The Demobilization of Women's Movements: The Case of Palestine

By Islah Jad

Building Feminist Movements and Organizations

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The Demobilization of Women's Movements: The Case of Palestine
By Islah Jad*

Introduction

It is now eight years since the beginning of the second Palestinian Uprising, or *intifada*, in September, 2000, and fifteen years since the creation of the Palestinian Authority (PA) following the signing of the Oslo Agreement in 1993 between the state of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to end almost half a century of conflict over the land of Palestine. In 2002, two years into the second Uprising, I returned to Palestine to do fieldwork against the background of ongoing Israeli Occupation. My original research topic was to explore the implications of the establishment of the PA on Palestinian women's movements[1] from a gender perspective, and to examine the changes occurring in the constitution of these movements to suit a new era of "state building."

I viewed my research as a new challenge in that it was to explore the incongruity of a state born after long years of colonization, but one that could not be called post-colonial since colonization was still flagrantly manifest in all aspects of Palestinian life. I was particularly intrigued by the ways in which this quasi-state would handle issues related to the control of its resources and development planning and how all these elements would influence gender relations and women's movements. I was also curious to probe into the difficult connections between a national liberation movement, geared to mobilizing its constituencies for a long struggle, and a new state bureaucracy in need of different types of structures, constituencies and discourses.

The study of Palestinian women's movements was no less challenging. Like women's movements worldwide, the Palestinian women's movements were faced with both "old" agendas of mobilization and liberation and new ones concerning women's equality and empowerment. Under normal circumstances, it is difficult to straddle these two agendas; it is all the more so when there is an extraordinary situation in which the state and society are threatened in their very physical existence by a military occupation.

The Context

The extremity of the situation became shockingly apparent in March, 2002, when I was calling upon some women leaders to examine the possibility of pouring into the streets to stop the advance of the Israeli tanks re-occupying our cities. The answer was simple but very revealing: "We are not organized," they said. The era of state building had evidently diminished the mobilization capacity not only of a vanishing state and a diminishing society. The nascent state structures were ill-equipped to assist in the organization of people's resistance and women's movements. I realized that I may have been pursuing a passing moment, a vanishing project that was being overtaken by history. The various conflicts I was tracing among different women's groups, which were trying to position themselves and articulate new feminist interests and discourse, all depended on the existence of

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1. I refer to women's *movements*, in plural, for two reasons. First, it is important to recognise historical variations and shifts which have taken place in each movement, according to the historical context in which it has emerged. Second, the women's movements that I examine, such as the movements of the Islamists and of the secularists, have had differing aims and interests; and within each women's movement there are a broad and fluid range of activities and involvements that cannot be grouped together.

a state apparatus to which they could direct their demands, protests, or opposition.

The physical destruction of most official buildings, including the headquarters of the head of state, along with institutions and resources, forced me to shift my focus to the arenas and opportunities for women in civil society to continue resisting the Occupation while working towards a more equitable gender order. This shift in focus to women's activism in civil society is of relevance not only to Palestine but also to many other countries in the Arab Middle East, where weakened states, under the pressure of international agencies and some local constituencies, are pushing for more "gender-equitable" legislation.

This project has been challenged and rejected not by the state, but by "people's representatives" in newly developing democracies, as well as by the counter-activism of many Islamist groups in civil society. This was the case in Jordan in January, 2000, for instance, when the Parliament rejected amending the law to tighten the punishment of males killing their female siblings to protect their "honour." It was also the case in Egypt in February, 2000, when the Parliament rejected an amendment to the Family Law giving women the freedom to travel without the consent of their male "guardians." In Lebanon, the Parliament rejected the implementation of a unified civil Family Law for all its citizens.

NGO-ization and Women's Movements

Women's responses to these developments and their capacity to secure and safeguard their rights are crucially important. But where were these responses and what had become of these capacities? What had happened to the vibrant women's movement, which had managed to mobilize large numbers of both urban and rural women to undertake feminist-nationalist projects during the first Palestinian *intifada* in 1987?

It is my contention, based on my reading, as well as on the empirical research that I have done

since I returned to Palestine, that within the past fifteen or so years, a mass-based, living social movement, which engaged women from grass-roots organizations throughout Palestine in working for a combined feminist-nationalist agenda, has given way to a process of "NGO-ization", initiated by members of the leftist political parties. NGO-ization is a term I use to denote the process through which issues of collective concern are transformed into projects in isolation from the general context in which they arise, without consideration of the economic, social and political factors affecting them. I contend that this process is failing to empower women and that it has transformed a cause for social change into a "project" with a plan, timetable, and a limited budget, which is "owned" and used by a small professional elite for the purpose of accountability vis-à-vis foreign donors.

Finally, it is my belief that "NGO-ization" has also hijacked the Palestinian national agenda of national liberation, transforming it instead into a particular set of issues around peace building, conflict resolution, and related issues, in the process creating a constituency of groups that have become the interlocutors of international agencies. In order to understand the magnitude and importance of the change, it is necessary to look at the evolution of women's movements in Palestine.

Before doing so, however, it is useful to note the existence of one important women's movement that has emerged in Palestine since NGO-ization took root. This movement consists of the Islamist women's organizations, the most recent additions to the field of Palestinian women's activism. In my doctoral dissertation, on women activists in the National Islamic Salvation Party (a component of Hamas), I problematized the relationship between Islam (seen as intrinsically anti-secular and consequently anti-modern) (Bill and Springborg 1990; Lewis 1964, 1988; Kedourie 1992; Crone 1980), secularism and feminism. Considering the juxtaposition of the image of the secular, "modern" agent of civil society with that of the Islamist woman seen by many Palestinian feminists as the "traditional", the "backward", the anti-feminist "moving tent"[2], I argued that these are caricatures, which hinder the recognition of a pos-

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2. This is in reference to their long, usually dark-coloured robes and veils, which look like a tent.

sible common ground between women's groups. They help us neither to understand nor to engage with the increasing power of Islamists in civil society in the Middle East in general or in Palestine in particular. Finally, I argued that although the growing influence of Islamic movements in the Middle East is usually attributed to the state's withdrawal from social welfare provision to its citizens, this is not the case in Palestine. Rather, it has been the socio-economic and political transformations produced by the Israeli Occupation that have been instrumental in giving, directly or indirectly, significant space in the public arena to Palestinian Islamists. Israel played a crucial role, for instance, in undermining the secular PLO and later on the Palestinian Authority, leading to the invigoration of Islamic movements in Palestine. Islamists used this space due to their flexibility in shifting their discourse to suit wider constituencies, especially women.

Evolution of Women's Movements in Palestine

My perspective in this paper is that it has been the ascendance of a new kind of secular women's organization in Palestinian civil society -- the "new" NGOs -- and their co-optation of many of the leaders of the secular mass movement, that have opened the way for the flowering of the Islamist women's movement. In this paper, though, I am interested in tracing the changes between the two kinds of secular activities that led to this opening in Palestinian civil society into which the Islamist women's movement moved and now flourishes. To do this is to look briefly back a century, to the earliest organized demonstrations of women's concerns, and then to jump quickly forward to events in the late 1970s.

Phase I: The Secular, Mass-based Palestinian Women's Movement (Late 1970s to Early 1990s)

At the turn of the twentieth century, women in Palestine, as in the rest of the Arab world and neighbouring countries, established their own charitable organizations in urban centres (Badran 1995; Baron 1994; Chatty and Rabo 1997; Joseph 1997). The pioneering women in that domain were mainly Christians who had benefited and been empowered by a missionary education (Al-Tibawi 1956; Husseini-Shahid 2000). Muslim women were also encouraged to join the national struggle, establish their own organizations, and transcend religious boundaries. Both groups were urban, middle-class, and driven by the desire to "modernize" the "traditional" social order by "uplifting" rural women through education (Mogannam 1937, Flieschmann 2003).

Charitable work undertaken by urban elites dominated women's activism until the formation of the General Union of Palestinian Women – *al-itihad al-'am lil-maraa al-falatineyya* (hereafter referred to as GUPW) in 1965 as one of the popular organs of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. GUPW activism varied according to the loyalty of the Palestinian communities. At the peak of the "revolutionary" era when the PLO was settled in Lebanon, the GUPW there was controlled by activist women divided along factional lines (Sayigh 1987, 1988; Peteet 1991). In the West Bank and Gaza, charitable activities and elite women continued to dominate the work and activism of the GUPW until the formation of women's grass-roots organizations starting from 1978 (Taraki 1989, Jad 1990, Hiltermann 1991).

The Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees – *itihad lijan al-maraa lil 'amal al-nissaei* (hereafter referred to as PFWAC) was formed in 1978. The Union of Palestinian Working Women's Committees – *itihad lijan al-maraa al-'amela,* was formed in 1981. The Union of Palestinean Women's Committees – *itihad lijan al-maraa al falastineyya* (UPWC) was formed in 1982. These three women's organizations belonged to Marxist-leaning political parties and are considered Marxist, secular and nationalist. The Union of Women's Social Work Committees – *itihad lijan al-maraa lil'amal al-ijtima'i,* was Fateh-affiliated, and created in 1983. They are all commonly known by the name *uttor nassaweyya* – literally meaning "feminist organizations"[3]. It is at this point that one

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3. In the Palestinian context, women differentiate between the term *nassaweyya* (feminist) and *nissaeyya* (relating to woman).

can identify the beginnings of a truly wide reaching Palestinian women's movement.

The role of these early NGOs, established before the Oslo Agreement, differed significantly from their role in the post-Oslo phase. Before the formation of the Palestinian Authority, Palestinian society was organized in and around political parties and grass-roots mass organizations. NGOs were connected to these parties under the umbrella of the PLO, which encouraged and financially supported the parties and their satellite organizations. Although the PLO and its political parties were banned by Israel, their satellite organizations were to some extent allowed to operate, since they were seen as service providers. Between the end of the 1987 *intifada* and the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, the NGO sector was used as the main channel of foreign aid for delivering services at the grass-roots level. Services included clinics, kindergartens, and income-generating projects. The result was that these NGO actors became important and acquired even more power than their parent parties.

The women's elite leading these organizations came from various social backgrounds, ranging from urban to rural or refugee, and the organizations they led managed to bridge the divide between rural (now refugee) and urban women. They all managed to organize and mobilize a large number of women in different political activities during the first Palestinian *intifada*, beginning in 1987.[4] Although in time the GUPW came to include women leaders who returned from abroad with the formation of the Palestinian Authority, in addition to women based in the West Bank and Gaza, their views on the role of the Union and how it was supposed to relate to the PA proved quite different from the views held by GUPW activists living in the West Bank and Gaza.

It is the women in the latter, the *utor nassaweyya,* that I characterize as having been nationalist secularist. They were nationalist because they developed their activism under the aegis of the PLO, the leading organization of the Palestinian national movement. They considered themselves secularist because they aimed to establish an independent Palestinian state founded on liberal or socialist principles, rather than on religious ones, and because they believed that religion should be separate from the state. Some of these organizations, especially the PFWAC, had a clear feminist orientation, while others were in the process of developing feminist platforms in relation to PA policies.

Crucially, through their activism, leftist women's organizations developed their own brand of feminism, combining the struggle for national liberation with the struggle for women's emancipation. In the Palestinian case, women's activism and feminism have historically been the adjuncts of nationalism. Troubled links between women and their national movements in Palestine are not dissimilar from experiences in other Third World countries in which the nationalist elite acted as the "modernizers" for their national and for "their" women (Jayawardena 1986; Kandiyoti 1991, 1991a; Molyneux 1998; Badran 1995; Chatterjee 1990, 1993; Mohanty 1991). Nationalist elites were driven by the paradoxical impulse to struggle against colonial domination while at the same time internalizing and applying the modernist values of the colonizer (Mohanty 1991, Chatterjee 1993, Kandiyoti 1991, Sharkey 2003).

Women had to forge a space for themselves in order to be able to join the national struggle on equal terms, perhaps especially in Palestine, where successive and on-going forms of colonial oppression have made it particularly difficult to disengage a project for women's emancipation from one for national liberation. The construction of Palestinian nationalism was cantered on the male fighter as the liberator of the nation, and on struggle and sacrifice as idioms of contribution to the nation. Women's activism introduced changes in the gender images of Palestinian nationalism whereby it became possible for women to be militant and activist without openly challenging the gender order. What women did was to identify with nationalism while also reconstructing it, through their activism, in an attempt to subvert its gender boundaries.

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4. The first *intifada* was triggered when seven Palestinian workers were killed by an Israeli-driven automobile in Gaza. The second *intifada* was triggered by Ariel Sharon's visit to al-Aqsa Mosque in blatant defiance of Muslim sentiments in September, 2000.

To illustrate the change from the early mass-based women's movement to the phenomenon of NGO-ization, I examine two contrasting women's organizations in Palestine. The first is the Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees (PFWAC) mentioned above. The second, the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) was a later development, a new kind of NGO, with a different agenda and representing a new type of organization. I will discuss them in that order.

The Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees (PFWAC)

The PFWAC was a powerful women's mass organization from the late seventies to the beginning of the nineties. It was a living social movement that engaged with women's grass-roots organizations. Its agenda was to attain equal rights for women with men in the "public sphere", in terms of wages, job opportunities, education, and political participation (Hasso 1997: 220). One of the most important ingredients for the success of PFWAC was its commitment to helping women by focusing on their specific needs (Caldeira 1998) or on what became known as practical needs (Molyneux 1985, Moser 1989, Alvarez 1990, Young 1993, Kabeer 1992, Nelson and Chowdhury 1994), which often included means of generating income and the provision of day care and pre-school services.

The task was not so much based on "the satisfaction of needs arising from women's placement within the sexual division of labour" (Molyneux 2001: 153), as on satisfying practical needs as a bridge to pursuing the more "strategic interests" (ibid. 1985: 153; Moser 1989) of national liberation, as well as the transformation of social relations, in order to secure a more lasting repositioning of women within the gender order and within society at large (Siham, Amal, Zahira, interviews). As a Marxist movement, PFWAC held the assumption that women's oppression stems from the linked trio of nation, class, and gender (*qawmi, tabaki, jenssi*). Thus, strategic gender interests (Molyneux 1985) would be fulfilled by organizing and mobilizing women in the national struggle. The means would be to work as hard as possible to meet the practical needs of poorer and working class

women. Providing services to address women's immediate needs in health care, education, social assistance, and employment was seen as the guarantor of women's social liberation from the constraints of dependence on men (Palestinian working women's committees [PWWC] 1985: 7, PFWAC 1988). As for gender oppression, women activists were aware of it but had to handle it with care, and indirectly, within the circle of the organization's members and political party followers.

This linkage between strategic interests and the practical needs of women was reflected in the variety of PFWAC projects. Income-generating projects differed from the projects of the charitable women's organizations in that PFWAC had a stated commitment to group decision-making. In addition, the goals of PFWAC projects were not profit or charity but organization and mobilization. The organization tried to provide services women wanted, a measure of economic independence through paid work, and a politicized space shared with other women. In addition, PFWAC wanted to increase its mass support and that of its parent party, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). The creation of income-generating projects for women and girls was also motivated by PFWAC's knowledge that in order to recruit village and working-class women it would have to provide a safe work environment that families and communities would find acceptable (Hasso 1997: 223, Siham, interview). During the first *intifada*, the demand for these income-generating projects increased, and women became more involved in PFWAC projects as the overall economic situation deteriorated.

Francis Hasso (1997) studied PFWAC in several periods, including its first flourishing years, as well as the time of the split and the decline of its support base. My analysis of PFWAC draws largely on her work and on my own interviews with women leaders and activists in the organization.

By the mid-1980s, the organization had established an extensive network of pre-schools and nurseries, mostly in villages and refugee camps, which served communities without charge or at a nominal cost. By 1987, PFWAC employed more than 48 teachers and five directors, serving 1,504 children (Palestinian Union for Working Woman Committee (PUWWC) 1987:a: 15, cited in Hasso 1997: 224). The PFWAC philosophy was that

child-care was a social rather than a strictly individual responsibility. PFWAC leaders found that such care was a necessary pre-requisite for mobilising women: "When we asked the members what their problems were, they replied: 'Children. If we want to become active, either by going to work or by becoming involved in the committees, we need kindergartens and nurseries for our children'" (al-Labadi 1993, cited in Hasso 1997: 224).

Hasso concludes from her extensive study of women that the women's narratives had a strong feminist content and that most of the women did have a strong feminist consciousness, although this did not necessarily translate into feminist action. That is, despite having some very radical ideas, the women did not always believe that they could effect significant changes in their lives. While all Palestinian women are relatively disempowered by the corporate control of female sexuality (Kandiyoti 1988), family or personal status laws that protect patriarchal authority, and a lack of national rights, the problems of working-class women are exacerbated by poverty, which severely limits the range of their actions. Thus action (or non-action) will not always transparently reflect the political consciousness of the relatively disempowered (Scott 1985, 1990; Kandiyoti 1988).

PFWAC managed, to a great extent, to construct a group identity of the type referred to in the writings of many scholars on social movements (Touraine 1981, 1988; Mdelucci 1985; Laclau 1985; Laclau and Mouffe 1987), according to which they used to refer to themselves and to be referred to as *banat al-'amal al-nissaei,* Daughters of Women's Action (i.e., PFWAC). If we consider that gender is a rather "fluid, contingent process characterized by contestation, ambivalence, and change" (Ong and Peletz 1995: 1-3), then as a group, they manifested their identities through cultural festivals, bazaars, demonstrations and publications. They were empowered by their role in the national struggle (Jayawardena 1986) and by a gender system in which the leftist secular parties were hegemonic over mass organizations and over culture, with all its artistic and symbolic manifestations.

Empowered by massive networks of relations, they managed to establish links with women in cities, villages and refugee camps through their well-respected and eloquent leaders and their collective action (Tarrow 1994). Agarwal (1994) refers to overt resistance as occurring when women have a power base; and she refers to covert forms of resistance as occurring when women are weak. In such a climate, women in PFWAC were "overt" in their demands and interests and able to act as a group. They asserted that no liberation for the homeland would be possible without women's liberation, that women would work side by side with men for national liberation, and that they should receive equal pay for equal work. Thus, at particular historical and spatial junctures, the negotiation of gender meanings, obligations, and rights can escalate into outright contestations, if not at the national, then at the local, ritual, and personal levels of daily life (Ong and Peletz: 3-4). It was at these moments when the women of the organization were mobile and assertive and gained the reputation of being *quaweyyat* (powerful).

In her work, Hasso captures this change in women's daily life. One of her respondents, a 28-year-old villager, emphasized the importance of PFWAC affiliation, rather than of PFWAC employment *per se*, when she discussed a number of improvements that had taken place in her life:

> It's not right to say that things changed when I began working. It's more accurate to say that things changed when I joined the PFWAC. Now, if I want to leave, I don't give them [her family] reports or have to tell them. They never allowed me to leave the house before. Now I can go on visits, trips, to the PFWAC offices, wherever I want to go. I used to expect that my parents would say 'no' to everything. I recently asked my father if I could travel to Jordan and he said 'yes' (Respondent #47, 1989, quoted in Hasso 1997: 244).

In the PFWAC case, nationalist participation, combined with a feminist agenda, was often empowering for women, transforming their sense of themselves as citizens and as gendered beings (Hasso 1997: 310). This combination was important for establishing a system of beliefs acceptable to other social groups, i.e., the obligation to resist an occupying power and, under this banner, the need to transform social relations and the social order through daily activism and direct democratic participation (Tornquist 1999: 155). As in other countries, the national movement provided a supportive environment for the growth of a large and radical

feminist movement. This movement did not claim women's rights exclusively, but rather claimed national rights with feminist ingredients.

Did these feminist "ingredients" affect the prevailing gender power relations in the society and in the "private" sphere? Did they replace the male power structure with a parallel women's leadership? Hasso, drawing attention to some changes in women's lives, argues convincingly that they did, but notes some contradictions when it came to women's lives in the domestic sphere. She states, for instance, that more than half the married women (57%), regardless of their own or their husbands' employment statuses, did most of the childrearing, housework, and cooking, and rarely challenged their husbands in this regard.

However, on the impact of women's PFWAC activism on their lives and marriages, Hasso states that "clearly, self-selection, personality, and, in some cases, the support of a liberal household cannot be ruled out as a partial explanation for many women's feminist ideas and actions regarding marriage. [Still,] given the extent of their involvement in PFWAC and self-reports concerning the effect of PFWAC on gender ideas and worldview, these ideas and actions are very likely to also be the result of PFWAC feminist consciousness- raising" (ibid. 279).

National identity or any other social identity is always evolving. It is through organized collective and sustained acts of resistance that oppressed and marginalized social groups gain power. In a situation in which an entire society is constantly under external threat, there is a vital need for collectivity and a sense of "togetherness" (Harris 2000). Nationalism, with its leftist associations, acted as the social glue for this "togetherness". This is not to say that left-leaning nationalism was a haven for gender equality (Jad `1990, Sayigh 1993, Peteet 1991, Joseph 1995). However, women activists were, through their collective actions, carving out a space for different meanings of gender and gender roles; they were filling the cracks they had created on a daily basis; they were shaping an alternative empowering structure separate from family and kinship ties; and they were "opening up new areas of struggle and renegotiation of the relations between the genders" (Kandiyoti 1988: 275) in society and in the national movement.

The Fragmentation and Decline of the Mass Movement, and the Shift from a Social to a Gender Agenda

In the early 1990s, however, all this began to change. To understand the dramatic transformation that took place in women's organizations at that time, one must bear in mind the processes initiated by the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. At the time, there was an atmosphere of euphoria, as if national independence had been achieved and Palestine was on the road to being a sovereign state. Perceived new possibilities prompted the women's movement to shift from combining the national struggle with women's emancipation to a phase where they could pressure to enshrine women's rights. In addition, the" peace process" sparked divisions between the various political parties and organizations within the national movement and within women's organizations, including PFWAC.

The decline of popular grass-roots organizations, including PFWAC, started in the early nineties and was related to the decline of what Vivian calls "institutional politics", meaning politics as practiced in political parties or unions. The decline of institutional politics in Palestinian society in general and in the DFLP in particular was due to an internal split. The split was attributed to disagreements over whether the party should participate in negotiations with Israel, over the role of the *intifada* in the context of a "transitional state" as part of a two-state solution, and over the unequal distribution of power between "local" DFLP leaders and "returnees". The return of some 100,000 Palestinians from the *diaspora*, with the establishment of the PA led to tension between those who had remained in the West Bank and Gaza, and those who had lived outside. The "returnees" were seen as part of a corrupt authority, which distributed favours and patronage to its loyalists (Roy 1993: 29). By September, 1990, the DFLP and PFWAC had informally split into four organizations (Hasso 1997: 187). The split reflected a larger polarization within Palestinian society over future directions, and women were part of that process.

PFWAC was the first women's organization to be affected by the split of its supporting institu-

tional base, the DFLP. The progressive dissolution of the DFLP, combined with a scramble to respond to new Israeli policies and actions, placed feminist issues on the back burner of the PFWAC. Israeli measures led to the separation of Gaza from the Executive Office of the PFWAC in Jerusalem in the first years of the 1987 *intifada*. The increase in membership in late 1987 led the male leadership to take the decision in early 1988 to merge the mass-based organizations, including the women's organizations, into "mixed" regional units and to redirect PFWAC women into party work. Party interventions in the PFWAC leadership structure, the new focus on the recruitment of PFWAC members as DFLP members, and a direct assault on the organization by two competing groups of the DFLP ended the autonomy and the mass-based structure of PFWAC.

Hasso states that "many DFLP and/or PFWAC women believed that they were systematically disempowered by party men of all political persuasions, debilitating the PFWAC and ending women's historic power in the DFLP in the territories" (ibid. 187). She attributes this result to "some male anxiety [over the fact] that women were in charge … and [to the fact] that an important source of women's institutional disempowerment lies in the nature of state-building itself" (ibid. 187).

This conclusion emphasizing "male anxiety" and patriarchy can be contested on two grounds. First, in this view, women are seen as pawns over which men are competing, according them no agency. I would argue, rather, that men and women were competing over PFWAC because both groups recognized that the women's organization represented a real power base for the DFLP: at the time, PFWAC estimated their membership as exceeding party membership by 6,000 to 7,000 persons. As the PFWAC leader said, "If we were weak, they would not compete with this ferocity to control [the organization]" (Siham, interview). Second, the emphasis on "male anxiety" privileges women's gender over their political ideology; women were also divided along political lines, being for or against the "peace process", and accepting or rejecting negotiations as the sole path to national liberation. As Siham put it:

"We in the women's organization were also members of the party…Yes, many of us tried hard to keep

the integrity of the women's organization because many had an organic linkage with it, but women also had to choose with what political vision … to ally themselves. Some followed their husbands; some got divorced; and others chose according to their own interests and wanted to ally with whoever paid their salaries" (Siham, interview).

Thus, women were divided by their political ideology and by their own interests. Also, considering that the majority of the women were outside the labour market, their choices were influenced as well by the need to maintain their livelihoods. As Goetz asserts, "Resource constraints limit women's leverage in politics" (Goetz 2003: 38).

Within PFWAC, the main difference between the women's groups lay in the efforts of the "peace advocate group" to rally women and build an autonomous "women's front" to influence the social agenda. The more feminist faction, for their part, viewed this group of women as not feminist enough to be willing to unite and rally around women's interests and thus as more nationalistic than feminist. In this way feminism was deployed to undermine a competing political view, driving a wedge between feminism and national politics. This particular use of feminism was to repeat itself when the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) tried to legitimize its dissociation from PFWAC, which had so far combined feminism with the national struggle, and to claim a feminism independent of its national context, a move which ended in the birth of what I call the politics of the "gender agenda".

An attempt to build a non-party "women's front" for this purpose failed. PFWAC attempted to form a "women's front" through the establishment "specialized women's centres," which later, in the mid-nineties, became NGOs. The first failure in building a "women's front" came when the split of PFWAC was quickly "blessed" by some other women's groups. Women also displayed divisions over their different interests and political orientations. The head of the GUPW in the West Bank, went on to endorse a general conference which formalized the split and declared that the women's organization belonged to the DFLP. Women's organizations belonging to the political parties of Fateh and the PFLP also endorsed the split for different reasons, the first to remove a strong and competing body from the street and assert Fateh hegemony, the lat-

ter to weaken those who advocated negotiations and "peace" as a strategic option for Palestinian self-determination. The split showed that gender issues could not unite women's organizations over and above political issues.

The lack of progress in the "peace negotiations" was accompanied by deterioration in Palestine's economic situation, including increased unemployment, which further eroded support for the PA and led to the rise of the Islamists. To undercut the support for the Islamist organization (Hamas), the PA came down hard against the "reactionary" actions of those (i.e., Islamists) who allegedly harassed women to observe a modest dress code. In time, Hamas shifted its interest from the "politically costly" (ibid. 23) insistence on a dress code to a more thoughtful analysis of Islamist interests. In February, 1994, Hamas presented a document spelling out its relationship to the PA. "Red lines" were to be drawn around: the educational system, which should be based on national Islamic principles; the spread of Islamic culture, in particular through mosques, which should not be obstructed; and the *shari'a,* on which Family Law should be based (Usher 1997; Jad 2000: 40). Thus a gender agenda became part of the conflict between the PA and the Islamists. Hamas, by the mid-nineties, had not yet formulated a coherent gender vision.

Attempts at state building added further complications to the functioning of these different groups and organizations. The "peace process" had triggered a process of state building in which the gender agenda became a pawn between those searching for a new basis for legitimacy after the split of their party (PFWAC), those who wanted to build a new constituency (the PA), and those who wanted to forge a new space in the public arena (NGOs) by claiming the state for citizens' and women's rights.

In an attempt to recuperate its power as a mass mobilizing movement, the PFWAC tried to focus on the consolidation of the gender agenda. As formulated by the PFWAC, this was based on a complex analysis of the different sources of women's oppression, understood to consist of Occupation, poverty, and unequal gender relations, particularly within the family. PFWAC's attempt to promote a gender agenda led to the creation of the specialized women's centres mentioned earlier, which were meant to examine empirically and systematically the different realities of women's oppression. This move unexpectedly resulted in the proliferation of separate, apolitical NGOs. One of these was the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), an organization, which was born within the structure of the PFWAC, but which then evolved into an independent centre with NGO status. This is the organization I will now follow as emblematic of the trajectory of the new NGOs.

Phase II: The Rise of WCLAC and the Coming of "NGO-ization" (Early 1990s to Present)

It is within the context of the worldwide "associational revolution" and burgeoning of NGOs[5] that I examine (WATC). This is a self-proclaimed new feminist organization, and is perceived by others as such. WCLAC claims to bridge the gap between the national and social agenda previously neglected by women's organizations and activists who subsumed their feminism within nationalism (WCLAC Reports 1999, 2000, 2001). WCLAC claims to redress this imbalance by establishing and providing different services and products that aim to transform existing gender relations by working on legislative reform.

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5. The growth of NGOs is a worldwide phenomenon in the North as well as the South. The number of development NGOs registered in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries of the industrialized North grew from 1,600 in 1980 to 2,970 in 1993. Over the same period, the total spending of these NGOs rose from $2.8 billion to $5.7 billion in current prices (OECD 1994). The 176 international NGOs which had existed in 1909 had blossomed into 28,900 by 1993. Similar figures have been reported in most countries of the South - for example, the number of NGOs registered with the government in Nepal rose from 220 in 1990 to 1,210 in 1993; in Bolivia, the figure increased from about 100 in 1980 to 530 twelve years later; and in Tunisia, there were 5,186 NGOs registered in 1991 compared to 1,886 in 1988 (Edwards and Hulme 1995: 3). This enor-

Ironically, WCLAC is a child of PFWAC, the very organization whose existence it later undermined. The expansion of PFWAC in the mid-eighties had led to the creation of a sophisticated internal structure. Many specialized offices were established as part of the permanent bureaucracy to administer day-to-day activities – e,g., the literacy and kindergarten office, health office, production office, internal organization and rehabilitation office, etc. These offices were created gradually to fulfil the expanding functions of the organization. The idea of having a "specialized" office for women's counselling emerged at the end of 1985 out of daily contact with women[6]. The initiator of the idea and of the office explained its *raison d'être.* After working in women's organizations for six years, Amal was elected as secretary of the committee for the region of Ramallah (including the city and its villages).

Through our work with women, we used to encounter so many cases of women with social problems with their families, whether from our own cadres or among others. We came across them in our daily work in the different places. The problems came from their growing involvement with the Union (PFWAC) and because of the awareness they acquired through their work. At the beginning, the head of the Union and her deputy were putting lots of time and energy into solving these problems. We could not go on like that; we needed a "specialized" and more focused office in our Union, like our offices for health, production, and literacy programs. We came up with the name "Women's Counselling Office". The idea

was not just to offer counselling for women but to empower them; many women with social problems are poor and lack education, work and skills. Through our different offices, we wanted to support women in an integrated way in all aspects, and not only solve their momentary social problems (Amal, interview).

Amal was assigned by the Union to develop a mission for this new office, especially since it might entail financial commitment and bureaucratization. The idea was new and its implementation required a complex network of relations between the counselling office (which became WCLAC) and other offices.

As the enterprise unfolded, different actors engaged in a process of deliberation to formulate and articulate their views. Some of these positions led to the formulation of projects for seeking funding based on the notion of women's universal human rights. The rights-based approach could be seen as a supportive mechanism to claim women's rights worldwide, but it could also be used, as I argue, to hinder a real participatory process to understand and articulate the different women's needs and interests.

The universal women's rights approach - which was used by many other women's organizations in addition to WCLAC - has been critiqued by many.[7] I argue that, in the context of unachieved nationhood, separating women's rights from collective national rights can inadvertently lead to the marginalization of women as a social group and sub-

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mous increase made some speak of an "associational revolution" (Salamon 1993: 109; Korten 1987). Women's NGOs are seen as active players in this revolution and as agents of democratization (Fowler et al. 1992). This mushrooming of NGOs is commonly seen as evidence of the weakening of the ideological political parties and the retreat of the state from service provision and social entitlements (Omvedt 1994: 35) due to structural adjustment policies imposed on most Third World countries by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and under the pressure of neo-liberal reform policies (Hann 1996, Edward and Hulme 1995, Vivian 1994, Omvedt 1994, Petras 1997

6. All interviewees told of learning about cases that motivated them to go on to solve other problems. One was the story of a little child who was suffering from a constant ear infection. When his mother was called by the doctor in the women's health clinic, it was revealed that she was hitting the child because he resembled his father, who had been beating her. Another case involved a woman who came to a lawyer's office with painfully swollen breasts. She was unable to breast-feed her 7-month-old baby because the father had kidnapped him.

7. Translated into the individualistic, narrow language of rights (West 1989 in Charlesworth 1994: 77), the rights discourse overly simplifies complex power relations, and its promise is overblown by feminist scholars. It has been argued by some that the focus on the acquisition of rights may not be beneficial (Kingdom 1991, in Charlesworth 2001), that women's experiences and concerns are constantly thwarted by structural inequalities of power (Smart 1989 in Charlesworth 1994: 67-8). Recourse to the language of rights may give a rhetorical flourish

sequently to the fragmentation of the group. The approach adopted by many women's NGOs, including WCLAC, based on individual and universal women's rights, worked on the assumption that social power rests with the state, in the form of the PA, and not in the other social and political groups opposing and competing with it (i.e., the Islamists). This approach, based on international conventions, ignores to a great extent home-grown, locally developed feminisms.

In order to make their proposed shift in orientation, the women involved had to work out what kind of structure they should adopt. They were aware of the importance of having "professional" people to provide very specific services, like counselling and legal literacy. However, hiring these professionals (lawyers, counsellors, and psychologists), would add to the financial burden of the organization and increase its bureaucracy. To avoid this burden, it was decided to have a central office at the level of the executive body to serve as the coordinating body, the function of which would be to spread trend and services throughout the *entire party* (stress added). The aim was to create an internal structure that would combine the national agenda with the gender agenda in a more public manner at all levels of the party, as well as other women's organizations. Amal recalls:

> *"I used to travel all along the Palestinian territory, from Gaza in the south to Jenin in the north, to 'integrate' the idea into the regional offices and to assess the need to train new cadres in legal literacy and to sensitize the activists in these offices to be receptive and supportive to women's social problems"* (Amal, interview).
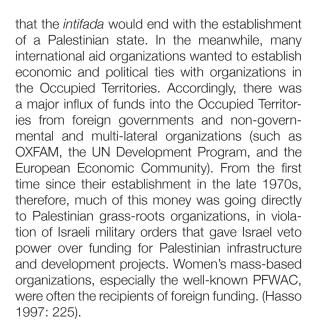
The need for such a program was great: "Women were thirsting for such information on their legal status" (Hanan, interview). The need to develop these types of courses for women and to hire more professionals was behind the urge to look for financial support, as was the need for a professional fundraiser. These changes would eventually transform the vision and the structure of the whole department for women's counselling.

Amal, the initiator of this specialized office for legal aid and counselling for women, mentioned the need for professional fundraising:

> *"We were short of money, and in order to hire professional people, we needed funds. With the split, we did not have any resources. In this case, it was natural to think of moving the program from the place where it was born (PFWAC) into a broader context where it could be adopted by all women's groups. We got some money for a few workshops, but that was not enough to keep the work going. It was at this point that we approached a friend of ours who has wide contact with funders and who was working in a foreign organization for legal aid, mainly for prisoners. We proposed that she help us in finding resources for our centre. She accepted, and with her high managerial skills, helped us on a voluntary basis at first, and then started to organize the centre financially and administratively* (Amal, interview).

In fact, the decision that the organization needed professionals to fundraise came after the failure of many of PFWAC's income-generating projects. After the Madrid Conference in 1991, many civil society organizations in the West Bank and Gaza, which up until then were financially dependent on their political parties or their sponsors, believed

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to an argument, but it provides only an ephemeral polemical advantage, often obscuring the need for political and social change (Charlesworth 2001: 209). It has been argued also that the individualism promoted by traditional understandings of rights limits their possibilities by ignoring "the relational nature of social life" (Tushnet 1984 in Charlesworth 2000: 209). "In short, liberty is not just a matter of having rights on paper, it requires being in a material position to exercise those rights" (Nussbaum 2002: 54). Although defended by some feminist voices, this critique of the universal human rights approach echoes reservations held elsewhere in the South. Among other criticisms, it has been pointed out that the Western enthusiasm for the articulation of women's rights not only ignores the historical realities of colonialism and the roles imposed upon, or accepted by, women in colonial encounters, but also makes untenable and essentialist assumptions about the sameness of the position of women worldwide (Nesiah 1996: 11). Coomaraswamy has argued that the very notion of rights has little resonance in many cultures, and that the discourse of women's rights assumes a free, independent woman, an image that may be less powerful in protecting women's rights than other ideologies, such as "women as mothers" (Coomaraswamy 1994: 55).

that the *intifada* would end with the establishment of a Palestinian state. In the meanwhile, many international aid organizations wanted to establish economic and political ties with organizations in the Occupied Territories. Accordingly, there was a major influx of funds into the Occupied Territories from foreign governments and non-governmental and multi-lateral organizations (such as OXFAM, the UN Development Program, and the European Economic Community). From the first time since their establishment in the late 1970s, therefore, much of this money was going directly to Palestinian grass-roots organizations, in violation of Israeli military orders that gave Israel veto power over funding for Palestinian infrastructure and development projects. Women's mass-based organizations, especially the well-known PFWAC, were often the recipients of foreign funding. (Hasso 1997: 225).

Hasso noted the critical role of donors at that time (in the eighties), saying:

While some funders seemed sincerely committed to democratically run projects that facilitated women's empowerment, many of their policies and practices belied this commitment. Generally, they were inattentive to the lack of skills and infrastructure problems (e.g., the weakness or non-existence of communication, travel, and banking facilities) when dispensing money. Page-length project proposals elicited hundreds of thousands of dollars that were funnelled into organizations that for the most part were unable to effectively manage these funds or create sustainable income-generating projects. By 1990-1991, five major income-generating projects had failed and most of the PFWAC-sponsored pre-schools were closed (ibid. 225-6).

The closure of the pre-schools was due to the suspension of salaries by the political party. The Union was keen to understand what went wrong and to learn from its mistakes; however, the proliferation of more "professional" organizations did not allow this to happen. It was easier; it seems, for funders to deal with women who already knew how to run an organization professionally. The proliferation of women's NGOs made it harder for old forms of mass women's organizations to survive and sustain their activities.

The need for professionals, or, in local parlance, *motakhassissin* (specialists), did not result solely from activists' realization of their need for more funds. It also occurred as women realized their need for people with specialized skills to "push our work forward". It was seen, for instance, when they hired a specialist to give advice on the work of their kindergartens, the school would improve significantly. As one of the leaders put it:

The woman activist was great in mobilizing the people, but she could not lead a specialized program in production or counselling, for example…. So we were interested in attracting, even paying, these skilled women in order to improve our work. We were in need of a women's magazine based on studies to provoke debates on our work, our movement, and on women's situation. The centres we established with some professional women were seen as the natural (stress added) development for the organization, as we established offices to develop our projects in health, production, child care … etc. But since we wanted to link women's general problems, such as violence (domestic and public), early marriage, and girls' dropping out of schools, which emerged on a massive scale in the first intifada, with national issues, we needed some professional vision and skills to tell us what would be the best way to deal with this big number of women with their different needs and interests. (Siham, interview).

Professionals were needed at many levels, and their inclusion on boards or in administrations, introduced different interests and an alternative vision. As the first lawyer of WCLAC recalls: "A problem arose when the new director tried to form a new board. The centre had to be an independent, professional institution, and not political" (Hanan, interview). The activist who drafted the mission statement for what became WCLAC and who made the initial efforts needed to spread the idea in the party, was quickly removed from decision making, under the banner of professionalism. The same applied to the lawyer: "When we started the program, I used to attend all the meetings, but when I became a full time staff member, I was not allowed to participate in the decision making" (Hanan, interview). To guarantee that no conflicts would emerge, both women had to choose between working as paid staff, with a specified job description, or being part of the decision-making body. Once a board was enlarged with professionals, it developed a character of its own. Siham, the leader of PFWAC, reflected:

Here, once you accept other professional people, you cannot control the direction of the organization; otherwise, you work within your own organization without involving others with different views. But at that time, if we had had in our committee the skills needed to run all the centres with our vision, we would not have asked outsiders. We did not have enough skilled people, especially in fundraising, proposal writing and administration (Siham, interview).

Thus although professionalism was the main vehicle used to introduce new actors to the women's movements, professionalism was not itself an adequate source of legitimacy. Nor was it clear that professionalism could bridge the gap between "understanding" women's situation (whether on a "scientific" basis or otherwise) and building a "women's front". This becomes clear when one traces the changes that WCLAC underwent when professionalism was applied to its structure, constituency, and programs.

The first years of professionalization led to a steady growth of WCLAC and to the organization's successes in fundraising; to the provision of valuable services to women in health, education, and legal literacy; and to the spread of more information on the legal status of women and their domestic situations, including domestic violence. However, with professionalization, WCLAC also witnessed a major shift in its mission and priorities. The well-integrated approach to the trio of oppressions (nation, class and gender) aimed at changing women's situation in society, as well as the direction of the national movement, as promoted by the initiators of the centre, was reduced to a legalistic approach in which the emphasis was put on the "legal understanding of women's oppression" (Vogel 1998: 135). To carry out these objectives, the organization started out in 1992 with three paid staff. By 1999, it had expanded to twenty-eight, supervised by a competent director and presided over by a 13-member Board of Trustees. The various program activities were implemented through five major Units: Legal Aid, Social Work, Health, Training and Advocacy, and Networking.

The mechanisms adopted to realize the organization's new objectives included workshops in legal literacy, provision of legal advice, counselling, and social and psychological help. WCLAC also embarked on documenting violations against women's rights, studying the status of women, and disseminating information on legal awareness and gender training for women leaders. It committed itself to cooperating with all centres and institutions working in the fields of legal aid and social, psychological, and health counselling for Palestinian women. Furthermore, enhancing the relationship between the centre and both Arab regional and international institutions working for human rights in general and on women's rights in particular was construed as an important mission (WCLAC, Internal Platform, Article 3). The shift in WCLAC's role was reflected in its new internal organization, in which the initiator of the centre lost her power. Some conflict erupted, but it was a lost cause, since she lacked the skills necessary to operate in the new structure. The difference in the two roles, that of a political gender activist, and that of a professional woman, was beginning to crystallize.

The new vision spelt out by WCLAC was driven by the notion of "modernization". This widened the disjuncture between political activists, who had grass-roots experience and support, and the professionals, who were good at proposal writing and fund-raising, but who lacked such connections. The professionals saw society as in need of modernization by educated women through the application of the rule of law. As the director put it, "We live in a traditional society, in which problems are solved on a tribal basis, not by law" (Maha Abu Dayya in a public meeting 12/2/2002).

One major undertaking was a project titled "Palestinian Model Parliament: Women and Legislation" [8], launched by WCLAC early in 1998. It aimed to achieve a defined set of goals including the endorsement of Palestinian legislation guaranteeing equality and human rights for Palestinian women, the right to participate in building a civil

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8. For a comprehensive study of the Model Parliament Project, please refer to my dissertation: Hossneya Islah Jad Gad (2004) Women at the Cross-Roads: The Palestinian Women's Movements between Nationalism, Secularism and Islamism, PhD Dissertation, Department of Development Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

society, based on justice, equality, and respect for human rights and the rule of law. In this project, "real" participation was considered a hindrance that takes much of the organisation's time. It was not seen as enriching the agenda under discussion; and although WCLAC had set up a series of workshops as a consultative mechanism, at the end of which it was apparent that there was a divergence of views, the organization nonetheless tried to preserve its own vision and ignored some important feedback which led to the creation of a separate organization in Gaza (Mashraqiyyat) driven by a different view on legal reform based this time not entirely on universal rights but on the reform of religion-based rights.

The Model Parliament thus provided an example of a situation in which what I term "project logic" prevailed. "Project logic", which is integral to the NGO-ization process, entails a less participatory approach in dealing with issues of public concern. It also entails emphasis on the 'ownership' of the 'project' and an exclusive focus on successful aspects of it, minimizing its pitfalls and lacunae, thereby leaving the door open for mistakes to repeat themselves.

Professionalism and project logic have provided a new power base for NGO elites, who determines which women's issues should be brought to public attention. Driven by project logic, NGO professionals lack awareness of the forces active in civil society and the public sphere, and this weakness enables a disproportionate influence by the donor on the organization's agenda. This is particularly dangerous, since NGO-donor relations are such that the agenda of the donors often prevail. Although the relationship between these actors is problematic and complex, NGO representatives do have the power to manipulate, renegotiate, and legitimize donor agendas. They are part of a "globalized elite" in that they are tied to international players and informed by global agendas. These links have been instrumental in the "NGO-ization" of the national agenda, from one that was primarily geared to realizing self-determination and sovereign statehood, into "projects" for donor funding, in which

donors played an important role in choosing their local interlocutors. From the nineties onwards, then, the effects of NGO-ization started to be felt in the formulation of the national agenda.

Many political positions concerning vital issues – e.g., refugees, the question of Jerusalem, forms of resistance, and the shape of the future state - are taken at conferences by NGO representatives in the international arena without having a national consensus over what should be asked from the international community. While it is true that there is no single interlocutor to consult with, and that this non-consultative approach is not unique to Palestinian NGOs, the difference is that Palestinian NGO activists are not backed by any legitimate political actors in the PA or in civil society, since they do not belong to any constituency, political party, or other representative organizations. Claiming feminist credentials and professionalism are the main criteria for qualifying as participants in these forums. In this context, professionally written reports and easy and efficacious channels of communication are important. Finally, some of these NGO elites lack any kind of training or experience in political activism, which might compromise their legitimacy back home.

The Second Intifada

The eruption of the second *intifada* in September, 2000, put the projects of many women's organizations, including WCLAC, on hold. But their work on the gender agenda introduced WCLAC and similar women's NGOs to an important community of donors, or, as Carapico names them "democracy and peace building brokers and entrepreneurs" (Carapico 2002). These look for suitable local actors to implement their agenda in the Middle East to spread democracy and to enhance women's organizations. The prevalence of the type of projects discussed above is usually linked to the power of the donor community to dictate or influence local NGO agendas (Kunibert and Singer 1996; Pinto-Duschinsky 1991).[9]

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9. Some claim that this flow of projects does not necessarily reflect orchestrated policy on the part of international NGOs and donors, who are not monolithic but driven by different interests, visions and politics. Chabbott, for example, suggests that there are some international development professionals, who have, over time, used their

Carapico noticed this tendency in the Middle East, where an industry of funding and projects has developed around issues relating to democracy, peace building, and women's rights, whereby brokers in Europe, North America, and Australia are kept busy writing proposals and submitting bids to public bureaucracies for their projects in the Arab world. This is an industry that relies on public funds, administered through grants and contracts, linked to the foreign policies of the great powers (Carapico 2002).

But again, it would be an oversimplification to perceive NGOs as passive recipients, and donors simply as following or executing their government's policies. It has been argued that local NGOs, as well as international actors, have a space in which to negotiate their mutual relationships. Cohen and Comaroff, for example, state that NGOs "do not respond to a need, but negotiate relationships by convincing the other parties of the meaning of organizations, events and processes….They act as brokers of meanings" (Cohen and Comaroff 1976: 88 cited in Hilhorst 2003: 191). I would argue that, besides their ability to convince international donors of the vitality of their work, "peace activists" are equally involved in this process, driven by their own interests. The involvement in "peace process" activities by many NGOs, including WCLAC, aside from getting funding, allows them to acquire power and legitimacy. "Peace process" activism can constitute a power base for the NGO elite, enabling them to reach decision-making positions, whether in the PA or in the leadership of the Palestinian women's movements and other social movements.

Concluding Remarks

In the above analysis, I have tried to explore the inter-relationships and the terms of engagement between two different types of women's organizations: a mass-based women's movement and a newly emergent NGO sector. I have argued for the role of mobilization to bring about collective action through which women have been able to gain power and articulate their different gender needs and interests. The "old" feminist discourse produced by the PFWAC and other groups did not rest on the application of universal agendas for promoting women's rights and empowerment. Rather, the organization expanded its membership as a result of hard work and daily contacts with women whose concerns informed the agenda for women's empowerment. Thus "non-entrepreneurs" were empowered by collective action which was sustained and which involved a process that took time, effort and networking.

The role of NGOs in the West Bank and Gaza shifted under the influence of the state-building process initiated by the Madrid Conference in 1991. I argue that the dual dynamics of state building and NGOization led to the demobilization of all social movements. The limited life cycle of "projects" induced fragmentation rather than bringing about what Tarrow has called "sustainable networking" (Tarrow 1994), whereby ties made with members and organizations are maintained on a regular basis. NGOization also has a cultural dimension, spreading values that favour dependency, lack of self-reliance and new modes of consumption.[10] NGOization as a process has also introduced

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concerns, which are distinct from those of their funders, to carve out a larger role for international NGOs in the world polity (Chabbott 1999: 223). In addition, a combination of schooling and work experience has produced a specialized cadre of international development professionals who spend the bulk of their working lives on a series of assignments in global metropolises and capitals of low-income countries. Chabott claims that these professionals become somewhat detached from their countries of origin. Given their proximity to funders, professionals have significant opportunities and temptations to exercise personal and professional prerogatives (ibid. 243). It is these professionals, rather than national politicians and diplomats, who have generated the international development discourse, written UN reports, drafted conference statements, designed conference follow-up strategies, and helped new nation states draft national development policies (Carapico 2000; Chabbott 1999: 244).

10. In advertisements in Palestinian newspapers, it is common to read about collective community actions, organised by groups of youth, and involving cleaning the streets, planting trees, painting murals…,followed by a little icon indicating the names of the donors which funded these projects. It is also noticeable that many of the NGO activities are held in fancy hotels, serving fancy food, distributing glossy materials, and hiring "presentable" youth to help organise the event or activity, leading to the disappearance of the "old" image of the casual activist with the peasant accent and look.

changes in the composition of the women's movement elites (Goetz 1997) which have resulted, I argue, in a shift in power relations. My study shows a shift from "power to" women in the grass roots to "power over" them by the new elite.

Against this background, I believe that women's NGOs and the new discourses they brought to the public sphere in relative isolation from the overall social, economic, and political context might have inadvertently acted to disempower and de-legitimise civil society and secular actors and their movements. "Professionalism" might not be a suitable mechanism for disseminating ideas about gender equity to the grass roots or to the state, but it has maintained a focus on the interests of and provided a power base for a few women. Professionalization, as part of the NGO-ization process, might not lead to more participation for the "target groups" or the grass roots. "Project logic", too, can lead to further concentration of power in the hands of administrators. NGO-ization pushes the NGO structure to be exclusive rather than inclusive. "Project logic" pushes toward upward vertical participation, and not downward toward horizontal participation. When donors are driven by the logic of the efficiency of their funds, NGO leaders and staff can be driven to prove their high level of "profession-alism" and efficiency. Concentration of power in the hands of administrators might not be helpful in drawing out lessons learned from activism. NGOs could be as complicit as donors in hiding mistakes and pitfalls.

Discourse does not consist of mere words, but rather "collective action frames for social movements and their power structures" (Snow and Bentford 1998: 198; Tarrow 1994: 122). The "new" discourse, used by the NGO elite, might be interpreted to discredit old forms of organization and a means of co-opting popular organizations. The new NGO discourse has been used to forge a space in the public arena at the expense of the old mass-based organizations. The point here is to question if this purportedly "counter-hegemonic" discourse is deployed to increase or to decrease women's social activism and their political power. I believe that any counter-hegemonic discourse must take into account the "totality of the historical situation, which included both the structural and super-structural element" (Bobbio 1987: 89), whether this is an ongoing military Occupation, an impotent Palestinian Authority, weakened political parties, weakened women's organizations, or the growing power of Islamic movements. I do not believe that NGO activism begins to do this.