



The Systemic Oppression of Women in Palestine

Kiera Hall

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Abstract

The Palestinian government fails to support an entire group of people in its country. The systemic oppression of women in Palestine is a huge problem. Being a female in Palestine immediately lessens the value of life, due to patriarchal norms that deem women inferior. This paper highlights the political, social and educational lenses of Palestinian women's struggles, while also recognizing the men, women, and governments viewpoints. It also goes over the benefits of political participation and legal reforms, which showed the most effectiveness in addressing Palestinian women's systemic oppression.

Keywords: Palestine, women, political, social, educational, government, systemic oppression.

Introduction:

Systemic oppression is an undeniable problem due to the fact that many people live in areas that do not have equal opportunities or rights. The painting: *Confrontation at the Bridge*, by Jacob Lawrence, portrays a civil rights movement which illustrates the oppression of black people. This relates to the systemic oppression of women in Palestine made by their government. Likewise, Elouise Cobell is an American Indian citizen who fought for the rights of her people, who were being discriminated against by the American government. They were being underpaid and neglected, which is an example of systemic oppression that can be compared to women living in Palestine, who don't have the same rights as men in their country. The problem identified is women's discrimination in Palestine, their government fails to support an entire group of people in its country. Being a female in Palestine immediately lessens the value of life, due to patriarchal norms the

country runs by, that deem women inferior. Huda Ammori, a co-founder of the direct-action network, found that in the West Bank women hold three out of twenty four ministerial positions, making men eight times more likely for the position (Ammori). According to an article, "Palestine: Gender Justice and the Law," Palestinian laws are so corrupt that in some cases crimes like domestic violence and rape are legal (5). To solve this problem, the main causes and effects for it must be studied. This paper highlights the political, social and educational lenses of Palestinian women's struggles, while also recognizing the men, women, and governments viewpoints. After continuous research, political participation and legal reforms (PP and LR) showed the most effectiveness in addressing Palestinian women's systemic oppression because when women possess decision-making power in a country, its citizens enjoy a better quality of life, more women will be recognized by the state,

and it will help with the law system and decrease domestic violence.

Women's social status is outdated

Women in Palestine are treated differently in society due to traditional patriarchal systems. These systems are still around today as modern mindsets for many people, making Palestinian society biased against women which holds them back. Frances Hasso, a professor in the program of gender and feminist studies at Duke University, finds women's equal gender status is usually assumed to represent modernity, which makes feminism, at least public feminism, a problematic project (459). Hasso's evidence supports the claim that Palestine is not recognizing women in modern times. Additionally, Agustín Velloso, a professor of comparative education at the Spanish Distance Learning University, makes a connection to Hasso's statement by introducing traditional social roles of women in Palestine. These roles find that women would manage the household under their husband's authority, and take care of the children (525). Women being immediately subjected into a family life by their societies can restrict them from accomplishing other goals. A study by Souad Dajani, a professor from the department of sociology at Antioch College, finds that in Palestine it was assumed the affairs of state did not concern or affect women (14). Since women are traditionally seen as household figures, concerns of the state would commonly disclude them. Due to this, many women report being victims of violence and harassment - which can force them to resign their decisions as political actors, says Juliana Restrepo Sanín, an assistant professor of political science from the University of Florida (16). It is clear Hasso and Dajani both agree women's public opinions are usually rejected and sometimes problematic in Palestine. Separately, Velloso highlights the social expectations of women in Palestine, and Sanín speaks on a different point of women's social status, recognizing women's troubles in politics due to societal factors. Although through different perspectives, all the authors remark how women's social status in Palestine is poor and needs to be updated.

The use of women's Education

Women in Palestine have the right to education, although it is commonly interfered with. Women pursuing academic careers in Palestine can be faced with burdens such as arranged marriage, causing them to drop out of school, and have much lower chances of

going to after graduate programs like college. Velloso finds, "early marriage has a serious effect on a young woman's acquisition of post-secondary education" (526). Furthermore, Ghada Talhami, a professor of third world politics and women's studies at Lake Forest College, agrees with the fact women's education is important, and says the value of university education is a liberator to age-old societal inhibitions. He highlights education helps women prove themselves worthy to male peers (677). There is also significance in biomedical engineer Lydia Cardwell's view, where she further stresses the value of women's education by saying it is a highly leveraged investment that a developing country should make for its future (24). Similarly, Munawwar Adnan Najim, a professor of women's leadership and higher education from the Islamic University of Gaza, realizes education is a necessary factor for women in assuming leadership positions. Talhami, Cardwell, and Najim all agree women's education is a major value to their life, and can be necessary in success. Velloso differs by pointing out a main problem with women's education in Palestine. Yet, all experts still highlight how education is a necessary right for women.

The importance of women's political participation -

Viewing the systemic oppression of women in Palestine from a political perspective is important because of the significant impact of a government on people's everyday life. Having a majority ruling government of men has shown to have negative effects on women's lifestyle and rights in Palestine. Hannah Rought-Brooks, an expert in family/public law at Garden Court Chambers, notices the priorities identified by the Palestinian women's movement as, "reforming the personal status laws; combating violence against women; and increasing women's political participation" (125). Along with this, community activist Sherna Berger Gluck, highlights concerns about women's working conditions, the reform of family law, a change of gender relations and the need for better primary health care (8). Accordingly, Lisa Hajjar, a professor in the department of sociology at the University of California, finds reducing violence from women's lives requires changes in laws that sustain or contribute to the problem (8). The lack of women in political leadership positions leads to the already implicated laws. Bilal Tawfiq Hamamra, an assistant professor of English literature at

An-Najah University, points out the implication of women in leadership positions being male figures deafness to female peers' voices (22). Together Gluck, Hajjar and Rought-Brooks all agree that in order for any changes to take place, there first needs to be a reframing of the law. Hamamra adds to this idea by inputting an implication to women's PP. He says women's voices are commonly ignored, therefore reframing the law will take both men and women's participation. All experts recognize the importance of women's PP.

Solution

Political participation and legal reforms are necessary factors for improving women's quality of life in Palestine. This is the most effective way to address women's rights in Palestine because when women are able to possess decision-making power in a country, its citizens enjoy a better quality of life, more women will be recognized by the state, and it will help with the law system and decrease domestic violence. This solution needs to be implemented by the state. Although for this to happen, both men and women must agree in majority, and the Palestinian government must financially aid its female candidates and their ideas.

Citizens getting a better quality of life

Half of the Palestinian population is women, but the majority of the rulings come from men. With such an undiverse political force, women are being underrepresented. Adding women into political settings could enlighten this left behind part of Palestinian society. Mi Hwa Hong, who studied political science at Kookmin University, found "when women possess decision-making power in a country, its citizens enjoy a better quality of life." She also found that the more women there are in parliament, the more female citizens' engage in politics, plus higher levels of social policy spending and improved public health outcomes (1). Talhami agrees women's engagement in politics has increased, and opens new opportunities for the female leaders in national activities that crossed gender lines (677). Older women in Palestine revealed how intifada activities created a free space for them in their lives, and express gratefulness for that freedom (Gluck 9). This correlates with Cobells story, because after years of struggle with the government, she finally gained justice for her community. The justice granted improved the quality of life for many American Indian citizens. Furthermore, Joost Hiltermann, a program director for the International Crisis Group found that the daily struggle of women in Palestine

has brought activists from the various factions in the national movement closer together, and is only getting better (53). The efforts of Palestinian women to mobilize enabled them to position themselves in "alternative " civil structures that could wield influence on a forthcoming state (Dajani 14). All of these experts can agree increasing women's involvement in politics will provide a better quality of life in the nation. In contrast, Gluck talks about the women personally affected, while the others recognize how it affects society as a whole.

More women will be recognized by the state

With more women being politically engaged, there is more spotlight on them. Women's representation in politics will create a spotlight for the everyday struggles faced in Palestine. Spotlight is a big part of the painting: Confrontation on the Bridge. In this painting the African American citizens are putting themselves directly in front of the oppressors and making their presence known, this forces a reaction and clear acknowledgement out of their oppressors. Lorraine Bayard De Volo, an associate professor of women and gender studies at the University of Colorado, finds women's individual voices and identities can be messages to society, challenging old patriarchal notions of what it means to be a woman (111). Arguably, women's equal gender status is often problematic and assumed to represent modernity, which makes feminism a difficult project for nationalist women (Hasso 459). Granted, Rosemary Sayigh, a journalist and scholar of middle eastern history, thinks the protractedness of the Palestinian struggle offers Palestinian women a "golden chance" to consolidate their position within the national movement (881). Along with this, Victoria Biggs, who has a PhD in humanitarian and conflict response from the University of Sheffield, analyzes Palestinian women's peace work as a way to understand their struggle, which can help make a difference possible (322). Najim finds designing training programs for working women on leadership skills that teach self-management, communication, the skill of influencing others, etc. is also a vital factor in making a difference for these women possible (Najim 199). Womens nationalism is an important way to get their voices heard. Although Hasso highlights the fact that modernity is a struggling concept for some Palestinians, most can agree women's voices are more recognized while in leadership positions.

Assists the law system

The Palestinian law system, like any other, is not perfect, although it has potential to grow. Including women in decision making processes helps add a different perspective that may not have been recognized before. Amal Jamal, an associate professor of political science and political communication at Tel Aviv University, finds the lack of attention to women's problems in Palestine media mirrors women's limited influence on decision making in Palestinian politics (1). Political quotas have proved insufficient in the representation of women's interests, and many Palestinian women report being victims of violence and harassment, with the intention of forcing them to resign as political actors (Sanín 16). It was found, "democracies can be more effective in increasing female legislative representation when combined with global norms of gender equality," this helps make calls for gender balance in legislative representation more effective in domestic politics (Hongl 2). This is found necessary by Azadeh Kian, a professor in sociology at the University Paris Cité, who highlights there's a shortage of day nurseries, kindergartens, and other child care facilities in Palestine. This is a big problem for women, especially those with young children, however no women parliamentarians were mobilized defending their cause (63). This problem is insightful to women and requires help from an inside perspective. Women deserve to have a say in their country, and "it is inconceivable that the Palestinian revolution should not be

accompanied by the liberation of the Palestinian woman" (Sayigh 880). As a whole, these experts believe women in the law system make a change. From Kian naming specific areas of specialty for women in the law force, to Sanín analyzing their decision making, it is undeniable women can help improve the law system in Palestine.

While increasing women's PP and LR have proved to be the most logical solution to this issue, there are still some limitations to consider. It is important to keep in mind that the progress toward reform is held back by classic patriarchy, and male bias is still present. The patriarchal system believes women's only positions are at home, and male bias keeps women from pursuing leadership, but overcoming these limitations is an obstacle that will be faced. As the world continues to move forward, so do humans, and the classic patriarchal system will become modern. Women in leadership positions symbolize modernity, and with more exposure to this modernity, patriarchal systems will be less able to thrive (Hasso 459). The time to implement change is now, every oncoming generation is just another step further into getting equal rights for women in Palestine. A better future for Palestinian women will begin with this solution, and it is necessary to be organized as soon as possible. After years of struggle, the women of Palestine may finally achieve the recognition deserved.

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