

The Role of Palestinian Women in Resistance from 1884 - 2006

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The Islamic Sharia discourse addressed both men and women. For example in several verses, Allah spoke to them and said, “Whoever did good, whether male or female, and is a believer, We will surely bless them with a good life, and We will certainly reward them according to the best of their deeds” [An-Nahl: 97]. Out of this belief, Palestinian women understood their high status and focused their jihad on dawa and social work, and they made considerable sacrifices and played a major role in the struggle.

This study focuses on the role of Palestinian women in the struggle at political and military levels. The study covers the role of women in the Palestinian struggle in three time periods: From 1884 – 1948, from 1967 – 1986 and from 1987 – 2006.

Topic One: The Role of Women in the Palestinian Struggle from 1884-1948

In this period of time, several revolutions erupted against Balfour Declaration, Jews’ immigration and land theft, following political and military methods. Women actively participated in these revolutions.

Beginning of Women’s Involvement

In 1884, women and men stood side by side against the establishment of the first Jewish settlement near Afula town. After the end of the First World War in November, 1917, the Palestinian women participated in huge demonstrations against Balfour Declaration. In 1921, they took their first step towards organized activities through the foundation of Arab Women Society in Al-Quds, which organized demonstrations against the Zionist settlements¹.

¹ Kazi, Hamida, **Palestinian women and the national liberation movement: a social perspective**, <https://libcom.org/book/export/html/49954>.

1925 Demonstration

In 1925, Balfour visited Al-Quds to participate in the opening of the Hebrew University. He wanted to visit Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa, but the Muslims and Christians prevented him from entry. Muslim and Christian women protested before the High Commissioner's house against the visit. One of the women had three veils on her face from Hebron, one with a single veil from Al-Quds, and a third was unveiled Christian¹.

1929 Al-Buraq Revolution

In this revolution, a meeting for women was held. Female Muslims and Christians such as Matil Maghnam, Anbara Al-Khaldi and Tarab Abdel-Hadi attended it. After the meeting, they formed a delegation to meet the Higher Commissioner, and after the interview women in one hundred cars carried out a demonstration in Al-Quds. This demonstration triggered major popular enthusiasm².

The Arab Women Executive Committee was formed, and it started organizing protests and demonstrations, demanding Arab rights, and boycotting Jewish stores (they even swore to it)³.

1933 Revolution

On April 15th, 1933, the women of Al-Quds participated in a protest against the visit of British officials to Palestine: Lord Allenby and Lord Swinton. The women marched from the streets of Al-Quds to the Masjid of Omar. Matil Maghnam, a Christian, delivered a speech from the Masjid's pulpit. The march continued to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre from where Tarab Abdel-Hadi, a Muslim, delivered a speech⁴.

¹ Abdel-Hadi, Mahdi, **Head of Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs**, Al-Nakba film, episode 1, Strings of Conspiracy, Al-Jazeera, May 16, 2008.

² Abu El-Reesh, Raf'a, **the Role of History, Role of Documenting Oral History in Protecting the Palestinian National Identity**, <http://www.badil.org/haq-alawda/item/199-article19>

³ Ibid: Abu El-Reesh.

⁴ Abdel-Hadi, Faihaa, **Jerusalemite Women in the Popular Collective Memory**, the Palestinian Al-Ayyam newspaper, (Ramallah, issued by Al-Ayyam Printing Press, Publishing and Distribution Corporation, on October 20, 2013).

1936 Revolution

The Palestinian women also played a military role. Chrysanthemums Flower Association*, founded by Mohiba Khurshid, started its work in charity, social work, and helping the poor students. Later however, an innocent child was killed by a British soldier in front of Mohiba so the association moved to organized military work¹. Khorshid's aim was to unite the efforts of the Muslims and Christians to serve the Palestinian cause and protect the Arabs' rights².

During that revolution, the British occupation bombarded Baqa al-Gharbiyye village and the soldiers captured the men causing the women, along with their children, to go to the military outposts at night armed with stones only demanding the release of their men – and they were successful³.

1948 War

Women at this stage greatly supported the steadfastness of the Palestinian community. After Deir Yassin Massacre in 1948, Hind Al-Husseini and Adnan Amin Al-Tamimi gathered 55 orphaned children from Deir Yassin and put them in two rooms in the Old Town. Back then, she only had 138 Palestinian pounds and swore to stay with them, dead or alive⁴.

On April 25, 1948, Hind founded a charity society for the Palestinian orphans and needy. She offered them shelter, care, food and entertainment. She called it 'Dar Al-Tifel Al-Arabi Organization'⁵.

* The name was given after the Chrysanthemums Flower of the French Revolution. It also holds local symbols. This type of flowers is widely spread in Palestine. It denotes natural beauty and freedom which the Palestinians seek to achieve. The logo of the association was created in India under the instructions of Mahatma Ghandi. It was designed by Mohiba Khurshid herself.

¹ Al-Shayib Yusuf, **Tales of Unknown Beginnings**, Palestine newspaper, (Beirut, issued by Al-Safir Al-Arabi newspaper, 4(39), July 15, 2013).

² Ibid: Abu El-Reesh, **Role of Documenting Oral History in Protecting the Palestinian National Identity**.

³ Linah, ALSaafin, **The role of Palestinian Women in Resistance**, Open Democracy, April 17, 2014, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/role-of-palestinian-women-in-resistance/>.

⁴ Yakoub, Aws, **Jerusalemite Pioneers: The Jerusalemite Pioneer Hind Al-Husseini (1916-1994)**, Al-Quds for Culture and Heritage Institution, <http://www.alqudslana.com/>

⁵ Ibid.

The organization covers all educational stages from nursery to high school. It also has a museum for heritage, a culture center and a dorm for the female students¹.

In the early nineties, the internal section had 300 female orphans. However, the occupation's measures and restrictions, such as preventing the people of the Gaza Strip to enter the West Bank and the separation of Al-Quds from the cities of the West Bank, reduced the number to 20 female orphans in the internal section and 93 in the external one².

The Arab Women Union Society contributed to the establishment of emergency hospitals in Al-Eizariya and the Mount of Olives, where the treatment of the wounded in the 1948 struggle took place. In addition, the meals were prepared for the fighters there, and the orphans and children of martyrs were cared for at the civil schools at its expense³.

Most of the exerted efforts were focused on handling the impact of the Nakba in social and charity work. The headquarter was based in Bab Al-Sahira where in 1950 a kindergarten, a children care center, pregnant mothers' care center, and a nursery (Dar Al-Aman for the elderly) were established. The female students and members participated in the resistance against the Zionist occupation through holding strikes and demonstrations causing the closure of the school multiple times⁴.

Samia Khuri, from Al-Quds, mentioned that Elizabeth Nasser, Zleikha Shehabi and Hind Al-Husseini founded a home in 1952 for homeless girls who make their living through begging. That home played a major role in limiting that phenomenon. It secured the girls a decent living and a safe refuge, and taught them skills that enabled them to work in institutions or become good wives. Gradually after 1967, the need for national

¹ Al-Husseini, Hidayat, **Hind Al-Husseini and Dar Al-Tifel Al-Arabi Movie**, (Al-Quds, **Dar Al-Tifel Al-Arabi Organization, Funded by Taawon Association, 2012**).

² Ibid.

³ **The Palestina Encyclopedia** www.palestinapedia.net .

⁴ Ibid.

homes and the people's desire for official education for their girls led to the development of a co-educational primary school with a kindergarten¹.

Topic Two: The Role of Women in the Palestinian Struggle from 1967-1986

The defeat of the 1967 war was a major disappointment to the Palestinian people. The Arabs' failures taught the Palestinians to be self-reliant, to exert all efforts to liberate their land, and to take back their rights. For that to happen, men and women began developing a new stage of national work.

The National Role

In 1967, the Palestinian women formed groups to distribute food and clothes to the needy people without receiving a permit from the occupation's 'authorities' in the occupied lands. In early August 1967, the Palestinian women demonstrated against the brutal atrocities committed by the occupation against the Palestinians. On October 19, the occupation arrested Fatima Barnawi accusing her of throwing a bomb on Zion Cinema in Al-Quds and of being affiliated with Fatah movement. However, Fatima Barnawi's courage during the trial made her a pioneer in the Palestinian struggle of women².

The women's demonstrations continued declaring their rejection of the 'Israeli' occupation. Two of the most prominent demonstrations were in Al-Quds on April 25, 1968 against the occupation's decision to hold a military parade in Al-Quds; and in June 1968 - on the first anniversary of the war. The women announced it a day of mourning and put bouquets of flowers on the martyrs' graves³.

In January 1969, three girls were tried from Gaza under the pretext of being affiliated with the Palestine Liberation Organization. On February 1, Nahla Al-Bayed

¹ Abdel-Hadi, Faihaa, **Towards the Awakening of Collective Memory**, the Palestinian Al-Ayyam newspaper, (Ramallah, issued by Al-Ayyam Printing Press, Publishing and Distribution Corporation, on October 27, 2013).

² **The struggle of Palestinian women**, Palestine National Assembly Research Center, (Beirut, Palestine Liberation Organization, 1975), p9.

³ Al-Waheidi, Maysoon, **Palestinian Women and the Israeli Occupation**, Arab Studies Society, Al-Quds, 1986, p. 35.

was sentenced three years in prison, and Fatima Murtaja and Fatima Afana were sentenced to two years in prison. On the following day, the people of Gaza participated in a demonstration against the occupation's decision, and clashes erupted between the people and the occupation forces¹.

Affiliation with National and Islamic Movements

In 1965, several associations and organizations headed by Palestinian women were founded. These included: the "General Union of Palestinian Women", the "Friends Society – Al-Quds", the "Association for the Development of Palestinian Camps," and the "Fifth of June Society²".

In the 1970s, the women began to join the Palestinian organizations, and their work was concerned with the popular, military and political organization. In 1970, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine focused on the women's issue in its literature, and their participation in the revolution so was the case with the Popular Front³.

The women's committees began their hard work in 1978, and they formed new committees which operated within the resistance. Since the late seventies and in the early eighties, women's role appeared inside the factions, and female representatives attended public conferences of the factions; especially Fatah's. In the fourth conference of the movement in 1980, 14 out of 450 seats were for women. Intisar Al-Wazir was elected and she became the first female representative of Fatah's Revolutionary Council. The Palestinian Declaration of Independence, issued by the National Council in 1988, stipulated gender equality but it positioned women as rivals not as worthy individuals⁴.

Around the same time of women's involvement in the Islamic movement, people became more aware of Islam (i.e. in 1977). At Masjid Al-Abbas, for instance,

¹ Ibid: p. 37.

² Elwan, Nour, **the Palestinian Woman in the Resistance' Front Lines**, Noon Post, June 21, 2017.

³ Yassin, Abdel-Qadir, et al. **Women of Palestine in the Battle of Life**, (Cairo, Shorouk International Bookshop, 1st ed., 2012), p. 158.

⁴ Ibid: pp. 158-159.

Sheikh Ahmed Yassin used to deliver religious lessons which were attended by men and women. Then he founded the Islamic Centre and women's work began in the movement in 1979. At that time, people's faith grew, more youth became religious and the official Islamic dressing became common among the girls¹.

Although Islamic awareness spread, it was not always well-received by the women. That year, they started looking for someone to involve them in revolutionary work. Three high-school girls (Rajaa Al-Halabi, Hiyam Hirzallah and Ruwaida Muheisin) went to Sheikh Ahmed Yassin asking for weapons to resist the Israeli occupation. The Sheikh was marveled at their enthusiasm, but he gave them a book by the preacher Fathi Yakan 'the Youth and Change'. The three girls read, summarized and discussed the books with the Sheikh. After a month of schooling with the Sheikh, the girls became more aware and pledged their allegiance to him (bay'a)².

Armed Activity

Women took part in the armed resistance and carried out Fedayeen operations against the Israeli occupation. Among these fighters are:

Abla Taha

Abla was three months pregnant when the occupation arrested her on July 25, 1968 accusing her of being affiliated with the Popular Front and carrying explosives. Her 'Israeli' lawyer proved that Abla had been tortured in prison³.

Mozna Nicola:

Nicola was a 30-year-old nurse from Britain. She returned to 'Israel' in 1975 after having visited her parents. The occupation arrested her and charged her with the attempt to recruit Nazareth residents to join Fatah, accusing her of leaking information to Fatah⁴.

¹ Alzaeem, Ibrahim, **the Islamic Women's Movement – Hamas**, (London, E-books, 1st ed., 2019), p.45.

² Ibid: p. 45.

³ **The Struggle of Palestinian Women**, Palestine National Assembly Research Center, (Beirut, Palestine Liberation Organization, 1975), p. 10.

⁴ Ibid p. 10 .

Shadia Abu Ghazaleh:

She was born in Nablus in 1949, and participated in many Fedayeen operations against the occupation. On November 28, 1968, Shadia was making a bomb at her house to blow it up in an 'Israeli' building in Tel Aviv¹. However, the bomb exploded and she was martyred. She was an active member in the Popular Front and set an example of women's bold participation in the struggle².

Laila Khalid

Born in Haifa in north Palestine in 1944, Laila, along with Saleem Al-Issawi, hijacked an American plane that was flying from LA to Tel Aviv. They rode the plane while transiting in Rome. They changed its path to Damascus, emptied it from the passengers and blew the plane. On September 6, 1970, she hijacked an 'Israeli' El Al plane. However, she failed and was arrested. She was freed a month later in a prisoner-swap deal³.

Dalal Mughrabi

She was born in 1958 in the Palestinian refugee camp of Sabra in Beirut. On March 11, 1978, Dalal led a fedayeen group and implement a landing operation on the beach of Tel Aviv. She hijacked an 'Israeli' bus and confronted the occupation forces, which refused to listen to the demands of Dalal and her group leading to clashes. Dalal Mughrabi and 11 Fedayeen were martyred after she had killed 30 'Israelis' and injured more than 80⁴.

¹ **Unforgettable Palestinian Women**, Wafa, http://info.wafa.ps/ar_page.aspx?id=20205

² Linah, ALSaafin, **The Role of Palestinian Women in Resistance**, Open Democracy, April 19, 2014.

³ Suleiman, Najah, **About Laila Khalid: The Female Fighter**, Al-Mayadeen, August 31, 2019.

⁴ Dalal Mughrabi (1958-1978), Journalists for the Land, March 10, 2017.

Topic Three: The Role of Women in the Palestinian Struggle from 1987-2006

The early work of women was preliminary to the Intifada. In the Islamic university of Gaza, for instance, the Islamic women's movement started in the 1980s and the female Students Council started raising the political awareness of the students so to base the resistance work on knowledge. The Council varied the methods it used understanding the importance of political awareness in intriguing resistance against the occupation at all levels. The religious commitment and political awareness were integrated forming a strong wall against any 'Israeli' attempts of penetration. Awareness was raised through encouraging reading, holding trips, making art and others¹.

First: Al-Hijara Intifada 1987

Palestinian women were very important to Al-Hijara Intifada and among the sources which documented their struggling experience is 'Naila and the Intifada' movie.

The movie explains Palestinian women's lives from different political, social classes, and cities in Palestine. Azza Qasem from Gaza, a leader in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, worked in the delivery of goods, medicine and statements to motivate the Palestinians to keep the flare of the intifada burning².

Naila Aiash, the focus of the movie, survived a bitter experience starting with the demolition of her family's house by the occupation forces, her administrative detention, miscarriage in prison, her husband's arrest, demolition of their home, and, most recently, her administrative detention again along with her 6-month-old son.⁽³⁾

Naila said that they focused on supporting women economically because most of the men were in prison. They used to distribute bread to camps in Gaza with which they delivered the statements that listed the demands of the Intifada⁴.

⁽¹⁾ Ibid: Alzaeem, **the Islamic Women's Movement-Hamas**, pp. 149-150.

⁽²⁾ Ibid.

⁽³⁾ Saber, Shukri, **the Intifada and Its Impact on Palestinian Women's Position**, (Gaza, Women's Affairs Center, 2002), p. 184

⁽⁴⁾ Ibid.

Naima Elsheikh Ali, social activist, said that every faction formed a women's movement. Publicly, that movement played a social role including working in sewing shops, teaching women sewing, opening a kindergarten, but in reality it was organizational work⁽¹⁾.

Second: Al-Aqsa Intifada 2000

A study conducted by the Gaza Center for Women's Affairs, on a sample of women representing professional performance in the Gaza Strip, showed a remarkable shift in women's political and social participation. Their participation rate in demonstrations rose from 35.25% to 80.25% during the Intifada, their leadership from 10.75% to 20.75%, blood donation from 7.25% to 31%, and visiting the families of the martyrs from 27% to 76.5%².

Women played a heroic role in the resistance. For example, Ahlam Al-Tamimi transported the martyr Ezz-Eddin Al-Masri to Al-Quds where he carried out "Sparo" restaurant martyrdom operation on August 9, 2001. She checked the streets of the city and briefed him on the security measures, and identified the location of the operation herself³. Al-Masri carried out the operation, killed 20 'Israelis' and injured over 100 others, tens of them were critical⁴.

She also bravely contributed to the protection of more than 75 mujahideen, mainly from Al-Qassam and other factions, as she helped break the siege that was imposed on them. The mujahideen were taking shelter in Umm al-Nasr mosque in Beit Hanoun. They fought back against the occupation soldiers' invasion, but after days of resistance their ammunition ran out. The occupation forces surrounded the mosque with tanks, and advanced towards it. The mujahideen sent out distress calls on Thursday, November 2, 2006⁵.

⁽¹⁾ Ibid: p. 184.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid: Yassin et al., **Palestinian Women's Struggle in Life**, p. 187.

⁴ 14th Anniversary of Sparo Restaurant Martyrdom Operation, **Al-Qassam Brigades Website**, August 9, 2015.

<http://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/news/details/7801>.

⁵ **Female Fedayeen of the Siege Movie**, Women's Movement Media Office (Hamas).

Fedayeen Woman

Palestinian women did not support their husbands and encourage their children on jihad only, but also they carried out martyrdom operations as well. Examples are:

Wafaa Idris

Idris was born on November 2nd, 1973 in Al Amari camp. She was a volunteer in the Red Crescent and carried out the first martyrdom operation in Al-Quds on January 28, 2002. It resulted in the death of an 'Israeli' settler and the injury of 90 others. The Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, the military wing of Fatah, adopted the execution of the operation¹.

Darren Abu Eisha

Her sister, Ibtisam, says that the main motive behind Darren's martyrdom operation was the shooting of two Palestinian pregnant women at a checkpoint near Nablus, north of West Bank, near her family home. Darren swore to avenge for the women's martyrdom and carried out her operation. It was in Maccabim checkpoint between Al-Quds and Tel-Aviv on February 27, 2002. It resulted in the injury of three soldiers, the martyrdom of Darren and two Palestinians who were with her².

Reem Riyashi

She is the first Al-Qassam woman to carry out a martyrdom operation. She executed the operation at Beit Hanoun Crossing (Erez) that separates the Gaza Strip from the occupied Palestine of 1948³.

¹ **Martyr Wafaa Idris: A Secret in This Land**, Palestine Zakerat Al-Shuhadaa website, May 19, 2015.

² Ibid: Yassin et al., **Palestinian Women's Struggle in Life**, p. 189.

³ **Statements and Notices**, Al-Qassam Brigades,
<http://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/statements/details/441>.

On January 14, 2004, Riyashi carried out the operation in a joint plan by Al-Qassam and Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades¹ that led to the death of 4 soldiers and injury of 10 others².

Fatma An-Najar

Fatma Omar Mahmoud An-Najar was born in 1938 in Jabalia. She is a mother of two girls and seven boys, and a grandmother of 44 grandchildren. She is the oldest of the female Fedayeen to carry out a martyrdom operation³.

This operation was unique as it targeted special forces. On Thursday, November 23, 2006, Hajja Fatma blew herself while being surrounded by a big number of special-forces soldiers in east Jabalia in Al-Jammul near Al-Shanti house. Several soldiers were killed and injured⁴.

For men to die for their countries is understandable. However, for women, old or young, to do it makes them greater and more appreciated. Women have proven their strength in fighting for their religion and rights and for sacrificing their souls, money and children.

Legislative Elections

27 women ran for the first Legislative Council elections in 1996. 5 of them won (i.e. 5.7%): Hanan Ashrawi, Dalal Salama, Jamila Saidam, Intisar Al-Wazir and Rawya Al-Shawwa⁵.

In the second elections on January 25, 2006, all coalitions, factions and political parties, except for the Islamic Jihad, participated. Some women participated in the elections while others boycotted them (both as candidates and voters)⁶.

¹ **Military Statement issued by Al-Qassam Brigades and Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades**, Al-Qassam Brigades, <https://www.alqassam.net/arabic/statements/details/>

² Ibid: Yassin et al., **Palestinian Women's Struggle in Life**, p. 190.

³ Ibid: 193.

⁴ **Operation of the Mother of the Female Fedayeen**, Al-Qassam Brigades, <http://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/statements/details/2314>

⁵ Awad, Talib, **Palestinian Women and their Participation in Parliamentary Elections**, Donia Al-Watan, December 28, 2019.

⁶ Ibid: Alzaeem, **the Islamic Women's Movement-Hamas**, pp. 153-154.

Women won 17 seats out of 132 (i.e. 12.87%), showing more representation than in the 1996 elections. The women who won representing Hamas' Reform and Change list were Mariam Saleh, Mariam Farahat, Jamila Al-Shanti, Samira Al-Halaika, Huda Naeem and Muna Mansour¹.

The notable increase in women's participation in the second Legislative elections reflect more communal awareness of the importance of women's role, especially women who were affiliated with the Islamic movement. The Islamic movement was repeatedly accused of not believing in women's role in politics and national activities.

Future of Women's Role

The political division from which Palestine suffers has influenced women's participation. Some men and women decided to quit the political arena. In fact, the complex reality of Palestine has led to neglecting key women issues. As a result, women turned to forming feminist movements far from political parties².

The influence of these movements remains limited politically and ideologically although such institutes should bridge the communal gap and serve women regardless any disparities.

In 1988, the PLO stipulated gender-equality, but discrimination is clear in the decision-making positions inside the Organization³.

If opening the door for women to assume leadership positions in the PLO is important, it should be open for all women from different national and Islamic parties.

It is necessary for national and Islamic women movements to be part of the reconciliation dialogue between Hamas and Fatah. They should discuss women's issues

¹ Ibid: p. 154.

² **Role of Women in Arab Revolutions and Their Impact on Palestinian Women**, Women's Affairs Center, (Gaza, 2013).

³ Mesleh, Rose, **Political Participation of Palestinian Women and Decision-Making**, (Research Center, PLO, 2012), p. 88.

and must collaborate in the Legislative council and local councils to protect women's rights¹.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion:

- Palestinian women played their role against the Jewish occupation in Palestinian as early as the end of the 19th century.
- Women played a national role in every stage of the Palestinian revolution.
- Women's resistance was through social work, dawa, politics and military.
- Women supported their husbands, encouraged their children, participated in Fedayeen work, and carried out martyrdom operations helping the jihad continue in Palestine.
- Women participated in the political process as well. They were more present in the second legislative elections, which reflected the community's awareness and the Islamic movement's belief in the importance of involving women in the community.

Recommendations

- Opening more doors for women's involvement in national work because it benefits women and the society alike.
- Protecting women's institutions from the misfortunes of division. It is important that these institutions' activities surpass any ideological and political considerations.
- Investing in women's potentials and achievements to develop the quality of services in the public and private sectors.
- Initiating serious talks, collaboration and coordination between the national and Islamic women's movements.

¹ Ibid: p. 89.

- Restructuring the PLO and including Hamas and Jihad. The representation should not be limited to male leaders. Women from the Islamic and national movements must be involved as well.

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