A Field study on Palestinian women

Do married educated workingwomen benefit from equality and independence, or are their burdens of inequality and traditional social duties the same as for married uneducated workingwomen?

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By

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Acknowledgements

My passion for women's rights and empowerment has always leaded me to observe the situations of women around the world, and especially in my homeland, within my own people and society.

Since I was born and raised in Palestine, unfortunately I have had to both see and experience the daily hardships of Palestinian women due to their lack of power. The Palestinian society is just like any other male dominated culture in the region of the Middle East.

This situation turned into a burning desire inside of me towards pursuing women's rights, I started to question the reasons behind the current state of affair of women's role in the Palestinian society.

I grew up, completed high school and entered the first year of studies at the University of Bethlehem. I noticed that the situation of women did not change according to educated or professional career. All I saw was women's powerlessness; and no hope towards creating a real change.

I came to Norway to continue my undergraduate studies. After having had a cultural shock of experiencing women's independence here, I got inspired to study and question why there was such a silence among Palestinian women towards all the social unfairness around them.

It was not an easy task to question my own society; neither to end up in arguments with my own family whenever discussing my life decisions or those of my friends or relatives. I became stronger, and independent in Norway. But I could not change the social fabric in Palestine, and even I felt stressed and frustrated by all the various considerations I had to make in relation to my Palestinian culture. I became even more aware of the situation for Palestinian women, both as an insider – and as a visiting outsider.

These were my personal motivations for choosing the present area of research. I wanted to study and write about something from the daily horizon of Palestinian women, something straight-forward and simple to understand.

A number of people have helped make this study possible. I want to thank my supervisor, Dr. Gerd Marie Adna, who encouraged me to explore my initial ideas and gave great support. Further special

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Chapter one

Methodology

1. Introduction and background

The research area of this project is the place and role in modern society of educated women in Palestinian society, foremost in Bethlehem. Firstly, I wanted to take a deeper look into what choices they have been making concerning their career development, during and after finishing their higher education, and secondly, I wanted to understand the different reasons behind their descisions. In order to relate my study to the most modern lifestyles, I decided to mainly concentrate on the following specific period of time and age: young women in Palestine born in the year 1988, having undergone university studies from 2006 to 2012.

According to the school system in the Palestinian territories, high school graduation is to be achieved after twelve years. Then follows university, where the Bachelor program has a duration of four years, and the Master program another one to two years. Throughout their school and university years, we can safely assume that the students are living within a globalized situation with full access to the internet and television. That is, they have the possibility to be directly informed about the Human Rights' Declaration, at home and/or within the educational system. They also learn about gender issues, and potentially have been enlightened through various youth programs offered within the framework of the many governmental and non-governmental organisations that exist in the Palestinian territories.

In addition, we should not forget the political conflict that is constantly present, bringing awareness about the international community and its obligation towards Human Rights. The 1988 generation of Palestinian women have also learned and participated in a new type of demonstration; the none-violent one. The reason why I mentioned these points is to explain that young women of this age have had the possibility to take their chances to understand the world around, and particularly the situation of women. Palestinian young women have actually been an active part of women's empowerment from the first moment they entered into university. A statistical study from the

University of Bethlehem in fall 2012, demonstrates that 76% of the total students at the university in Bethelehem are women,1 coming from different regions of the Palestinian territories.

These results, indicates that women from Palestine are able to receive higher education and empower themselves with knowledge and ability to change their lives and become more emanicipated. But still, it seems, women are *not* making a change, not in society as a whole and neither inside their own homes, within their own families.

This background gives my main reason for becoming motivated to conduct research on what are the obstacles that stop educated young women to making a change in their place and role in modern Palestinian society. Why are they still not free to choose and embrace the life that they want, and not care about what people will say when they implement their choices?

With all the options for young women living in the Palestinians territories, many freely choose to follow the traditional lifestyle, to perform their traditional duties as mothers, wives, girlfriends, daughters and sisters. They frame their higher education certificate and hang it on the wall; either at their parents' home while taking their line in waiting to get married, or in their new home after marriage. It seems to me, that the majority of graduating young women refuse to begin working, especially after having wedded. Despite achieving a high educational level, the Palestinian woman is looking for a traditional marriage and chooses a groom that can provide for her, without her ever having to work outside the home. This reality has been hard for me to personally face and understand, given that I myself am born, raised and educated within Palestinian society. I decided to study the reasons for these women pursuing a university degree, and yet choosing a traditional lifestyle and not a professional career.

Even those women who decide to use their university degree and go out into their professional field of work, cannot be called independent or empowered as they are still identifying with their role as a traditional woman. Because women have always been working and providing for their families also without education. In earlier times, all women helped with work at the farms, or with collecting water from the rivers around. Palestinian women in general, it can be argued, have

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[1] http://bethlehem.edu/facts

always been contributing to the economical household of the family. I seriously doubt that the place and role of women in Palestininan society have been improved through education. According to several gender sensitive development theories, education equals empowerment, i.e. women need to first learn about their rights and how to claim them, before actually exercising them. But Palestinian women still accept to be weakened by their cultural roles, which are obstacels to social development. Palestinian women refuse to take initiative for a change. They seem to simply be standing where they are; accepting the dominant traditional cultural-religious rules to lead them.

In conclusion, the hypothesis for this study, is that there is not necessarily a correlation between women's education and emancipation, and that Palestinian women are not more independent if pursuing a higher education degree. However, it is often claimed the opposite

Anyone with the slightest familiarity of Palestinian everyday life can notice the dichotomy as described above. The fact of the matter seems evident, yet the rationale for this situation, is not. And exactly for this reason, I wanted to look for answers as to why there have been very small changes in the roles of women within their families, their culture and religious tradition, even though the level of education among Palestinian women looks promising. Unfortunately, we will see that many are giving up their dreams for traditions. How can enlightened and educated women choose to remain silent to all the gender inequality surrounding them? In order to understand this phenomenon, I intend to present the reasons claimed by educated women as to why they stay home after marriage and not contribute to their professional working field; why are they still waiting for the "perfect" husband who can care for her according to the cultural norm when she in fact can work and care for herself?

As a result of the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict, most of the women in Palestine are considered to be working outside their homes in order to help with the income of the family since many of the men have lost their jobs and they are sitting at home. However, the unemployed men are not helping with the household chores; not with cooking, cleaning, shopping, helping their children with homework. They are instead hanging out with their likewise unemployed friends and neighbors.

Such a situation creates a lot of frustration for the women, but still they accept and are not pushing for a change. Huge constraints are holding them back; how long can they manage? I suggest that

Palestinian women are similar to other Arab women who are forced to bear more than what they actually can endure, due to their commitment to familiy, religion, and culture.

Based on the above, we can stipulate that there is no inherent connection between education, economic development and women's empowerment. In the following, I wish to further argue, and prove, that this is indeed the case. In short, I aim to demonstrate that education is not enough to shife and change the role of women in Palestinian society, due to the countless social obstacles standing against any real positive development.

Obstacles that are standing against women's empowerment and equality in Palestinian society, are not only a problem for the women themselves, but also for the development of the whole society. When a major party in society is paralyzed, general development will be severely hampered and even not take place. My choice of research topic is therefore important not only for the women themselves, but for all of Palestinian society. If we correctly can understand what the obstacles are, we will be able to make recommendations towards overcoming the obstacles, and work towards real societal development.

Another motivating factor for conducting this research, is that I want to know why educated women are not resisting their own marginalization in society, even though they fully understand that this is the case. Is there some internal, emotional drive that makes them happy and fulfilled by staying at home? Are they afraid of change? Or is the drive exclusively external, stemming from the surrounding cultural environment that has captivated them and paralyzed their ability of making any effort to change. My additional questions were endless, and I wanted to search for answers with an open mind.

2. Qualitative field research

The obvious choice of method for this type of study is qualitative field research. This method is mostly used within social sciences, but in many other fields of studies as well. It aims to understand the behaviour of human beings, and to highlight the reasons and causes of those behaviours. In comparison to quantitative research, where the focus is on retrieving numerical data, qualitative

research "aims to produce factual descriptions based on face-to-face knowledge of individuals and social groups in their natural settings"[2], and is useful for obtaining the beliefs and opinions of the respondents in question. It is important to limit the field research to a specified group. In a broader picture, the specific results can be used for hypothesis-testing and generalizing beyond the particular case-studies.

The overall methodology adopted for this study comprises three main parts: a review of previous research related to the area of study; a presentation of the actual field research in the form of fifteen questionnaires and in-depth interviews, and an analysis of the data.

2.1 Selection of target group

My study focuses on married women in the Palestinian society, and the interviewees are divided into five categories:

1. married educated working women
2. married educated but not working women
3. married uneducated working women
4. married uneducated and not working
5. single women continuing their higher education or working

These categories enabled me to get a broad overview of obstacles standing against improved conditions for women in general, and married women in particular. At the same time, I was eager to identify a list of factors that play a basic role in developing Palestinian women's social status. In addition, I was interested to include also single educated women in my study, since I wanted to understand whether there are any differences between the groups in terms of offered opportunities and social support.

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[2] www.oxfordjournals.org/tropej/online/ce_ch14.pdf p. 196

2.2 Design of the questionnaire

I followed the basic procedure to turn the study into a set of questions to which an answer could be given.[3] This has made it easier for me to clarify the problem, how to analyze and try to solve it. Sometimes to find the right question is more important, and can be even more difficult, than to provide an answer.[4] Furthermore, I needed to find questions that would give me knowledge not only about external resources (such as time, and funding), but more importantly about personal resourses, social characteristics and circumstances.[5]

During my interviews, I used five different questionnaires, one for each specific group, with a number of questions in common for all the groups. The questions aimed at collecting information about the educational level of the candidates and the duration of the period of education. My informants were not all from the same generation, as I wanted to see whether the younger generations claim to have better access and opportunities. The questions also seek to cover the respondents' daily life, at work and at home.

2.3 Field interviews

My research involved questioning some existing theories about the connection between women's social development and education. As already stated, I noticed that the situation of women in Palestine seem to stand in opposition to those theories, or at least that women's education and improved social status are not necessarily causally connected. Therefore, a principal goal was to identify obstacles preventing educated women to become emancipated, thus seriously challenging the validity of the equation and it's efficiency perhaps also in other parts of the world.

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[3] Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p. 24

[4] Merton 1959.

[5] Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p. 24

The field work took place in Palestine between August to September 2012. Persons interviewed were sampled by gender, ethnicity, age and educational qualifications.[6] As we know, "science is to be based on what we can see, hear, touch rather than on personal opinions or speculative imaginings"[7] – accordingly, the interviews enabled me to listen to women and get a first-hand look into their choices relating to education, family, and professional career.

My research was mainly concentrated on the generation of girls born in 1988. However, some stories from other generations have been included as well for comparison. I was able to study what were the differences in opportunities available for the women according to the five different categories. I was could also track each woman's life process and check if there were differences in the development of single women compared to those married .

I have been communicating with my informers orally, which is the traditional way of communication in the Palestinian culture, of which I am a part. Talking is still the simple way of human communication that is taking place within the Palestinians territories.

During my interviews, I wrote down personal notes and key words on my laptop. I had an extra copy of each file that I used during the interviews, which then were saved on my external hard-disk. All the information has been locked in my computer which has a password that is only accessible by me. I kept my computer locked inside my room, always bringing the door key with me. These measures were of course to secure the data received.

Oral conversation is the most suitable tool for communication within Palestinian society, especially when it comes to communication between persons of the same gender. Thus, I had an open and easy access to get into contact with women suitable for my categories. Also the flexibility within Arabic culture to plan an appointment, made it possible to quickly set up a comfortable schedule of interviews with the fifteen interviewees. There were three candidates for each of the five groups. Most of the interviews took place in the respondent's own home, while a few

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[6] Hammersley, Martyn and Atkinson, Paul. (ethnography) p.90-120

[7] Chalmers, A.F. (what is this thing called science) p.1

interviews took place at my home in Beit Jala, West Bank, because of convenience (mainly for candidates travelling through checkpoints and needing a place to rest). Interviewing the group of single women was very informal and social. We met at a youth cafe, where chatted freely as friends. Two out of the in total fifteen interviews took place online through Skype due to last-minute changes in my division of categories. I secured the approval of my advisor to make these two interviews via Skype. I was aware of both my advantages of being able to talk openly and freely with my informants, and the limitations, should I suddenly forget myself and begin talking about issues, which my interviewee might consider as too sensitive.

Towards the end of September 2012, I returned to Norway and began processing the collected data and relevant literature. I will be submitting this thesis on December 1, 2015.

3. Limitations and observations in the field

There were several challenges during the process of my field research. In the following, I will firstly relate to my personal status as both an insider and an outsider to Palestinian society, which according to my view has played a limiting as well as a constructive role in this research project. Secondly, I will be discussing the original lack of definitions of concepts used in my questionnaire, which considerably limited the immediate usefulness of the information received in the interviews.

3.1 Being an insider and the general reactions towards me as an insider

Being a part of the Palestinian society has given me an immediate understanding of the daily routines of my interviewees, as well as most of the prevailing social systems. I was therefore able to have easy access to my candidates, and have comfortable communication with them. Sharing the same language and sex, rights and duties, cultural and social experiences – were actually the key to entering the candidates' personal arena. I was one of them in one way, but in another way I was considered to be an outsider, due to my living in Norway for six years, and in addition coming back home to seek and call for social change. Some of the women interviewed did not accept me for it, mainly, I believe, because Palestinian culture is very conservative when it comes to girls:

girls must not go out alone, girls must not travel alone, girls must not be late out, girls must not have boyfriends – there are a million constraints surrounding girls in Arabic society, and not only in the Palestinian society per se. And not only were I a young woman, but I emerged suddenly as "an outsider, who is coming back from the other world", as people are popularly called who are from other cultures and traditions that does not suit the Palestinian ones). My presence and research was not considered desirable, by some. On the other hand, the interviewed women of the older generation, who themselves had suffered a lot from the unfairness of Palestinian patriarchal culture, looked upon me with understanding and wished me good luck to fight for, and achieve, things that they could not. Their words of support are still in my ears, and strengthened my motivations for the research. But that some of the young women participating in the study were so critical and opposed to what I stood for, was a shocking experience for me. In this case, being an insider was particularly challenging. "Do you think you are in Europe?" one of my candidates asked me. It was indeed very hard for me to discuss with these women; that it was useless to raise issues of women's independence with them. Their attitudes and ambitions were so clearly directed towards other values. In my ears, they were repeating and reinforcing their families' social history, instead of trying to make a change. It was certainly an interesting experience, as I had expected the opposite result, i.e. positive attitudes towards my research question from the younger generation and rather negative attitudes from the older women, who supposedly are conserving the traditions. In the end, this experience made me even more conscious about the many social obstacles paralyzing the process of women's emancipation. Both the negative as well as the positive reactions towards me as an insider, as expressed by the older and younger generations, in fact lead me to discover the two main types of obstacles that stand against any real development of women's improved status within Palestinian society. Later in my thesis, I will present these obstacles.

I found it helpful to adopt the idea of the symbolic interactionism theory developed by Erving Goffman[8] in order to further explain how limitations in my field work are due to the fact that I am an insider to the social arena that is the focus of my research. Goffman's abiding concern was concentrated on what he came to call "the interaction order ", that is, the structure, process, and

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[8] Goffman 1983

products of social interaction.[9] Goffman's approach to the study of social interaction is often called dramaturgical, meaning that he viewed social life as something like a staged drama, similar to a "religious ceremony filled with ritual observations".[10] According to Goffman, we can assume that there must always be a kind of drama and rituals in each and every social interaction. In my particular case, it happened when I entered – as an insider – into the presence of others. Then both the drama and rituals automatically were enacted. It is axiomatic that people mostly do not show who they really are in front of everyone. Or differently said: you can never get to know people unless you live with them under the same roof. Living with someone under the same roof, is no longer defined as a social interaction since you live together for a long period of time, and no one can manage drama all days around. At some point or the other, you will have to stop pretending to be something else. Similar applies to the times where you are stressed, busy, exhausted, or otherwise no longer care about pretending to be something else than what you are. A poignant example from within Arabic culture, are sayings about marriage that is applied especially to girls: girls are advised to be cautious, to leave their eyes open for the unseen things, to be careful no matter what the fiancée is doing for you before the marriage, because – you will never know the real him unless you share the same bed. This refers of course to marriage, since in Palestinian culture no one shares the same bed before marriage. So, both boys and girls pretend to be somebody else before marriage, because they are afraid of showing their real selves during the engagement period. In Palestinian culture, divorce is undesirable and almost impossible. Therefore, pretending before marriage is a successful technique for both boys and girls to hide themselves until they enter the next and safe stage, when there is no way back and their true selves are revealed. They can finally do whatever they want, whether the other part likes it or not.

In the social interaction with my informers, both drama and rituals took place. Drama is famous in Arabic society and has a special expression in Arabic: *Mazaher*, which can be directly translated to "appearances." I was an insider whom my informers did not have to reveal themselves in front

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[9] Goffman 1983, p. 175

[10] Goffman 1883, p. 175

of, in order to be in the safe side. Some informers I knew from before, and since they knew me, they wanted to come out as their best before me. Yet I knew what was happening in their homes. Performing the interviews required sensitive social skills in order to retrieve authentic data. Goffman claims that any extra possessed information concerning either of the parties in the social interaction will help to define the situation and enable both parties to know in advance what to expect from one another. I find that this is exactly what happened when I met with the informers I knew from before. We already had a kind of stereotyped picture of each other, but she would begin to perform and tell me what she thought is best for me to know about her. Goffman explains, that "some of our performances may be thoroughly calculated to evoke a particular response, others may be less calculated and much easier to do because they seem more natural to us or more authentic". [11] And so when the drama started, I already knew what type of person I was interviewing. The many performances were no longer hidden to me. In accordance with Goffman, whenever we face a social interaction, we are not only performers but an audience for their performances as well. In other words, "I love hearing lies when I know I can the truth."[12] Another pertinent citation from Goffman relates to his concept of a "backstage": "audiences are aware that performers are likely to present themselves and the social entities they present in a favourable light. Thus, they often look for evidence of deception. They may try to overhear or catch a glimpse of what is happening backstage".[13] And again: "the most social settings consist of a front region- or front stage- where a performance is given and a back region- or backstage- where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted".[14] This is exactly what *Mazaher* is all about, in that my informers could not be real for me, not only because I am an insider but because this is the condition of being in the presence of others. We want to show the best of our selves. As any other person would, I got impressions and made observations during the social interaction in my interviews. Later I took the results home with me to create a backstage to all what had been

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[11] Goffman 1983, p. 177

[12] Goffman 1983, p. 177

[13] Goffman 1983, p. 177

[14] Goffman 1983, p. 177

said and observed on the front stage. Perhaps what happens in restaurants can illustrate the two concepts in a clearer way: on the backstage of a kitchen in a restaurant, food gets picked up after falling on the floor, leftovers are placed on new plates to be served, staff ridicules customers, etc. On the opposite side is the front stage of the dining area, where everything looks delicious, waiters and waitresses are behaving very politely in order to gain a good impression to the customers.

The level of honesty in societies all over the world is considerably variable and depending on many factors. One factor can be how much drama hides within society itself, in addition to the drama within each individual's self. In the Middle East area, people are known for their social drama, including the covering of truth, and are well aware of this fact. Consider stopping at fruit markets in Europe and noticing that watermelon's slices are offered for sale; and even some markets offering a dish with slices to taste before buying. On the contrary, if stopping at fruit markets in the Middle East, watermelons are for sale the way they are; you can very rarely buy watermelons in slices, and slices for tasting are not offered. The lesson behind these state of affairs, is connected to the previous example of the sayings on marriage: most sellers in the Middle East will not show you the inner of the watermelon unless you buy it, leaving success or failure to your own luck. After buying the watermelon, there is no way back. Either you have been lucky and got a red and sweet watermelon, or it has been a bad luck for you this time and you got a light-pink and tasteless watermelon that cannot be replaced. So, marriage is like a whole, unopened watermelon; you can never know what it will be like unless you cut it open and check the inner part. You can never know how your marriage and partner will play out, unless you enter the cage of marriage and live in it together. When entering the cage, again, there is no way back. Consequently, the drama continues as long as it serves the aim. Immediately after achieving the aim, no matter how big or small, people will gradually decrease the drama. This can happen without people knowingly changing their behaviour and appearances, or, people are consciously letting go of their appearances since they have fulfilled their aims and no longer need a hidden agenda.

The reactions of my informers were very obviously examples of drama. Members of a society can be afraid to break the cultural behaviour patterns in front of other members. This happens in order to not look different, not be apart – in spite of an inner opposition to what they are presenting on the outside. Thus, a conflict is taking place between what each individual need and think is right, and what the whole society needs and thinks it right. Arabic culture is maintaining its strong and

conservative collective relations, and many are afraid to show their real selves in contrast to the cultural paradigm in order not become rejected. Goffman writes: "society is organized on the principle that any individual who possesses certain social characteristics has a moral right to expect that others will value and treat him in an appropriate way".[15] Following this, we can understand that those who follow and are carriers of the specifics of Palestinian cultural behaviours and attitudes will be highly respected by everyone else sharing the same values. Whereas those who do not follow or have other opinions, are might become rejected or get no respect from any other society members. So many are indeed afraid to show their real self, and instead adjust their appearances in the presence of other society members. And they might even follow the cultural pattern with blatant enthusiasm in order to prove that they do belong to society with all their heart.

Goffman, again: "the individual does of course intentionally convey misinformation by mean of both these types of communication, the first involves deceit, the second feigning".[16] Individuals act to convey the impression to others, which it is in their interests to convey.

Some of my informers behaved in a way that served their cultural interests. They wanted to look "normal" as anybody else around them. For example, one of my informers said that she was very happy to be a homemaker without any help of her husband – though she looked very unhappy and tired. Since I already had background information about her, as a result of the Palestinian collective society where everyone almost knows everybody, I understood that she was answering me according to the cultural norm. This particular informer wanted to look satisfied with being a homemaker without any help from husband. She did not want to break her husband's appearance in front of me, nor her own or her families' appearance. It was in her interest to convey the ideal image of a satisfied wife that follows the cultural pattern of a family: at home raising kids, cooking and cleaning, while her husband is outside trying to provide for his family. This is the traditional married social life with division of roles and duties between the husband and wife. Most of the Palestinian society members are following this pattern. Men are outside as the main family provider, and women are at home with children. At the same time, many women have been helping

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[15] Goffman 1959, p. 105
[16] Goffman 1959, p. 98

with the family income and have been working outside, in addition to their traditional duties in the household. But still they are continuously refusing to talk about any satisfaction from working outside of the home, or to value if their partner offers to help in the household. As stated earlier, these women are not willing to break the cultural pattern out of concern for no longer being treated in an appropriate way from the other social members. Some few women get help from her husband inside the home, but they cannot admit it in front of other men or women in the society, including her husband's family. If she indeed would tell the image of her husband and his masculinity will be broken – instead he will appear as a man who is not in control of his own home, his own wife. He will lose his respect in front of everybody and other men may laugh at him, when they get to know that he is helping his wife at home. This is very sad phenomenon, and very true at the same time. Such attitudes and behaviours can stand as one of the most important obstacles against women's social development and change. Later in my thesis, I will further discuss these social obstacles, as well as others.

3.2 Lack of definitions in advance

It is appropriate to present some other concepts that I have found useful for analysing the social dramas of my informers, though there were not in place at the time of the interviews. It was only later that I realized I needed to better define what I aimed at finding out through my questionnaire and interviews. The lack of definitions of concepts was probably the reason why I did not always get clear and detailed answers to my questions, nor truthful descriptions of the realities. For example, when I asked the candidates about support from their surroundings, they answered that they had great support from their families and their spouses. Here I needed to look closer on what was meant by "support"; support by words, and/or in action? A more exact question to pose would be: did my candidates get *practical* support, that is: did they get help from their spouse in house cleaning, cooking and attending to the children? Did her spouse participate in the household work, or did he leave all the housework for her when she comes home after a long day of work? Because if so, the support the women were talking about, is not a support that can make a difference. While analysing my interviews, I discovered that some of the women fitted exactly with my preliminary observations regarding the concept of support. As for those of my informers who did not convey

a drama, I could see their lack of practical support. Those informers had so much in their lives that they wanted to change and truthfully presented their sad realities. My youngest informers of the 1988 generation had been married for around six years, running a household as a full-time job. Many of them had left their career aspirations aside, as they did not get active, practical support from their spouses. Again, the original lack in my questionnaire of a clear definition of "support" as "practical support", had to be adjusted by asking additional questions, in order for me to be able to, as it were, fill in between-the-lines.

In fact, while doing my interviews, I faced an overall problem. As already explained, I had not clearly defined the concepts that I referred to in my questionnaire and therefore, I did not receive clear answers. Also in general, I presented a number of questions that I thought would lead me to the answers that I was expecting. This did not happen, because my candidates choose to overlook some parts of the questions. Since the questions were not explicitly concentrated on the theme, the candidates could easily decide to play with the answers instead of saying that they would prefer not to answer at all. For example, when I gave an indirect or unclear question, the answers were not inclusive to cover the aim of the question. Consequently, I was left with several gaps directly connected to my research problem. Instead of filling in the missing blanks with the information I had collected, I had difficulties to apply the information correctly on my research problem. In the end, helping me fill in the gaps, were my observations in the field, and my personal inside-outside cultural position and understanding that I have discussed above.

3.3 Exploring motivations towards a process of change

I hesitate whether to use the word "motivate" or "forced" in order to properly describe processes towards creating a change in the traditional daily routines and lifestyle of women in Palestinian society. During my interviews, I came across some stories of specific events that had changed the direction of life style for the woman in question, i.e. stories of turning points. For example, when I was interviewing one of the candidates from the married uneducated and not working category, I recorded that she had been forced to leave the household after seventeen years due to some family conflict. She was the mother of four girls and since she had no work, she could not take the children with her. She would not have been able to provide them a living. Her marriage had been a so-

called love marriage, and not an arranged, or traditional one. But it seemed to me that the problems had made her stronger. When she left her husband's home and went to live with her brother's family, she began to work on her own professional career. She applied to a school in order to retake the governmental exams for a high-school certificate that she had failed to achieve before she got married. When I interviewed her, she was working in a kindergarten as an assistant beside her studies so as to not bother her brother with her expenses. Her dream was to become independent; to get a job and a house for herself so that she could ask the court to allow her children back to her. Her husband had always forbidden her to study or work throughout their marriage, and even after separating from him, he exercised power over her. This woman is one of many that illustrate the point of women being forced to move on and create a new lifestyle for themselves.

Concentrating my efforts on women issues has been a rewarding and meaningful experience. I must confess that I in the beginning considering the women themselves and their roles in society to epitomize the weak and the fragile. However, such terminology is not entirely accurate. The women I interviewed opened the door for an inside-outsider interfering with their lives. When searching for motivations for cultural change in Palestinian society, I believe it is easier to focus on women since they are on the disenfranchised side. *They* will be the ones seeking for an improved situation where they can claim their rights. Men are in a different, strong social position, and for this reason they are satisfied with the traditional routines the way they are. If the call for change would come from inside the women, then they for sure would be able to achieve their rights, by uniting in their efforts and dreams. If an outside power breaks the egg, there will be no life … but if the power comes from inside the egg – life will be created and burst open.

Chapter two

Theoretical approaches

1. The Palestinian context

The occupied Palestinian territories have gone through very harsh and difficult circumstances since more than 60 years. Even so, the daily life of Palestinian citizens became yet more complicated during the first Intifada, beginning in September 2000, when the Israeli occupation army began demolishing of Palestinian homes which left thousands of families homeless. In addition, Palestinian society lost vital parts of its leadership, many young men were imprisoned by Israel, and rampant unemployment destroyed the infrastructure of the Palestinian economy. These traumatic events have had direct impact on all levels of society, including education. The Israeli occupation has destroyed stones, trees, and human beings, and constructed an apartheid wall that has swallowed most of the Palestinian land and divided the remains into encircled ghettos. The establishment of a viable Palestinian state is obsolete. Any talks about a Palestinian state are only talk about a fragmented, incomplete and distorted entity.

In spite of the severity of the situation, the struggle for survival in this land has never stopped. The faith in our rights as human beings, and the trust in our just cause, leads us to continuously finding ways and means to withstand. Since the formation of the Palestinian Authority and its Legislative Council, several attempts have been made to consolidate and establish the essential basics for the creation of a Palestinian independent state, such as, for instance, the preparation of a Palestinian school curriculum, or civil laws that will serve the needs of the Palestinian community. For this reason, the current times are very important as an establishment phase where anyone can make the effort to bring about laws that suit the community and all its groups of women and men, children and the elderly, disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Most importantly, such laws should encourage and safe-guard the social development of the community rather than crippling the process of development.

Perhaps the organizations, institutions and centres that work for women's rights are the most active bodies in this area. The Palestinian Authority is working on ensuring the sovereignty of law and the equality of men and women. A most important political initiative includes the feminist document issued in 1994; a memorandum filed by the Palestinian Women Union to the Palestinian Legislative Council.[17] Such efforts are continuously introduced to the drafting of basic laws, the Palestinian constitution and other bills concerning employment, public health, education, and other issues.

I consider my research to be an honest attempt to identify and address the obstacles that stand against women's independence. My study will thus focus on what is preventing social equality, and briefly examine the fairness and comprehensiveness of these laws by checking the homogeneity of some of the laws in force and some Palestinian draft laws with approved rights covenants and international conventions and treaties on the one hand, and to examine the sensitivity of these laws to gender issues on the other hand.

2. Human rights declarations

It is essential to include human rights and regulations of the international community, those which are meant to protect all human beings. The following United Nations' principles are of specific relevance to my field of research:[18]

Now, Therefore THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition

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[17] Baheth nakde 2005. p. 11 . This book is published by women´s centre for legal aid and counselling and can be downloaded online from this website : http://www.wclac.org/atemplate.php?id=97

[18] http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#atop

and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

The human rights declaration is divided under 30 articles presenting different regulations for the sake of justice in our world. The most important ones are the first two articles that state the general rights for all humans and are applicable for all.[19]

1. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

2. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

These two articles present seemingly evident rights that should be available to everyone around the world without the need to structure or formalize them. Unfortunately, these rights still have to be secured by legislation and achieved on a global level. All human beings share the basic conditions of life and death, yet we go on war against one another, expose others to unfairness and suffering, mishandle the weak to become strong, and forget our humanity. Thus, there is a profound need to declare these human rights articles and implement them through international laws.

International laws are being enforced by the international community and not necessarily willingly adopted by individual states. And even countries that have signed the laws might not act on them, so that there are laws, and the values they uphold, that are not practiced by the state or by the civil society. The Palestinian society is one example of a society whose members are not practicing the human rights conventions signed by the Palestinian state. In my thesis, I will present some

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[19] http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#atop

considerations of why I believe this is the case. I will concentrate on women rights, but will relate also to general aspects.

3. The millennium goals

There are eight international development goals that were officially established following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000 and the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Declaration. All 193 united nation member states and at least 23 international organizations agreed to achieve the following goals by the year 2015: [20]

1. Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger,
2. Achieving universal primary education,
3. Promoting gender equality and empowering women,
4. Reducing child mortality rates,
5. Improving maternal health,
6. Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases,
7. Ensuring environmental sustainability,
8. Developing a global partnership for development

If we take a closer look on those goals, then we can see that the first five are either directly or indirectly connected to women's issues around the world. For instance, global statistics show that poverty is deeply connected to women and children; that is, if we improve the situation for women and children, we will accomplish change for the whole world.[21] The eight points are listed as the main challenges towards achieving international development, though they do not necessarily relate to the cultural specific challenges that are within each and every society around the globe.

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[20] http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/mdgoverview.html

[21]   https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/news/2013/03/11/56097/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-are-key-to-addressing-global-poverty/   and at the same time from this article we can see the connection between global poverty and women.

http://www.unfpa.org/gender-equality

In my thesis I will direct my attention to the specific challenges that underlie dynamics in the Palestinians society, preventing women from attaining real social development.

4. Women's rights

Women, as already mentioned in the end paragraph of my introduction (Chapter one), are a most marginalized and fragile part societies worldwide. Despite the increasing resources put into research and development concerning women, there is a need to study and better understand what cultural challenges and obstacles are still stopping the process for a woman to be respected in her own right, without being valued according to her ability to give birth and raise children, nor based on to what family she belongs. Women's rights are not truly achieved around the world, for countless of reasons. The lack of economic resources is often heard as one excuse; shortage of food supplement, for instance, is indeed connected to geographical-political divisions rather than socio-cultural matters. But take the example of higher education, the topic under discussion in this thesis, where there are cultural issues that prevent women from applying their graduate degree in the wider society. Such cultural issues and obstacles are often, as we shall see, directly or indirectly related to various religious interpretations and/or to dominating patriarchal principles. A particularly disturbing consequence of the cultural and religious demands faced by a young woman is that she is lead to look at *her own self* in a certain way, placing *herself* under the required restrictions and limitations and thus contributing to the dispersion of women's rights.

Later in my discussion I will be coming back to this phenomenon while referring to the various different kinds of cultural and religious challenges.

5. Robert Chamber's "poverty as entanglement" theory

The figure below illustrates the poverty system of the household that Robert Chambers has used to define and describe poverty from the viewpoint of the household: [22]
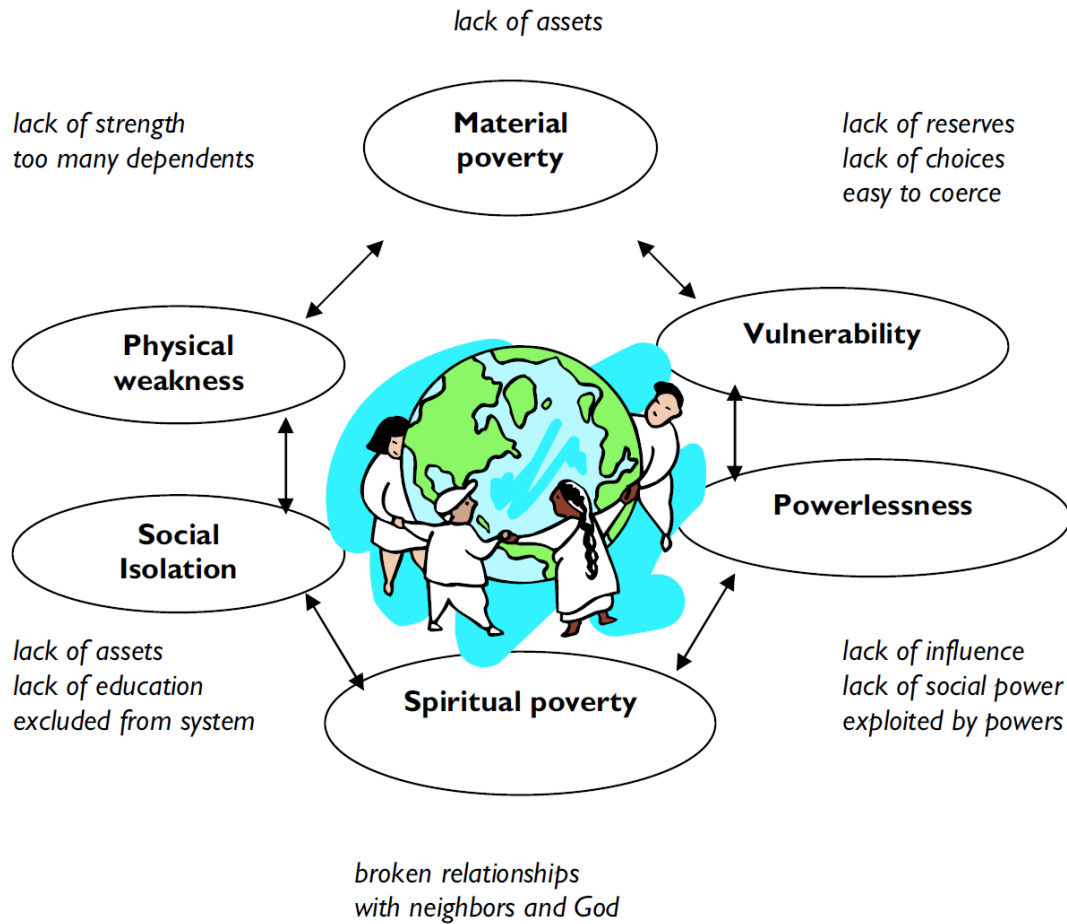
Chambers describes the poor as living in a "cluster of disadvantage". The household is in material poverty, physical weakness, isolation, powerlessness, and vulnerability. These dimensions of poverty are interacting in a system that he calls the "poverty trap". 23 Bryant L. Myers added the spiritual poverty to those dimensions as a sixth element in the interest of making it more holistic.

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[22] http://www2.crcna.org/site_uploads/uploads/igps/modules/c-walking_with_poor.pdf

[23] Chambers 1983, pp. 103-39

[24] The idea is that each of these elements is linked to and reinforces the others. A problem in one area transfers to a problem in another, etc. until the end-result is greater and greater poverty.

I will be using Chamber's theory as the main tool for my analysis of the different social obstacles for Palestinian women, as living in a "cluster of disadvantages". I find his theory particularly valuable since he applies a relational thinking which also takes the time-factor into account, the social development process over time. We cannot separate religious issues from the cultural ones when studying the process of women's development and social roles. There will be no social change if not all parts of the process are involved. I will be applying Chambers' "cluster of disadvantage" onto the Palestinian social context in order to identify and describe the obstacles which are preventing women's development, and rendering them as helpless in terms of change.

6. Symbolic interactionism and the presentation of self in everyday life

I have already dealt at length with Goffman's theories, and why I find them useful in presenting Palestinian social processes. Here it suffices to underline that the complexities of social drama are very much at the fore of Palestinian society, and that Goffman's insights have helped me twofold: firstly, and foremost, when grappling to understand the difficulties I faced during my field interviews. And secondly, when drawing my conclusions and summarizing my research.

7. Empowerment according to Martha Nussbaum and Naila Kabeer

Empowerment is "to put people in a position to demand their rights and influence on their own life and society." [25] Further according to Martha Nussbaum, empowerment is a fundament for development: to let people know their rights and how to claim them. Giving people the opportunities to get enlightened about their rights, gives strength. Knowledge makes people more

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[24] Myers 1999, pp. 65-69

[25] Nussbaum 2000, pp. 4-31

aware. Knowledge is the first step in the whole empowerment and development process. Knowledge is not limited by going to school and getting educated. Knowledge is about *being able to know and understand* the whole situation surrounding you. Without knowledge, people with not be able to claim their rights.[26] In my analysis, I will critically review these statements in relation to the Palestinian women interviewed, and discuss why their behaviours and decisions are *not* in correspondence with Nussbaum's empowerment theory.

Naila Kabeer defines empowerment as "the process that helps every individual deprived of the freedom of choice and the ability to participate in strategic life decisions, to be able to acquire this capability."[27] Empowerment is thus linked with choices, and provides the ability to making a real choice. It means acquiring a previously non-existent ability; the ability to make strategic life decisions that directly affect one's lives in order to live the life one wishes.[28]. This theory has been very useful for my study, because it will help me presenting and showing how hard is it for Palestinian women to make own decisions and choices. And at the same time will then show how is this connected as an obstacle to their empowerment.

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[26] Nussbaum 2000, p. 4-31

[27] Ba7eth nakde 2005, p. 24

Available also as mentioned before online at this website: http://www.wclac.org/atemplate.php?id=97

We can as well find the same definition for Naila at this website: https://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~kmacd/IDSC10/Readings/research%20design/empowerment.pdf

[28] Baheth nakde, p. 24. The online book: http://www.wclac.org/atemplate.php?id=97

8. Directions of equity and empowerment: " bottom-top" and "top-bottom"

Since the 1940's and into the mid-70's, policies of development approaches towards women by and large considered women as passive recipients, targeted primarily as mothers and caretakers. Furthermore, the aim of these initiatives was to achieve economic growth. A real interest in the inclusion of women in development aid appeared after the release of a study by Ester Boserup, which highlighted the division of roles between the sexes in agricultural production and draw the attention to the invisible role of women.[29] Boserup's contribution formed a significant turning point in the setting of development policies and agendas oriented towards women in third world countries. Likewise, "The Women's Decade" from 1976 to 1985 declared by the United Nations had a crucial role in highlighting the productive role of women, which had so far not been visible in the socio-economic realities of third world countries.[30] These efforts led to the development of the key concept of "Women in Development", which in turn paved the way for the emergence of a variety of initiatives for the integration of women in development.[31] There are various different platforms within the wider agenda of bringing women into development:

1. Fight against Poverty. This direction does not differ much from the basic direction towards welfare though it refers to increasing the productivity of poor women through the provision of small-scale projects for generating income to increase the family income, and thus in turn caters for a woman's productive role and meets her practical needs.
2. Direction of Efficiency. Holds that the development and increase of women productivity serves the process of overall development, so this direction is targeting both the productive and reproductive role of women, as well as providing opportunities of work and loans for small businesses.
3. Direction of Empowerment
4. Direction of Equity

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[29] Boserup 1970

[30] http://www.un-documents.net/a31r136.htm

[31] Gender in development, 2004, p. 1-21. At the same time the information from the UN sites: http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2014/10/world-survey-2014

These last two points are heading towards the political role of women and their role in community management as well as the productive and reproductive role. Both approaches are trying to meet the strategic needs of women; and the main difference being that directed empowerment is based on a "bottom-up" method while a directed equity depends on a "top to bottom" approach, whether imposed from governments or development agencies.[32] Neither of the last two approaches are desirable for use among politicians, planners and development partners, because both of directions of empowerment and equity challenge the traditional roles of women, motivates a process of changing women's roles, and thus arouse conflict and resistance. Thus, here we find the most contentious issues, and therefore I will discuss and relate my research findings to these two areas of continued opposition against the development of women.

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[32] Baheth nakde, p. 23. http://www.wclac.org/atemplate.php?id=97

Chapter three

Social aspects within the Palestinian society

Do married educated working women benefit from equality and independence, or are their burdens of inequality and traditional social duties the same as for married uneducated working women?

In this chapter, I am taking the theories and methodological considerations presented in the previous two chapters as reference points for an analysis and discussion of women's development in Palestinian society based on data received from my fifteen interviewees. I will touch upon socially motivating aspects within the Palestinian society, both against and for the process of women's development,

1. Cultural and social challenges against women developments

1.1 "We think that this is the way it should be done"

This statement is culture in its simplest form – *we think that this is the way it should be done*. That is how we are thinking about ourselves as part of a specific culture, anywhere on the globe. A culture that has its own rules and rituals, acculturating its members into thinking that *this is the way it should be done*. We look upon (and judge) others from our own point of view, our culture, customs, values, attitudes and ambitions, believing that we alike and chasing a common future. This, I would argue, is a great misunderstanding that brings our social endeavours backwards instead of releasing creativity and constructive ideas.

Cultural norms and traditions, in most cases, minimize and destroy the aspirations of a new generation; they determine and limit potential ambitions in order to keep up traditional "appearances" set by the many preceding generations. Most of the women in Palestine are not living the life they want, but the life they have. "You are just like every other woman around you; if they manage to do it, so will you." These were the words of the mother of one of my informers. Culture is affecting our own personal choices and decisions.

Stories of Hanan and Dania – One of my informants, Hanan (fictional name) is deeply connected this point of performing according to what is considered to be the cultural norm. Her total life is destroyed because she thinks "this is the way it should be done". She is one of many other women sharing a similar story: she got married the traditional way, in an arranged marriage. She did not have the big love and passion for her husband but she accepted him since his family had a good reputation, and he had a well presented personality during the few times they met alone during the six months of the engagement period. As explained earlier, the customs of arranged marriages do not give the partners the time to really meet instead they create an image about the other, which has little to do with the actual person. Some of these arranged marriages are actually successful, but most of them turn out to be a disaster for the families, given the fact that marriage problems in a collective society are the business of not only the couple themselves, but all members of the two families, and maybe their neighbours and friends as well. Hanan ended up with a bad arranged marriage. She discovered that she had got a life that she never had wished. She had three children, two girls and one boy. Her life became locked between four walls. The relation to her husband became impossible with many fights including her husband beating her. Hanan started thinking about divorce and shared those thoughts with her family, she become but felt guilty. "My mother told me that he is my husband and since I accepted to go through life with him, I should be responsible for my decision because we marry for good and bad, and your life no longer belongs to you but to your kids, do you want to destroy your daughters' life in the future? No one will look at them or propose to them because their mother is divorced and has not been a good wife so they will surely be like her, everyone will think so, my mother said." Hanan herself initially thought that divorce would be the way out of an impossible situation towards a new beginning, towards a life she had wished long time ago. Thinking through, days and nights, what her other had told her, made her realize that divorce is not compatible with her culture. Divorce is not how things are supposed to be. She decided to continue her marriage because she thought, "this is the way it should be." Like many other women who are not happy in their marred life, she stayed within the marriage for the sake of her children, and for the sake of keeping her family's good reputation. Hanan's mother (and father) totally complied with the traditional beliefs of what is best for one's children: better to raise them in a family with married parents, than divorced ones, even though there is violence and unhappiness in the marriage. However, Dania (fictional name), the oldest daughter of Hanan, did not agree with her mother's decision to stay in the marriage. From an early

age, Dania was feeling the tension between her parents, and was always asking her mother to divorce and run away with her, her brother and sister. It was hard for Hanan to tell Dania that divorce and running away was not the right thing to do, not even for the sake of Dania and her siblings. Dania was 16 years old when I interviewed Hanan, who told me that Dania now is blaming her mother for the life they are living. Dania kept saying things like, "why were you afraid from the people around you? We could have it much better, mama, we could have ran away and got a calm life". It hurts Hanan to hear, but at the same time she is still convinced that this is the way it should be, "at least as long as we are living in this society", she said. Hanan continued living a life she wished to run away from. She was afraid of her husband, his family and other members of society. She became paralyzed and could not overcome her fears. She could not find inside her the strength to demand a change within the framework of her marriage in order to create a better life for herself and for her children.

Hanan is an example from my category 4. Married uneducated and not working. Her lack of education and working life outside the household was in itself a point of weakness for her. "I was afraid not to be able to feed my kids, I do not work and have no education how come I will send them to school and raise them with no means". This made Hanan think twice before divorcing; she was fully and utterly dependent on her husband. "That is why I could not discuss with him, he was in charge of everything, I should only follow the rules he made for us home", she said.

1.2 Women stereotyping as a type of handicap

The image of women within Arabic patriarchal culture is the most self-evident obstacle standing against women's empowerment. The ways Arabic society in general, and the Palestinian society specifically, defines women, severely weakens the chances for any real change: the ways how a woman should act, dress, walk, when and with whom she can speak, etc. are the social rules that stereotype and frame women's personalities. Stereotypes eradicate any room for uniqueness and force women into traditional roles, hindering individual initiatives and choices. A key

A key to the stereotyping of women is – her honor. For example, women are forced by cultural-religious rules not have a sexual relation before marriage or outside of wedlock. Similar prevents also men from being promiscuous outside married life, but in the cases where a man and a woman have practiced sex outside marriage, it is only the woman who is facing the social consequences. A man does not lose his reputation in the community, but a woman loses everything. Not only might she get a sanction and blame from the whole community, but she can indeed also be killed for making her so-called personal choice. The place of honor within Palestinian society gives the women a feeling of dependency, lack of freedom to make personal choices that do not comply with tradition.

Story of Gazal – One of my single informers, Gazal (fictional name) said: "The last thing on my mind is sexual relations, but when a man comes and judge me as a person according to my open mind and modern opinions about relations between men and women, then I curse for living in such a society where I do not own myself, and where men can control how I should talk and I express my thoughts, and even how should I think." Gazal insisted on calling Palestinian society as having a "sick mentality" that lacks a basic understanding of what honor in fact means. "Try asking men about the noble women and see what they will answer. Let them describe her, and you will be shocked when you see that the majority will give you this answer: a noble women, is a women that has never had any relation to a man in her life, she is the noble women to marry," Gazal said, and continued: "it is sick how they connect nobility only to physical pureness, the first thing that comes to their mind is her virginity. What about men's mind virginity then? Why it is more important for women to test men's nobility by his pureness of mind, his personality, kindness and his way of thinking?" Gazal kept on discussing the ugly truth that dwells between the lines in Palestinian society: that the concept of a woman's honor is limited to her vagina. Gazal is an inspiring woman, with a passion for bringing about a change in Palestinian society, yet she is facing a kind of a cultural shock: She is a very active young woman with many social activities and friends of both sexes. This type of a life style makes it difficult for her to enter into a real relationship. She is not to a typical Palestinian girl, rather the opposite. She is open-minded, ambitious and independent. When I conducted my fieldwork she had concluded her Bachelor's degree and was looking for graduate scholarships abroad.

"If I get lucky and get to do my Masters abroad, I will do my best to never return to these mentalities. I want to get a life, a valuable one with no discrimination of my existence as a woman", said Gazal, who was fed up of living in constant tension with her family. She led an untypical lifestyle, which generated gossiping and criticism from people around her. Her family worried because she was twenty-four years old and without any proposal for marriage. "Of course no one will look at you and dare to propose to take you for their sons; who would risk having such an irresponsible and unstable daughter in law," Gazal's mother told her. Because Gazal was active and indepentent, people thought she would not be a good wife in the future. Even her mother told her: "If I would have a son I would never bring him a wife like you, because I will not be able to sleep at night while thinking if his wife is taking good care of him or if she is outside looking for a life of her own." Gazal understood that change would not come in her lifetime, that it would take many more generations. "If my own family does not support me, how on earth would I manage to fight all of society? I do not want just to survive; I want a life, and I will never look back if I get the chance to do my masters abroad." Gazal spoke with teary eyes. She seemed very tired and hurt. "Wallah … [an Arabic word for swearing] I don't want to do anything wrong, I respect our culture and I do not want to have any sexual relations before marriage; not because I am afraid of what people will say about me, but because I believe in Jesus and I respect his words. All I want is that people will respect me for whom I am, and understand that my nobility is not limited to physical conditions but on personality and values, let them try to understand the real me, and if they can just try for once to understand the good and positive energy inside me, they might later on discover that I am very precious and that I of course will take care of my future family, and even in a better way from the traditional women, because I am stronger and independent, I will give a better life to both my husband and kids, I am not bad."

What make it worse, for Gazan and other women in similar situations, are the reactions from other members of society and the extended family. By judging, they isolate her. Thus, a woman has to think very carefully before she makes decisions, and has to take everybody and everything into consideration in order not to go against the ideal image of the noble woman. Whatever the case, women take the blame, and a woman's honor is a triumph card in the hands of men. For women driven by jealousy and competition, there is always the method of defiling another woman's reputation. Thus, a woman's honor can come under attack from all sides.

1.3 The love of family is controlling individual choices

The Palestinian society is a highly collective society, with potentially positive and negative consequences for each individual. For the individual woman and her potential choices, the effects are mostly negative. Firstly, she is limited to making choices that are approved by the majority of the extended family members. Secondly, her choices create circle of responsibilities where everyone else in the extended family are at risk. It is not easy to make independent choices when one is living in a collective society, with circles of responsibilities. You cannot think about what you want for yourself, but rather always think about what is best for everyone around you; how they will be affected. You can never experience the learning by your own mistakes, or taking responsibility for your own choices. On the other hand, it is good to have a family beside you when you fall, and get support in times of need. But you will always be blamed and trapped inside the circle for not taking everything and everyone into account. You will never forgive yourself, if you unintentionally would damage the reputation of any member of your family. To illustrate, let me present another story from the category of unmarried women.

Story of Linn – who graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Bethlehem University. "I was not very free to choose what I wanted to study; I wanted to study graphic design and to do so I needed to go abroad because we do not have this speciality in Bethlehem. I did not get the financial support from my family to go abroad because they were afraid of what will people around us would think… An Arab single lady will always worry about being judged wrongly… this made me less free in making my decisions." Further on in my conversation with Linn, she again referred to her parents' concerns: "What would people around us think? They will consider us bad parents that left the hand of their daughter. A daughter should live beside her family till she gets marry, then she moves under the protection and responsibility of her husband." Linn had another two sisters in their teens, which her parents also were worried about. Linn said: "All I want is to study; I do not want to go abroad and do unsuitable things in opposition to how I was raised. But the problem is, that people around us only think that women have a dirty mind and want to travel abroad to live in freedom. My parents were afraid of what would happen to my sisters is I would go abroad… that people would gossip, blame her parents

… that her sisters will be just like her, impolite and careless about cultural limitations and responsibilities. My sisters will then have no future here, no one will look at them, and everyone will judge them according to what their sister did. We all live together, raised by the same parents; it means we are all bad, if one of us ended up in the wrong track." One might ask: what about trust and respect – and love – between children and their parents?

Following Linn's story, it is appropriate to briefly reflect on how to define love between Palestinian parents and their children. For instance, is there any room for trust within the parents-child relationship? If we take the cases of Hanan, Gazal and especially Linn, they all communicate a certain lack of trust within the parents-child relationship, or more specifically, within the parents-*daughter* relationship. At the same time, one cannot deny that there is a very deep connection and closeness with concerns about each other. Maybe there is a trust but something greater is controlling the relationship, something that is stopping a genuine practice of the trust. I believe that the influences of the dominant cultural traditions and customs actually deny the person not only of having the freedom of individual choices, but also from expressing authentic love. The prevailing culture – and the fear of going against it – limits the full practice of trust and respect within the family. The fear is an excuse for almost all interventions against individual choices. Family members are an extremely close-knitted group that can go far to avoid unexpected and unwanted social risks. In comparison to Western European individualistic society, the collective Palestinian society sees more connection and closeness between children and parents, but without any room for privacy and trust. In almost all my fifteen interviews, I noticed that women had given up some or many things just to keep good relations to their parents and extended family, and, to their natural extension – society at large. Palestinian parental love has established a certain kind of routines of what is accepted and what is not. No one dares to cross these lines; no girl wants to be the one who breaks the relationship with her parents, nor damage her parents' good reputation. Thus, all continue to stay connected to one another; repeating the same circle again and again. No one dares to be the black sheep and challenge the traditional lifestyle of old. To conclude: the love and commitment within the family group severely limit the freedom to make one's own personal choices and do not allow the individual to learn how to be independent and stand on her own feet, without the intervention or help from the extended family.

1.4 Not breaking the norms

Palestinian society is indeed very conservative, and its members are trying to hold on to the traditions and not get lost in modern individualism. By keeping the traditional norms, there is little chance to succeed in developing an infrastructure for women empowerment. The prevailing culture dictates the rules, norms, customs, and traditions – all of which, from the perspective of women's development, could be termed: *obstacles*. Palestinian culture is a male-oriented culture through and through, like many other cultures around the world. Women, who do not subject, risk to be rejected. That is, loosing respect, honour, good reputation, social relations, including family relations. She will find herself in a circle of doubts and physiological pressure, leading to isolation and surrender to the might of her culture. Or, she might decide to find herself a new life, maybe emigrate, and break out of the frame of the Palestinian noble woman. She will no longer be *mo'addaba*, which literally translates "polite" but is used to describe women that are suitable for marriage, i.e. respectful, kind, conservative, virgin, listens to her parents, trusted and not hanging out with friends. In short: *mo'addaba* is a noble woman that will be perfect to marry with.

Based on my data analysis of information received from my informers, and from my field observations, I listed a multitude of norms that women are expected to follow when living in the Palestinian society. In the following, I will continue to present and discuss what I consider to be the most basic and influential norms for women's lives.

The good daughter – is fully subordinated to her parents.[33] She must follow and respect all what her parents tell her to do, from daily chores to decisions on marriage proposals. She will always

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[33] Although a biblical concept, my informants never explained the issue of women's subordination in religious terms, whether Christian or Muslim. I think it would be worthwhile to investigate to what extent religious traditions, Christian and Islamic, have influenced Palestinian traditional understanding and formation of women's subordinate role in society.

be home before dark outside, spend more time at home with her mother and family than hanging out with friends. She helps her mother with the housework and takes care of her younger siblings. She prepares to be a good housekeeper for her future husband. Later on, her subordination deepens when she gets married. She will be under the name of her husband and his family, so her behaviour and reputation will be counted on her new family – if anything goes wrong, if she misbehaves, etc., it will be on the heads of her husband's family. Her responsibilities will double, especially after becoming a mother. In addition to the duties in her parents' home, will be the duties as a mother and a daughter in her in-law's home. If anyone complains, she will no longer be a noble woman. In any case, a noble woman does not argue, especially not with the men in charge of the family. This is perhaps the most difficult part of a good daughter's life: if she complains, everything collapses.

Story of Vano – Vano is married, educated and working. She has a BA from Bethlehem University in Business Administration. She got married after finishing her higher education at the age of twenty-three. Vano met her husband in the traditional way: he proposed, she liked him, so they got married. She said: "My husband is very good to me; he helps me sometimes at home because we both work in order to provide for our family. We had a joint understanding about our daily life together at the beginning of our marriage, until everything failed." Vano's husband is not rich so they both have to work in order to be able to pay the monthly expenses. There is no welfare system in the Palestinian society where you pay taxes and in receive social security in return. No, you have to pay for everything, with no subsidies on housing, medical care, schools, kindergarten and other living costs. A lot depends on how well you succeed in saving money for the bad days; so you need to live in the present and be smart in planning for times that will be less prosperous.

The interfering mother-in-law – she can be very damaging, whether interfering in her son's or daughter's life. She especially puts her nose in the household economy, criticizes excessive and unnecessary money-spending, according to her criteria. Her interference is annoying for the daughter-in-law who in vain turns to her husband who will not do or say anything out of respect

for his mother. The irony is, that girls who are looking forward to getting married in order to get away from their parents' home and taste a bit of freedom, very soon find themselves at loss due to the problem of the mother-in-law. To return to Vano: "I thought I could finally move out from my parents' house and to my own house and my own independent life where I would be safe to do whatever I wanted." She continued: "At my parents' house, I understood that they were a bit strict on me because I am a girl in an Arabic culture, and because my reputation is very important to maintain in order to get married. So that is why I did not argue with my parents when they used to tell me not to go out at night or I was not allowed to go to parties. I was hoping that one day I would be able to do this with my husband." Why did Valo say that everything collapsed a short while after her wedding? She answered simply: "my mother-in-law". And she continued: I thought that I was on the safe side once I was married. I thought my husband would be more understanding towards my needs and wishes. But unfortunately, the constraints placed on me by my father, started all over again, in a new format, coming from my husband and his family. I thought my husband would be helpful, as he was during our engagement period, whenever my father got angry with me. Then he used to tell me not to be sad, that we would soon be married and then we could do whatever we want; together we would be more free." Vano sounded very disappointed of her family, her husband and his family. She explained: "Three months after our marriage the problem started from nothing. His mother saw him helping me in the kitchen and she gave a bad comment. Then, my husband made me a cup of tea in front of his father noticed that his father and everyone else around were staring at him, blaming him with their eyes. I saw how my husband became embarrassed – from the very normal thing that he did for his wife! These incidents made me realise that my husband from now on will have to think a hundreds of times before he will do something nice for me when anyone is around. His mother does not like my friends because she thinks they are visiting me too often, and that I instead have to take care of my husband, be home and make him dinner after work. She does not consider that also I am working all day and need someone to do dinner for me. She cannot even imagine that because I am working I need time for recreation with my girlfriends in order for me to feel alive and not just like a servant for my husband. My mother-in-law keeps nagging on my husband; that I dress in tight clothes and that people will begin to talk about him if he does not make me change the way I dress, since now that we are married, I have to dress more conservatively to protect my husband's reputation. My husband actually got tired from his mother nagging on him, but because he has to respect her he cannot tell her not to

put her nose in our private business. And every time I am trying to tell her in a very polite way that we have a private life of our own and we alone should decide how to live it, she gets angry and complains to my husband; he then comes and fights with me because I am considered to show disrespect for his mother. I got tired of it all, and decided to keep silent because I wish to have a calm life. I no longer go out with my girlfriends, I spend much time at home watching series on the TV after work and my relation to my husband has become tense because he knows that although I am silent, I am angry, and, from my side, I have lost respect for my husband because I cannot understand how he cannot realise that there is a difference between disrespect and to have a right to decide over your own life."

I asked Vano if she feels weak even though she is an educated and working woman, and she answered: "educated and working, does that make sense in our culture, you think? In whatever I do, I have to depend on either my father, brother, and then comes of course my husband and many years later my son. I feel that I have made the wrong choice, because now I am very tired of this life, many misunderstandings with my husband and he is not rich so I have to go out to work in order to help with the family income and he is not trying to make any efforts towards changing or stopping his family interfering in our life. I feel like I cannot handle this stressed life for very long especially after having our children, I cannot imagine what will happen to me if he no longer can give me a hand in the house, even in front of his family, or help me with the children, or give me some free time with my girlfriends. I guess it is doubled stress that got me depressed very fast after our marriage."

Vano never imagined that she would have to live and abide by a traditional Palestinian life style. She remembers her mother: "My mother was not educated and I thought that when I got my Bachelor and my job, I would be able to make better choices than she. My fiancé and I talked many times about these issues during our engagement and then we always seemed to sharing the same opinions, but I should have never trusted him, he is a man and for him there is nothing to lose if following a traditional lifestyle. He is not giving up satisfying his mother. He has nothing to risk; he is a man and can therefore do whatever he wants."

While interviewing Vano, I realised that she was blaming herself for not thinking like a regular young woman who would never even dream of trying to change her situation. Vano thought that if she would marry with the right person, someone who thinks like her and also is dreaming of an independent, private life for a husband and a wife, she would succeed. But she got disappointed when discovering that it is not enough to hear some positive words during the period of engagement; having a Bachelor's degree or a job is totally irrelevant. Vano concluded the conversation: "I am trapped, and I have to either lead a traditional life, keep pretending to be happy and never complain, or keep on complaining and make myself more miserable, never get what I want and fight with my husband and his family all the time. Either way, I will not be happy."

Goffman's theory of drama is well illustrated by the dynamics of Vano's engagement period: her future husband presented himself in the best light in order to gain her trust and lead her to believe that he shares her values and opinions, whereas after the wedding he reveals his true self. Also other factors affected the marriage and made Vano even weaker than when she was at her parents' house.

Story of Mia – is another story connected to the theme of not breaking the norm. Mia is single, born in 1988. She has a Bachelor degree from Bethlehem University in Social Work. She was working as a social worker in a school in Bethlehem just 10 minutes by car from her parents' house. Mia was still single, and was therefore still living with her parents and three brothers. One brother is one year older than Mia; the others are younger. She still she has to consider whatever her brothers and her father tell her to do, or to wear: "We live in a very small place where everyone knows everyone; this makes it very difficult sometimes when it comes to your own privacy. I cannot forget the day me and my friend Amal were supposed to attend an evening ceremony at the Catholic Church in Beit Jala (part of the Bethlehem area). My father dropped me at my friend Amal's house just 10 minutes by foot to the church. So we thought we could easily walk to the Church. When arriving outside the entrance of the Church my youngest brother was standing at the door with his friends – all boys, of course. He stared at me in a very bad way and asked why I am walking. Amal got stressed and afraid, and I got afraid too because for a while, seeing the way he looked at me with anger in his eyes made me doubt myself for a second. I know this is silly but I really got afraid and felt like he will hit me in any second. He made me feel like I made a scandal

without even doing anything wrong. I was walking in the street like a normal person, properly dressed and not as naked as he made me feel."

I wondered why she listened to her younger brother. She answered: "Because he is a man, you know. My brothers control my life more than my father. Sometimes I feel they got crazy or lost their minds, because they exaggerate and make me wonder if they are sick or something. They doubt everyone and everything around me. I remember my oldest brother had a girlfriend when we were in the first year of our university studies. The girl he felt in love with was a friend of mine. I remember how different he used to be in front of her. I was always wondering when he would treat her the way he treats me. He was very jealous and did not allow her to talk to other boys. She was stronger than me and he never interfered in the way she dressed; she was always answering him whenever he tried to tell her what to do. But I was always sure that if he marries her, he would treat her the way he treats me because she will become his wife and he will control her. But he loved her a lot. He used to tell her that he is not worried about her because he knows that she is strong and with a different personality than me. His girlfriend used to argue with him about why he would not allow me to go out with her and her girlfriends, and she pushed him really hard and actually succeeded to convince him. He loved his girlfriend so much that he did not want her to discover the real him; he was afraid she would leave him. I was always hoping that she would change him, until the day they broke up, because she could not handle his jealousy anymore. He started to say bad words about her, so she left him. Now my brother is married to a girl in a traditional way and he controls her life exactly the same way he does with me. His wife is even weaker than me; I feel sorry for her." When asked to explain the behaviour of her brothers, Mia answered: "Firstly, they are boys; they can do whatever they want. Secondly, because they spend too much time with other boys and hear how they are talking about their girlfriends or any girl. And they also hear many stories about so-called bad girls... they do not want anyone talk about their sister or wife in bad terms, so they become very strict… this is what makes it hard in our society, every man wants his sister, mother, wife or daughter to be perfect and break the pattern that was set for her as a "polite" woman *mo'addaba*. The boys in our culture believe that if a girl talks to you, maybe kisses you if she falls in love with you, then she will do the same with all others. They do not trust any girl that gives them anything before marriage, even if it is a perfectly pure kiss. This is so sad because they do not understand that this is love and this girl is not bad or dirty. They like that kind of a girl to hang out with and then abandoned her to marry a girl who

only sits at home and has a good reputation. They do not realise that they actually broke the reputation of the girl they hang with at first for fun. They do not blame themselves; they always blame the girls. I remember again the girlfriend of my brother and I assure you he was really in love with her. She acted freely with him sometimes, like going out to a restaurant when there had been no formal relations or talks between the families yet. She was honest and brave and did not care about what others thought of her when seeing her beside my brother at the University. But I do not wish to be like her, because the love of my brother did not protect her; in the end, he did not appreciate that she kissed him because she loved him; he started doubting that she was doing that with all boys. I knew he loved her a lot because he cried when she left him, but still I cannot understand what kind of love is this? Their story made me want to be even more traditional and conservative in order not to be the black sheep."

1.5 Gossip ends the game – reputation controls the Palestinian woman

Mia was very engaged in the discussion and we touched upon many examples of norms and rules for women in Palestinian culture. Such as when women use the method of breaking the reputation of other women in front of men, by not telling the truth. We have a saying in Arabic: *Be careful when believing something you hear about a woman, it might either be a gossip from a man that could never owe her, or from another woman that is not capable of competing with her*. All that a woman owns with this culture, that cares so much about what other say and think, is her reputation. There are so many stories that are directly connected to the broken reputation of a girl. And, people never forget a girl's mistake; they even use it as an example to threaten other girls.

Story of Niro – exemplifies the obstacle of a damaged reputation. Niro belongs to the married educated working category from the 1988 generation. After her traditional marriage, it became known that she had been in a romantic relationship with another man. Her family had not accepted this man because he was one year younger than her, had no work, could not afford the appropriate wedding expenses, nor provide for her – everything about him went against the cultural expectations. Niro faced many problems because of her story with her ex-boyfriend, who wanted to get revenge on her family. He even wanted to get revenge on Niro for not standing by his side and waiting for him until he had finished University, got a job and become worthy in the eyes of

her family. Niro's husband started to receive anonymous letters and sms:s saying that his wife is not *mo'addaba* and that she had played with many boys before him. This made Niro's husband very stressed and doubtful about Niro. During my interview with her, I asked if her level of education and job had helped her to earn more respect from her husband and the community, she said: "If you mean the job that I am going to leave soon, then I can tell you no, because it means nothing to a man if his wife is working or not, he will still look at her as a chair in the house that he can move whenever and wherever he wants." Her answer made me realise that she was in pain, so I continued asking some additional questions that were not in my questionnaire. I learnt that she was going to leave her job because her husband accused her of going to work first of all to attract the men she was working with. Because of her previous love relationship, he had begun to doubt whether she was a good and "polite" woman or not and even suspected that she had a relation with her boss. Her husband's friends had told him that her ex-boyfriend was going around and gossiping that she had performed oral sex with him. Niro explained to me that she had been in love with her boyfriend, and kissed him out of love, never considering that it sometime would be described as "dirty oral sex." She was shocked and shamed by the gossip; and could not make her husband listen to or believe her side of the story: "Sadly in our society you hear stories about yourself that even you yourself have never heard before … I became the story of the season, my family in-law started reacting to everything I wore and did. It is true that I married traditionally, there was no love between my husband and me, but I know that at the beginning he did care about me and respected me. He had never hurt me before hearing the gossip from my ex-boyfriend; it is like nothing in the world can make him trust me again." Niro was pregnant now, and she said that this made her situation both a bit easier, and harder, since her husband would not divorce her, yet, she felt that he wished he could, and that he doubted that he was the father of the baby. Niro concludes: "Nothing gives a woman more respect from her husband than her good reputation. Everything else is just words on papers. Even if you were the president and you do not have a good reputation as a pure and noble woman, you will not be respected. A woman is valued according to her behaviour. Because of the way I dress, everyone thinks that I am dressing to attract other men; no one understands that I am in love with fashion and simply cannot go outside the house if I am not looking good every day. This is just me, but since I lost my reputation due to my ex-boyfriend's revenge, my clothes have become the weapon that society and even my husband use against me in order to judge me as a "dirty" woman."

Also Gazal's story, mentioned earlier, is a story of the importance a woman's reputation. Gazal was judged harshly due to her extraordinary social participation.

Story of Malak – is another example, in this case how jealousy between girls can harmful a woman's reputation and standing within the community. Malak is single, born in 1988. She led a similar life as Gazal: she was strong and self-confident, studied Spanish and translation at the University of Birzeit in Ramallah. Though from Bethlehem, due to the difficulties of transportation and movement under the Occupation, she had moved out of her parents' house at the age of 18 and went to live closer to the Birzeit together with another girl from her class. Malak had many European friends; she even travelled to Europe with organized trips throughout her studies. She loved to party and go out with friends, staying until late at night at her girlfriends' houses, contrary to the Palestinian norm: girls must not stay out late. Malak seemed very confident when I first met with her, but during the course of our interview, it turned out to be the opposite. "I wish I would never have been strong, I wish I would never have been social," she said, "…because I lost the person I love because of this. Imagine, my best girlfriend was the cousin of my boyfriend, and it turned out that she was extremely jealous of me, my lifestyle and personality. She began telling he uncle – the father of my boyfriend – that I was not a good girl, that I just liked to play with a boy's feelings and that I was not in love with her cousin. My boyfriend's family stopped him from seeing me, and some months later I heard that my best friend had got engaged to her cousin – my ex-boyfriend. I realised that she had ruined my reputation because she was in love with her own cousin. I have heard of similar things happening before; girls back-talking girls because of jealousy – but I never thought it would happen to me. Look at me, my best friend ruined my love and my future and left as the black sheep that no one wants to have.

2. Cultural and social motivating aspects towards women's personal development

In my field research, I noted certain events and factors that for some of the women had served as motivations towards change. These changes did not necessarily result in better treatment or (in some cases restored) respect from their surroundings, but the results were definitely empowering,

with improved self-confidence and self-esteem for these women, even though they did not reach a position of demanding their rights.

2.1 Economic and political factors

In my thesis, I am not focusing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as such. However, the socio-economic daily life in the Palestinian territories is of course severely affected by the conflict, including the social relationships within the wider community and within each family. Owing to the on-going political conflict, many Palestinian men are unemployed and cannot move freely in the Palestinian territories. As a result, the general income level of the households has been greatly reduced and women have gone out to find work in order to help support their families.

Story of Laria – who is a mother of five children; married, uneducated, and working. Laria had not completed high school as she failed in the governmental exams. Already in high school, Laria was engaged to her cousin, and everyone therefore told her that there was no need for her to retake the exam and get a certificate. Why bother, when she anyway would get married soon. Also her fiancé was not educated but he had a good job as a car mechanic. Between each and every sentence in her interview, Laria kept repeating how much she wished she would have completed her education and never married. The work of her husband had become very bad during the short period between the First and Second Intifadas, when he lost all his business. He could no longer buy car parts, could not sell or repair. Slowly but steadily their income got reduced to almost nothing. Laria was forced to go out for work; at first she started as a cleaner, but she was not used to work – as a married woman she had stayed at home, raising the children, with a very social daily life. She said: "I remember the first month I started to work, I was very tired, I had never thought that working with cleaning houses would be so tiring. I am a housekeeper and I clean almost every day in my own home, so I thought I could clean also in other houses, because I had no other option. But working outside your own house, is different. In the beginning I did not notice that I was tired, I remember the first day I came home, I said to my husband thank God it went okay and I am not so tired. But before going to bed I was almost dead after coming home at four and then be a housekeeper and a mother at the same time; is unfair. I remember that I could not sleep, and that I felt like a machine." When asked whether her husband started to help her around the house, she

said: "If I ask him specifically, he does help, but I have to define what he has to do, and he does not accept to do everything. If we have visitors, he does nothing so it depends on the situation. I do not want to wait for his help, because you never know what will happen, I cannot depend on his help. In our society, you never know when there will be a knock on your door and you are getting visitors. So I cannot wait for my husband to help, I have to be ready all the time. If I would have an education, it might have been easier, to work in an office and not with cleaning, which is physically exhausting. Or at least I would receive a better payment that would be worth my time away from home." Laria knew that it would not help her situation at home if she would have an education or a better job, however, she said it would make a lot of difference for her personally if she would not have to clean other peoples' houses: "I would not have to feel less worthy every time I go out of my house to clean. In our society, cleaning is a low occupation and I feel tired and bad every time I go to clean other peoples' houses, I feel ashamed and am broken inside. I started blaming my husband for not being able to provide for us, and that I was forced to go out and humiliate myself, even though I know deep inside that it is not his fault and that I should stop nagging him. But I cannot feel proud of myself and am accusing him for marrying me so early without giving me a chance to finish my education." Laria very soon left her first job as a cleaner, and when I interviewed her, she was working as a kindergarten assistant, which suited her much better: "I feel like I am doing something good, but still I would prefer, if I would have the option, to just be a mother and housekeeper at home. Having five children and working outside the home is not easy for me. To take care of the house, my children, cooking, and then go outside to work… it is very tiring when there is no helping hand around. I think it would still be hard even if my husband would help me after work. In Laria's story, and reflected in her personality, I identified, again, one of the most important obstacles standing against women's development: she was not happy to go out and be independent, she preferred to stay at home.

There is many more life stories connected to this obstacle that seems to emanate from inside the women themselves; women who have got a chance to empower themselves by becoming a family provider, able to earn money and not rely on pocket money from their husbands/fathers/brothers. By going to work, they get to see another world from the one that has been capturing them from the beginning, to meet new people, learn how others live their lives, learn about their own rights, participate in the community, contribute to society, and not only by raising children and keeping their home clean. Unfortunately, many of these women are not happy since they get exhausted,

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have no support at home, while still having to live up to traditional social responsibilities and expectations. The women are doing double work, losing their health and not earning a lot. They have less time for themselves, and become frustrated.

For Laria, and other women in a similar situation, the main reason for going out to work is to raise the family income. They actually have no other ambitions, no personal strive to become empowered and independent, or just to go out and do something different than being a mother and housekeeper.

2.2 Changes in the civil status: when married women become separated, divorced or widowed

Change in a woman's civil status has in itself a negative connotation within Arab culture in general and Palestinian culture in particular. Separation and divorce are usually not preferred for women. Even if the woman herself is not the cause for her separation or divorce, she is always the one who takes the consequences. People will begin to keep an eye on her, following what she is doing, how she dresses, where and with whom she spends her time. Separated and divorced women are targets of gossip, much more than are married women. It is as if people expect them to lose control and damage the reputation of the family by going out with men. Separated, divorced and widowed women have nothing to be afraid of – since they are not virgins anymore, their families cannot exploit their virginity as tool of control against them anymore, and therefore they are regarded as a risk and a burden. Many of them face problems vis-à-vis their in-laws, especially if they have daughters. The family in-law might become very strict towards them because the risk of the daughters to imitate their mother if she loses control. On the other hand, some of these women are suddenly forced to take over and carry responsibilities, and to become strong and independent.

Story of Celine – she was forced to leave her home because her husband betrayed her with another woman. Celine was uneducated and not working, born in 1974 and married at the age of eighteen. Theirs was a love marriage, not arranged in the traditional way, and her husband told her he was jealous and therefore did not want her to go to university. In his opinion, he was working and earning good money, so there was no need for his wife to work outside of the home. After sixteen

years of marriage he cheated on her and threw her out of the house because he wanted to get a divorce and marry the new woman. Celine had to move back to her brother's house and stay with his family. Her parents were no longer alive and she only had her brother to turn to. Her brother was married with three children and was living in a small house together with his working wife. Celine had four daughters but she could not take any of them with her. The court told her if she wanted to ask for her girls, she had to show that she has a separate house where she can live with her girls, and a job with enough income to support them. Celine began to look for options to quickly find a job. Since she had no high school certificate, she first of all had to complete the governmental high school exam in order to be able to enter any further education that could give her a proper job. When I interviewed her, she was working in a kindergarten as an assistant and attending evening classes to finish her high school diploma. She said: "I feel stronger now, even though I lost everything, but I think I have learned to take care of myself, and this is the best part. I do not feel good living at my brother's house, they need privacy, and I am trying not to come home unless for sleeping. I spend the days working in the kindergarten and the evenings studying at school. After my high school diploma, I want to study to become a kindergarten teacher. I know everyone is blaming me; in the way people are looking at me and talking to me, they treat me as if I lack something and that because of it my husband abandoned me. They blame me for leaving my daughters, even though they know I never wanted this to happen. They say behind my back that I was not a good wife and I could not take care of my husband. I know it is not true; I was giving him everything he asked for, and maybe this was the problem. Maybe if I would marry him now with the personality I have developed, I would never allow him to control my life and stop me from getting an education or even to work." I asked if she think she would have been able to control and decide about her own life if she had been educated and working, and she answered: "Not necessarily, because in our culture, it would have required more than that, but at least it would have made me feel stronger inside, it could have given me the confidence to discuss and argue. During my marriage I felt that I am so weak and I was fully depending on my husband, I could never argue with him, and whatever he said was like a sword. His words were to be obeyed. I could maybe have exercised the right to take my daughters with me when he threw me out after cheating, but because I was weak, with no work, no education, I lost them and I can only see them if he gives his permission."

Many of similar stories have a bad ending, where the women find themselves even in a weaker position after separation, divorce, or widowhood. It is however important to note, that there are also positive examples, like Celine, who manages to maintain a positive attitude, empower herself, and mobilize for getting her daughters back. The battle is hard, but in Celine's case demonstrates that there is a possibility for women to become economically independent, through a personal effort by the women themselves, to find their inside strength and make a change in their own lives.

2.3 The poverty trap of women

Keeping in mind Chambers' explanation of different factors that are causing poverty on the level of the household, I wish to briefly explore how Palestinian women are locked between a "cluster of disadvantages", and how hard it is for Palestinian women to overcome these disadvantages at large, even though they might overcome one or two of them. My discussion will mainly be empirically derived from the stories I have presented, together with my own observations in the field.

2.3.1 The cluster of disadvantages for Palestinian women

1. Material poverty

Chambers explains material poverty as the "lack of assets, properties or savings".34 Overcoming these disadvantages are important steps towards achieving women empowerment. In the stories of women presented above, we can see that in most of the cases, women were afraid to leave their homes because they had nothing to lean on. Women in Palestine are in general not rich; they do not own houses or businesses. They are mostly economically depending on their either fathers, brothers or husbands and sons. When a Palestinian woman marries, it is the husband who buys the

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[34] See above chamber´s theory in chapter two or: Chambers 1983, p. 103 -139. And Myers 1999, p. 65-69

house and provides for everything they need. Even though women might be working, they will not be able to pay all expenses for a loan to buy or build a house. Usually, the young men get help from their families, to save and invest for their future marriage. As mentioned earlier in Niro's story, when her parents refused the proposal of the one she was in love with because had not yet acquired enough economic means to marry her. No one looked at Niro as if she was independent, able and eager to stand beside such a husband in order to build a family and together. In practice, women are still poor even if they marry a rich man, because nothing of what he owns belongs to her as long as he is alive. Many men register their wealth in the name of their sons or brothers, so that they will become the inheritors, according to the rationale that men are taking care of the family, ergo they should be the ones in charge the economic means of the family. Even if women do have a job or education, it is still not enough for her to be independent. She will not be able to live alone with her children, acquire a house and pay all expenses on her own. In addition, we need to remember that women usually earn less in a monthly salary than men, even for the same jobs.

Palestinian women belong either to their original family or to their husband's family after marriage. The overall economic situation in Palestine is not good, people earn very little and living costs are expensive, connected to the Israeli prices. Families are depending on every family member's to be able to survive to the end of the month. Working women have been helping providing for their families either before or after marriage. They cannot save or invest their salaries in other than the running living costs, because the daily life in Palestine has become so expensive lately.

Though my informers in many cases bear witness to resourcefulness and resilience in the face of difficulties, none of them were able to become economically independent and stand on their own feet. Celin could not get her daughters back after the separation because she was left hopelessly poor and forced to move back to her brother's family. Niro, Mia, Malak , Gazal, Laria, Vano and Hanan – none of them were able to walk away from the life they had. They were weakened from all sides, and certainly economically. The issue material poverty was a very important factor in the cases I presented; standing as a severe obstacle against the ability to make choices and move on in life.

In sum: the Palestinian woman can get a job and go to work, but she will not become rich from it, she will not be able to buy a house and become economically independent, she will still need the help of others to provide for her children. Her job income is not enough, and the division of ownership and inheritance is controlled by patriarchal structures. She will remain dependent on her family.

2. Vulnerability

As previously introduced, Chambers defines "vulnerability" as the "lack of reserves, lack of choices and easy to coerce".[35] Vulnerability is intrinsically connected to material poverty. Arabic women in general are vulnerable; they are like a puzzle, which cannot find their missing pieces. If they fix one side of their broken self, another part will break open. They cannot win without losing.

Palestinian women do not have individual or personal reserves; their families might be their only reserve if things go wrong. Unfortunately, families tend to function in the opposite, draining the women. In many cases, the family is the root problem, as we have seen when discussing the role and importance of a good reputation. Going back to their own families after divorce, for example, cannot be called a reserve because it will not place them in a better situation; on the contrary, divorced women risk even harsher control than during marriage.

The obstacle of lack of choices matches perfectly the reality of the Palestinian woman. She has not many possible choices in her life; she is either single, depending on her parents, or she marries, and is depending on her husband and his family. She has no real option to be free and choose something else, such as moving out of the parents' home and live alone. She has no freedom to choose how many children to have, or where to live, where to work, who to have as a friends and what to wear.

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[35] See above chamber´s theory in chapter two or: Chambers 1983, p. 103 -139. And Myers 1999, p. 65-69

The easiness of coercion appears because of feelings of weakness or hopeless. The Palestinian woman is insecure about many parts of her life, and does not have the inner strength to stand up against what others decide for her. All is connected – lack in one side will result in lack in the other side. In some of the women's stories I presented, it was discernable that some of the women were weaker in inside while others had more strength and self-confidence, but unfortunately all were easy to coerce. Even those with a strong personality who had tried to put up a fight, had to give up at some point, realizing that if they would win the fight, they would not survive on their own later on.

3. Powerlessness

Chambers defines "powerlessness" as the "lack of influence, lack of social power and exploited by power".[36] Definitely, the Palestinian woman is disadvantaged in terms of power. She lacks influence, no matter what she thinks, she has no power to influence decisions, not even when she is right. Only in a very few cases, a woman can influence others with her thinking and get them to agree with her. None of my informants were able to impact their social context, when exposed to difficult situations. They lacked influence on their own lives in particular. They were powerless, even when they had a job or an education. They were left to be exploited by other powers such as parents, husbands, and in-laws.

Based on her sex, the Palestinian woman lacks influence – since being a woman is the very meaning of powerlessness. No matter how strong and independent she can become in professional life, she will always be connected to her father's house or her husband's after marriage. The lessons from the stories of the married women, demonstrate exactly how profoundly the Palestinian woman lacks influence on her own situation. She cannot even convince her parents that she is able to be independent and provide for herself. Even she cannot convince herself, at times. She herself knows she looks stronger beside a man.

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[36] See above chamber´s theory in chapter two or: Chambers 1983, p. 103 -139. And Myers 1999, p. 65-69

4. Spiritual poverty

To "have a broken relationship with your neighbor and with God," is, in Chambers' terminology, "spiritual poverty".[37] I have pointed out some situations where Palestinian women have broken relationships to their community, i.e. to families, friends, neighbors, husbands, husband's family, etc. Palestinian identity is collective and relational. Women often identify and introduce themselves as "the daughter/wife/sister of"… Most of the time they relate themselves to their male relatives; and to the man that is responsible for them.

Palestinian women feel more secure when they are at peace with others, especially those related to them. They are not comfortable to break relationships, especially within their family. Rather than losing contact with her family, the Palestinian woman complies with decisions forced upon her. She is captured inside the ghost of broken relationships. She cannot live with broken relationships, because it will affect every other part of her social being. She will lose her social life, become isolated and rejected by other members.

For example, remember Hanan who she was forced to remain inside her marriage, because her family did not permit her to divorce. She was facing the very real threat of losing contact with her parents if leaving, and had no one else to go to than them. This was an impossible dilemma. If Hanan broke the relation to her parents she would not be able to draw on them as a reserve after divorce; thus she would become powerless on all sides – no home to go to, and broken relations with her own family. She saw no other option than to stay in her marriage, keep the relations with her parents, live together with her children, and have a home.

The disadvantage of spiritual poverty through non-existent relations with other community members touches the core of Palestinian identity, and perhaps especially for the women. They cannot see themselves without their families, relatives, and friends. Broken relations cause deep unhappiness for the Palestinian woman, even if she would gain her freedom, she would not appreciate it. If becoming independent is for you lose the connection to your very being, the price is too high: rejection. It is therefore important to find a delicate balance between what you want

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[37] See above chamber´s theory in chapter two or: Chambers 1983, p. 103 -139. And Myers 1999, p. 65-69

and need, what you can achieve within the boundaries of tradition, and what is forced upon you. The close connection between women and their families deeply affects women's decisions. The Palestinian woman will almost always choose the solution, which will gain her trust and respect from her family. Even if she gives up her heart's desire, losing her social ties is a greater loss.

5. Social isolation

More specifically, Chambers explains "social isolation" as the "lack of assets, lack of education, and exclusion from the system".[38] We have already discussed how Palestinian women lack economic assets, and how hard it is for them to gain them. However, it does not follow that Palestinian women lack in education; that is not the case. Maybe for some individuals, the lack of education plays a role their exclusion from the system (e.g. for those living outside the urban areas) but in general, Palestinian women are well educated. Some of my informers who lacked higher education or even the basic high-school diploma were restricted to housekeeping or simple labor. They were not active participants in public society, but marginalized, feeling humiliated, as one informer said. Yet, the stories of the educated women were no success-stories either. On the one hand, education seems to give Palestinian women a certain *feeling* of achievement, as well as chances for better job opportunities, often in the educational sphere where they give important contributions to the formation and training of future generations. On the hand, also educated women are excluded from the patriarchal decision-making system and easy targets for social exclusion. The actual isolation brings about feelings of being shamed and unwanted, and breaks down the self.

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[38] See above chamber´s theory in chapter two or: Chambers 1983, p. 103 -139. And Myers 1999, p. 65-69

6. Physical weakness

Chambers holds "physical weakness" as the "lack of strength and too many dependents".[39] I would argue that Palestinian women lack in physical strength; they have so many worries and burdens, especially the women who perform double work – at home and in their professional job. In addition to cooking, cleaning, and tending to their children, they usually are caring also for the old people of the family (mothers, fathers, in-laws, who are typically not staying in old peoples' homes, contrary to Western cultures). They are working like machines, long days and evenings, also under the constant pressure of the political conflict and its impact on the daily life.

The Palestinian woman has too many dependents as well – while she herself is financially dependent, her parents, husband, children, in-laws, etc. are depending on her to care for them and all the social events of which the family takes part. Women become very tired of doing the double work and their health situation and physical weakness can easily become the first obstacles against their development. The daily life becomes exhausting, especially without the practical support of their spouses. Included in the pressure is of course also the psychological stress of always be aware not to cross the lines of unwanted behavior, alongside all other duties. There are very few spaces where women can relax their bodies and minds, and be recreated.

Basically, the Palestinian woman carries the responsibility of holding all of society in her hands, while lacking the authority of taking the decision. She is making huge contributions to society, with no appreciation from the structures of power. She is acculturated into this male-dominated system from childhood, and lives all her life within its confinements until she becomes a grandmother.

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[39] See above chamber´s theory in chapter two or: Chambers 1983, p. 103 -139. And Myers 1999, p. 65-69

Chapter four

Summary and conclusion

It is time to conclude my findings in relation to the different theoretical approaches towards women's empowerment and development discussed in Chapter Two, but first a summary of the field interviews and observations presented in Chapter Three.

1. Summary

A. Education and career

A high percentage of Palestinian women in Bethlehem of the younger generation are well educated. It further appears that a good percentage of Palestinian women – educated and uneducated – is participating in the working force. As working women, they have double responsibilities as family providers while remaining in their traditional social roles and duties.

B. Obstacles

Palestinian women in Bethlehem – educated alongside uneducated – find themselves with limited options concerning their life choices due to the following identified obstacles:

- The norm of how the *noble woman* should be: sets the limitations, rules, and rituals of what is accepted and respected, and what is refused and disgraced.
- Having a *good reputation*: connected to the noble woman as a perfect woman to marry. Social isolation if you lose it. The risk of losing your good reputation freezes the ability to be different and make a change.
- *The perfect husband is able to provide for his family alone*: a norm that dictates how parents should choose a husband for their daughter, and that women should chose the traditional way of marriage.

- Being part of a *collective society*: all members of the group are connected; the mistake of one member affects the whole group. Every member is thinking about the risks of social failure; behaviour and decisions are strictly monitored.
- *Love of the family*: connected to being part of a collective society, underlining the emotional aspect of women not wanting to hurt or shame their family by making wrong decisions. Women rather give up their dreams and comply than go against their family, also for reasons of love and devotion.
- *The social drama – Mazaher*: focusing on appearance, pretending one thing to fit the social norm, covering the truth, or revealing the truth when it is too late.
- Interference and of the family and in-laws: prevents both men and (mostly) women from being independent and making decisions.
- *Lack of support in the daily duties*: Workingwomen have double work, which is exhausting and may lead them to give up their career and stay at home.

All the above listed obstacles can be referred to as external disadvantages and circumstances. But the other major hindrance for women empowerment are the women themselves; their own lack of will or motivation. Some of the Palestinian women are actually relaxed and happy with the way things are; they are comfortable with being housekeepers, they simply do not wish to go out and exhaust themselves by having a professional job. They are not looking for independency, empowerment and freedom. Or, they are willing to change, but the external disadvantages are causing fear inside them. Not all obstacles are necessarily connected to women, but they do have the potential to destroy women's lives. At the same time, experiences of unfairness and inequality might force women to re-think their place and role in society, and bring about an inner motivation towards creating a change.

C. Situations that challenge the traditional role of Palestinian women

There are external circumstances that may push Palestinian women towards a new lifestyle:

- Bad economic situation the Palestinian society as a whole, so that it becomes socially acceptable for women to find work outside of home.
- Change in civil status, from married to separated, divorced or widowed.

- Continuing education or entering professional training in order to find better job options; even though a higher education does not bring about a change in women's traditional social role and duties, it may at least function as an inspiration to be stronger and more independent in some parts of life.

2. Conclusions

A. Empowerment of Palestinian women with consideration to Martha Nussbaum

The educated Palestinian woman can be described as empowered, according to Nussbaum, in the sense that she has taken the first step of the development process: learning about her rights, and possible also how to claim them. The problem for Palestinian women is, in my opinion, not the lack of knowledge or education – but the practical possibilities or personal choice to actually claim them. In that sense, they are powerless. Empowerment for Palestinian women does not mean that they are independent and have control over their lives. Instead, they prioritize a respectful life, a social standing with a good relationship to everyone. I would instead call some or most of the Palestinian women strong and capable rather than empowered since they are not claiming their rights. They have too much to lose.

B. Empowerment of Palestinian women in the light of Naila Kbeer

Palestinian women do definitely not fit within Kbeer's definition of empowerment as the process that helps every individual deprived of the freedom of choice and the ability to participate in strategic life decisions. Clearly, Palestinian women lack such freedom and ability. The men in charge take the final decisions. This has nothing to do with the level education of Palestinian women. Again, they have knowledge, are strong and capable – but powerless. Palestinian women have to always take others into consideration before considering their own lives. They give up on their own beliefs and dreams in order not to shame or sadden their own community and to satisfy the society they are living in.

C. Palestinian women towards the direction of equity and empowerment?

As I discussed in Chapter Two, there are two main possible approaches to strategically address the needs of women's empowerment. In the Palestinian context, directed equity, a "top-to-bottom" approach that imposes governmental decisions and initiatives from human rights and development agencies, has not been so successful when it comes to the protection of women's rights within the family household. It does not work for the male "top" of the household to relinquish power and improve women's rights and place within the family. Nor is he ready to give practical support at home to women providers working outside of the household. The women cannot manage the double work and stress, and prefer, if possible, not to go out and work. Neither the direction of empowerment, the "bottom-up" method, has been successful in Palestinian society. As previously concluded, educated women *are* aware of their rights, but they are not pushing for or claiming them. This is as a consequence of living in a collective society where considerations refer more to the group than to an individual. In my interviews, I was able to document that the Palestinian woman – or rather, Palestinian *society* – lacks in both of these two possible directions towards empowerment and equity.

3. Concluding words

I have argued and demonstrated that there is no easy correlation between women's education and emancipation in Palestinian society. The findings of my fieldwork have been very useful in explaining the choices Palestinian women have been making concerning their careers and lifestyle, and the different obstacles framing their decisions, many times preventing them from achieving social emancipation and equality. The cases I presented have given us some insights into some of the relationships, dynamics and concerns in the life of a Palestinian woman; the challenges they have to go through, the different considerations they have to keep in mind in every way they turn. In addition, the cases I presented and the observations I made, showed how little support there is from the society for women in their daily life, including from their own families. No one thinks of comforting a woman, not even their mothers, mother-in-laws, or other women. All women are afraid from breaking the traditional role of a woman. They do not dare to risk being abandoned and excluded from the community, its members and activities. The relationship to their family is

the first and the last – to lose that, is to lose everything. This is the reason why especially educated women choose to give up a professional career after marriage. With no practical support, they end up having a double work life, which exhausts and breaks them down physically as well as psychologically over time. Women are captured in a poverty trap of many obstacles that brings them down no matter how hard they fight not to fall. Not many women manage to stay strong and continue struggling; and new generations of educated women choose the traditional marriage. When all is said and done, I would keep insisting that there are many well educated, hard working, strong and motivated women within Palestinian society. But they are still not strong enough to break the norms of the traditional social roles. They cannot claim their rights, they cannot change the life they have. They do not lose their traditional social status if educated, and they do not gain or lose in respect whether they are educated or not. If a change for the better is to take place, no better how good are the seeds or the grains, they will not be able to spring up and grow in contaminated soil.

Appendix 1

The sixteen interviewees used in my study as divided into the five categories applied in the fieldwork.

And as mentioned before all the names are fictive chosen by the informants themselves with considerations to privacy and anonymity.

- Educated Married and working
    1. Niro: was born in the 1988. Niro has a bachelor in social sciences and works as a social worker.
    2. Vano: was born in the 1988. Vano has a bachelor in IT informational technology and works in this field at a computer company.
    3. Amani: was born in the 1988. Amani has a bachelor in accountings and works in the bank.

- Educated married but not working
    1. Lamar: was born in the 1988. Lamar has a bachelor in English language and literature.
    2. Larina: was born in the 1988. Larina has a bachelor in Media and communication.
    3. Maria: was born in the 1988. Maria has a bachelor in English language and literature.

- Uneducated married and working
    1. Hanan: was born in the 1971. She got married before finishing high school. She is working in cleaning and cooking.
    2. Laria: was born in the 1979. She got married before finishing high school. She is working in a kindergarten.
    3. Rita: was born in the 1988. She got married when she was 21 years old. But didn´t pass the high school exams so she couldn´t continue her studies in the university. She is working in a shop for selling women cloth.

- Uneducated married but not working
    1. Celine: was born in the 1973. She got married before finishing high school.

2. Chloe: was born in the 1988. She didn´t want to go to university because she was already engaged at high school and she saw no need of joining university because she was getting married.

3. Alice: was born in the 1988. She got married right after finishing high school, and was not in the need to work and help in providing her family because he husband had a good job and income.

- Single ladies
  1. Gazal: was born in the 1988. Gazal has a bachelor in English language and translation. She was working in an organization for women when I made my fieldwork right after graduating from her bachelor and while looking for master scholarships.
  2. Malak: was born in the 1988. Have a bachelor in Spanish and translation.
  3. Linn: was born in the 1988. Linn has a bachelor in business administration. She was working in the field of her studies.
  4. Mia: was born in the 1988. She has a bachelor of social sciences and was working at a school as a social worker.

Appendix 2

Fieldwork Questionaire

Fictive name (chosen by the woman herself):

Age: (real age of the samples)

- How long did you come with your education?
  - Why did you stop?
  - Or how did you manage to continue your higher education?
- How can you describe the support you got from the surroundings (family, friends, school, other)?
- How will you express your freedom in taking your decisions when it comes to your educational track?
- Do you feel that education helped you developing your personality?
  - If yes. how?
  - If no, then why?
1. What were the obstacles?
2. What are the things that you feel you could do if you had the chance to continue your education?

Group 1:

- How is it like to be an educated working married woman?
- How are you managing your roles as a wife/mother and at the same time as an employee?
- How can you describe the help you get from your spouse?
- Do you feel that your educational level has given you some kind of empowerment in your relation inside your marriage life? (to be more clear; that you have more rights to claim and more respect to gain?)
- How far can you describe your freedom of choices?
- If you have children, how do they evaluate your level of education?

Married:

- How is it like to be an educated/ uneducated working / not working married woman?
- How are you managing your roles as a wife/mother and at the same time as an employee?
- How can you describe the help you get from your spouse?
- Do you feel that your educational level has given you some kind of empowerment in your relation inside your marriage life? (to be more clear; that you have more rights to claim and more respect to gain?)
- How far can you describe your freedom of choices?
- If you have children, how do they evaluate your level of education?

Single ladies:

- How can you describe your opportunities as a single educated / uneducated lady?
- How are you managing your everyday life?
- How far can you describe your freedom of choices? Does anyone have something to do with your decisions?
- How will you describe the development of your personality?

Questions to all groups:

- What are the obstacles that stand against your development whether in your everyday marriage life or within educational level or in your career?
- What are the things that can be done to overcome those obstacles?
- How far can you do the change yourself? And how far do you need the intervention of others in your own decisions?
- How will you express your satisfaction with the life you are living?

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