

Women in Palestine:



Mothers, Workers, or Security Threats?

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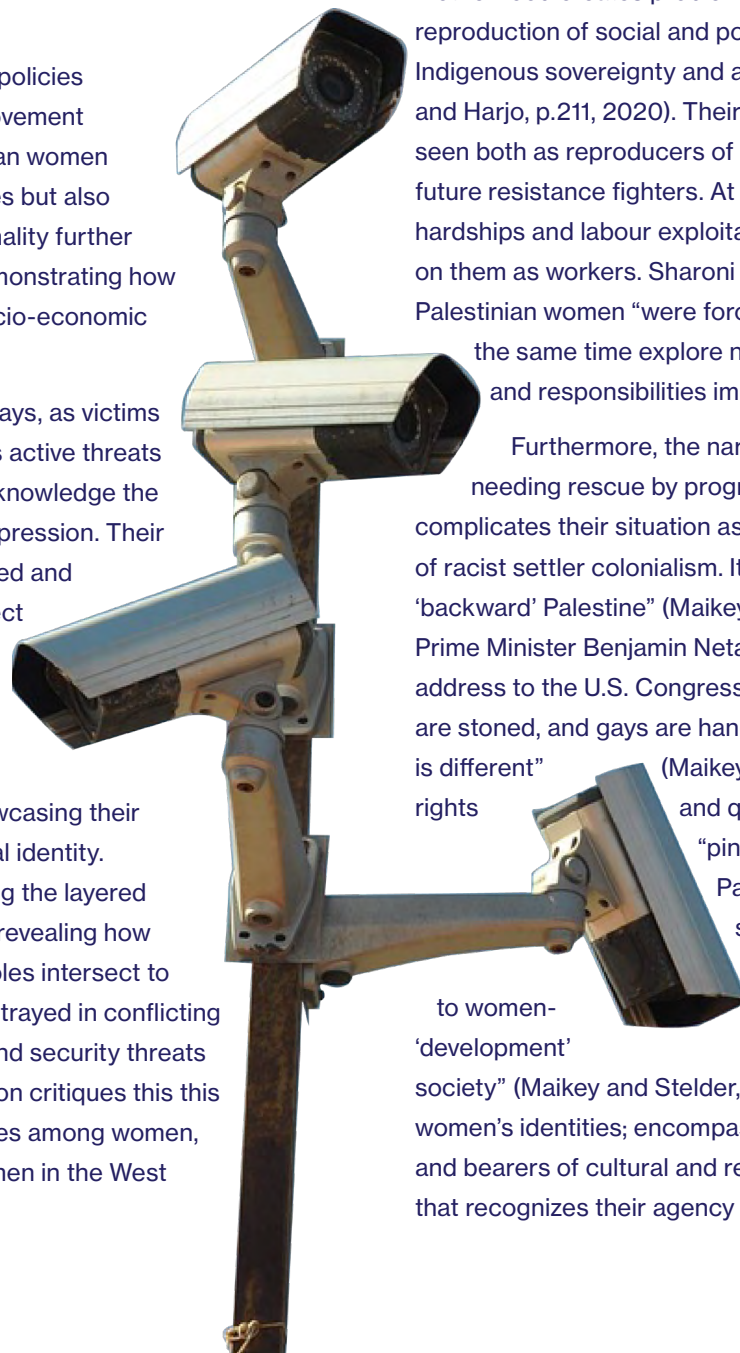
Abstract

This paper investigates the securitization of Palestinian women under Israeli occupation, analyzing how and why they are portrayed as security threats and subjected to marginalization through various legal, political, and social mechanisms. This lens of securitization is important for understanding the treatment of Palestinian women under Israeli occupation, as it frames them as inherent security threats within the context of an ongoing conflict. This paper also explores the impact of these portrayals on their rights and daily lives, considering the intersecting forms of oppression that shape their experiences. It concludes by examining the diverse displays of resistance employed by Palestinian women and the broader implications of their resilience under occupation.

The securitization process involves the portrayal of Palestinian women as potential supporters of resistance activities, which justifies extensive legal, political, and social measures against them.

This narrative of supposed threat is deeply embedded in state policies and media representations, leading to invasive surveillance, movement restrictions, and legal discrimination. The portrayal of Palestinian women as security risks not only legitimizes these oppressive measures but also perpetuates a cycle of control and marginalization. Intersectionality further shows the complexity of Palestinian women's experiences, demonstrating how their identities, shaped by gender, sexuality, nationality, and socio-economic status, intersect to impact their lived experiences.

Palestinian women are often shown in contradictory ways, as victims of oppressive Islamic customs needing Western rescue, and as active threats due to their roles in resistance. This dual narrative does not acknowledge the nuanced ways in which these women experience and resist oppression. Their roles as mothers, workers, and community leaders are politicized and exploited, illustrating how intersecting forms of oppression affect their daily lives. In response to these challenges, Palestinian women demonstrate strength, resilience, and agency through various forms of resistance. Despite the securitization and complex forms of oppression they face, Palestinian women continuously assert their rights and resist marginalization, showcasing their enduring strength and commitment to their cultural and national identity. Intersectionality provides a crucial framework for understanding the layered identities of Palestinian women living under Israeli occupation, revealing how their gender, sexuality, national identity, and socio-economic roles intersect to shape their lived experiences. Palestinian women are often portrayed in conflicting depictions, being both victims of oppressive Islamic customs and security threats due to their potential involvement in resistance activities. Hudson critiques this dual narrative by pointing out that it hides meaningful differences among women, especially in relation to security, where the experiences of women in the West differ greatly from those in developing regions (Hudson 2005).



This simple view does not consider the specific ways in which Palestinian women experience and resist oppression, whether as mothers, wives, workers, or community leaders. For example, the intersection of national identity and motherhood creates problems for women in Palestine, “due to their role in the reproduction of social and political orders, Indigenous women are signifiers of Indigenous sovereignty and as such threaten the settler colonial regime” (Dorries and Harjo, p.211, 2020). Their roles as mothers and caregivers are politicized, seen both as reproducers of Palestinian culture and as potential enablers of future resistance fighters. At the same time, these women go through economic hardships and labour exploitation, as the Israeli occupation creates more burdens on them as workers. Sharoni describes this as a “triple oppression,” where Palestinian women “were forced to simultaneously struggle against this (...) and at the same time explore new ways of coping with the overwhelming pressures and responsibilities imposed by the occupation” (Sharoni, p.79, 1995).

Furthermore, the narrative that portrays Palestinian women as victims needing rescue by progressive forces, particularly from the West, further complicates their situation as “colonial-savior mentality disguises the reproduction of racist settler colonialism. It reiterates a rhetoric of ‘progressive’ Israel and ‘backward’ Palestine” (Maikey and Stelder 2015, p.94). Important figures like Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have used these stereotypes, as in his 2011 address to the U.S. Congress, where he argued that “in a region where women are stoned, and gays are hanged, Christians are persecuted, Israel stands out. It is different” (Maikey and Stelder, 2015, p.93). This use of women’s rights and queer rights to further political agendas, known as “pinkwashing,” not only exploits the struggles of Palestinian women but also reinforces harmful stereotypes. “Pinkwashing is a continuation of a familiar colonial discourse and logic, comparable to women-‘development’ saving narratives, that uses the colonizer’s and ‘progress’ to measure the colonized Palestinian society” (Maikey and Stelder, 2015, p.85). Thus, the intersectionality of Palestinian women’s identities; encompassing their roles as mothers, wives, economic actors, and bearers of cultural and religious traditions needs a nuanced understanding that recognizes their agency and resilience in the face of multifaceted oppression.

The securitization of Palestinian women under Israeli occupation is deeply rooted in a process that frames them as security threats through a combination of stereotypes, political rhetoric, and state policies. As Balzacq explains, “securitization theory elaborates the insight that no issue is essentially a menace. Something becomes a security problem through discursive politics” (Balzacq, 2011, p.1). The framing of these women as threats is part of a broader narrative that associates Palestinian identity with terrorism and unrest. In this context, Palestinian women are often depicted as raising the next generation of resistance fighters or directly participating in protests and other forms of resistance. This stereotype is reinforced by media representations that focus on women involved in resistance activities, while ignoring the vast majority who are engaged in peaceful or non-political activities. This selective representation contributes to the idea that Palestinian women are inherently part of the conflict, reinforcing the idea that Palestinian women are security threats in the eyes of Israel.

State policies and security practices show this stereotyping. Palestinian women are subjected to “extensive security checks at checkpoints, invasive surveillance, and arbitrary detentions” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2015, p.39). These measures are often justified by Israel as necessary to prevent potential security threats. In reality, these practices are there to control and marginalize the Palestinian population, with women being victimized by these measures.



The impact of these measures on Palestinian women is extremely damaging. In a documentary by Al Jazeera, a Hebron resident explains, “the Israeli Military turned her roof into a surveillance post, which is able to see into the windows of her home”. She describes how this constant surveillance has stripped her of any sense of privacy, making her

feel like she lives “on the street and not in a home” (Al Jazeera, 2023). Another woman from the same community describes how “even when I’m asleep, I see those red laser points, and I know someone is holding a camera and tracking our movements...in the bedroom”. She goes on to say, “The house looks like a prison – no light, no voice, no breathing space” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, p.37, 2018). These personal accounts show the dehumanizing effects of the securitization process, where Palestinian women are stripped of their privacy and subjected to a constant state of fear. This will not only affect these women’s lives in the present but will follow them for the rest of their lives in the form of PTSD, or other mental health challenges. The portrayal of these women as security threats not only legitimizes the use of such invasive measures but also perpetuates a cycle of control and marginalization that serves the broader strategy of maintaining dominance over the occupied territories.

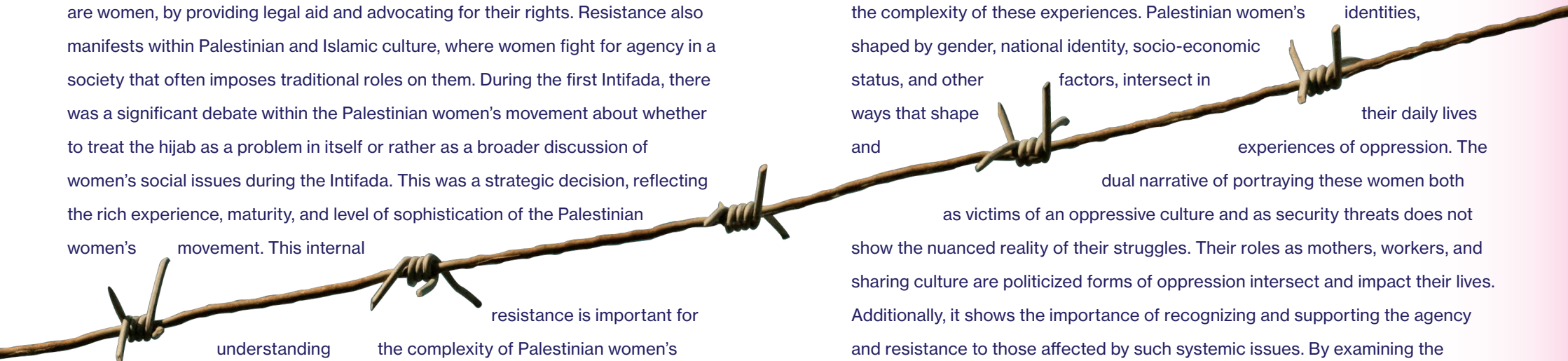
Palestinian women have played an important role in resisting the Israeli occupation and asserting their rights, demonstrating remarkable agency and resilience in the face of systemic oppression. Their resistance takes many forms, from political activism and community organization to cultural preservation and economic self-sufficiency. For example, during the first Intifada (1987-1993), women joined demonstrations and marches organized by the women’s committees. Women of all ages and social classes threw stones, burned tires, raised Palestinian flags and prevented Israeli soldiers from arresting people (Sharoni, 1995). These actions were not only a form of resistance against the Israeli occupation but also a way of asserting their agency within Palestinian society. The women’s committees was founded in the late 1970s and is considered the backbone to the new Palestinian women’s movement and played a significant role in this mobilization (Sharoni, 1995).



Palestinian women also resist through cultural preservation and education, teaching Palestinian history, language, and traditions to younger generations to counter the erasure of their cultural identity (Sharoni, 1995). This form of resistance is particularly important in maintaining the community's sense of identity and continuity in the face of ongoing occupation. For example, organizations like Addameer work to support Palestinian prisoners, many of whom are women, by providing legal aid and advocating for their rights. Resistance also manifests within Palestinian and Islamic culture, where women fight for agency in a society that often imposes traditional roles on them. During the first Intifada, there was a significant debate within the Palestinian women's movement about whether to treat the hijab as a problem in itself or rather as a broader discussion of women's social issues during the Intifada. This was a strategic decision, reflecting the rich experience, maturity, and level of sophistication of the Palestinian women's movement. This internal resistance is important for understanding the complexity of Palestinian women's experiences under occupation, as they navigate the challenges posed by both external oppression and internal pressures.

The Israeli military has used national security discourse to justify massive arrests of Palestinian women and their forceful interrogation. Sharoni notes, "Threats and actual sexual assaults happen during interrogations to pressure women to get incriminating evidence against family members and force the families to turn Palestinian fugitives to the Israeli authorities, as well as to deter women from resisting the occupation" (Sharoni, p.55, 1995). Yet, Palestinian women remain firm in their resistance, as shown in Um al-Asirah's assertion: "I know that my daughter might be sexually harassed or even raped, but your threats will not deter her or other women from political activism" (Sharoni, p.55, 1995).

The securitization of Palestinian women under Israeli occupation represents an important aspect of the broader conflict. By framing Palestinian women as security threats, Israeli policies justify invasive surveillance, legal discrimination, and social control. This portrayal not only reinforces oppressive measures but also perpetuates a cycle of marginalization that affects various parts of Palestinian women's lives. Intersectionality offers another lens for understanding the complexity of these experiences. Palestinian women's identities, shaped by gender, national identity, socio-economic status, and other factors, intersect in ways that shape and their daily lives and experiences of oppression. The dual narrative of portraying these women both as victims of an oppressive culture and as security threats does not show the nuanced reality of their struggles. Their roles as mothers, workers, and sharing culture are politicized forms of oppression intersect and impact their lives. Additionally, it shows the importance of recognizing and supporting the agency and resistance to those affected by such systemic issues. By examining the multifaceted nature of Palestinian women's experiences and resistance, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the ongoing conflict and the complex dynamics of power and identity in occupied territories.



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