economy, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Ministry of Finance and other relevant authorities.

The next section presents a review of some of the women's cooperatives that are currently operating in Palestine, although they may not be registered with the Cooperative Work Agency: Canaan Agricultural Cooperative, Ritaj Women's Cooperative, Land and Plant Cooperative (Roots Nursery), Sarta Agricultural Cooperative Association, Beta Cooperative for Food Manufacturing, Jama'in Women's Cooperative and Cooperative Association for Saving and Credit.

How do cooperatives establish an economic/social protection network for women?

Cooperatives work to create job

opportunities and reduce unemployment among women, especially female graduates, because the cooperative production model focuses on employment rather than profit accumulation and wealth. The most recent figures from the Labor Force Survey show that approximately 40,000 people enter the labor market annually. However, the Palestinian labor market appears to offer around 8,000 job opportunities annually at most. Opportunities for female graduates are scarcer still, with recent data showing that unemployment among female graduates (with diplomas or higher degrees) has reached 61.3%. This is indicative of a real issue, which is compounded by the fact that the general unemployment rate among women has reached 40%.

These women, both graduates and non-graduates, can be directed towards collective production sectors, with a particular focus on the agriculture and food processing industries. As mentioned earlier, this may increase productivity and reduce food expenditure if production from cooperatives is abundant. This expenditure, in turn, circulates back to reinforce local resources and enable greater reliance upon them. This improves the living conditions of marginalized groups, including women, who head 12% of households and are considered to be disadvantaged in terms of



job opportunities and property ownership. Where women lack immediate access to or ownership of production means, cooperatives offer a way for them to acquire these tools at minimal cost within a communal framework. Additionally, women may form associations to distribute water (water user associations), which are legitimized by a cabinet decision to manage water for irrigation sustainably at the local level and maximize the use of available water resources.

The matter does not stop there. The presence of cooperatives in different productive sectors, as mentioned above, offers women greater opportunities to form cooperative housing associations in response to unaffordable and rising housing and land prices. University-educated women can also work to establish engineering cooperatives, medical cooperatives and childcare cooperatives.

Exploratory survey results

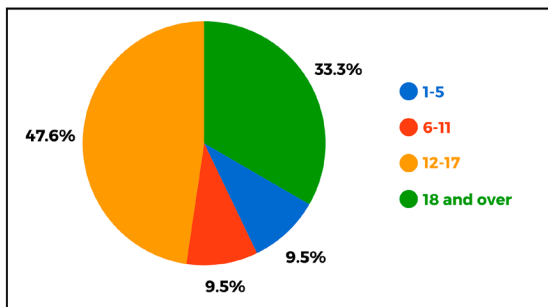
A questionnaire was distributed to a random sample of 23 women's cooperatives, 21 of which responded. All the cooperatives were located in the West Bank. It was not possible to distribute any surveys in the Gaza Strip due to the difficult circumstances facing its residents following the

occupying state's declaration of war on civilians in Gaza on October 7, 2023.

The sample was spread across the governorates of the West Bank. The questionnaire shows that the oldest cooperative in the sample was established in 2002, while the most recent was founded in August 2023. Upon comparison, 57% of the cooperatives were found to have been established in or after 2017. This highlights a recent trend in establishing cooperatives, especially from 2020 to 2023. More specifically, 9 out of the total sample of 21 cooperatives were founded between March 2020 and August 2023.

As for the number of members in the cooperatives, the majority of the cooperatives (47.6%) had 12-17 members, 33.3% had 18 members or more and 9.5% had 1-5 members and 6-11 members:

Figure 2: Number of members in cooperatives in the survey sample



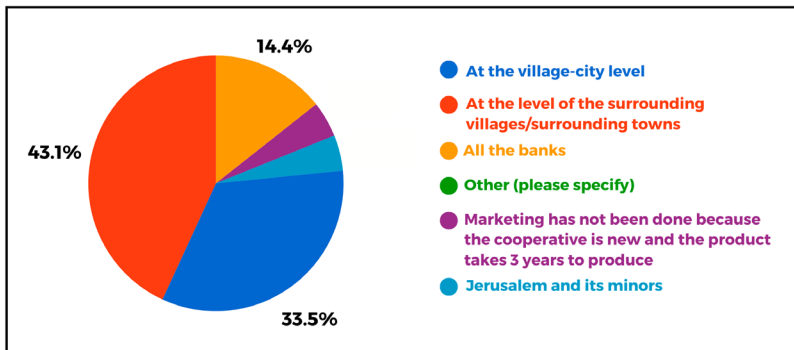


One-quarter of the women's cooperatives indicated that there were men working in them. The number of men in the cooperatives ranged from 2 to 4 workers. However, 75% of the cooperatives in the sample were exclusively made up of women. With regard to the age of the workers in the cooperatives, one-third fell into the 36-45 age group, while the other age groups were almost equally represented.

In terms of the activities of women's cooperatives, the survey results revealed that 42.9% are involved in food manufacturing, while 23.8% are agricultural cooperatives working with crops and 9.5% are agricultural cooperatives working with livestock. Saving and credit cooperatives, beekeeping cooperatives, consumer cooperatives and textile cooperatives were almost equally represented.

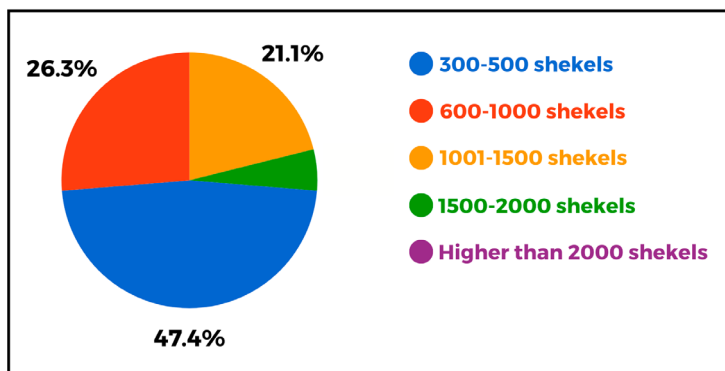
Regarding the geographical scope of their operations, 42.9% of the cooperatives sell their products in their own village and surrounding villages. Meanwhile, 33.3% sell their products in their village and the nearest city and only 14.3% market and distribute their products to the entire West Bank. In addition, only one cooperative marketed and distributed its products in Jerusalem and its suburbs:

Figure 3: Geographical scope of women's cooperatives in the sample



When it came to wages for female workers in women's cooperatives, the survey revealed that 47.7% of the cooperatives offered wages ranging from 300 to 500 shekels per month. In 26.3% of the cooperatives in the sample, workers received between 600 and 1,000 shekels monthly, while 21.1% paid between 1,001 and 1,500 shekels. Additionally, 5.3% of the cooperatives pay their workers between 1,500 to 2,000 shekels monthly, with no cooperative paying its workers more than 2,000 shekels per month:

Figure 4: Average monthly wage paid to female members of the cooperatives in the sample



When asked about the main obstacles facing women's cooperatives, poor sales was the most common concern, with 38.1% of respondents viewing it as the main obstacle. Meanwhile, 33.3% of respondents believed that policies and legislation were the primary obstacle facing women's cooperatives. 23.8% viewed the cost of production inputs as the greatest challenge for women's cooperatives. 14.3% stated that a lack of awareness of cooperative work and production was the biggest issue, while 9.5% cited a shortage of labor as the main problem.

85.7% of cooperatives in the sample have an internal system, 61.9% have a strategic plan, 70% have a marketing plan and 71.4% have a development plan for the cooperative.

Figure 5: Percentage of cooperatives in the sample with an internal system

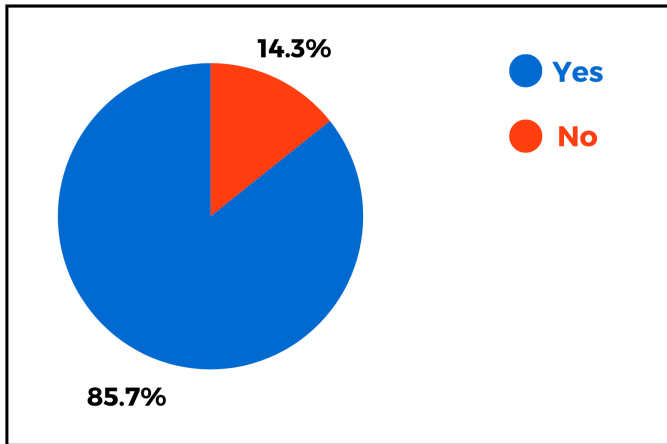


Figure 6: Percentage of cooperatives in the sample with a strategic plan

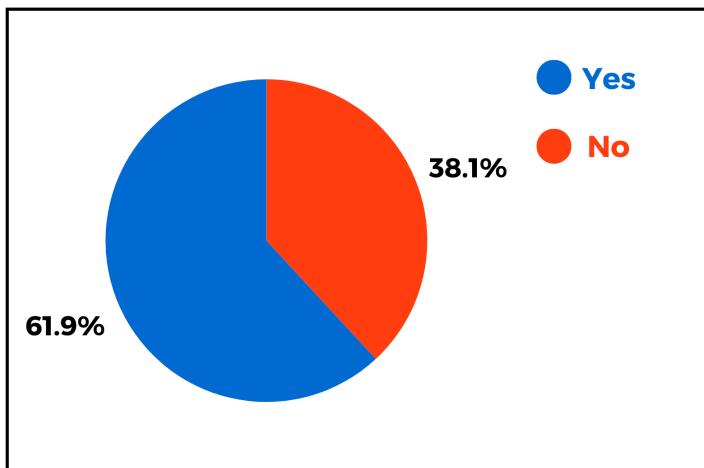


Figure 7: Percentage of cooperatives in the sample with a marketing plan

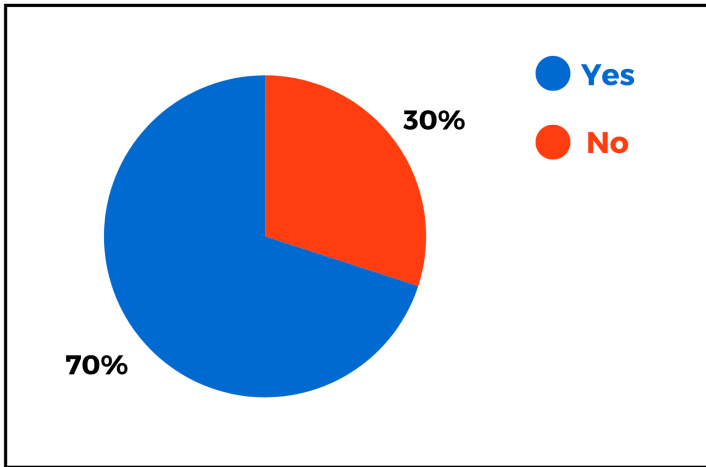
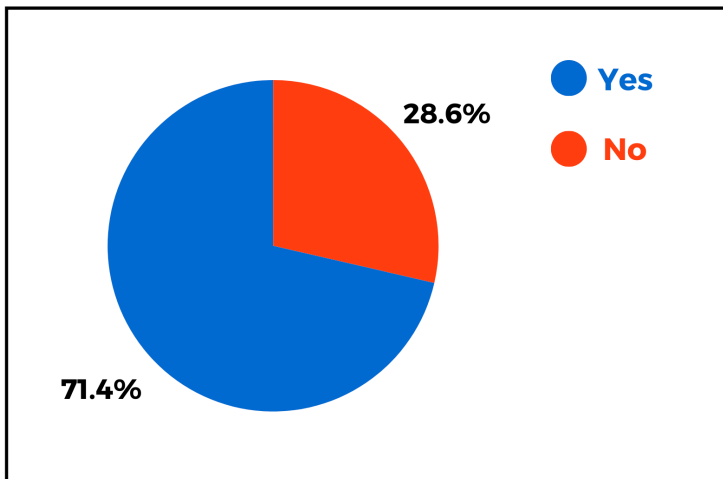


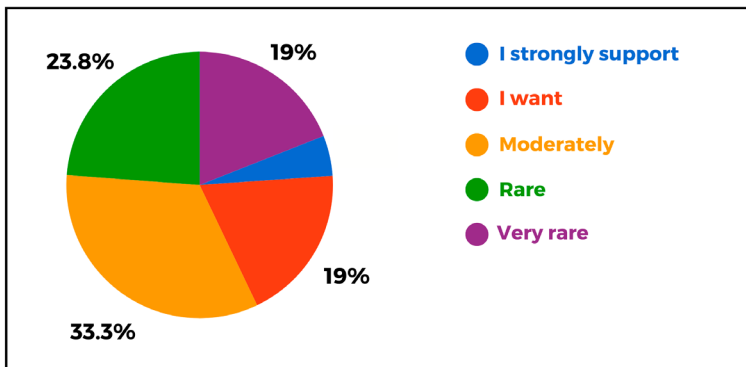
Figure 8: Percentage of cooperatives in the sample with a development plan



When asked whether the cooperatives market their products via social media platforms, 90.5% confirmed that they do so and only 9.5% stated that they do not. 57.1% of the cooperatives in the sample market their products by engaging with traders in different areas, 81% market their products through women's and non-women's associations (friendly associations) and 42.9% exchange products with other cooperatives.

With regard to their participation in semi-monthly sales exhibitions, 33.3% of the cooperatives in the sample indicated that they participate moderately, while 23.8% reported that they rarely participate in these exhibitions. Meanwhile, 19% participate regularly and the same percentage very rarely participate:

Figure 9: Participation in semi-monthly sales exhibitions



As for permanent points of sale for products made by women's cooperatives, 33.3% indicated that they are available to a moderate extent and 23.8% considered them to be almost fully available. 19% mentioned that these points of sale were rarely available to them (see Figure 9). When asked whether they have multiple sales points (outlets) in more than one location, 33.3% of the cooperatives noted that this is extremely rare and 28.6% indicated that it is available to a moderate extent, while 9.5% stated that it is very common (see Figure 10):

Figure 10: Presence of permanent points of sale for cooperatives in the sample

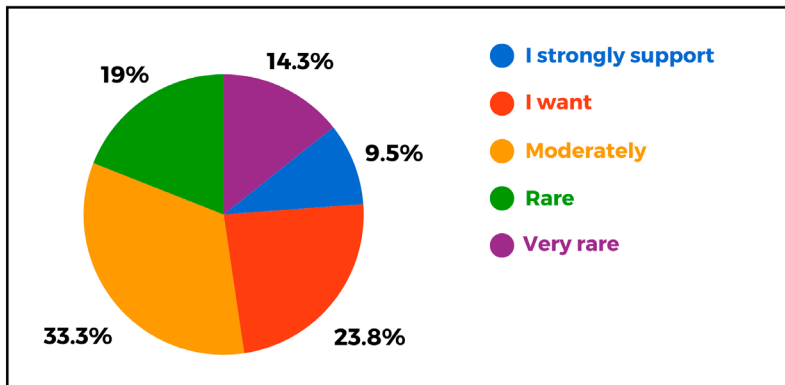
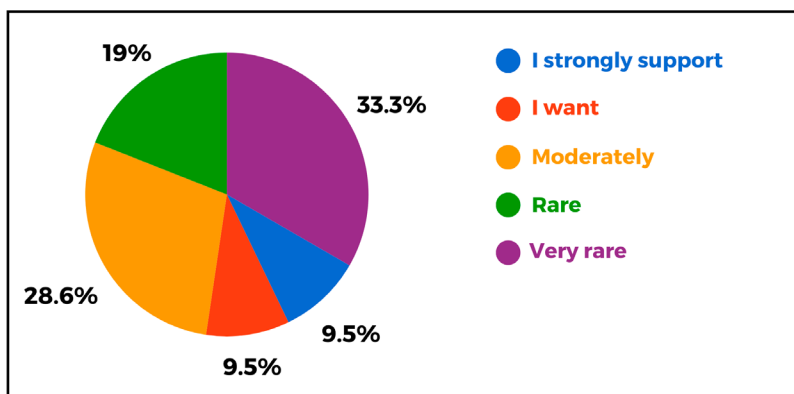


Figure 11: Proportion of cooperatives in the sample with points of sale (kiosks) in more than one location



When asked whether they market their products directly via personal relationships, 47.6% of the cooperatives responded that they largely rely on this method, 42.9% indicated that they use this method alongside others and 9.5% stated that they use this method to a moderate extent in their marketing and sales.

The cooperatives perceived an urgent need for a series of measures to sustain cooperative work and expand production operations. This was expressed in their answers to an open-ended question in the questionnaire, with the most prominent needs being:




- Cooperatives are often located far from urban centers, so there is a need to empower them to market their products in different markets. Some cooperatives operate in areas with a scattered population, making it impractical to rely solely on local markets.
- Most cooperatives expressed a need for better means of production and manufacturing tools, emphasizing the importance of greater ownership to boost the independence of their operations.
- The cooperatives highlighted their ongoing need for experts in technical and managerial supervision, as well as strategic and marketing planning.
- Production inputs and their costs, particularly water and agricultural inputs (both crops and livestock).
- Attracting male and female workers to employment opportunities in cooperatives.

Recommendations

Although collective effort is the primary factor involved in consolidating women's cooperative production, it will be impossible to expand the cooperative production base without support for the cooperative movement and women's involvement in it. Women's unions must return to their natural role in supporting

Palestinian women economically and socially. They can protect cooperative production within the cooperative framework and work to revive this spirit at the local community level and within the political and national institutions. This support should not be based on competition, but on genuine empowerment. The current situation facing Palestinian women demands work from all unions to change it. Changing one woman's situation can change the situation of her entire family and social circle, both female and non-female.

Work in this context offers opportunities to build a more resilient economy and establish an economic and social protection network for women, enhancing support for female farmers, particularly those with smallholdings, who can become more resilient through the expansion of cooperative movements. Cooperatives can also boost local production and consumption, prompting a shift away from reliance on imports. Despite the ongoing exploitation of Palestinian resources and lands by the occupying state, we must achieve effective representation by reclaiming underused agricultural lands, whose preservation lies at the heart of the political struggle.



This paper offers a set of recommendations for Palestinian policymakers to work towards in order to create a more propitious environment for women in the cooperative sector:

- The budget for cooperative activities should be increased by increasing the funds allocated to the Ministry of Labor and the Cooperative Work Agency. The current budget allocated to the cooperative sector by the Palestinian government is inadequate to revitalize the sector. For example, total expenditure for the Ministry of Labor (which the Cooperative Work Agency falls under) was approximately 46,796 million shekels in 2019, 41,693 million shekels in 2020 and 44,924 million shekels in 2021. Based on the strategic plan for the cooperative sector and collaborative work with other agencies, this budget offers insufficient support for the sector, especially since funds are primarily allocated to paying the salaries of staff at the Ministry.

- Policymakers should consider introducing tax adjustments on agricultural and livestock production inputs by setting price ceilings for active cooperatives. This would boost “negotiating power and access to inputs at suitable quality and prices”, as per the strategic plan developed by the Cooperative Work Agency. It would also help fulfill the first and second Sustainable Development

Goals.

- Collaboration with public agencies and institutions should be established to make collective purchasing feasible for women's cooperatives. Buying inputs in bulk generally costs less than individual purchases, resulting in higher profit margins when selling at competitive prices.
- Women's cooperatives should be encouraged to market their products across different sectors to achieve "product competitiveness and access to local and international markets" and contribute to the attainment of the first and second Sustainable Development Goals. This would also achieve the objective of "making women's handcrafted products available to local and global markets" and contribute to the fifth Sustainable Development Goal.
- Women should be encouraged to form and lead water users associations to overcome their lack of participation in water-related decisions. This would achieve the objective of "access to water or necessary materials and equipment for production".
- The Consumer Protection Law must be implemented and enforced to promote a culture of consuming products from national cooperatives instead of products imported from abroad or from the occupying state. This would achieve the

objective of “improving the quality and quantity of agricultural and food products and playing a fundamental role in food security”.

- Favorable lending programs or no-interest financing programs should be designed for women's cooperatives to improve their access to funding sources that would improve their means of production and boost their production.

- The Cooperative Law should be reviewed to ensure that it serves cooperatives. Community discussions should be held and recommendations issued, especially concerning the number of cooperative members. The law currently stipulates that there must be 15 members to establish a cooperative, which may pose a dilemma for some women in rural communities and even in urban areas.

- Greater attention should be paid to the issue of endowment lands, which should be used to benefit women's cooperatives, especially as women demonstrated their competence in returning to the land and producing goods during the COVID-19 pandemic.


- The authentic concept of “cooperation”, which is vital to a genuine Palestinian approach to cooperative production, must be revived. This means ensuring, as far as possible, that cooperatives are not established solely to receive funding as this may increase women's

dependency rather than boosting their economic independence and social freedom.

- Women's unions must work diligently to encourage women to return to and focus on land for production, protecting it and abstaining from consumption that is not supported by production. They should create a strong network of actors seeking to build resilience in the economy. There must be a reciprocal relationship in terms of production and consumption. Women's products should be supported through consumption. While the foundations have already been laid for this relationship, it needs to be more clearly structured.

- Private sector institutions should increase community initiatives to market food and agricultural products from women's cooperatives and hold community awareness workshops about the importance of cooperatives and cooperative work. In addition, they should organize more volunteer activities and street markets and encourage consumers and producers across the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Palestinian "interior" to participate in order to "establish direct reciprocal relationships between consumers and women's products".

- Data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics shows that approximately 72% of women aged 10 and over in the West Bank and



Gaza Strip own a smartphone, compared to 74% of men. Moreover, in 2022, 88% of women in the same age group use the internet compared to 89% of men. Similarly, data from the 2022 Digital Reality Report by iPoke revealed that the penetration rate of social media platforms in Palestine had reached 66%. Use of social media platforms by gender was distributed fairly evenly, with 51% of men and 49% of women using them. This indicates that most women now use social media platforms and their numbers are rising. Therefore, it is imperative for both civil and governmental institutions to work on enhancing the e-marketing capabilities of female cooperative members in the cooperative sector.





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من سعيها للتسليط على أحكامها
المتساهلة تحت الأيدى؟

البلادة النساء الفلسطينيات هي شروع
بإنهاء الوجود الفلسطيني

أين فزع ال U.N
من اغتصاب الفلسطينيات؟
أوقفوا العدوان فوراً

يا عالم...
نحن النساء الفلسطينيات
جوعى للعدالة والحرية وتقرير المصير



**WHAT DO
PALESTINIAN
AND ARAB
WOMEN HAVE TO
CELEBRATE ON
MARCH 8?**

Rasim Obaidat

What do Palestinian and Arab women have to celebrate on March 8?

Rasim Obaidat

Palestinian women are not only victims of a brutal occupation that forces them to withstand great burdens, responsibilities, struggles and sacrifices, they are also affected by multiple social limitations and obstacles that constrain their freedom and strip them of many of their rights. Despite representing half of society, in practice they are pushed into political, economic and social marginalization and subjected to the worst forms of exploitation. Due to the “revolution” or Arab Spring, women in the Arab world are now being trafficked and bought and sold like any other commodity. They have even been sold on the market of disgrace by extremist groups such as ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra and other terrorist organizations, as was the case of the Yazidi women in Iraq and Syrian women. These women were exploited in the worst possible way by extremist and terrorist groups, which used religion to serve their interests and satisfy their

hunger for power and sexual desires. They created and legislated on what is known as “sexual jihad”, exacerbating the already great problems suffered by Arab societies, such as illegitimate children produced by this “jihad”, which is an insult to and distortion of the true meaning of jihad.

Amid the occupation and the occupying state's repression, persecution, collective punishment, arrests and killings, Palestinian mothers struggle on multiple fronts as the head of the family, be it the husband, father or son, is often absent. They must be both mother and father to their children, whose fathers have been arrested for fighting for their homeland. They are required to compensate for this absence in terms of emotions, upbringing, education and livelihood, bearing the full burden of their households. These women are subjected to humiliation, degradation and indignity at the hands of male and female jailers during distressing visits to their husbands or sons in prison, enduring long waits outside the prison gates in the summer heat and winter cold and humiliating searches, which can even go as far as strip searches.

Instead of simply raising their children, securing a decent living for them and educating them, Palestinian women become mothers

to martyrs. They never expected to have to compensate for the love and affection lost as a result of the absence of their children's fathers. Sometimes, they are left homeless by the occupation's demolition of their husbands' or families' homes. They may be displaced, with no proper support to obtain alternative housing from the authorities or the community. In some cases, mothers and children may be separated, as in the case of the wife of the martyr Ghassan Abu Jamal. The occupation authorities deported the martyr's wife, Um Al-Walid, to the eastern suburbs after revoking her residency and left her three children in the care of their grandfather in Jabal Mukaber, far away from their mother.

Laws remain unfair to women, whether it is in terms of their personal status, work or rights. Moreover, multiple social constraints and obstacles limit women's freedom and participation in the productive economy and in certain jobs or positions and subject them to wage discrimination. Following the so-called "Arab Spring", the situation of oppressed women worsened as terrorist and extremist groups, with their strange ideas, imposed stricter restrictions on women, interfering in their most intimate affairs and depriving them of education or even the right to travel and work. These groups have



issued fatwas and laws that focus largely on how to sexually exploit women's bodies, imposing further oppression and persecution upon them.

While women globally have made significant strides in terms of rights, freedoms and status, with some even rising to the highest positions of power in their countries, in many Arab countries debate continues as to whether women should be permitted to drive or travel by plane without a male guardian. Everyone is aware of the tragic incident at a Saudi Arabian university, where a female student died of a heart attack. The ambulance was not allowed to enter the university campus to save her because the driver was male. This incident is indicative of a backward, ignorant stance.

In our Arab societies, the patriarchal dominance that is prevalent oppresses women, deprives them of their rights, quashes their potential and reduces them to mere objects. A nation cannot thrive if its women are suppressed, as societal progress is closely tied to women's empowerment. As Lenin once said, "The freedom of nations can be judged by the freedom of their women".

What Arab societies are now experiencing is

the product of sectarian and religious wars, which have numerous economic, social and familial impacts. These wars create a cascade of problems that lead to family breakdown, deviant behavior and social diseases. The killing and martyrdom of many men creates widows and leaves families without support due to the weakness of states and their limited resources. This accumulation of social, economic, familial and even psychological problems is a direct consequence of these wars.

We live in Palestine and the Arab world, where women face constant instability. They struggle on all fronts and in all arenas to protect their rights and secure more of them in order to live in freedom, dignity, security and safety. Meanwhile, we witness a growing assault on those rights and freedoms and on women's participation in defending their homeland against the repression of the occupying forces alongside their husbands, sons, brothers and fathers. They are martyred, arrested and insulted and their struggles and sacrifices are overlooked or maliciously criticized.

While many nations enjoy freedom, security, stability and rights enshrined in law, there is little for Arab and Palestinian women to celebrate on March 8. They suffer oppression, persecution





and torment and are burdened with numerous troubles, problems and rights violations as a result of occupation and sectarian and religious wars. Amid the dominance of Takfiri thought and ISIS in cultural and media spaces and without an enlightenment awareness, revolutionary, progressive, genuinely democratic frameworks, and social institutions that ensure women's freedom, rights and participation in society, it will be impossible to free ourselves from ignorance and backward thinking. Women are a fundamental cornerstone in the struggle for change, yet they are confined to a particular mold, deprived of many rights and robbed of their freedoms, leaving little possibility for the nation or people to rise up.






**AN ANALYSIS OF
THE LEGAL STATUS
OF THE JULY 2023
INVASION OF THE
JENIN CAMP BY
ISRAELI
OCCUPATION
FORCES**

Raya Radwan

An analysis of the legal status of the July 2023 invasion of the Jenin camp by Israeli occupation forces

Raya Radwan


- From July 3-5, 2023, Israeli occupation forces launched a military operation against the Jenin camp, which is considered to be the largest operation in the occupied West Bank since 2002. In order to document the violations suffered by Palestinians in the camp, especially women, the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees conducted field visits and interviews with women who were directly affected by the attack. Israeli occupation aircraft indiscriminately bombed buildings, infrastructure, electricity, water and communications networks. **Israeli bulldozers destroyed large vehicles. Israeli occupation forces obstructed ambulance operations and attacked hospitals, displacing around 4,000 people, as well as besieging 12,000 civilians in the Jenin camp as collective punishment.** These violations included direct assaults inside civilians' homes, beatings, humiliation, inhumane treatment, expulsion



from homes and destruction of property from bulldozing, demolition and bombing.

These missions reflect the objective of the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees to draw attention to the suffering of Palestinians, and especially women, in the Jenin camp, where they live under Israeli military occupation and endure constant attacks.

Under international law, Palestine is considered an occupied territory (comprising the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza). In light of this state of occupation by "Israel", a specific set of rules and principles of international law apply to occupied Palestine, including international humanitarian law – the Hague Regulations, the Fourth Geneva Convention, Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions and customary international humanitarian law – and international human rights law – the Convention against Torture, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. As the International Court of Justice has underscored, international human rights law applies to occupied Palestine and "Israel" is bound by these laws and conventions, as it exercises jurisdiction over Palestinian territories



as the occupying power. These conventions must therefore be respected by the Israeli occupation forces, including in the Jenin camp.

The Jenin camp, situated in the north of the occupied West Bank, has been under Israeli occupation since 1967. It was brought under Area A of the West Bank in 1995 and is now under the administration of the Palestinian National Authority.

Most Palestinians living in the Jenin camp are refugees from the Nakba in 1948, which was a process of ethnic cleansing of Palestine by the Israeli military that forced 700,000 Palestinians to flee their homes and take refuge in Gaza, the West Bank and outside of Palestine. Palestinian refugees living in camps in the occupied West Bank reside in housing granted to them until a just and lasting solution for their return is found. Residents of the camps are considered protected civilians under international law and should thus enjoy a higher level of protection.

Over the years, Jenin city and refugee camp have been and continue to be targeted by the occupation forces. However, they remain standing to this day. Jenin refugee camp, which covers an area of one square kilometer, remains

a symbol of defiance and steadfastness. In 2002, the Israeli occupation launched the so-called “Operation Defensive Shield” to restore control over the West Bank and eliminate hotbeds of resistance there. The battle at Jenin camp was the fiercest and longest.

On July 3, 2023, Israeli occupation forces stormed the Martyr Dr. Khalil Suleiman Governmental Hospital in the city of Jenin and opened fire inside its courtyard, injuring three people, two of them seriously. Dozens of citizens suffered from suffocation. The occupation forces also entered Ibn Sina Hospital, in clear violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Attacks on civilian homes and use of torture against Palestinians in Jenin

Sarah, aged 50 years old, resides in the Jenin camp with two of her sisters, Lana, aged 47 years old, and Esra, aged over 50 years old, both of whom suffer from chronic mental illness. She reported that her house was damaged during the attack and the glass in the windows shattered and fell to the ground. Her sisters were terrified. They had previously witnessed the storming of Jenin in 2002, which had acutely worsened their mental health.




Lana and Esra's current medical condition is challenging and they are unable to comprehend their surroundings. Forced to evacuate their house due to Israeli airstrikes on the camp, Sarah found it difficult to go out with her sisters given their limited understanding of the situation. Following a power cut and the departure of most of the neighborhood's residents, Sarah remained alone in her house with her sisters until neighbors came to help them leave.

Sarah describes the difficulty of navigating in the dark on the debris-strewn ground left by the bombing and destruction of the camp.

Farah, aged 56 years old, is originally from Zar'in in Haifa District but now resides in the Jenin camp. She has four sons and two daughters. Like other women in the camp, Farah recounts that during the attack, when they were informed of the need to evacuate, her child Amin clung to her and refused to leave the house. The situation was incredibly difficult, as the very idea of abandoning their home seemed unthinkable. They walked out amid the dirt and destruction in a state of fear and panic.

Farah explains that this sense of fear has persisted since the attack, leading to



sleep deprivation and heightened anxiety. She describes staying awake for hours at dawn with her neighbors, as drones constantly hover over the camp.

Fatimah, aged 50 years old, has four sons and three daughters. She lost her son in a raid on the camp 19 days before the latest attack. Fatimah was forced to leave her home along with 14 women from her family who were in the house during the attack. She is currently facing difficulties as she suffered a blood clot in her leg. This made it hard for her to evacuate her home and navigate the destruction in the camp. With help from a girl in the family, Fatimah managed to leave the house, but the girl was attacked by a dog accompanying the occupation forces during the raid, resulting in a bite to her hand[1].

Suha, who has two sons and two daughters, experienced the storming and occupation of her house for over 8 hours. The occupation forces used her house as a military barracks for their soldiers. They also arrested her husband and deported him for the whole time they were inside the house. More than 45 soldiers participated in the raid. Suha was detained with her daughter in one of the rooms in her house for more than 1.5 hours. During this time, they were attacked by

a dog, causing extensive injuries. Suha and her daughter continue to suffer from the effects of the dog's fangs and claws all over their bodies, with injuries to their necks, hands and backs. Suha lost her molars and her daughter's braces were dislodged from her mouth by the dog.

The dog then targeted Suha's 16-year-old son, Ahmad. He was detained for interrogation for over an hour in one of the rooms in the house, with the soldiers ordering the dog to attack him intermittently. The occupation soldiers also used a suffocating smoke bomb against Suha and her four children while they were detained alone in a closed room. Suha describes the experience as a slow death.

Rawa, aged 50 years old, is a refugee from Al-Mansi in Haifa District and had 70 members of her family gather in her house after her cousin's house was bombed. Occupation forces then fired a missile at her house, which hit her brother's house on the top floor and reached hers. The electricity was cut off and Rawa's house was damaged. The window glass and kitchen cabinets were broken and the water tanks were irreparably damaged. Rawa remained in her home until 15:30. She then joined her family at her uncle's house after she was ordered to evacuate. She stayed at



her uncle's house for two days and discovered upon her return that her mobile phone had gone missing.

Yara, originally from Bani Ghurra, has been a widow since 1990 and has five children. The entire basement of her house, used by her sons as an internet café, burned down as a result of the attack. The occupation forces entered the house, vandalized and broke it. Yara's house suffered extensive damage, with cracked, destroyed walls and floor tiles and broken window glass caused by the fire, which lasted an entire day. Yara is apprehensive about spending the night in the house, as it is now uninhabitable and could collapse at any moment. As a result, she has been compelled to leave her home and rent another house outside the camp.

Najma, a refugee from Mansi in Haifa District, has four sons and one daughter. Her husband suffers from epilepsy. They were instructed to evacuate when the attack occurred. Initially, Najma hesitated to leave the house due to the fear that her husband would have a seizure. Eventually, she left her home, only to return and find it in ruins. The Israeli occupation forces destroyed everything in the house, peeing on the beds and furniture and confiscating her son's

computer, two iPads and a sum of money from her son's pocket.

These acts by the occupying state are violations of international law and may constitute war crimes:

- Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention stipulates that "No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed". However, the civilian residents of the Jenin camp are constantly subjected to collective punishment by the occupying state through regular violent attacks on the camp and all its inhabitants.

- Article 18 of the Fourth Geneva Convention states that "Civilian hospitals organized to give care to the wounded and sick, the infirm and maternity cases, may in no circumstances be the object of attack, but shall at all times be respected and protected by the parties to the conflict". Despite this, hospitals are regularly attacked by the occupation forces in Jenin, terrorizing patients and medical personnel.


- Article 8(2)(e)(xiv) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted in Rome on July 17, 1998, stipulates that it is not permissible to use asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases and all similar liquids, materials or devices, but

the occupying state regularly uses asphyxiating gas against Palestinians in Jenin, including in hospitals.

- Additionally, Article 7(1)(d) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court considers the deportation or forcible transfer of populations from the area in which they are lawfully located, by expulsion or any other coercive act, without justifications permitted by international law, a crime against humanity. In their attack, the occupation forces forced the civilian population of the camp to leave their homes.

- Torture and inhuman treatment, i.e. the intentional infliction of severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, upon a person in the custody or under the control of the accused, is constitutive of a war crime and a crime against humanity under Article 7(1)(f) and 8(2)(a)(ii) of the Rome Statute. In the attacks on Jenin, many civilians, including women and children, were victims of torture and inhumane and degrading treatment, even inside their own homes.

- Article 8(2)(a)(iv) of the Rome Statute also considers extensive destruction and appropriation of property not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly as a war crime under international law. In Jenin, many civilian houses and property were destroyed without military necessity.



The attacks on Jenin are never-ending. The Israeli occupation is committing a crime against humanity by carrying out inhumane acts against Palestinians as it seeks to eradicate any form of resistance to the occupation and colonization of Palestine. The occupation continues to storm the cities and towns of the West Bank, wreaking havoc. In the last three months of 2023, the number of martyrs in the West Bank exceeded 325.

The Union of Palestinian Women's Committees calls on the international community to fulfill its obligations towards the Palestinian people and demand that Israel adhere to its responsibilities as a military occupation, prioritizing the safety of the civilian population. Additionally, we stress the need for United Nations institutions to fulfill their responsibilities towards the Palestinian people, acknowledging their right to self-determination and return. We demand an end to the colonization and illegal occupation of Palestine and respect for the right to return of all Palestinian refugees.



Free Palestine

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This brochure is a testament to our solidarity and our collective struggle. Together, we will continue to march until all women are free!

In solidarity!

Contact Information

If you want to communicate and contribute to the growing solidarity with Palestine, you can contact us at

info@marchemondiale.org



In the name of the World March of Women
Research and Writing

WMW Palestine

WMW Middle East and North Africa

Editing

Pınar Yüksek

Design

Ellen Dias

Translation

Ahed Nasser Abu Khdeir

Isadora Carolina Prieto

Eleanor Staniforth

Carole Salas





