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Palestinian Self-Determination from a Feminist Perspective “

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*To all Palestinian women fighting for their right of self-determination, and especially to those
who entrusted me with their stories.*

Abstract

This master's thesis is an analysis of the Palestinian activism of a young generation of feminists currently fighting for their right of self-determination in Palestine/Israel. First, I will present a historical contextualisation of the conflicting narratives in Palestine/Israel and the genesis of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination, as well as the developments of the Palestinian women's movements in the tension between national and feminist objectives. For conceptualisation, the thesis draws on critical feminist, decolonial and intersectional perspectives to highlight various power relations that lead to a multidimensional system of oppression for Palestinian feminists and, at the same time, to identify the different forms of feminist resistance that are shaped and formed by those. Based on qualitative narrative interviews with young feminists from Palestine/Israel, a feminist and grounded theory methodology is applied for the analysis. The understanding of feminism and self-determination is illuminated to understand the dualisms between transnational (feminist) solidarity and the return to homegrown forms of feminism, as well as the national and feminist aims in the struggle for self-determination. I argue that the knowledge and experience of feminists in the struggle for self-determination is essential for Palestinian self-determination, as there can be 'No Free Homeland Without Free Women'.

Diese Masterarbeit ist eine Analyse des palästinensischen Aktivismus einer jungen Generation von Feministinnen, die derzeit in Palästina/Israel für ihr Selbstbestimmungsrecht kämpfen. Zunächst werde ich eine historische Kontextualisierung der widersprüchlichen Narrative in Palästina/Israel und die Entstehung des palästinensischen Kampfes um Selbstbestimmung sowie die Entwicklungen der palästinensischen Frauenbewegungen im Spannungsfeld zwischen nationalen und feministischen Zielen darstellen. Zur Konzeptualisierung greift die Masterarbeit auf kritisch-feministische, dekoloniale und intersektionale Perspektiven zurück, um verschiedene Machtverhältnisse aufzuzeigen, die zu einem mehrdimensionalen Unterdrückungssystem für palästinensische Feministinnen führen, und gleichzeitig die unterschiedlichen Formen des feministischen Widerstands zu identifizieren, die dadurch geprägt und geformt werden. Basierend auf qualitativen narrativen Interviews mit jungen Feministinnen aus Palästina/Israel werden anhand einer feministischen und Grounded Theory Methodologie, die Analyse durchgeführt. Das Verständnis von Feminismus und Selbstbestimmung wird beleuchtet, um die Dualismen zwischen transnationaler (feministischer) Solidarität und der Rückkehr zu einheimischen Formen des Feminismus, sowie der Vereinbarkeit nationaler und feministischer Ziele im Kampf, um Selbstbestimmung zu verstehen. Ich argumentiere, dass das Wissen und die Erfahrung von Feministinnen im Kampf um ihre Selbstbestimmung für die palästinensische Selbstbestimmung von wesentlicher Bedeutung sind, da es kein freies Heimatland ohne freie Frauen geben kann.

Keywords: Palestine, Intersectional Feminist Activism, Self-determination, Transnational Feminist Solidarity

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Glossary

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

ESCWA: Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

GBV: Gender-Based Violence

GTM: Grounded Theory Methodology

ICT: Information Computer Technologies

IDF: Israeli Defense Forces

OPT: Occupied Palestinian Territories

PA: Palestinian Authority

PFC: Palestinian Feminist Collective

PLO: Palestine Liberation Organization

PYM: Palestinian Youth Movement

1. Introduction

*„My sister, our land has a throbbing heart,
it doesn't cease to beat, and it endures
the unendurable. It keeps the secrets
of hills and wombs. This land sprouting
with spikes and palms is also the land
that gives birth to a freedom-fighter.
This land, my sister, is a woman.“*

„Hamza“ by Fadwa Tuqan (Translated by Azfar Hussain) (Khalidi 2022)

„Palestine is a Feminist Issue!“ (BDS Movement 2022) is a statement that has been used by feminist movements repeatedly and has been discussed in literature several times over the past decade (Elia 2017; Lloyd 2014). But where does the connection between women, feminism and Palestine originate? While Palestine has a long history of women's movements, since the Oslo Accords women's voices have been increasingly marginalised in the national struggle of liberation (Kuttab 2009: 104-113). However, on 26 September 2019, the Tal3at initiative, with the slogan 'No Free Homeland Without Free Women', succeeded in a coordinated feminist protest that brought thousands of Palestinian women to the streets, both in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) and in the refugee camps and diaspora, to demonstrate together against the rise in gender-based violence (GBV). Not only did activists succeed in overcoming geographical fragmentation and physical borders, but at the same time they reopened up the discourse on feminism in Palestine (Al Zaanin 2021b). The voices of feminists were heard, and movements worldwide called for transnational feminist solidarity with Palestinian women who, due to an intersectional system of oppression, would be disproportionately affected by the Israeli apartheid (Palestinian Feminist Collective 2021). They declared Palestine as a feminist issue, arguing that through the implementation of feminism as an ideology and practice within the national liberation movement of contemporary Palestine, the long-awaited self-determination for the people could be realised (Abouesh 2019).

Although it would be too ambitious to attempt to answer the wide plethora of questions that arise as a result of this struggle, this thesis aims to contribute to the current debate on contemporary feminist activism in Palestine by answering the following central research question: *To what extent can Palestinian feminists in the context of intersectional systems of oppression be central to the struggle for Palestinian self-determination?*

In order to adequately answer the research question, the following sub-questions must be taken into consideration: *To what extent is feminist activism shaped by the intersecting systems of oppression for women in contemporary Palestine?* In an intersecting system of oppression, creative forms of resistance are needed and the question that arises is: *What forms of intervention do the young feminist activists utilize?* Of course, it is simply not possible to cover the different feminist discourses and agendas on the ground and the different viewpoints of those who see themselves as feminist activists, especially because the field is insufficiently investigated and some of the concepts such as intersectionality are still very young in the Palestinian context (Al Zaanin 2021b), but by highlighting the marginalised voices on the ground, the thesis aims to give an insight into the challenges and possibilities of a diverse feminist activism in order to explore the question: *Is there a new wave of feminist activists in contemporary Palestine?* For this purpose, qualitative interviews with young feminists in their 20s and 30s, who come from different areas of Palestine/Israel and have different backgrounds, will be analysed. Furthermore, this work questions transnational feminist solidarity, which was called for in the campaign of the Palestinian Feminist Collective (PFC). Regarding transnational feminist solidarity, it is necessary to question the relationship of Palestinian feminists to other feminists in the international context and to open a discourse regarding the types of allies and supporters the Palestinian feminist movement welcomes. Therefore, the fourth sub-question is: *What are the possibilities and constraints for transnational solidarity for Palestinian feminists?* But the issue of solidarity and unity across borders is all the more relevant in the Palestinian context, as forced segregation has resulted in a wide variety of borders that make a unified struggle for Palestinian self-determination difficult. At the same time, there is a huge discussion around the meaning of Palestinian self-determination in general, therefore, the question arises: *What does self-determination mean to young Palestinian feminists and how are they trying to achieve it?*

This thesis will give a brief overview of the historical developments of the conflict between Israel and Palestine to establish a basic understanding of the narratives in conflict that continue to shape feminist activists today and influence the question of Palestinian self-determination (in Chapter 2.1.1 Israel and Palestine: A Conflict of Narratives). At the same time, there has always been a relationship between the national and the feminist struggle for self-determination, and in order to understand this in contemporary Palestine, the connection is explained with a historical outline (in Chapter 2.1.2 Feminist Activism in Palestine: The Struggle between National Liberation and Women's Rights). After the historical contextualisation, the theoretical and conceptual basis for the analysis is laid (in Chapter 2.2

Conceptualising Feminist Activism and Intersectional Systems of Oppression). The thesis draws on critical feminist, decolonial, and intersectional perspectives, to reveal different relations of power that lead to a multidimensional system of oppression and to point out creative ways of feminist resistance based on research of postcolonial¹ feminists involved in anti-colonial feminist struggles, elaborating on the connection from personal experiences within deeply oppressive geopolitical contexts and the activism that emerges from them. After bringing related literature to the fore, the further procedure is explained (in Chapter 3. Methods and Techniques) in order to clarify the importance of a feminist methodology, in connection with a grounded theory, for the openness and value of knowledge transfer of marginalised voices, as well as to reveal the personal sociological location of knowledge. Subsequently, (in Chapter 4. Analysis and Discussion) the qualitative interviews with the activists will be presented and discussed based on the literature and concepts reviewed. Ultimately, (in Chapter 5. Conclusion) implications for future research on feminist activism in Palestine will be highlighted with the intention to illustrate the contribution that Palestinian feminist activists can provide to the project of Palestinian self-determination through women's own constant struggle for self-determination, and to analyse the possibility for the revitalization of the Palestinian liberation struggle through activist feminism.

¹ A de- and/or post-colonial approach is characterised by the questioning of Western-colonial narratives, the resulting physical and structural relations of violence and processes of exclusion and can refer to very different layers such as statehood or identity processes (see Dittmer 2018:7).

The authors mentioned in this thesis associate themselves with de- or postcolonial schools of thought, so that both terms will appear in the course of the thesis.

2. State of Research

This chapter consists of two parts to lay the foundation for the analysis. First, it provides an overview of elementary political events that have had a major influence on the self-definition of Palestinians and the ongoing and contested issue of Palestinian self-determination and the narrative that accompanies this concern up to the present day. Then, through detailing the history of the women's movements in Palestine, the connection between national and feminist struggles for freedom and the domination relations which emerged and created the current situation that now shape the lives of feminist activists in Palestine will be illustrated. The second part outlines the theoretical basis for the analysis by introducing the feminist concepts that shape contemporary feminism in Palestine and additionally explaining, from an intersectional and decolonial perspective, the basis for the web of oppression that Palestinian women face.

2.1 Historical Background

2.1.1 Palestine/ Israel: A Conflict of Narratives

The following, by no means comprehensive, set of developments in the history of Palestine/Israel² are pertinent to understanding the issues discussed in this thesis, but it is of course very abbreviated. The focus of this historical overview of Palestine/Israel, is on the emergence of two narratives³ that contradict each other and their manifestation in the respective societies. As it is often the case in history, there is a dominant hegemonic narrative that suggests a historical truth, while other voices are marginalized and suppressed. Therefore, this short historical overview of this thesis attempts to focus on exactly these narratives that shape the struggle for Palestinian self-determination.

Ilan Pappé explains in his book „A History of Modern Palestine. One Land, Two Peoples” that over the past 200 years the history of Palestine/Israel has been riddled with external power influences. European influence was consolidated by the British Mandate after World War I, which replaced the Ottoman Empire until 1948 and defined the territory that is now

² Following the approach of Sabbagh-Khoury the slash in Palestine/Israel is used in this thesis „[...]” in order to allude to and accentuate the multiple temporalities in the history of the territories whose borders were signified by the British Mandate but disrupted by settler colonial processes. This usage brings Palestine side by side with Israel to depict a split geographical entity, reinstating the temporality of historic Palestine and restoring its elimination from the map and from consciousnesses.” Sabbagh-Khoury 2022: 72.

³ The focus of this master's thesis is not on the historical political events themselves but rather on the narratives that emerge from and frame those events. The subject of scholarly examination, therefore, comprises narrative knowledge structures that symbolically represent specific elements of reality. This encompasses the shaping and preservation of social units, particularly the constitution of social realities, and, consequently, questions of power and the maintenance of a community and its social structures. For more in-depth discussions on the epistemological aspects of narrative social science, please refer to Vaasen (1994): 16-24.

Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT)⁴. Since then, narratives have split, and Pappe contends that in the post-1948 period, there are hardly any history books that treat the two national histories as a single subject, unless it is the specific context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Pappe 2012: 1-5). This thesis follows Pappe's approach of focusing on individual actors, arguing „[...] that the history of these actors is no less the history of place than is the history of nationalism, of conflict, of elites, or of Westernization” (ibid.: 8). Therefore, the emphasis is on people who have a connection to the country in which they live or have chosen to settle. They are local actors who are part of various communities, defined by their religious or ethnic origins, as well as their views on religion, whether secular, orthodox or fundamentalist (Pappe 2012: 8-9). In the course of this thesis, it is important to understand to what extent these definitions of belonging ultimately reflect the self-description of the actors, shaping their sense of belonging and identity. Another important role in shaping this self-description, according to Pappe, is the past, which matters for the people living in Palestine/Israel, affecting aspects of religion, tradition, and customs. However, the past should not be understood as something regressive, but as resilient and adaptable under the constant politically changing influences. At the same time, these aspects have always been and remain a powerful force influencing politics, society and culture (Pappe 2012: 9-10). Keeping this in mind is important in presenting the milestones in the history of Palestine/Israel in the post-1948 period, in which „[...] politics and nationalism are allowed to become what they cannot truly be – the essence of life” (ibid.: 12). Many discussions revolve around these central points, however, in this thesis the impact that political decisions have had on the various groups and people within Palestine/Israel is central. Every event initiated by the elites, be it wars or peace agreements, has produced a new and different reality for the people living there, affecting their everyday life and their understanding of what to fight for (ibid.).

On 29th of November 1947 the international community voted for UN General Assembly Resolution 181 (II), which intended the partition of Palestine into an Arab (48%) and Jewish State (52%). This was followed by the 1948 war in the course of which Israel became sovereign and took over 78% of the former Palestinian land (Todorova 2020: 322). This also meant that two-thirds of the Palestinian population became refugees. Only a very small

⁴ By Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) I understand the usual designation in international diplomatic parlance of those territories that Israel conquered in the 1967 war and from which the state was asked to withdraw, for example in UN Resolution 242, which includes the West Bank, Gaza and East-Jerusalem. Krieger 2015: 19. For more information about the Interpretation of UN Resolution 242 read „Umkämpfte Staatlichkeit” by Helmut Krieger 2015.

percentage of the population remained in the territories and became citizens of the newly established state of Israel. Those who had already lived in the West Bank or had fled there came under Jordanian control and Palestinians in the Gaza Strip came under Egyptian control, until 1967, when both regions were occupied by the Israeli military (Todorova 2020: 322). For Palestinians the events of 1948 are known as Nakba (al-nakba translated in English: the catastrophe) because it meant a disintegrated, segregated community, without having the communal life as they knew it before (Sa'di/Abu-Lughod 2007: 2-3). The Nakba is either described, as by Pappe, as a historical event that took place in 1948, or as an ongoing process, as by Mohammed Nijim. To Nijim the Nakba is a progressive project, which, although clearly expressed by the 1948 war, also found its expression in the following wars and intifadas, forming a genocide of the Palestinian population (ibid.: 27). Therefore, according to him, one must understand the Nakba as „[...] what transpired in historic Palestine started with a combination of forced expulsion and mass murder, but then took a harsher shape that reached genocide, destroying a large part of the Palestinian society” (ibid.).

Still, the Nakba, as a process or historical event, illustrates clearly the division of the divergent histories of Israel and Palestine and the narratives that accompany them, as criticized by Pappe. According to Sa'di and Abu-Lughod, two situations arose at the same time, on one side the 1948 war led to the destruction of Palestinian society and its displacement, on the other side the establishment of the State of Israel, short after their persecution and genocide under the Nazis, was understood as a sign of good. This narrative of something positive coming out of something evil was widespread. Critical voices claim that the fate of the Palestinians that went along with it was excluded from history, at best regarded as a humanitarian case handled by the UN agencies. But for the Palestinians, it became a cornerstone of their collective memory and national identity (Sa'di/Abu-Lughod 2007: 4). Most of the Palestinians fled in '48 due to forceful eviction, massacres or out of fear and until now are not allowed to return to their home (Abdo/Yuval-Davis 1995: 295). Between 1948 and 1967, the two stories once again took different paths. While Israel strengthened itself as a nation state through extreme migration processes, especially by Mizrahi Jews⁵, and military

⁵ *Mizrahim* or *Mizrahi Jew* is a term used for „[...] Jewish immigrant-settlers who came from Arab or Muslim countries who have faced persistent discrimination [...] and generally perceive themselves rather as second-class citizens and victims of the Israeli state [...]” (Sabbagh-Khoury 2022: 49). There is a lot of postcolonial research on the ethnic/racial/class discrimination that still persists in the state of Israel due to a so called „white Ashkenazi Zionist project”(ibid.: 55), which cannot be covered in this thesis, but should be kept in mind for the analysis and for further information read „Tracing Settler Colonialism: A Genealogy of a Paradigm in the Sociology of Knowledge Production in Israel” by Areej Sabbagh-Khoury 2022.

strength, the Palestinian entity became more and more fragmented through dislocation. By winning the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel had enormous territorial gains, including the rest of Palestine, namely the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which meant a new wave of displacement and for Israel ruling over a large number of Palestinians. At the same time Palestinians were more and more splintered and dispersed as refugees across various neighbouring countries. The autonomous national organization, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), was founded in the diaspora and fought against the occupation of Israel. The struggle thus began in the diaspora and expanded to include both international diplomatic and civil resistance campaigns in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (Abdo/Yuval-Davis 1995: 295-298).

The first intifada that erupted in December 1987, “the grassroots popular uprising in the occupied territories” (Khalidi 1997: 200) drew the focus of Palestinian politics from the diaspora back to the inside of Palestine itself and restored momentum to the Palestinian national movement (ibid.). The first Intifada was a sign to many Israelis that the indefinite extension of Israel’s military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip was not possible in its then current form and paved the way for negotiations that led to the Oslo Accords in September 1993 (ibid.: xvii). According to Rashid Khalidi⁶, the PLO was initially the hope for many that a freedom movement evolving into a para-state would eventually lead them to Palestinian independence. „Perhaps the high point in this narrative was the signing of the Oslo Accords between the PLO, represented by Yasser ‘Arafat, and the Israeli government, represented by Prime Minister Yitzhaq Rabin, on the White House lawn on September 13, 1993” (Khalidi 2007: 150). The negotiations at Madrid, Washington D.C., and Oslo, which are known as the Oslo process, encompassed high hopes for the Palestinians in their goals of liberation, and a fully independent and sovereign Palestinian state, ending Israel’s occupation and colonization of Palestinian land. But in fact, during the process the number of Israeli settlers in OPT doubled, the occupation became more all-encompassing and instead of producing peace, the system of occupation and settlement was manifested (ibid.: 157-158). Although the Oslo Accords state that the occupation should end, and the Declaration of Principles⁷ states that after an interim period of five years Israel should withdraw from the

⁶ Rashid Khalidi studied in detail the obstacles that Palestinians faced in state-building or creating alternative state structures, as well as the struggle of Palestinian identity itself. For further in-depth understanding of these struggles read Khalidi (1997) “Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness” and Khalidi (2007) “The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood”.

⁷ Read letter to General Assembly Security Council (1993) “Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements” especially Article 1 and 7 specify on interim period and creation of a Palestinian Council (known as

Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which is sometimes described as a blueprint for a two-state solution, there is no mention of the establishment of a Palestinian state, leaving the issues of sovereignty, settlements and refugees unresolved. Quite the opposite happened, Todorova (2020) describes the post-Oslo period as the beginning of the policy of closure, which permanently restricted Palestinian mobility by both blocking OPT access to Israel and exacerbating the fragmentation of the West Bank through administrative zones A, B, and C. With the second Oslo Accords two years later in 1995, the Palestinian Authority (PA) was established, which has the authority over the Area A, which are the major towns like Bethlehem, Hebron, Nablus, Tulqaren, and Ramallah (and 450 villages) and responsibility for civilian affairs in Area B, not including security there. All in all, this constitutes 28% of the West Bank. „Simultaneously, the occupying state subjected the Palestinian population under its military rule in Area C of the West Bank to discriminatory policies of land expropriation and house demolitions“ (Todorova 2020: 323) (ibid.).

Khalidi describes this new system of control of Israel and the expansion of Israeli settlements, together with an increasing loss of faith in the negotiations of the PLO and PA's incompetence in state building as the root causes for the eruption of the second intifada in September 2000. The second intifada was very different from what began as a largely unarmed grassroots-based mass movement, resorting to brutal violence and militarisation on both sides (Khalidi 2007: 178; 204). The following four years were marked by suicide bombings inside Israel and extreme armed violence, which not only turned out to be a strategic mistake which led to a defeat for the Palestinians, but was also used by the Israelis to destroy the governmental infrastructure of the PA (Khalidi 1997: xxi) and at the same time to employ the narrative of violence to establish the West Bank Barrier, a renewed expression of the fragmentation of the Palestinians and a symbolization of the restriction of mobility (Todorova 2020: 322-324).

The Palestinian national movement became divided and there was a political split in 2007 within the PA, separating the former symbol of national self-determination in two, Hamas and Fatah. At the moment Hamas is ruling over Gaza and Fatah over the West Bank, and their fronts are increasingly hardening, not only because of their conflicts with each other but also because of the influence of international actors, which for years favoured Fatah over Hamas

Palestinian Authority (PA)), also referring to the UN Resolution 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which both call for the end of the occupation.

and treated the party differently. This leads to an impediment of any diplomatic breakthrough between Israel and the Palestinians in resolving or even managing the conflict (Brown 2010: 35-36; 47-48), because „[t]he Palestinian division, however, prevents the Palestinians from speaking with one voice, much less acting in a coherent manner” (ibid.: 35).

The question of Palestinian self-determination remains an unresolved and highly contested issue today, which cannot be covered in the framework of this thesis, nor is it intended to be, as the self-definitions of the actors are in the focus of this thesis. In general, however, self-determination is understood as a right for people to „[...] freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development [...]” (OHCHR 2023) on their land. It is argued that provided the recognition of a people and thus the right to self-determination, this would then automatically form the basis for „independence, autonomy and statehood in the country in which they exist“ (BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights 2021: 1). However, according to BADIL, this problematic discourse associated with statehood emerged through the Oslo Peace Process, because „[p]rior to the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian struggle was perceived as exactly that - a legitimate national struggle against a colonial power, with an indigenous people fighting for their right to self-determination. However, this has turned into a discussion about statehood instead of self-determination” (ibid.: 48). From a decolonial perspective, it could therefore be argued that instead of the concept of statehood, the Palestinian self-determination of the entire Palestinian people should be the goal, which „[...] must emerge from the realisation of the right to decolonisation owed to the Palestinian people [...]” (ibid.: 15). According to this understanding, having a state, as proposed by the peace process, within the Israeli colonial-apartheid framework would not be feasible, since only breaking through colonial oppression would make the liberation of the Palestinian people possible (ibid.: 15-16).

The post-Oslo period thus led to a situation of segregation, fragmentation and division of the Palestinian population as well as an impediment to the common struggle for self-determination. Due to this specific situation of segregation and division not only of the population but also of political representation, Aharoni describes the Palestine/Israel conflict as „one of the most persistent contemporary examples of asymmetric warfare” (Aharoni 2016: 205). Since the mid-1980s Israel has been involved in military conflicts with non-state actors. Some describe it as ‘new wars’ (Newman 2004), which refers to the change from state military confrontations to other forms of militarized violence. The actors of the conflicting parties would focus on new identity issues that go beyond national notions of ethnicity and find new justifications for the conflict such as religious, cultural and economic arguments. At

the same time, Aharoni argues that the role of women in conflicts would have changed. „Moreover, the relationship between identity and war in contemporary conflicts coincides with a certain ‘feminisation’ of war, as women and their bodies have come to play increasingly visible and important roles in military organizations, religious codes, and cultural discourses” (Aharoni 2016: 205). Consequently, according to Aharoni, the new wars have raised new questions for feminism, some of which are linked to feminist activists' calls for transnational solidarity across nation-state borders, and research on women in wars, would have largely contributed to the knowledge of asymmetric warfare. By focusing on women's experiences and their definitions of insecurity in contemporary wars, feminist scholars have managed to develop a concept that points to a „continuum of violence in zones of conflict and peace” (ibid.: 206). In the last decade, there has been an increasing incorporation of the gender dimension in international politics in peace processes and in conflict areas (ibid.) and this thesis aims to join the debate.

This chapter highlighted how the history of Palestine/Israel is permeated by external power and political aspirations of westernisation, which influence the struggle for Palestinian self-determination. The decolonisation and overcoming of forced segregation and the recollection of unity of the whole Palestinian people is therefore proposed as an approach. Within the conflict, new discourses, such as identity, and new actors, such as increasing numbers of non-state actors, especially women, are gaining in importance. However, the struggle for recognition as important actors in conflict areas has been fought by women for many years and is still facing new challenges. In order to understand women's contribution to the struggle of Palestinian self-determination, the next chapter must first examine the historical political implications for the feminist struggle in Palestine.

2.1.2 Feminist Activism in Palestine: The Struggle between National Liberation and Women's Rights

To contextualize and theorise Palestinian women's experience and voice in the struggle for self-determination it is essential to understand the transformation of women's movement in Palestine/Israel and the lessons learned. Eileen Kuttab (2009) summarises in her article “The Palestinian Women's Movement: From Resistance and Liberation to Accommodation and Globalization” the different forms of women's movement⁸ in Palestine and their connection to

⁸ Beckwith points out that the conflation of women's activism, movements and feminism impairs our ability to distinguish between the different interests of women based on differences such as race, class, ethnicity, nationality and gender, and nationality. Her article focuses on the definitional challenges and the limitations of conflating "women's movements",

the national struggle, shedding light on the distinctiveness of women's national and political activism in the region.

Since the 1920s, Palestinian women's activism has been linked to the resistance movement and shares the fate that accompanies the will for independence. A relevant event was the establishment of the Women's Union, the process of which began in 1921 and shaped and organized women into a women's movement that continues to this day. The policies of the British Mandate and their support of Jewish migration policies led to women fighting alongside men against the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. By 1947, their struggle was strongly emphasized by their presence in the media, and women participated in the national struggle through their involvement in meetings with government officials and memoranda to the government, as well as through demonstrations, arms smuggling, and support for prisoners. At the same time, they were able to maintain their feminist agency and autonomy from the male national project during this period⁹. Kuttab argues that the outbreak of the 1948 war was a key disruptive element in the history of Palestinian people, and for women in particular, since it led to the creation of the Israeli state in the larger part of historical Palestine and the fragmentation of Palestinian social networks. This presented novel challenges to women's organisations, demanding an enhancement of their capabilities in order to expand their assistance and social support initiatives (Kuttab 2009: 104-105).

The renewed disruption of the political, economic and cultural structures that accompanied the 1967 Six-day war led to the need to expand structures even further and across borders. The women's movement had to form a large structure of charitable organizations to respond to the needs of the communities. In the aftermath of the 1967 war and the subsequent Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, women assumed the responsibility of safeguarding cultural and national heritage, which was a crucial part in sustain a society (Kuttab 2009: 105-106). Additionally, these disruptions led to a broad-based Palestinian resistance, which resulted in a process of democratisation of the national struggle. Taking

"feminist movements", and "women in social movements" and is recommended reading for further information "Beyond compare?: Women's movements in comparative perspective" by Karen Beckwith 2000.

Conceptually, women's and feminist movements can be distinguished, but in practice they are interrelated and overlapping (Beckwith 2000: 436). Since the authors mentioned here use the terms as synonyms in relation to Palestine/Israel, this is also done within the historical chapter, but afterwards the term feminist movement is used as a critique of intersectional systems of oppression in order to avoid a homogenisation of the category 'woman'.

⁹ Eileen Kuttab regularly refers to Islah Jad and Ellen Fleischmann in her historical outline. For in-depth information about the involvement of Palestinian women in the national struggle during the British mandate period read "The Nation and its New Women: The Palestinian Women's Movement 1920-1948" by Ellen Fleischmann (2003) and for more information until 1967 read "Claiming Feminism, Claiming Nationalism: Women's Activism in the Occupied Territories" by Islah Jad (1995).

advantage of this democratisation process, women created their own mass-based organizations by founding women's committees, which were capable of organising and mobilising women in villages and refugee camps, and "[a] new generation of women activists appeared with a new approach to understanding the relationship between national liberation and women's emancipation [...] [challenging] the social, cultural and political traditions that prohibit women from participating actively and effectively in public life" (Kuttab 2009: 108-109). However, living under colonial settler occupation made it difficult to balance national and social agendas, which complicated the fight for changes to enhance the role and status of Palestinian women systematically (ibid.: 105; 108-109). Within the historical framework, it is noteworthy that the eruption of the 1987 Intifada was the culmination of an extensive process of democratic activism, primarily orchestrated by mass-based organizations that served as democratic extensions of the national movement. Mass-based organizations fought together with the national movement and managed to include different communities, such as students, workers, and also women, as major actors. While the pre-Oslo period in the 1970s and 1980s was thus, a time of democratic movement that responded on a decentralized level to the needs of the national struggle and meanwhile, despite the challenges, tried to promote gender issues, the women's movement changed drastically through the Oslo Accords. These paved the way to „[...] an elite movement represented in more central and formal institutions or non-governmental organizations that has institutionalized women activism and transformed it into specialized work" (ibid.: 110) (ibid.: 109-110).

According to the literature the Oslo Accords, agreed upon in September 1993, led to far-reaching changes in the structure of the Palestinian society and deeply destructed the feminist movement in Palestine (Jad 2008, 2018; Hawari 2019; Richter-Devroe 2018; Kuttab 2009). The changes brought about by the Oslo Accords were manifested, on the one hand, in a new dependence on international donor aid and, on the other, in support for the corrupt and patriarchal PA, which, instead of fighting the Israeli occupation, complimented it (Hawari 2019). Palestinian feminist activists had to tackle three major tasks, at the same time: they were trying to continue the national struggle, participate in the state-building process and press for women's rights. However, they faced new challenges in all three areas. After signing the Oslo Accords there was a phase of quasi-state building that proved illusionary due to the ongoing Israeli occupation under the cover of the Oslo peace process, and women's movements had to painfully feel that they could not address their demands to the newborn state as they had hoped, because it was too ill-equipped and unstable to do them justice (Jad 2018: ix-x; 159). The new emerged civil society, „[...] was largely depoliticized and had

effectively lost its own previous capacity to organize and mobilize different groups, and in particular, women's groups aiming to combat the Occupation" (Jad 2018: x).

Another challenge arose from a new phenomenon called the „NGO-ization“, in which feminist NGOs started to play an important but controversial role in the women's movement (Kuttab 2009: 112). Islah Jad describes it as „[...] the process through which issues of collective concern are transformed into projects in isolation from the general context in which they arise, without consideration of the economic, social and political factors affecting them" (Jad 2008: 2). This NGO-ization led to a situation where, instead of a unified agenda that combined both the national struggle and the struggle for women's emancipation, certain issue complexes around peacebuilding, conflict resolution and related issues were prioritized. According to Jad: „[...] the transformation from organizations of mass mobilization into NGOs was ultimately disempowering in that it weakened the mobilizing potential of secular feminist women's organizations and depoliticized their activism" (Jad 2018: x-xi). An increasing number of specialized and professional feminist NGOs started to intervene in the national and international policy process, trying to influence new national policies through more policy and advocacy-oriented measures, which were highly influenced by the agendas of international donors and entities. The participation of feminist NGOs in so-called peacebuilding activities led to more funding and to more power within the women's movement, which ultimately led to the NGO-ization of the national agenda. The favouring of the peacebuilding ideas of a globalized NGO elite over female grassroots organization, weakened the historic women committees and resulted an impediment for collective action to promote the national agenda (Kuttab 2009: 110-113; Jad 2018: 161-162). The new discourse, which was used by the NGO elite „[...] claimed that legitimacy founded on 'resistance' and 'sacrifice' led to the subordination and isolation of women" (Jad 2018: 163), which is why the focus shifted to a universal human rights approach. According to Jad, the shift of focus would have been so disconnected from its local context that on one hand aided the Islamist movement, and on the other hand weakened the homegrown feminism. It separated women's rights from collective national rights, which in the context of Occupation led to the marginalization of women as a social group and their demobilization, by obscuring and ignoring local history (Jad 2018: 163; 168).

While international NGOs have become a major industry in the Palestinian territories, women movements have increasingly lost power, vision and cohesion. Professionalization and bureaucratization have created a distance between the elite NGOs and local grassroots organizations, which additionally increased the distance from the previous discourse of

liberation and nationalism. Since many women lost their leadership positions to male politicians, and the tensions between the national struggle and women's liberation got all the more visible, there were attempts to ease these tensions. Important achievements for women at the official political level, was the establishment of the first Ministry of Women's Affairs in 2003, the introduction of quotas for female officeholders in local elections in 2004 and in parliamentary elections 2006, and the adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 concerning the protection of women in conflict and post-conflict situations. Most of the efforts were to appease certain requirements by international funders and to react on the domestic and international pressure, to include women into the political structure. However, the inclusion of women in institutional politics remains low, and there are only isolated instances of women representing the Palestinian people. On the one hand, this is due to the patriarchal structure inherent to the PA and insufficient democratic processes, on the other hand, international guidelines and domestic politics did not sufficiently address the special context for Palestinian women under occupation (Jad 2018: 171-176; Hawari 2019).

An important example is the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which the Ministry of Women's Affairs already based their agenda on in 2004. In 2014, the PA officially acceded to the UN Convention of CEDAW without reservations in an attempt to officially improve the status of Palestinian women. It was the first country in the Middle East to do so and was hailed by the international community as significant progress. However, the CEDAW text was not published in the Official Gazette of the Palestinian Authority, which made it not binding under national law. Additionally, the Supreme Constitutional Court's decision of November 2017, which regulates the status of international agreements in the Palestinian legal system, undercuts any agreements that conflict with Palestinian law. This allows for unregulated executive power and the maintenance of superior patriarchal authority through the legislature. Both the Ministry of Women's Affairs and women's organizations have worked together to achieve various legislative and policy changes and have exerted pressure for CEDAW to be adopted. Through lobbying, they have succeeded in gaining official attention, but not in having it implemented in everyday politics and incorporated into policymaking (Hawari 2019; Abdo/Yuval-Davis 1995; Jad 2018).

Throughout history, it becomes clear that the women's movement in Palestine constantly has to adapt to changing political circumstances and has always had a close relationship with the national liberation struggle as it has developed through engagement with national issues. In addition, the context of the resistance against the occupation is particularly important, as it has

created an awareness of gender and class differences that has had an extreme influence on the struggle of the women's movement for their own rights. Kuttab describes concisely the connection between national and feminist struggle:

„Although Palestinian women's participation in the national struggle had been perceived as a necessary but not a sufficient condition for their emancipation as women, they still express their belief that the struggle for women's liberation is not distinct from national independence and at the same time does not constitute a paradox.” (Kuttab 2009: 106)

Since the 1920s and during the first Intifada, nationalism was understood as an instrument of liberation and a necessary legitimizing tool for feminist activism, as it allowed space for public political expression (Kuttab 2009: 106-108). According to Jad, the link between nationalism and feminism even goes so far as to claim that „[t]he greatest successes have been achieved at moments when the feminist and nationalist agendas were maximally synergistic” (Jad 2018: 165). Both authors agree that for feminist activists under colonial occupation, it is essential to incorporate the experiences of oppression under colonial rule and connect them to the struggle for gender equality and women's emancipation. It is important that the tensions between elite NGOs, grassroots movements, rural and urban feminist groups are overcome through a common focus on the daily struggle of women under occupation. After all, whenever this divide would have been overcome, the greatest successes for the women's movement in Palestine would have been achieved (Jad 2018: 158: 165-169; Kuttab 2009: 106-108). Hawari further adds that achieving a collective project of liberation would only be possible, if women's groups become autonomous from a system that is strongly patriarchal structured. Women's groups must manage to connect with both the grassroots and the liberation discourse by replacing the elitist NGO structures with more democratic ones, whereby independence from donors is essential. Furthermore, the political marginalization should also be made clear to men in order to visualize the power dynamics and to support women in their struggle against it (Hawari 2019). For political participation and representation, as well as the advocacy of women's rights, Palestinian women have been confronted with great challenges over time and have had to assert themselves in a national and international system of oppression that has always neglected their interests. At the same time, by synchronizing with the national liberation project, it would have been possible to achieve successes in the past and the focus on homegrown feminism would be necessary to overcome the NGO-ization, which further marginalized women's voices in the project of Palestinian self-determination. Therefore, taking the history of the Palestinians women's movement into consideration, this thesis interrogates if the connection of both these approaches could lead to the revitalizing of the feminist struggle in Palestine.

2.2 Conceptualising Feminist Activism and Intersectional Systems of Oppression

The conceptual groundwork picks up on the historical foundations in which it became clear that throughout history, the focus of feminist activism in Palestine adapted to the political environment and changed due to new challenges, but also new scopes for action. Palestinian women had to adjust to the political realities, national goals of liberation, as well as their new realities of life, which were shaped by different systems of oppression due to the ongoing conflict. In order to understand this transformation and its implications for current feminist activism in Palestine, it is first necessary to establish terminology, introduce concepts, and elaborate on postcolonial theories on feminist activism to contextualize both the unique struggle for self-determination of Palestinian women and at the same time the parallels, impediments and possibilities that arise through a feminist solidarity-based, anti-colonial and intersectional struggle for liberation.

2.2.1 Feminist Activism

First of all, concepts of feminist activism based on research of de- and postcolonial intersectional feminists involved in feminist struggles will be presented, terminology will be introduced and different approaches to feminist resistance and the complexity of solidarity between these feminists' movements will be illustrated.

Waves and Generations of Feminist Activism

The first question to be answered is roughly what is meant by feminism in the first place, a term that is constantly reinterpreted and expanded. For this purpose, the definition of the feminist author and activist Bell Hooks from her book „Feminism is for Everybody“ (2000) will be borrowed: „Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression“ (Hooks 2000: viii).

Hooks invented this definition to make everybody understand that the movement is not anti-male, it's not about women being angry and making the world hard for men, but the problem is sexism. Hooks further elaborates:

„To end patriarchy (another way of naming the institutionalized sexism) we need to be clear that we are all participants in perpetuating sexism until we change our minds and hearts, until we let go of sexist thought and action and replace it with feminist thought and action. (Hooks 2000: viii-ix)

Hooks clarifies therefore that sexism is an issue for everybody, which also makes the fight against it one for everybody. However, it is again important to emphasize that the interpretation of feminism has different manifestations and definitions depending on the region and nation, which is why this simple definition by Hooks is so fitting. Feminism

differs according to political possibilities as well as material resources. At the same time „[...] we need also to take account of the internationalization of feminist ideas, requiring us to think of it as a movement that crosses borders in constant interaction with other actors, contexts and political ideas, creating what Keck and Sikkink (1998 [2014]) refer to as a ‘boomerang effect’¹⁰” (Molyneux et al. 2021: 3). How feminism as a movement has changed over time or ways to classify its development are questions that historians and activists are intensely concerned with. When analysing feminism, the metaphor of waves is often used to periodize the development of feminism, but this is increasingly falling into disrepute. There is much dispute about what characteristics define a wave, whether it is ideological change, political characteristics or practices, and how overlaps can be classified. In addition, there is the justified critique of the exclusion of the Global South and socialist states, as well as the ignorance of the role of race in feminist organisations in the Global North and their influence on the movements (ibid.). In postcolonial societies, complex problems arise for feminists, who are constantly reminded that their discourse is shaped by the mindset of Western colonial powers, requiring all political and social movements in the region to look not only inward to society, but also outward to the Global North, which demonstrates both resources and limitations. While liberal feminism shaped from the Global North provides a strong narrative about the various waves of feminism, it ignores women's rights activism or feminism in other parts of the world, although these diverge due to changes in the collective of both activists and the social context (Stephan 2014: 1). Stephan therefore offers a new concept using Lebanon as an example, which Qazzaz transposes to Palestine, when she divides the feminist movement into waves and questions the emergence of a new wave (Qazzaz 2021: 436): Qazzaz, a Palestinian feminist researcher and activist, uses the metaphor of waves herself to describe the different historical stages of feminists movements:

„The first, in the 1920s, emerged with the elite women inspired, among other things, by anti-colonialism movements. The second wave covered several decades, influenced by socialism and with a strong concern for peace and security. The beginning of the third wave coincided with the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, and has been the opportunity for activists to reach out to all women in order to increase their political awareness, and institutionalise their organisations.” (Qazzaz 2021: 436)

The question of whether a fourth wave followed and what characterizes this wave will be discussed intensively in the course of this thesis. This example indicates that rather than stop

¹⁰ „When channels between the state and its domestic actors are blocked, the boomerang pattern of influence characteristic of transnational networks may occur: domestic NGOs bypass their state and directly search out international allies to try to bring pressure on their states from outside. This is most obviously the case in human rights campaigns.” Keck/Sikkink 2014: 12.

using the wave model as a concept, it is important to consider the criticisms associated with this reduction in the complexity of the topic. As a well-known concept, it offers the possibility of „[...] signalling the importance of temporality and history in considering social movements” (Molyneux et al. 2021: 4). It enables patterns to be identified, invites a comparative analysis of the different periods, and leads to important analytical and political debates on the history of feminism as a social movement (ibid.).

Particularly relevant to this paper is that each wave of feminism is often characterized by young people who are at the forefront of new social movements, bringing new ideas and interests with them and often seeing themselves as a new generation. This is the reason research is including more and more generational studies. According to Molyneux et al. „[...] such an approach draws attention to the materiality and the temporality of historical experience, embodied in a collective endeavour, with its specific challenges, optics, opportunities, political strategies and discursive configurations” (Molyneux et al. 2021: 4). The generational approach takes into account that over history there were certain moments in which young people were essential in bringing political and social change. According to the approach a generation spans between 20 and 30 years, in which the people share certain general values. However, a generation is not a homogeneous group, but is divided into different subgroups with different identities and forms of self-expression in pop cultural trends. The unifying element of this age group is that they share certain historical and cultural experiences that are the foundation of their specific identity. This would be particularly noticeable in generations experiencing certain crises such as conflicts, financial crises, or major health crises. These are decisive experiences that shape a particular age group and mark a generation. While certain experiences are locally bound, there would be an increasing internationalization of generations that shape youth culture in particular through the expansion of the global communication system (Molyneux et al. 2021: 4-5). This influence of new generations, which bring new ideas through their respective imprint, would be quite recognisable through the changes in feminism, both globally and regionally. However, feminism, if strongly generalised, would always have represented certain goals, according to Molyneux et. al:

„From its earliest appearance as a movement, feminism has challenged illiberal and unequal socio-legal norms and the informal rules that undermine women’s autonomy and place limits on their opportunities. Most feminists share a desire for gender justice and equality and work in some way to bring this about.” (Molyneux et al. 2021: 5)

Because of the differences in time and place, the movement cannot be called one movement, but many activists prefer the plural 'feminisms' in order to avoid ignoring these differences

and to prevent the appearance of a homogenous movement (Molyneux et al. 2021: 6). Keeping all the criticism in mind, Qazzaz and Molyneux et al. thus put forward a relevant thesis, namely that there is a new wave of feminism that is characterized by a young generation of feminists who bring with them new ideas, concepts and forms of resistance.

Women in Conflict – Representation and Resistance

Keeping this in mind and understanding the shaping of feminism and activism in a historical context with distinctive political and cultural imprints, the importance of conflict needs to be briefly addressed in the Palestinian context. Feminist perspectives have been dealing with the issue of conflict and its effects on women for many years. Over time, there has been a number of theories that seem to have one thing in common, namely their criticism that traditional approaches have ignored gender as an important issue. Conflicts have a different impact on women than men, which can only be explained by a gender perspective which makes clear that the difference between men and women as a social construct which is a product of unequal power relations over history. In order to analyse conflicts holistically, the gender dimension must therefore be included, which also opens the door to include other categories of oppression and exclusion. However, it is only since the 1990s that feminist academic approaches have been available that provide information on the gendered perspective of conflicts (Villellas Ariño 2010: 15-18).

The connection between women and conflict is a controversial issue and has changed over time in context with external circumstances. The focus of classical feminist approaches has been on women's bodies and their vulnerability regarding gender-based sexual violence as a war strategy and women's active role in the participation of war defending their communities. The first focus reflects the traditional perception of gender roles, whereas men are represented as active subjects and aggressors while women take on the passive, vulnerable role exposed to risks like rape and aggression. Within classical feminist theories, women and men are ascribed stereotypical classical characteristics, from which it is derived that the man as the aggressor is associated with war and the woman as the vulnerable with peace¹¹. New feminist theories question this concept and the idea of gender roles and division of labour according to

¹¹ For further elaboration read Elshtain, Jean B. (1995) "Women and War". In her work, Jean Elshtain explores how the narratives of "Just Warrior" for men and "Beautiful Soul" for women shape and uphold traditional gender roles, while emphasizing that these gender roles are products of industrialization and bourgeois nation-state ideology and simultaneously highlighting the tensions arising from actual instances of female bellicosity.

gender¹². Instead, they focus on women's agency, which means that the participation of women in conflicts is seen as part of their empowerment (Begikhani et al. 2018: 7-8). Most recent feminist theories understand gender within an oppressive construct of several inequality categories, studying the intersections and looking at the different political and social positions based on these categories¹³ and thus consider gender, war and peace in the context of power relations (Begikhani et al. 2018: 9). This thesis follows the most recent feminist theories, focussing on the exclusion of women in public life and their activism as an expression of political participation, while analysing what it means to identify or being read as a Palestinian woman, by understanding gender as one of several intersecting categories of inequality.

This approach is even more significant in the context of the representation of women in the Middle East, since "[t]here is a general tendency to portray Middle Eastern women as inferior and imprisoned by their traditions and cultures in comparison to Western women who are often depicted as possessing a superior and liberated status" (Khodary et al. 2020: 206). There are various explanations for this phenomenon. Firstly, during the nineteenth century, there was limited visibility of literature portraying Middle Eastern women differently (Afshar 2001 [1993]). Secondly, authors like Meriwether and Tucker (1999) criticize the instrumentalization of this portrayal of Middle Eastern women as oppressed by a misogynistic religion to guide and justify Western policies and actions. They refer to the concept of Orientalism¹⁴ and the Western construction of 'the Orient', which involves a self-aggrandized construction defining itself as 'the Other', ultimately legitimizing control and exploitation¹⁵ (Khodary et al. 2020: 206). In contrast, texts written by postcolonial feminist writers are increasingly challenging this narrative and the complex relationship that develops between oppression and conflict on the one hand and women's agency, activism, and resistance on the other (ibid.). Simona Sharoni particularly highlights, that in the context of armed conflict or post-conflict, the orientalist lens must be removed in order to understand the creative ways of

¹² Read Pateman, Carol (1983) "Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy". This critique forms the central focus of Carol Pateman's article, highlighting that the feminist movement over the last two centuries, revolves around the examination of the division between the private and public spheres within liberal theory and practice, and some feminists considering this division a universal, enduring aspect of human existence across time and cultures.

¹³ Since as Judith Butler already wrote "[g]ender is always intertwined with other political and analytical categories (Butler, 1990)" (Begikhani et al. 2018: 9). For further information read Butler, J. (1990) "Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity".

¹⁴ For further information read Edward Said's (1978) renowned and widely cited work "Orientalism".

¹⁵ In her article "The New (and Old) Classics of Counterinsurgency" Laleh Khalili (2010) elaborates on how this inaccurate perspective of Middle Eastern women was utilized to justify the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

coping and resisting against various forms of domination and oppression, which goes far beyond the perception of women as victims of conflict (Sharoni 2001: 85-86). In order to generate an analytical understanding of women's resistance in Palestine according to their specific reality of life, it is necessary to explore the context of oppression, violence and marginalization of women in this conflict in order to analyse their (in)existing responses. Yasmin Khodary summarizes this phenomenon shortly:

„According to Foucault and Gordon 1980, resistance occurs when power is exercised for the sake of oppressing and repressing others. Resistance, hence, is inseparable from oppression by the powerful or dominant group which possesses more power and access to resources. Different forms and degrees of oppression are capable of triggering a wide of array and degrees of resistance” (Khodary et al. 2020: 207).

She briefly reproduces some forms of resistance responding to oppression, referring to Véronique Dudouet's concept of a continuum of responses to oppression. Because responses to oppression are dynamic, they are transformative, they can be combined or adapted depending on the time, place, and type of oppression. Dudouet divides this continuum into two main analytical categories, conventional and non-conventional/contentious actions. The former includes negotiations, diplomacy, and party politics; the latter includes everything outside political channels (Khodary et al. 2020: 207). However, it is important not to draw false causalities or make assumptions about how women in conflict should behave, as this is highly dependent on personal context and socio-cultural and security conditions (ibid.: 208).

Intersectional Feminist Activism

Forms of resistance responding to oppression vary as forms of oppression vary and the discourse of intersectionality highlights this circumstance. The notion of intersecting categories is a relatively new concept that has been an important step toward the inclusion of all women in the discourse on global politics. It was coined by women of colour as a harsh critique of liberal feminism, which by claiming equality between men and women, ignored the fact that in a system of capitalist white supremacy, there are complex positions of subordination depending on various dimensions of oppression, like race and class (Wibben 2016: 7-8). In the words of Kimberlé Crenshaw, who introduced the term 'intersectionality':

„The failure of feminism to interrogate race means that the resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of color, and the failure of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy means that anti-racism will frequently reproduce the subordination of women.” (Crenshaw 1991: 1252)

Therefore, the struggle for equality should recognise that it must be fought on different levels, within different dimensions, or as Audre Lorde, one of the most famous radical feminists, sums it up:

„There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives. Malcolm knew this. Martin Luther King, Jr. knew this. Our struggles are particular, but we are not alone.” (Audre Lorde (1982) “Learning from the 60s” in Lorde 2007: 38)

Intersectional feminism gains the perspective that the struggle against oppression can be a unifying element by seeing that oppression does not only happen on one dimension. There are a number of authors who address the meaning of intersectionality, questioning the homogeneous identity of categories and focusing instead on subject positions differentially situated in relation to multiple axes of power (Crenshaw 1991; Hooks 2015; Yuval-Davis 2006). A person is not only read as a woman, but a person is always constructed in other social divisions like social class, sexuality, nationality, geography, etc. Taking individual dimensions such as nationality or womanhood as specific systems of oppression and understanding them as additive elements would not do justice to both a multi-layered person and the many layered blanket of oppression¹⁶ (Yuval-Davis 2006: 193- 197). Thus, as the two quotes at the beginning of the chapter can be interpreted, a struggle that focuses on only one form of oppression would stabilise other systems of oppression through ignorance, and recognising this, other elements could become unifying elements that could lead to unifying struggles.

One of the most important authors and most powerful voices of intersectional feminism is Angela Davis, who explains feminism in a lecture at the university of Chicago in May 2013, as follows:

“Feminism involves so much more than gender equality. And it involves so much more than gender. Feminism must involve a consciousness of capitalism (I mean, the feminism that I relate to. And there are multiple feminisms, right?). It has to involve a consciousness of capitalism, and racism, and colonialism, and postcolonialities, and ability, and more genders than we can even imagine, and more sexualities than we ever thought we could name. Feminism has helped us not only to recognize a range of connections among discourses and institutions and identities and ideologies that we often tend to consider separately. But it has also helped us to develop epistemological and organizing strategies that take us beyond the category’s ‘women’ and ‘gender’. And feminist methodologies impel us to explore

¹⁶ The image of crossroads and traffic as developed by Crenshaw (2001) plays an important role: „Intersectionality is what occurs when a woman from a minority group . . . tries to navigate the main crossing in the city . . . The main highway is ‘racism road’. One cross street can be Colonialism, then Patriarchy Street . . . She has to deal not only with one form of oppression but with all forms, those named as road signs, which link together to make a double, a triple, multiple, a many layered blanket of oppression.” Yuval-Davis 2006:196 citing Kimberlé Crenshaw 2001 at WCAR meeting as presented by Indira Patel to a day seminar in London organized by WILPF UK, November 2001.

connections that are not always apparent. And they drive us to inhabit contradictions and discover what is productive in those contradictions. Feminism insists on methods of thought and action that urge us to think things together that appear to be separate, and to de-segregate things that appear to naturally belong together.” (Angela Davis at The Chicago Center for Contemporary Theory 2013: 48:40 – 50:20).

The feminism described here is a simultaneous critique of liberal middle class white feminism which, while not directly hostile to minorities, is so entrenched in the system that it allows institutions that manifest inequality to hide it through diversity management. The feminism needed and demanded by intersectional feminism is one that directly challenges racism, imperialism, capitalism and systems that have perpetuated structures of inequality for years, thereby signifying freedom rather than focusing on gender equality as a buzzword (Ahmed/Irani 2020: 42-45).

The fact that this integrated approach is not yet embedded in society is shown by the fact that systems of oppression and the struggle against them are still understood in a separate and not multilayered way. As Angela Davis explains in an interview with Jadaliyya, feminists are often faced with the demand to decide whether they are concerned with women's rights or the struggle for black rights or class struggle, but this separation is precisely the wrong question. Rather, it is about these interconnected systems:

„We are still faced with the challenge of understanding the complex ways race, class, gender, sexuality, nation and ability are intertwined—but also how we move beyond these categories to understand the interrelationships of ideas and processes that seem to be separate and unrelated. Insisting on the connections between struggles and racism in the United States and struggles against the Israeli repression of Palestinians, in this sense, is a feminist process.” (Angela Davis in Barat 2014)

The task for feminists who follow the intersectional approach is therefore to continue the process of understanding the interrelationships of ideas and processes and to grasp and utilize the interconnectedness of struggles.

Transnational Feminist Solidarity

The question of the interconnectedness of struggles has been taken up repeatedly over the years and the concept of transnational feminist solidarity has been introduced. The discussion about transnational feminisms is not new; especially in the 1990s, there were many theoretical debates about it. Be it the materialist position, such as Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty's (1997) perspective rooted in Black Feminist Theory, which links questions of positionality with those of material justice, or the post-structuralist position of Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994), which calls for a decentring of categories and (spatial) concepts, or the strictly institutionalist approach of Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink (2014)

which focuses on processes of organisation and negotiation (Ruppert et al. 2020: 21). For this thesis, which combines critical feminist, postcolonial and intersectional perspectives, Mohanty's commitment „[...] both politically and personally, to build a non-colonising feminist solidarity across borders [...]” (Mohanty 2003: 503) is relevant and her position guiding for the analysis.

The first relevant question that needs to be clarified is what is meant by solidarity, Mohanty writes:

„I define solidarity in terms of mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities. Rather than assuming an enforced commonality of oppression, the practice of solidarity foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together. Diversity and difference are central values here—to be acknowledged and respected, not erased in the building of alliances.” (Mohanty 2003: 7)

Following this understanding of feminist solidarity is, in her opinion, the best way to cross borders and decolonise knowledge (ibid.). In order to build bridges, it would be important to acknowledge the conflicts, differences and fears that lie in the borders among feminists and to recognise their real manifestation through nations, race, class. The task of feminism would be to strive for social justice across these boundaries and divisions. Because, according to Mohanty, that is what it is all about:

„[...] to speak of feminism without silences and exclusions in order to draw attention to the tension between the simultaneous plurality and narrowness of borders and the emancipatory potential of crossing through, with, and over these borders in our everyday lives.” (Mohanty 2003: 2)

Intersectional Feminist Activism and Transnational Solidarity in Contemporary Palestine

Keeping in mind the issue of the marginalisation of women's voices in politics and the web of oppression that Palestinian women face, it seems like the concepts of intersectional feminism and transnational solidarity could be valuable for the analysis. Before analysis though, this sub-chapter presents research already conducted in this context and addresses the Palestinian feminists face in the international context, which could prevent transnational solidarity and interconnectivity to other feminist struggles worldwide.

The concept of intersectionality was incorporated into feminist discourse in Palestine only in the last decade. Fidaa al Zaanin argues that, in her view, a new generation of young feminist¹⁷

¹⁷ This paper follows the categorization of Qazzaz, which distinguishes between: „‘Younger’ and ‘older’ feminist as a term refers to age differences as well as some characteristics mainly related to the use of modern technology. ‘Younger’ refers to

activists have emerged who understand the oppression of women in the context of intersectionality and are pursuing new forms of feminist activism such as integrating the importance of feminist knowledge in the Arabic language. Their activism would both transcend across geographic fragmentations and borders, as well as make space for diversity in the experiences of Palestinian women marked by origin, identity, and forms of oppression, and thus their differing needs (Al Zaanin 2021a: 4). As an example, she refers to the Tal3at initiative, whose slogan ‘No Free Homeland Without Free Women’ has received both local attention in progressive circles and Arab feminist groups, as well as international attention from various feminist collectives around the world. Tal3at is one of the initiatives that revitalized the discourse of feminism and moved many women to reflect on its concept and practice in Palestine. Their aim is to place a progressive feminist agenda at the centre of national liberation politics, which is directed at all areas of life. For them, the combination of scholarship, activist practice, and personal experience, is a fundamental component of feminist activism. These young feminists are aware of the power relations and interactions that go hand in hand with neoliberal and colonial structures and denounce them, as well as exchanging knowledge with feminist theories and international feminist struggles through social media (Al Zaanin 2021b: 2, 2021a: 3-6).

This approach, which has an explicit transnational anti-colonial and intersectional solidarity framework and additionally is a radical critique on conventional notions of self-determination based on a state-framed human rights discourse and international law paradigms, seems to be increasingly pursued in the contemporary struggle for Palestinian liberation. Welchman, Zambelli und Salih examine in their article the Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM) which describes itself as „[...] a transnational, independent, grassroots movement of young Palestinians in Palestine and in exile worldwide as a result of the ongoing Zionist colonization and occupation of our homeland” (Palestinian Youth Movement 2022), whereby the approach shows both the transnational focus and the decolonial perspective (Welchman et al. 2021: 349). Their analysis also reveals the new focus that would attempt „[...] building and sustaining the ‘intersectionality of movements’ (Davis, 2016, p.27) in the struggle against the colonial and imperial ‘matrix of domination’ (Hill Collins, 2000)” (Welchman et al. 2021: 350). This means that they would try to form cross-movements by recognizing that there is

feminists below 35 years old, who identify with the fourth wave of feminism and use cyber space as a main field of activism. Older refers to activists older than 35 years old and who used NGOs and organisations as their main field of activism. Those activists mainly identify with the third wave of feminism.” Qazzaz 2021: 443-444.

not only national oppression, but also oppression on different levels such as race, class and gender. The common struggle against colonial power structures and intersectional experiences of oppression allows the group to form alliances with other social movements around the world that are engaged in an anti-colonial struggle (ibid.: 355).

But these expressions of solidarity are by no means self-evident in the case of Palestine, on the contrary, Palestinian feminists fought for recognition from both Global North and Global South feminists, as the texts by Elia (2015) and Naber et al. (2016) clearly illustrate. Probably one of the most famous examples of this is Betty Friedan's statement to Nawal el Saadawi, at the UN International Conference on Women, Nairobi, 1985, when she stated: „Please do not bring up Palestine in your speech. This is a women's conference, not a political conference” (Elia 2015: 141). This silencing process takes place at different levels and by different actors, whether at international conferences, through the media, or in public lectures. Repeatedly, Palestinian feminists would face headwinds just when they expect an audience that wants to hear their voice. As soon as the narrative of the Arab women suffering under patriarchy would not be served, but they would denounce the oppressive mechanisms of Israel's settler-colonial regime, they would be censored by the audience by having to listen to accusations such as antisemitism (Elia 2015: 141-143; Naber et al. 2016: 97-99). But Palestinians face opposition not only from liberal Western feminists, but also from feminist communities of colour, which for a long time didn't understand the Palestinian struggle as a decolonial one (Elia 2017: 46-47). According to Elia, this negative special status of historical exclusion would be known by the acronym PEP syndrome: Progressive Except for Palestine. Meaning that people are committed to progressive causes as human rights, movements for justice or as in this example feminist issue, except when it comes to Palestine¹⁸. This syndrome has only diminished in recent years, allowing for the formation of alliances with other feminist activists in solidarity with decolonial struggles, but remains a controversial issue (Elia 2017: 47). After all, speaking about power and violence, it is important not to overlook the fact that systems of power occur on a wide variety of levels and between a range of different groups and actors. Indeed, solidarity that transcends national boundaries is a cornerstone of intersectional feminism and a central concern of feminist work in this millennium, but the dialogue across very real national borders and across many power relations showing the interconnectedness of

¹⁸ The PEP syndrome is a quite controversial concept, for more a short overview of the controversy read these articles: Zarook, Ruqaiyah (2021): „Jean-Paul Sartre and the Problem of Being „Progressive Except for Palestine“. Current Affairs. And Mendes, Philip (2021): „The jibe 'Progressive except for Palestine (PEP)' is a cynical political strategy to exclude moderate progressives from debates on resolving the Israeli-Palestine conflict“. Fathom Journal.

women's lives is challenging and caution is in order not to replicate the existing power relations. The aforementioned silencing process and the suppression of voices, but also of knowledge and experiences, is an essential point of analysis from a critical feminist perspective (Wibben 2016: 8-10).

According to Islah Jad, Mohanty's approach of transnational solidarity would have been the way to reverse the international influence that has led to the marginalisation of women's movements in Palestine. Jad writes to Mohanty that:

„[...] it gave us a huge energy for reclaiming our 'militant feminism' and it helped a great deal to discredit the 'peace negotiation' camp that worked hard with donor funding to 'bring Israeli and Palestinian women' to build peace, assuming that feminism per se is capable to do wonders. Your work brought us back the spirit of resistance as the basis for solidarity.” (Mohanty 2013: 985 citing an E-mail exchange between Islah Jad and the author from November 6, 2011)

Considering the importance of solidarity and the transfer of ideas like anti-imperialist feminism, as per Mohanty's concept of solidarity built on principles of mutual support and responsibility, it becomes evident that these ideas can be applied effectively in the Palestinian context. Particularly important would be, as just mentioned, „[...] the decolonization of knowledge, the politics of differences and commonality, and historicizing and specifying women's struggles and identities in the context of anti-colonial, anti-capitalist struggles [...]” (Mohanty 2013: 985). According to Mohanty, as Jad acknowledges, her concept of transnational solidarity can be understood as a critical intervention against hegemonic feminist formations, political and academic work as well, which is why it can be disruptive and thus create a discursive space for decolonising feminist hegemonies by making the most marginalized women's communities of women heard by giving them epistemic privileges (ibid.). Jad explains that at the moment of depoliticization and professionalisation of grassroots feminist struggles, the concept of transnational solidarity provided an important counterpoint to the narrative of the only possibility of peace negotiations. Mohanty, according to Jad, managed to stop the marginalisation of homegrown feminism in that:

„Your work was a cornerstone that helped us to defend our own notion of „militant feminism” that seeks to liberate the country and women in the same time. I think it deconstructed once and for all the notion of „sisterhood is global”. [Instead] you founded „sisterhood” on the basis of solidarity and resistance to empire and to global capital, [reversing a tendency to see] contemporary feminism as „apolitical” and narrowly focused on „women” in isolation from their context.“ (Mohanty 2013: 984-985)

This combination of transnational solidarity and the strengthening of homegrown feminism through feminist grassroots movements seems to pave the way for Jad to turn away from NGO-ization and towards the combination of nationalism and feminist liberation struggle. At

the same time, it seems like there is recognition for the real Palestinian feminist struggle and even famous feminists as Angela Davis are raising awareness by stating: „The important issues in the Palestinian struggle for freedom and self-determination are minimized and rendered invisible by those who try to equate Palestinian resistance to Israeli apartheid with terrorism” (Davis 2016: 8). However, to what extent intersectionality and transnational solidarity play a role for young feminists in contemporary Palestine is a question that will be discussed in more detail in the analysis and is one of the central questions of this thesis.

2.2.2 Intersecting Systems of Oppression

Given this background, the following chapter will explain the intersecting of different forms of oppression and the experiences that accompany them. As Nira Yuval-Davis writes, it is particularly important for an intersectional analysis: „[...] how the differential situatedness of different social agents constructs the ways they affect and are affected by different social, economic and political projects” (Yuval-Davis 2011: 3), whereby Yuval-Davis, unlike many feminists, especially black feminists, who focus on ethnic minorities women, does not prioritize one category of social difference, but understands it in a mutually constitutive way. How many facets of social difference and axes of power need to be analysed varies by historical location and momentum and must include empirical reality as well as political and ontological aspects.

As Yuval-Davis would put it, there are social divisions, which are formed through intersectional systems of oppression, that have „[...]organizational, intersubjective, experiential and representational forms, and this affects the ways we theorize them as well as the ways we theorize the connections between the different levels” (Yuval-Davis 2006: 198). One could recognize them in specific institutions, in the law, in socioeconomic structures, within families, and in many other expressions. But generally speaking, it is about specific expressions of power between people acting in their own roles. This is precisely why, when analysing systems of oppression, one must look not only at the experiences of discrimination that accompany daily life and shape specific identities, but also at how these experiences shape peoples thinking about themselves, their own society, and the ideas they have about others. Therefore, social differences show up in various forms, through representation in images or symbols, in texts and ideologies, and in legislation (ibid.). The impact of these affects people differently even when they are within the same boundaries of belonging. A term Yuval-Davis describes as: „Belonging is about emotional attachment, about feeling ‘at home’” (Yuval-Davis 2011: 4) (ibid.: 3-4). It is important to keep this in mind to understand that structures of oppression are described which have an influence on a group of people, but

individual experiences of oppression express themselves in different ways. As mentioned earlier, Khodary et al. summarize the phenomenon of resistance based on Foucault and Gordon (1980) as a response to oppression exercised by a dominant group possessing more power and resources (Khodary et al. 2020: 207). Paulo Freire understands achieving freedom as liberty from the forces of oppression as well. His definition of oppression shall be used for this thesis, in „Pedagogy of the oppressed” Freire defines oppression as follows:

„Any situation in which „A“ objectively exploits „B“ or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression. Such a situation in itself constitutes violence, even when sweetened by false generosity, because it interferes with the individual's ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human. With the establishment of a relationship of oppression, violence has already begun.” (Freire 2014 [1968]: 55)

According to Freire the oppressors’ consciousness desires to „transform everything surrounding it into an object of its domination“ (ibid.: 58). Thereby understanding „Humanity [as] [...] a thing“ (ibid.: 59), which the oppressors „possess [...] as an exclusive right“ (ibid.). However, Freire’s approach, although still very relevant in the field of social justice studies, has been harshly criticised in recent years. Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang (2012) critique Paulo Freire's approach to decolonisation, accusing it of being unclear under Freire’s paradigm who the oppressed are and that „[f]or Freire, there are no Natives, no Settlers, and indeed no history, and the future is simply a rupture from the timeless present“ (Tuck/Yang 2012: 20). Settler colonialism is ignored by Freire and liberation is thus understood by him as a liberation project reminiscent of Plato’s Cave allegory, in which „[...] the thinking man individualistically emerges from the dark cave of ignorance into the light of critical consciousness“ (ibid.). But from a decolonial and critical feminist perspective, settler colonialism must be included, because as Audre Lorde would point out „[...] black feminist thought roots freedom in the darkness of the cave, in that well of feeling and wisdom from which all knowledge is recreated“ (ibid.). This is how Lorde writes:

„These places of possibility within ourselves are dark because they are ancient and hidden; they have survived and grown strong through darkness. Within these deep places, each one of us holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The woman's place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep.” (Lorde 2007 [1984]: 36-37)

The significance of settler colonialism and its intrenchment with knowledge, which is inextricably bound to power in the context of settler colonialism (Sabbagh-Khoury 2022: 44), must therefore be considered in the context of the oppression of Palestinian women. Since, there are „[...] multiple, intersecting webs of oppression that Palestinian women activists face in their everyday organizing” (Nazzal et al. 2023: 1) that need to be taken into account to analyse the opportunities and challenges arising for their activism, it is necessary to introduce

concepts and data to understand the systems of oppression, composed of historical, political and cultural elements and manifested in institutions, laws and norms. In an intersectional framework, this chapter tries to uncover how gender and settler-colonized domination led to a intersecting web of oppression for Palestinian women and especially the particular challenges Palestinian women face according to their the differential situatedness trying [...] to challenge the social structure, within their quasi-state, settler-colonized context” (Nazzal et al. 2023: 3).

Patriarchal Structures: Systems of Oppression within the Palestinian Society

First of all, to understand the meaning of patriarchy, again Hooks offers an easy definition:

„Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence.” (Hooks 2021: 1)

Hooks further refers to John Bradshaw, who describes in the book *Creating Love* (Bradshaw 1994) that patriarchy expresses itself through male domination and power, and structures world religions, school systems, and family systems. Thus, patriarchal thinking would be so ingrained that it would lead to blind obedience and shape the values of cultures. Once again, it is important to emphasize that all people have to submit to these patriarchal structures, which are learned in the family, mostly taught by the mother, and then further indoctrinated in institutions (Hooks 2021: 1-2). It is a phenomenon that continues to structure the world today, although, as mentioned earlier, Orientalist colonial discourse likes to try to dismiss it as a problem of the Arab world so that humanitarian intervention can be justified. Hawari points this out while equally writing:

„Patriarchy in Palestine exists, as it does elsewhere in the world, as a system that upholds male dominance and male hierarchies. It enforces gender binaries and stereotypes in order to preserve the current power structure. While the patriarchy affects everyone, its violent manifestations disproportionately affect women.” (Hawari 2018)

There are different reports that have measured gender inequalities in Palestine in recent years. The summary of the values is intended as a basis for understanding the complex struggle against patriarchy and to reveal the different levels that can be addressed for the subsequent analysis. Most reports focus on political, social, economic and legislative aspects on the one hand, and gender-based violence on the other. Most of the challenges Palestinian women face today are not new to them, the patriarchal context results in a persistence of gender inequality in all aspects of life (Qazzaz 2021: 434-435).

Nazzal et al. (2023) already analysed the „multiple, intersecting layers of oppression that Palestinian women activists encounter, and how [...] these layers manifest themselves

differently in activists' everyday lives" (ibid.: 3). Their findings suggest that patriarchy, social conservatism and cultural norms related to the family are important elements that lead to relatively stable structures linked to rules and resources that are used by actors, organisations and institutions to oppress women activists (ibid. 11). An important finding is that „[w]omen activists occupy distinct positions relative to the patriarchy" (ibid. 13). As Hooks mentioned patriarchy constitutes itself in a political-social system that in every part insists on male dominance and Nazzal et al. confirm that in contemporary Palestine this dominance is expressed in „[...] men's economic, political and religious superiority, subordinating women [...]" (ibid.), which would become apparent in the male control over women activists within the domestic structures (ibid.).

This political superiority would preserve the current power structure by undermining women's political representation and involvement. Especially in the Occupied Territories is the structure of gender inequalities very complex, since the restrictions imposed by the Israeli government and the political division between the Palestinian factions have led to significant changes in established gender relations, toward stronger conservative social norms and behaviours towards women. This results in an ongoing conflict between, on one side, the longstanding aspirations of women's movements for political participation and gender equality and on the other a traditionally male-dominated structure (UN Women – Palestine Country Office 2018: 14).

Furthermore, the issue of gender stereotyping, which means ascribing specific roles, attributes and characteristics only due to the membership of the social group of women or men (Plesko 2014:1), produces further oppression on Palestinian women. As Linda Lindsey (2020) argues negative gender stereotypes that can lead to sexism, social stigmatization, prejudice and discrimination, which according to Nazzal et al. (2023) affected women activists being insulted based on their physical appearance (ibid.: 16). But also concerning men's economic domination gender stereotyping cannot be overstated. First, according to the UN Women Report of 2018, it is striking that in OPT there is a high fertility and unemployment rate among educated women in this region. While more women than men study in percentage terms, they are proportionally more unemployed, and almost a quarter of women aged 20-24 had their first child before the age of 18 (UN Women – Palestine Country Office 2018: 14-15). Of particular concern for this thesis is the high unemployment rate of young Palestinian women, with a high education, which was more than double than of men, and unlike their male counterparts, „[...] high-skilled women are more likely to be unemployed than low-skilled women" (ESCWA 2021: 33) (ibid.: 29-33). The report of the Economic and Social

Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) draws on a qualitative study by Action Against Hunger to explain this, which clearly illustrates gender stereotyping. According to the study, this is due to the fact that men are seen as family breadwinners and are therefore preferred when competing with skilled women. Masculinity would still be linked to the ability to provide for the family, which highlights that conventional gender division of labour is anchored in societal norms, in which women are primary caregivers and men are breadwinners (United Nations 2022: 3; Swan 2018: 15; 21-22). The system upholds the male dominance, in households, and communal structures, which affects the social setting and relationships, especially the gender relations, which are manifested in customs, norms and laws preserving the current power structure of men over women (UN Women – Palestine Country Office 2018: 15).

Laws preserving the current power and dominance of men, are still a huge issue for Palestinian women. As mentioned earlier, there are still challenges in the process of adapting national legislation to international policies such as CEDAW and other legal reforms that aim to protect and support women and include them in the decision-making process. As a result, the legal framework for GBV still does not meet international standards (ESCWA 2021: 3-4), highly affecting the safety of Palestinian women. First of all, GBV is defined by the United Nations as:

„Gender-based violence is considered to be any harmful act directed against individuals or groups of individuals on the basis of their gender. It may include sexual violence, domestic violence, trafficking, forced/early marriage and harmful traditional practices.” (OHCHR 2014)

Palestinian women and girls in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel face several forms of Gender-Based Violence. This is a long-standing problem, which got even more severe in recent years, resulting in both increased domestic violence and decreasing access to justice, protection and security services (ESCWA 2021: 3). Especially from a feminist perspective, it is important to illuminate that many authors understand GBV as a sign of Western culture and Israeli occupation, which support patriarchy and thereby reinforce the oppression of women. According to Bilal Hamamra, who is referring to Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2009), domestic violence is linked to the continuous oppression system, in which men are ashamed to be subordinate, so they express violence towards the women around them (Hamamra 2022: 1-3). Fayeze Mahamid explains GBV as a result „[...] of unequal and unjust social conditions, with gender relations intersecting with other dimensions like race, class, culture, and the economy, as expressed through the concept of structural violence” (Mahamid et al. 2022: 2).

GBV would therefore be intensified for Palestinian women due to the intersecting systems of oppression. These unjust social conditions can be explained by a web of oppression that leads to GBV on the one hand and stabilizes the oppressive system on the other, making it impossible to prosecute the violence. First of all, Palestinian legislative system is dysfunctional, since there are not only different authorities ruling over the fragmented Palestinian population, but at the same time different codes of criminal legislation¹⁹, the political division between Fatah and Hamas and its territorial and political separation between the West Bank and Gaza, further paralyzes the legal system, which complicates implementing laws that eliminate discrimination against women, like CEDAW. Thus, victims of violence face two major challenges, on the one hand, discriminatory laws that perpetuate such violence and discrimination like the guardianship clause, lack of access to divorce and abortion and many other issues, and the widespread lack of institutionalized policies to prevent this violence or provide assistance to victims and make perpetrators accountable for their actions (Baldi 2018; Hamamra 2022). This means that the right of self-determination for Palestinian women is heavily influenced by the legal system, which itself reinforces the idea of women's subordination (Baldi 2018: 14). In addition to the discriminatory structure of the legal system, the external and internalized norms of society, represents a barrier for women who are victims of violence. Thus, the violence of men is disguised by justifying the reputation of women and honour of the family, many women are silenced (Hamamra 2022: 3). However, if not for fear of retribution or difficulty accessing support, internalized stigma leads survivors of GBV not to seek support due to shame and fear of experiences of discrimination and loss of status (Mahamid et al. 2022: 6).

But from an intersectional perspective, it is not only about how the patriarchal system stabilises itself through norms, institutions, and domination axes, but, and this is particularly relevant in the context of the oppression of Palestinian women, how these oppression systems affect people differently even when they are within the same boundaries of belonging, as Yuval-Davis puts it. This differential impact would have immense implications for Palestinian women's activism, according to Nazzari et al. (2023) reflecting on:

„[...] the diverse nature of Palestinian women's social class, political affiliations and settler-colonized experiences. In the Palestinian context, the challenges wrought by powerful structures of patriarchy and the complex, overlapping fields of political interests and class-

¹⁹ Jordanian Penal Code No. 16 of 1960 (in force in the West Bank); the Mandate Penal Code No. 74 of 1936 (in force in the Gaza Strip); and the Criminal Procedure Law No. 3 of 2001 (applicable throughout the country).” Al-Botmeh 2012: 27.

based division, stymie the ability of some women to confront gender inequalities.” (Nazzari et al. 2023: 25)

In this context, it is important to illustrate the divisions in Palestinian society that lead to different experiences of oppression for women, and because of the political and administrative divisions, it also leads to the concealment of certain groups, such as the consideration of Palestinian women living in Israel. Khodary et al. state that „[t]he intersectionality and interplay between gender and other identities also intensified the impact wars and conflict had on particular women groups, such as the female Arab population in Israel [...]” (Khodary et al. 2020: 204). And Hanna Herzog follows a feminist and postcolonial discourse using the concept of ‘every day experience’ to show „[...] the complex array of these women’s experiences in racialised and gendered social sites, as well as within the class, religious, and ethnic contexts in the subordinated group and its relations with the dominant Jewish group” (Herzog 2006: 53). Herzog argues that for Palestinian women in Israel, this complex interplay of structures results in a space of continuous ambivalence through which they must navigate and challenge dominant social definitions in order to negotiate their own identity (ibid.). In this context, the multidimensionality of identity, which emerge and sometimes conflict with each other, reflect the multidimensionality of the different intersectional axes. „The encounter with the Jewish society in the researched, gendered and racialised social sites generated simultaneous closeness and distance, co-operation and confrontation, resemblance and resentment towards both the Jewish society and the Palestinian-Arab society” (Herzog 2006: 77). This would give rise to strategies that are expressed in a dichotomy between an independent attitude toward both Jewish and Palestinian society and, at the same time, a sense of national identification, which is linked to the need to preserve the gendered culture of origin (ibid.: 77-78). Nehami Baum also addresses this discursive and conflictual process of finding identity and dealing with the interplay of trying to blend into Jewish Israeli society on the one hand and being excluded and discriminated against on the other. Baum’s argument here is that this sense of disjointedness leads to a „[...] process of self empowerment that [is] marked first by resistance and protest and then by the simultaneous embracing of and reflection on their identity as Palestinian citizens of Israel” (Baum 2010: 135). A discourse that must be taken up and illuminated within the analysis, since the oppression of an identity and the question of belonging, will be taken up again in the next chapter, and is vital for the analysis of women’s self-determination in Palestine.

Concerning gender-based violence and understanding the intersectionality of oppression for Palestinian women, the issue of gendered racism must be included. Nadera Shalhoub-

Kevorkian's article on the reaction of police officers to violence against Palestinian women in Israel closes the research gap, that refers to countries that are simultaneously at peace and war, and the special situation that part of the citizenry is suspected of supporting the 'enemy'.

„Israel is one such country. Its history and political circumstances render it a unique context for analysing the policing of violence against the female members of its major indigenous/minority Arab/Palestinian community. Israel's unique geopolitical situation provides an additional dimension for intersectionality analysis (Crenshaw, 1991) of violence against minority/indigenous women.” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2007: 172)

Shalhoub-Kevorkian shows that the culturalization of violence under such circumstances offers, on the one hand, a possibility for the normalization of violence, and on the other, and more importantly, a depoliticization of relations between the two communities in conflict, which further weakens the protection of abused women, as police accountability to this part of the population is neutralized (ibid.: 171-172). The results of Shalhoub-Kevorkian's study demonstrate that „[...] police used ethnic identity, cultural stereotypes, and political beliefs to shape their responses to abuses inflicted upon women” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2007: 178), whereby the women were homogenized and standardized by the ideas of the police officers of the 'others', with their own ideas of national security, religion and culture, as well as gender playing a supporting role (ibid.). The issue is not with the actions of an individual, but with the values and stereotypes that prevail in a state institution. Policing in a conflict area is very problematic because values and classifications run along national and cultural lines. The objectivity of those in power is compromised, especially when, as in this study, violence is perpetrated against the 'other' woman, who belongs to the indigenous, ethnic and political minority of Palestinian Arabs in Israel and is thus understood as a national threat to the state (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2007: 180-190). Thus, Shalhoub-Kevorkian concludes that: „Policing, as we have learned, may be easily mobilised to serve political, patriarchal and socio-cultural hegemonic interests and can be transformed into a vehicle that further abuses and endangers women” (ibid.: 190).

Hegemonic interests stabilise a system that establishes a system of economic, legal and socio-political oppression of Palestinian women. Once again, Palestinian women cannot be understood as a homogeneous group, but are confronted with different daily experiences of oppression due to their identities (gender, race, class, etc.) and their social and geographical location in Palestine. How this situatedness of young Palestinian activists affects their experiences of oppression as Palestinian women and activists remains to be analysed. It seems like patriarchy, as Hooks (2021) writes, finds its expression in different systems of dominance that are geared to perpetuate this system of power through expressions of violence and

discrimination, but to what extent these patriarchal, and racist hierarchical power structures constrain feminist activism, and to what extent it is shaped by them, remains to be analysed.

Israeli Occupation and Settler-Colonial Structures

While the last chapter highlighted the extent to which institutional, political, and structural systems of power lead to Palestinian women's experiences of oppression as a result of the ongoing conflict and occupation of Palestine and its relation to patriarchal structures, this chapter will focus specifically on the influence of everyday life experiences of oppression by the Israeli occupation.

On March 22, 2022, Michael Lynk, the UN Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, states that:

„Apartheid²⁰ is not, sadly, a phenomenon confined to the history books on southern Africa. [...] There is today in the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967 a deeply discriminatory dual legal and political system that privileges the 700,000 Israeli Jewish settlers living in the 300 illegal Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank [...] Living in the same geographic space, but separated by walls, checkpoints, roads and an entrenched military presence, are more than three million Palestinians, who are without rights, living under an oppressive rule of institutional discrimination [...].” (OHCHR 2022)

Lynk explains that the dual legal and political system clearly privileges the Israeli Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Jerusalem, while the Palestinians living in the same geographic space are separated by walls, checkpoints and a dense military presence and live under oppressive rule. The political regime „[...] intentionally and clearly prioritizes fundamental political, legal and social rights to one group over another within the same geographic unit on the basis of one's racial-national-ethnic identity [which] satisfies the international legal definition of apartheid” (OHCHR 2022). While apartheid is considered a crime against humanity, Israel would establish an illegal Israeli sovereignty through an active settlement policy that increasingly squeezes Palestinians into small and fragmented geographical spaces, combined with inhumane acts such as extra-judicial killings, torture and home demolitions as a part of the occupation (ibid.). This kind of oppression of a population already living there by another group largely settled there can be explained by the concept of settler colonialism.

As mentioned earlier, from a decolonial perspective, especially in the analysis of the oppression of Palestinian women, history must be included in the context of oppression and

²⁰ The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines: „'The crime of apartheid' means inhumane acts [...], committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime” The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court 2002: Article 7, 2.(h).

not ignored. Paulo Freire wrote his book „Pedagogy of the Oppressed“ (1968) partly in response to Frantz Fanon’s book „Wretched of the Earth“ (1961), but the two differ in a crucial point in regard to decolonisation. As Tuck and Yang (2012) criticise, Freire’s liberation project seems to be reminiscent of Plato’s Cave allegory through its historical detachment, while Fanon, in contrast, „[...] positioned the work of liberation in the particularities of colonization, in the specific structural and interpersonal categories of Native and settler“ (Tuck/ Yang 2012: 20). For Fanon, „[...] colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state [...]“ (Fanon 2002 [1961]: 61). The project that must be realised, as the BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights (2021) proposed, in order to achieve Palestinian self-determination of the entire Palestinian people (ibid. 15), means, according to Fanon, to „[...] change the order of the world, [which] is, obviously, a program of complete disorder [...] Decolonization, as we know, is a historical process: that is to say that it cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible nor clear to itself except in the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give it historical form and content“ (Fanon 2002 [1961]: 36).

If decolonisation is understood as an alternative to the conflict-management-focused peace process, the perspective of settler colonialism must be included in the analysis (Todorova 2020: 322). Tuck and Yang (2012) describe settler colonialism as „different from other forms of colonialism in that settlers come with the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain“ (Tuck/ Yang 2012: 5). Land becomes the most valuable and contested issue, on the one hand because it becomes the settler’s home, and on the other hand because it disrupts the indigenous connection to the land, which „[...] represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence. This violence is not temporally contained in the arrival of the settler but is reasserted each day of occupation“ (ibid.). As Patrick Wolfe emphasises in his essay „Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native“, which is often cited as the principal work representing the concept and theory of settler colonialism, settler colonialism is as structure and not an isolated event (Wolfe 2006: 399). The basic idea represented here is that it is necessary for settlers to build a home by destroying the habitat of indigenous people and claiming the land for themselves. This means breaking the relationship to the land, but this relationship to land would comprise epistemologies that would be destroyed in the process. Over time and through law and policy, indigenous life and claims to land under the settler regime would be destroyed, as it would be in the way of the settlers (Tuck/Yang 2012: 6).

In the course of history, many authors have therefore described the establishment of the Israeli state as a manifestation of ongoing European colonialism (Abdo/Yuval-Davis 1995; Khalidi 1997) and above all, the subsequent active settlement policy combined with the increasing occupation of land and destruction of Palestinian living space as settler colonialism (Sayegh [1965] 2012). The authors Abdo and Yuval-Davis (1995) once again combine the decolonial and feminist perspectives by pointing out that the settler project in Palestine/ Israel cannot be adequately analysed without incorporating the „[...] complex articulations and interrelationships of gender, class and ethnic divisions which underlie it“ (Abdo/Yuval-Davis 1995: 292). Gender, political and social relations in Palestine/Israel would have been both affected and affecting both the Zionist settler project and the resistance to it (ibid.: 316). And even today, women would be those most affected by the settlement policy, both in the economic sphere through higher unemployment and higher risk of poverty, and in everyday life. The ESCWA report explains that the freedom of movement, which is already restricted by a multi-layered system of physical barriers, as well as administrative requirements such as permits to enter zones forbidden to Palestinians, is further restricted by gender-based violence such as harassment at checkpoints by Israeli soldiers, as girls are not allowed to go to school by their families (ESCWA 2021: 22).

Additionally, Baldi explains the psychological violence women face at home due to fear of night raids and settler violence, sleeping with their cloth on afraid of being seen without them by soldiers and living every day with the fear that their livelihood might be destroyed by settler violence (Baldi 2018: 5). Fear of settler violence, house demolitions and displacement are particularly high in Area C areas and East Jerusalem. Due to infrastructure and housing projects of the Israelis, the space in the areas for the Palestinian population is becoming even smaller and the danger that houses and vital infrastructure will be destroyed, or the Palestinian residents are being evicted is constantly increasing. The restrictive discriminatory system makes it almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain construction permits, but without the authorization of those the Israeli authorities consider themselves authorized to destroy the constructions. This creates a psychological pressure that often has a greater impact on women, especially in rural areas where women are often at home due to the patriarchal division of labour, as they are the ones who are on the scene when Israeli officers come to them with demolition orders or actually demolish their home (ESCWA 2021: 22-24). However, the extent to which Palestinian women are oppressed in the context of settler colonialism on the one hand, and on the other hand are affecting this project through resistance, only becomes clear by talking to young feminist Palestinians.

Tuck and Yang (2012) address with the issue of destroying epistemologies an important element of settler colonialism (ibid.: 5), which is an important element in the analysis of the intersecting system of oppression, namely epistemic violence. Epistemic violence is at the core of the othering process of marginalised groups and there is extensive work on this phenomenon, such as by Gayatri Spivak, who explains in detail how the knowledge of subalterns is disregarded and not heard because „[...] he, more often she, is silenced, misinterpreted or essentialized (Spivak, 2009²¹). Even when she speaks, Spivak argued, the subaltern's voice is not heard because her ways of knowing are considered flawed compared to more credible epistemologies” (Trottier et al. 2020: 116). In many asymmetric conflicts, a strategy would therefore entail that a dominant group that possesses more symbolic power²² uses this power through epistemic violence (Bunch 2015: 11). Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2010) uses the epistemic violence approach and analyses in her article „Palestinian Women and the Politics of Invisibility: Towards a Feminist Methodology” how the „[...] unheard, silenced voices, understand the meaning of the loss of home and the loss of access to education and the right to education” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2010: 3) by looking at the knowledge and experience of indigenous women in conflict zones (ibid.). The paper will follow this example because exposing the silencing and invisibles global impact of the „[...] deprivation of education, of security, of certainty and predictability, and the everydayness of violence, via critical feminist methodology, is a feminist and a political act” (ibid. 16-17) and helps to understand the importance of women's personal resilience, within their family, in their community and the place they live in.

The author Claudia Brunner (2020) provides a good basis for clarifying the relevance of knowledge within the global relations of inequality, power and domination. Brunner follows the understanding of post- and decolonial as well as feminist authors in order to problematize the dimension of knowledge as its own part of violence and to focus on the connection between knowledge, domination and violence in colonial modernity. She criticizes that in most debates within peace and conflict studies and international relations, knowledge is given little importance or, on the basis of a narrow understanding of violence (direct and physical use of force), is even understood as a way of overcoming violence or as an antithesis to

²¹ For further elaboration on the topic: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2009): Four women's texts and a critique of imperialism. In: Robyn Warhol-Down and Diane Price Herndl (eds) *Feminisms Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. pp.365–389.

²² Pierre Bourdieu introduced the concept of symbolic power, meaning the power to dominate, that would help create and maintain social hierarchies in modern societies. More information on this can be found in „Symbolic Power, Politics, and Intellectuals” (2013) by David Swartz

violence. This separation between violence and knowledge questions the concept of epistemic violence (Brunner 2020: 9-13). Violence must be understood not as an event but as a process and a relationship that can not only destroy an order but also establish and manifest it. This is especially important when writing about phenomena of violence in the context of the still persisting imperial order of domination with its global relations of inequality (ibid.: 22-24). If questions such as the transnational solidarity of feminists are thus at issue, but also individual experiences of silencing and oppressing voices, epistemic violence must be included into the analysis.

Foucault already understood the meaning and connection of power and knowledge and therefore uses the term power/knowledge to show that power is constituted by accepted forms of knowledge and the establishment of truth:

„Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.” (Foucault/Gordon 1980: 131).

The oppression of certain truths by dominant voices establishing a hegemonic narrative is an important analytical concept in the discourse of feminism in Palestine. As Foucault writes: „Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault 1978: 93) and it is in this sense neither an agency nor a structure rather a permanent and self-reproducing process (ibid.) and therefore must be analysed in all the multi-layered dimensions. Understanding epistemic violence as one of these relevant forms of oppression against Palestinian feminist activists could thus bridge the gap between the control of narratives to establish knowledge, the importance of recognising marginalised voices in the international context of solidarity among feminists and the destruction of epistemologies as a settler-colonial project. The extent to which epistemic violence is problematic for young feminists and shapes their activism, as well as how knowledge can be used as a form of decolonisation, is to be questioned in the analysis.

This chapter extensively explores the intricate web of intersecting oppressions faced by Palestinian women, emphasizing the profound influence of both patriarchal and settler-colonial structures on their lives. It underscores the necessity of adopting an intersectional perspective to fully grasp the multifaceted challenges and experiences of Palestinian women activists, as oppression is a complex interplay of various forms of discrimination and power

dynamics within specific historical and empirical contexts Building upon Paulo Freire's definition of oppression, this chapter conceptualizes oppression as any situation in which one group objectively exploits or obstructs the self-affirmation of another. However, acknowledging recent critiques of Freire's paradigm, particularly regarding its exclusion of settler colonialism, becomes essential in the context of understanding the intricate systems of oppression faced by Palestinian women activists. To gain a comprehensive understanding of these systems, it is essential to discern how dominance is manifested within these oppressive structures and to explore the interconnectedness of patriarchal and settler-colonial systems within the Palestinian context.

The first part of this chapter therefore examines the multifaceted manifestations of patriarchal structures across various dimensions of Palestinian society. These structures, deeply ingrained in institutions, legal frameworks, socioeconomic systems, and familial dynamics, perpetuate male dominance. Moreover, they extend their influence beyond these structural aspects, permeating symbols, texts, ideologies, and legislation, thereby shaping self-perception, societal perspectives, and perceptions of others. The pervasive nature of these deeply entrenched patriarchal systems becomes evident in the daily lives of Palestinian women, limiting their agency and impeding progress toward gender equality. Furthermore, it is imperative to acknowledge that these patriarchal systems do not operate in isolation. Rather, they intricately intersect with various other forms of discrimination, creating a complex and interrelated network of oppression. The second part of the chapter sheds light on the impact of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian women's daily lives. It highlights the existence of a discriminatory dual legal and political system that privileges Israeli and Jewish settlers in Palestine/Israel, a system characterized as apartheid by UN Special Rapporteur Michael Lynk. Viewing this through a decolonial perspective, history becomes integral to understanding oppression. Settler colonialism, characterized by the intent to establish a new home on indigenous land, forms a structural foundation for understanding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This approach views land as the most valuable and contested issue, both as a settler's home and as a disruption to the indigenous connection to the land, resulting in the destruction of indigenous epistemologies (Tuck/Yang 2012). The establishment of the Israeli state and its subsequent settlement policies are examined in the context of ongoing European colonialism, further emphasized by the intersection of gender, class, and ethnic divisions within the settler project. The authors Abdo and Yuval-Davis (1995) further emphasize the intertwining of gender, class, and ethnic divisions within the settler project, asserting that it cannot be

comprehensively analysed without considering these complex articulations and interrelationships. Women, in particular, bear a significant burden of oppression within this context, experiencing economic hardships, gender-based violence, psychological trauma, and epistemic violence through settler colonialism (Abdo/Yuval-Davis 1995: 292; 316; ESCWA 2021: 22). In the realm of feminist activism in Palestine, the recognition of epistemic violence is becoming increasingly crucial as a critical lens to comprehend the multifaceted challenges posed by intersecting systems of oppression. The intersecting system of oppression is particularly evident in the case of GBV, often not reported, prosecuted, or taken seriously, leading to the silencing of victims. Gender-based violence (GBV), deeply rooted in patriarchal structures, is heightened by settler-colonial structures. This interaction not only intensifies GBV but also results in epistemic violence, illustrated by the systematic neglect of the voices of Palestinian women, while at the same time there is an additional exacerbation due to the dysfunctional legislative framework in OPT and the dual legislative system in Israel.

In conclusion, this chapter highlights how patriarchal structures intersect with settler-colonial systems, resulting in unique forms of oppression for Palestinian women. It emphasizes the need for an intersectional perspective to comprehend the complexities of their experiences. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for grasping the challenges faced by young feminist activists as they navigate these intersecting systems of oppression in their pursuit of self-determination. These concepts serve as the foundation for addressing a central question: *To what extent is feminist activism shaped by intersecting systems of oppression for women in contemporary Palestine?* This chapter illustrates the reasons behind feminist demands to recognize and challenge the overlapping colonial, patriarchal, and racist hierarchical power structures as manifestations of women's oppression (Hawari 2019a). Analysing these intersections and illustrating the different forms of feminist interventions against this web of oppression should ultimately answer the central question: *To what extent can Palestinian feminists in the context of intersectional systems of oppression be central to the struggle for Palestinian self-determination?*

3. Methods and Techniques

The data that constitute the basis of this thesis were collected using an exploratory qualitative research design and are based on in-depth interviews with young female activists. The focus is on the knowledge and words of those whose voices are not heard due to silencing, misinterpretation and essentialisation, as Spivak would put it. An interpretivist and feminist research approach has been guiding the understanding of the motives, feelings, narratives and heterogeneous everyday life experiences related to intersecting systems of oppression and the resistance to it from the perspective of the activists. Since the research corpus is still largely unexplored, a Grounded Theory methodology will be used, which enables the reconstruction of actors' action processes and aims at generating theories through the collection and analysis of qualitative data (Keller 2011: 67-71; 79-90; 98-99; 105). The natural data of oral narrative semi-structured interviews are analysed using a thematic analysis technique first to capture subjective situational interpretations and motives for action, as well as to reconstruct their latent structures of meaning and collectively constituted horizons of meaning. Second, these structural units are then used to new insights using codes and categorisations, to break down the qualitative data and summarise its main findings about the discourse and practice of feminist activism in Palestine.

3.1 Feminist Methodology: Challenges and Possibilities of Doing Feminist Research in Palestine

In the field of International Relations, especially the research in a zone of conflict, feminist interventions still pose many challenges as feminist research claims to reshape the nature of knowledge production itself. This implies that the entire approach to conducting and presenting research needs to align with feminist principles. The issue is that there is still little agreement on which methods or techniques should be applied that are „[...] inherently suitable to the process of generating knowledge that is subjective, reflexive, and consenting to the notion of women as knowers [...]” (Jacoby 2006: 153). As Tami Jacoby accurately describes, it is particularly difficult to translate experiences into knowledge which were acquired through fieldwork in a location that „[...] is far away from home, both figuratively and geographically” (ibid.). Therefore, methodological choices must be made in advance and during the process of research, to allow the researcher a brief insight into the lives, experiences and, above all, the knowledge of those who are willing to share it. However, with this focus of the thesis's attention on the individual experiences and opinions of activists, new challenges to and questions for the research arise once again. „If experience is something tangible, sensory, and direct, how can it be articulated theoretically? [...] In what circumstance is experience politicized? [...] How can the experience of one person be

interpreted and analysed by someone who derives from a different culture and context?” (Jacoby 2006: 154). Additionally, by interpreting and presenting these experiences, there is a shift of power to the researcher to decide what is valuable knowledge, violating an ethical principle of feminist ethnography. However, in feminist research the agency lies on both the researcher and the researched and consists of a negotiation process that entails all steps of the research. Especially the *how* is central in the accumulation and employment of knowledge for research purposes and „[...] it is the role of the researcher actively to interpret, to the best of his or her ability, the intentions of those whose words are transcribed and the ultimate meaning those words represent in the worldview of the researcher” (ibid.: 171). Despite all precautions and reflection, there are still limitations, such as time or financial constraints, which make it difficult to fully meet the ethical requirement. Jacoby proposes to keep an open mind in fieldwork due to different approaches and interpretations to difficult subjects that have various meanings for each individual. The concept can only be grasped through the individual perspectives on the topic, which is why research must be understood as a constant process of negotiation between subjects with agency, involving continuous adjustments to the initial questions and hypotheses (ibid.: 171-172). Instead of striving for truth, researchers and researched together elaborate a subjectivity that shows a snapshot of the prevailing reality. Together, these different perspectives can then create a body of knowledge that can be meaningful to a larger group. This claim has informed this work and the researcher has attempted to weave a theoretical construct from the experiences and knowledge of the activists that does them justice. In addition to language barriers, financial and time constraints, there are cultural differences in Palestine as well as restrictions on movement that pose certain challenges to research. Challenges that were largely overcome thanks to new technologies and the openness and flexibility of all those involved. As Jacoby states, the process is fraught with some challenges, but „[...] a lot can be learned from the trenches, so to speak. Awareness of the mutually constitutive relationship of experience, interpretation, and representation in fieldwork is necessary for doing feminist IR” (Jacoby 2006: 173).

All statements, therefore, should always be understood in the context of the political and historical contextuality at that time and do not pretend to be an absolute truth, especially remembering the last chapter about the establishment of truth constituted by power/knowledge, is something this thesis does not aim at but foregrounds the questioning of other knowledge systems. Likewise, the researcher is not neutral nor objective in the context, and as a white European researcher, subjective perceptions will inevitably flow into the interpretation. As a feminist researcher, however, the claim remains to clarify this

positionality, because as criticized, otherwise the status quo is supported, and the researcher would be complicit with the powerful and dominant hegemonic systems of knowledge. Feminist research aims to foreground the voices and experiences of marginalized groups, offering the power to resist patriarchal conceptualizations and to speak for themselves, which is why feminist research prefers qualitative approaches as methods (McHugh 2020: 204, 209). Aiming for a way to conduct an open and nonexploitative way of research and focusing on the voices and experiences of the activists, it is necessary to reflect on one's own experiences and share how these influenced the choice of topic and question (ibid.: 212). This reflexivity was a fundamental part of this thesis and an integral part of each interview. As a German student, I learned a certain narrative of the conflict and because of historical responsibility, any questioning and criticism of Israel might be misconstrued as anti-Semitism. Only through dialogue with Palestinians, both in Palestine and in neighbouring countries, a process of questioning my own knowledge was initiated. An experience that becomes clear in the exchange with the activists and throughout every step of the research process. As Herzog (2006) also confronts the question, I agree with her statement that through the theories and approaches used, the aim is to fulfil the trust placed in me:

„Do I have the right to study and ‘speak for’ the Palestinian women subalterns, to use Spivak’s (1985) terms? This epistemological question is beyond the scope of this paper. However, I hope that by revealing the heterogeneity of women’s experiences and the various modes of interim spaces and multi-dimensional, shifting identities they create for themselves, I at least tried to follow Spivak’s demand to avoid an ethnocentric extension of Western logos that totalise and essentialise the Other.” (Herzog 2006: 78)

Following a feminist methodology, a mixed-method approach was chosen, based on guided narrative interviews, which are a valued method for feminist researchers to get insights to the lived experiences. Since the focus of this thesis is to get an in-depth understanding of being a feminist activist in contemporary Palestine, a smaller sample is sufficient to describe meanings and processes. The method of guided interviews is used as a supportive structuring tool not as a limitation. Broad, general questions derived from the theoretical corpus are setting the general structure of every interview while otherwise the flow of speech of the interviewees is in the foreground. In order to obtain a wide variety of opinions, open, narrative-generating questions were asked as far as possible, which is why a semi-structured and easily modifiable list of key questions had to be drafted in advance. The narrative design in the end was to be left to the interviewee, so that she could present her point of view and thus provide an insight into her experiences and opinions (Nohl 2017: 16- 19; McHugh 2020: 219).

Additionally, the grounded theory allows as a research style to derive a theory from the data in a controlled and rule-guided manner. The appealing aspect of Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) is that it is first and foremost a research style and secondly an evaluation method that can be easily applied. The GTM offers a set of flexible analytical guidelines, which enables to really focus on data collection, and by successive levels of data analysis its aiming to build inductive middle-range theories. Although a variety of different understandings of GTM, based on the theory of Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser, have developed over time, there are distinctive features common to all of them, which will be used as a guideline in this thesis. The research process takes place in cycles, so that data collection and evaluation are not separated from each other but are intertwined. This means that findings within the interviews affect the following interviews, like a constant learning and adaptation process of the researcher. Furthermore, a specific coding process was used, making it possible to condense the empirical data material and to collect relevant new data for the development of the theory (Mey/ Mruck 2011:12; 15). This reflexive research cycle, which is characterised by constant adjustments and changes in the applied collection and interpretation procedures, ends when no additional knowledge can be gained through further variation of the research (Lueger 2000: 53). In other words, the sampling ends when a theoretical saturation has been reached, at which point new data can no longer provide a substantial increase in knowledge for the theory generated (Mey/ Mruck 2011: 15).

By providing tools to analyse processes the GTM holds much potential for research on social justice issues (Charmaz 2004: 508). The use of grounded theory as a research style, can provide insight into activists' subjective feelings and perceptions of reality. The term grounded theory refers equally to process and outcome, to problem-solving research and to emerging theories through constant feedback effects. The researcher is thus always confronted with the reflexive task that problems are determined within the research, starting already with the first interview, which then require a solution, only to encounter once again the limits of the latter, which need adaptation once again. The result is a pragmatic problem-solving cycle, which should ultimately contribute to an improved understanding of the practice for both the researcher and the actors in the field of action under investigation, so that in the end potentially an object-related theory with practical explanatory potential emerges (Strübing 2014: 458-460).

3.2 Research Procedure: Sampling, Narrative Interviews, Coding and Category-Building

Exploratory Reading and Sampling Strategies

The exploratory reading forms the beginning of every research project. Since in the course of my studies, literature was already collected that addressed feminist studies in the context of conflict, as well as social movements and activism in the MENA region, it was possible to build on this foundation. Through cross-referencing and references in the articles, the area of interest could be increasingly clustered to formulate an initial research question and specify the research interest. At the same time, in addition to the academic interest, the personal was relevant to the choice of this research. Through personal contacts, the Palestinian struggle and feminist activism on social media was a daily companion for the researcher as a feminist who lived and worked in the MENA region. Through these social channels, calls were shared to take to the streets in solidarity with Palestinian women and to demonstrate against misogyny, so-called honour killings and the Israeli occupation. In 2019, initiated by the Tal3at initiative, more and more feminist groups expressed their solidarity over the following years and declared Palestine as a feminist issue. Voices were raised that through the implementation of feminism as an ideology and practice within the national liberation movement of contemporary Palestine, the long awaited self-determination for the people could be realised (Abouesh 2019) and I wanted to get to the bottom of that.

From the beginning, which was in October 2021, rather subconsciously, a feedback process of reading theories, working out the theoretical and conceptual framework, and collecting data emerged as GTM expected. Still, the focus was on collecting data, which would be gathered through guided narrative interviews. Initially focusing on the Tal3at initiative, the focus shifted from a movement to personal perspectives of activists spread across the West Bank and Israel. It was a deliberate and politically informed decision to exclude activists from Gaza. This choice was made due to the unique and complex political dynamics in Gaza, which demanded a distinct set of considerations. The living conditions in Gaza are distinctly different from those in the West Bank and Israel, requiring the incorporation of diverse literature and a more comprehensive exploration of daily experiences and the political landscape. In order to maintain the focus on the primary research objectives and recognizing the formidable logistical and security challenges associated with engaging activists from Gaza, it was strategically decided to limit the scope of the study to the West Bank and Israel. This approach allowed for a more in-depth exploration of the selected regions, while still

providing valuable insights into the broader context. Initially, personal contacts were used via social media. To establish contact with the interviewees and to use already existing contacts and knowledge, the gatekeeper principle and the snowball principle were applied. The network of people active in the field under investigation, so-called gatekeeper, was used to obtain contacts by getting passed on new contacts or by getting introduced to other possible interviews by those already interviewed. These key individuals either directly approached contacts who could be helpful or spread the word within their social networks and groups. Although this poses the problem of selective choice, which is already given by language barriers, the hurdle of mistrust of a foreign researcher can be overcome (Koschmieder et al. 2021: 12-15). In the course of the research, it became clear that without personal contact, the inquiries were always rejected or ignored, and only through personal conversations and recommendations contact was successfully established. The following statement from the Tal3at movement makes this distrust particularly clear:

„Since the inception of Tal3at the movement has been inundated with requests for interviews as objects of studies. After a lot of deliberation, the movement decided not to engage with international researchers. We would instead focus on building the movement and our understanding and practice of radical feminism. I am aware that many things have been written about Tal3at regardless but I think this only confirms our initial fears about international researchers and the way they would portray the movement.” (Personal email record)

After recommendations and through personal contact of the interviewees, a contact with Tal3at was eventually established, but during the research the focus had shifted to the diversity of understandings of feminist resistance and personal perspectives and experiences of women with diverse bibliographic backgrounds. Due to this shift in the focus of research, the sampling strategy also had to be altered, which affects the degree of saturation. As mentioned earlier, GTM theory building ends when theoretical saturation is reached, and no additional knowledge can be generated through new data (Mey/ Mruck 2011: 15). Despite this, in my research on the diversity of understandings of feminist resistance and the plurality of experiences of Palestinian women, data saturation could not be reached. It became evident that the gathered evidence would not yield repetitive information, but rather, conducting additional interviews could have led to further insights. However, recognizing the limitations of a master's thesis project, I opted for a concise two-month timeframe for interviews. Nevertheless, this period proved sufficient to collect substantial data, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

Guidelines for the Interviews and Data Collection

In total, 10 interviews were conducted, all of them part of the same generation, as the researcher as well, ranging in age between 22 and 34 years, they all belong to the 'young' feminists, which means younger than 35 years old, growing up after the Oslo Accords and in the age of cyber space as a form of activism (Qazzaz 2021: 443-444). All participants not only exhibit diverse political activities but also possess distinct everyday life experiences. This diversity extends to their social positioning and respective living conditions, ranging from upper-middle-class Ashkenazi Jewish or Christian activists who work and travel abroad to individuals from lower-middle-class backgrounds or residents of heavily oppressed areas like the South Hebron region and the Firing Zones²³. At the core of this thesis lies a central inquiry dedicated to understanding the intricate connections that transcend enforced borders. To explore this question, interviews were conducted with activists from various regions within Palestine/Israel. The primary aim is to shed light on how the diverse life experiences within these regions exert influence upon and shape the multifaceted expressions of feminism. Because of the significant discrepancies in daily experiences arising from diverse socio-economic conditions and geographical contexts, these experiences play a pivotal role in shaping the intricate landscape of feminisms. Therefore, conducting interviews with both Palestinian women from the occupied territories and activists from Israel was crucial. These interviews brought forth a range of life experiences and different viewpoints. Especially concerning the issue of Palestinian self-determination, the involvement of Palestinian women and Ashkenazi Jews residing in Israel held great importance. Their varied backgrounds and perspectives significantly enriched the research, making it more comprehensive and fostering a nuanced analysis. All of the interviewees were highly educated, all went to university and had at least an undergraduate degree, and two of them were married. Interviews were conducted both in person and online and were conducted in English. In one interview the support of one of the other interviewees working in the same organisation in translating some of the questions and answers, was necessary for a fluent conversation, which means that there won't be any direct quotes from these parts of the interview. Due to limited financial and time resources, as well as the restriction of freedom of movement, the online format offered more flexibility in conducting the interviews; at the same time, the face-to-face exchange, in the

²³ The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) explains that “[a]ccess to 20% of the West Bank is prohibited by Israeli military order on the grounds that the area is designated as a ‘firing zone’ for military training [by the Israeli Defense Forces], or as a border buffer zone.” See for more information OCHA (2023) “Fact Sheet: Movement and Access in the West Bank, August 2023”.

activists' hometown, has been associated with a more intense exchange, usually lasting several hours (Janghorban et al. 2014: 1-2). All of the interviews were conducted in the time period ranging from the 11th of May till the 28th of June in 2022. They were recorded with the consent of the interviewees and with the possibility to say something off-the-record and lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, on average one hour. Furthermore, the anonymisation of the interview material, especially for confidential and highly sensitive statements was very important to ensure that there are no negative consequences for the interviewees. In advance, it was therefore agreed with the interviewees that the data material would be anonymised by using pseudonyms²⁴, the records would be deleted after doing the transcript and if requested could be proof-read by the activists themselves. The assurance of confidentiality of the data is indispensable because it is the researcher's duty to anticipate and, if possible, avoid potential breaches of trust. Based on Medjedovic's and Witzel's classification, the researcher has opted for de facto anonymization, which is not expected to identify the person by changing personal details. Since some parameters such as age, origin and education are relevant for the analysis, they will appear in only slightly modified formats, but the identification of the persons should still be possible only with great effort. Of course, there is a residual risk in the anonymisation, which is why the access to the thesis can be additionally complicated as a safety measure (Bogner et al. 2014: 89-90). The research only focused on women, people that are not only read as women, but identify themselves as women as well. The idea is to openly listen to these voices which are suppressed by intersecting systems of violence, and situating their knowledge within this thesis, as well as becoming answerable for what is written in it (Wibben 2016: 11). At the same time this focus on young women who are part of the Palestinian feminist movement, allows to obtain different gendered positions on the issue and thus gaining a better understanding of the differences and similarities among these women, which are linked to the intersecting and accumulated impact of the conflict on their roles, experiences, and attitudes (Aharoni 2016: 206). For this at first broad questions were asked, especially the introductory question to make the conversation flow, most of the topics were raised by the interview partners themselves and the different topics were covered by first the conversation, and if not follow-up questions at the end (Lueger 2000: 193-194). The semi-structure, with certain topics to be covered, had room for flexibility to dive deeper into the topics relevant to the activists' experiences and perspectives. All of the interviews covered, albeit with different characteristics: their upbringing and family background, motives and

²⁴ Some of the interviewees have chosen to keep their own name, others have selected a different name for themselves.

forms of activism and their constraints, as well as different forms of oppression they face in their every life and unequal power relations restricting their lives and activism. Furthermore, long discussions about the meaning and understanding of narratives, feminism and self-determination evolved during the conversations.

Coding and Category-Building

For the analytical procedure, coding played a vital role first for the rough, later the fine analysis of the data, being structured by a GTM into categories in the end. The data analysis is carried out systematically along different coding procedures, in which the data material is successively abstracted and condensed and the constant comparison between empirical data, generated codes and categories and their adaptation is essential to enable a processual research process (Glaser/Strauss 2010: 5-7). To enable a systematic coding and evaluation process, the program MAXQDA was used, which allows the transcription of the interviews, the coding of the sequences, making comments and memos, and the categorization of the material all in one program. After transcribing the interviews, which was carried out hand in hand with conducting further interviews, during the first readings comments and memos were written in order to already record the first reflections. For the interpretative-analytical fine analysis, as grounded theory would call it ‘codes’ are developed, i.e. abstract categories that name different phenomena through three steps: open, axial and selective coding (Keller 2011: 102-105). These three steps are not necessarily clearly distinguishable from each other in the process of research; however, research begins with open coding and ends with selective coding. In open coding, the text or data material is divided into individual sense units and categorized into terms of codes. Particularly significant, unclear or introductory passages are analysed in more detail (Hug/Poscheschnik 2015: 155-156). „The codes are active, immediate, and short. They focus on defining action, explicating implicit assumptions, and seeing processes” (Charmaz 2004: 517), these short codes need to be easy to handle to build the foundation. Since afterwards, in the next step of analysis, the codes are bundled into categories that seem particularly relevant to the research question. The resulting categories are again coded, but now at a higher level of abstraction. The result of open coding is a list of codes and categories that structure the data material (Hug/Poscheschnik 2015: 155-156) (see Appendix: Table 1). „Grounded theory is a comparative method in which the researcher compares data with data, data with categories, and category with category” (Charmaz 2004: 517). Since there were considerable periods of time between the interviews conducted, the opportunity arose to compare the codes with each other, to adapt the following interviews

focusing on certain elements, and to be more selective in the coding of the data material. This means that axial coding could already be integrated within the process. In axial coding, the categories obtained from open coding are differentiated and refined. Here, those categories are selected whose follow-up seems most promising. These act as axial categories, which are connected to as many suitable passages from the text as possible. Furthermore, the relationships between the categories and subcategories are worked out. Axial coding thus attempts to relate the codes found to each other to identify the causes and contextual conditions of a phenomenon. Based on the elaborated rough structure, which still possessed a multitude of over- and sub-codes, the codes and categories obtained from the open coding could be sorted out and connected to each other. Especially by identifying the relationships of the codes to each other, the essential overlaps of the data material became clear (see Appendix: Figure 1). Selective coding then goes one step further and continues axial coding at a higher level of abstraction. The goal in grounded theory is to work out a so-called core category around which all other categories can be grouped. The result of this step is a central category, which represents the centre of theory building (Hug/Poscheschnik 2015: 156). In the course of the analysis, it became evident that the development of a core category within this work was not possible and not productive. Instead, eight coding families or categories emerged from the conversations with the interviewees, which revealed both differences and overlaps in the activists' interpretations, referring to different elements of the topic: Narratives, Identity, Systems of Oppression, Activism and Feminist Resistance, Feminism(s) in Palestine, Exchange to Overcome Segregation, Question of Solidarity, Vision for the future.

The intense coding practice with several cycles of re-evaluation and consolidation of the data material, first helped to understand my own assumptions based on the literature review and personal experiences and knowledge, secondly it visualised the assumptions and knowledge of the activists (Charmaz 2004: 519). In order to connect these assumptions and to meet the main feminist goal of this thesis, which is to focus on the knowledge and words of those who are otherwise silenced, the analysis chapters are divided according to the central questions of the thesis, to which categories of data analysis are assigned as an answer and always one or two quotes from the activists are given as an introductory answer, which briefly summarise the assumptions on the question. The research process, which core are the knowledge of an activist community that is „marginalized and subjugated” (Abdelnour/Abu Moghli 2021: 18) requires reflexivity, which will be illustrated by the visualisation of the research process at the end. The knowledge that is to be reflected within the work has emerged through a feminist

methodology from an exchange process between researcher and research partners and shall thus also be displayed, because the „collective understanding of the Palestinian cultural context, power and inequities was key to ‘analyzing the systematic interconnections of institutionalized processes of racism, sexism, nationalism, and class exploitation in the colonial project of Israeli occupation’ (Mohanty, 2013: 968)” (Nazzal et al. 2023: 11). Grounded theory strategies, according to Charmaz (2004) „[...] result in putting ideas and perspective to empirical tests [and] [...] can show how inequalities are played out at interactional and organizational levels” (ibid.: 512). Using these strategies should therefore help to analyse the motives, feelings, narratives and heterogeneous everyday life experiences related to intersecting systems of oppression and the resistance to it from the perspective of young female activists in Palestine in their struggle for self-determination.

4. Discussion and Analysis

The discussion will first present the aggregated data material based on the categories and then interpret it in relation to the literature review and contextualise it in terms of political, cultural and social realities in contemporary Palestine. It is divided into three chapters, first to analyse how feminist activism is shaped by intersecting systems of oppression for women in contemporary Palestine, second, to analyse the forms of feminist intervention and understanding of feminism(s) of the young Palestinian activists, and third, analysing their approach to and understanding of self-determination. Categories established by the coding of the data material are used to answer these relevant questions to conclude in the answering of the central question of feminists' contribution to Palestinian self-determination.

4.1 Intersecting Systems of Oppression and the Conflict of Narratives

As elaborated in the literature review, the intersecting of different forms of oppression and the experiences that accompany these forms are defined by the differential situatedness of different social agents that construct the ways of affecting and being affected by different social, economic and political projects (Yuval-Davis 2011: 3). The different systems of oppression constructed by power and dominance of one group over another are going to be analysed to understand the extent that feminist activism is shaped by the intersecting systems of oppression for women in contemporary Palestine.

4.1.1 Narratives and Identity

„I think being Palestinian means that you want to fight for your rights, because they are not given to you by birth” (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 151)

The categories of the simultaneously existing, contradictory narratives are analysed together with the category of identity, since, as Pappe (2012) has made clear, the self-attribution, the history and the identity one associates with it are strongly connected with the narrative that goes along with it (Pappe 2012: 8-12). Within the conversations, it became clear that the desire to situate oneself, to differentiate oneself and to categorise oneself plays an important role in the feminists' activism. In most of the introductions, the women stated that they were activists, feminists, and Palestinians, which constructed their activism and identity as a vital part of their self-description (Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 11; Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 2) like „I'm a Palestinian and I'm a feminist” (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 33). The self-description went beyond mentioning the name, age, field of study, job, and place of residence, and linked the activists' own individual stories to history, nationalism, and politics.

„My grandmother from my mom side was 8 years old when the Nakba started, and she went with her family. They had been deported to Amari, in the refugees' camp in Ramallah. [...]

and my other grandmother from my father side is from Gaza. So, the political issue was always my issue. And my struggle!” (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos.15)

“I think being a Palestinian is defending my right being Palestinian. So, I want to be a Palestinian. By having the power to come to emphasize my existence in Palestine. [...] So, in Palestine, Palestinian identity, it indirectly forces me, but I'm honoured to be forced, to actually fight for this identity [...] I'm not privileged and like inherited this identity from my parents and I can do whatever I want. I actually want to work to become a Palestinian. I want to put effort in becoming a good Palestinian citizen. You can be a good Palestinian, like you are a good European citizen by just going to school and having work, but in fact I can be a good citizen by fighting for my land, [...] And by spreading the word of Palestine [...]” (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 151)

Thus, identity is not passed on purely through the country of birth or the nationality of the parents, but through the struggle for the right to own a Palestinian identity, which at the same time includes the historical struggle. As explained by Sa'di and Abu Lughod, the Nakba marks an important crossroads for the Palestinian identity, which becomes visible by the comment of Aya. The history of her family representing a part of the collective memory of Palestinians becomes her personal story and at the same time a political issue (Sa'di/Abu-Lughod 2007: 2-3).

The meaning of identity becomes even more evident talking to women from '48, which are struggling with their identity.

„But the Palestinians inside Israel, specifically, they do have more restrictions than any other from the West Bank or Gaza or from the Arab world. 'Cause we don't believe in anyone in this life. We just know the importance that we live in and that's it. Others do travel. And they interact with Arabs from other countries, but we have our own weird situation. We are Palestinians on one hand, but on the other hand we have the Israeli passport, and many accuse us with being also unfaithful. Betrayers. This is the site from the Arab world and the side from Israel we are terrorists, you know, we're not accepted from the two sides. So, we are so much like how to say this: restricted.” (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 35)

The situation described is one of having a feeling of not belonging to one or the other group and being discriminated by both of these groups. At the same time, it would be difficult for Palestinians in Israel to identify themselves as Palestinians. Haneen said: „They don't know what their origin is. And we talked, we tried to protect our Islam, we tried to protect our Arabism but nothing about Palestine. We didn't know what Palestine is then” (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 4). Haneen highlights that in the discourse there is a clear distinction between who is conceived as Palestinian and who is not. That due to the narrative that describes Palestinians as ‘the other’, they are understood and described as Arabs. This distinction would be necessary to enable coexistence in '48. Haneen says that „[...] in the north because they want to live this euphoria or this illusion that they have sort of coexistence with Arabs, so they want to call us like you are the good Arabs, they are the Palestinians. You don't relate to them” (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 12). This sense of distinction would also make

it difficult for Palestinians in Israel to identify with other Palestinians because their daily experiences would be so different.

„I am really trying to find my voice and it's really hard for a Palestinian inside of Israel, because I think for Palestinians in the West Bank it's easier in this way. They have like the physical or daily obstacles which I can't really find words to explain how hard it is or even to understand it, but they don't really deal with manipulation and gaslighting on a daily basis. Like they don't really go to school or work where someone is saying there was no Nakba.” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 5)

Both activists therefore confirm Herzog's argument that for Palestinian women living in Israel, there is this constant struggle in negotiating their own identity due to challenging dominant social definitions (Herzog 2006: 53). The disorientation, constant struggle and negotiation of women living in Israel that try to embrace their Palestinian identity, confirms Baum's argument that this sense of disjointedness leads to a process of self-empowerment or self-determination, reflecting on their identity as Palestinian citizens of Israel (Baum 2010: 135). In a gendered-racialized place, negotiating their own identity can therefore be understood as a form of feminist activism contributing to Palestinian self-determination. Within their own process of reflecting on their identity, exploring their own history, and sharing with others the narratives surrounding Palestinian identity in Israel, there is an exploration of what Palestinian self-determination still means for this specific group today. Identifying oneself as a Palestinian woman can thus be understood as a form of invoking one's own agency as feminist activist in Palestine. Enass explains that due to the oppression she is so attached to being a woman and a Palestinian. Palestinian women would describe themselves not only as Palestinian, but as a Palestinian woman. “I have to have words for the problem that I'm having both as a feminist and a human being. [...] I think that being called an Israeli, like they choose who you are, and to say that I'm a Palestinian is like to establish in your mind how you see yourself” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 89). Simultaneously learning about and reflecting on certain narratives seems to improve one's understanding of identity and can also be understood as a form of supporting Palestinian self-determination. This becomes evident in talking with Yael, an „Israeli feminist who is in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle” (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 4), who makes it very clear that it is necessary to do a lot of learning and reflecting about history, feminist discourse and the discourses about solidarity and equality, as a Jewish woman being a feminist activist in Israel (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 2; 4). Without personal effort of getting to know the Palestinian history, it would be difficult to learn anything about it. Because education in Israel follows a certain narrative, which its people unquestioningly follow. She speaks of indoctrination and ignorance of the story of the Palestinian people for many Israeli (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 32). Knowing about her own

position in society and reflecting on her own identity, helped her to understand the meaning of solidarity with the Palestinian struggle, but at the same time would restrict her in her ambition to support. It shows again the conflict that comes with someone's identity, and the diverse power relations between the groups living in Palestine/Israel:

„[...] I am very privileged, like in the hierarchy of Israeli society. I'm very privileged and you can see it on me, and you can see it in many ways. It's not just the way I look. It's my English. It's the way, it's my education, it's everything. [...] I know how I'm perceived as Ashkenazi Jewish white woman in the inner Israeli discourse and society and hierarchy, and how the things that I say when I'm like pointing the finger at Israeli society, saying we are responsible for this. It's very hard not to see that it's pointing a finger at the people that are being used obviously to implement this oppression, which are usually not Ashkenazi. The Ashkenazim are sitting up there on the top, sending orders down. Basically, enslaving all of the non-Ashkenazi to do the dirty work of oppressing the Palestinians. [...] it influences the way I talk and it influences the way how I join struggles that our inner Israeli struggles, like feminist struggles or Mizrahim struggles [...] Once you see these things, you can't unsee them [...] and I see what my identity does to people in these rooms. This also has an influence of how I speak to other Israelis about the occupation.” (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 42)

Being aware of her own privilege and position in the society in Israel/Palestine, which is built on Ashkenazi being the dominant and at the same time oppressive group that practices ethnic/racial/class discrimination (Sabbagh-Khoury 2022: 49-55), she has to find her way out of this oppressor role in feminist activism and behave accordingly. For her, coming to terms with her identity and synchronize it with her activism lead to the realisation that her focus should not be on her origin, class and ethnicity, but on the fact that she is a woman:

„[...] I always see myself as a woman before everything [...] Like I mean, first of all, I'm human and I'm a woman and I'm very much Israeli like, even though I know that this is triggering and this is something that's it's hard to accept in my struggle for the people who I'm in solidarity with [...] But I'd say that I feel like a woman most of the time. I feel like a woman, first of all because the influence that this experience has on my life, on my personal day-to-day life is usually of being a woman, because no matter what kind of woman, like I encounter experiences that remind me that I'm a woman every single day.” (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 48)

Through the experience of being a woman, which comes with everyday experiences of oppression and violence, she can fight as a feminist activist together with other women against oppression despite her position of power.

Her privilege has emerged from history, a history that, depending on the narrative, leads to a different constitution and legitimacy of identity, but also means a claim to Palestine/Israel. The narratives presented by the activists that entwine around the identities reflect the different stories that Pappe describes after 1948 (Pappe 2012: 1-5). While the Palestinian story is about occupation of the land, expulsion from the homeland and oppression (Nijim 2022: 1; Sa'di/Abu-Lughod 2007: 2-3), from an Israeli perspective, the story is told as the creation of a safe haven through the re-establishment of the state for people that are traumatized since

generations and have a biblical right for this land without people (Sa'di/Abu-Lughod 2007: 4; Abdo/Yuval-Davis 1995: 291). It is important to note that the issue of identity and the narrative around it is highly emotionalised. While the interviewees mentioned historical and family facts, the focus here is on portraying the feelings associated with them and how they manifest themselves in their own identity.

The importance of history and an identity being formed and influenced by it, becomes particularly clear in the example of the women living in Israel, who are always surrounded by the dominant narrative of 'the other'. Enass describes the manipulation and gaslighting from people around her, and the system in which she is living, that are neglecting the Nakba, that would make her feel inferior.

„Like I think that to be able to talk about my Nakba and to receive recognition, like to be seen, I feel like by this system I am less than a human because I can't really remember who I am. And this is really critical like to be able to know who you are like what happened to your people in order to feel like you are like a full person.” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 93)

Neglecting the Nakba and ignoring Palestinian history, describes Enass as a feeling of oppression and a feeling of being “less than a human” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 5; 93). As Freire would put it, her pursuit of self-affirmation is hindered by a dominant group which interferes with her “ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human” (Freire 2014 [1968]: 55).

Yael explains that this oppression of identity connected to the Palestinian narrative is not necessarily done purposefully. According to Yael, it is a mixture of ignorance, oblivion and indoctrination that many Israelis do not have the Palestinian displacement and the right to return on their minds. Furthermore, she clarifies the instrumentalization of the narrative as a strategy of Zionism and how different it is from her own understanding of the history and the identity of being Israeli. The Zionist project, according to her, is designed in such a way that certain parts of history remain hidden and in order to really understand what the Palestinian feminist struggle is about, time has to be invested in unlearning Zionism (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 8; 18-20; 32). For this, the distinction between Zionism as an ideology that propagates that the land belongs to Israelis and the understanding of Jewish people as Israelis as part of their identity would be indispensable:

„[...] the word Israel has been weaponized by Zionist ideology, but like 150 years, up until 150 years ago, the word Israel was what we were called. If you look in the Bible, we are called Israelites. If you look up the word Israel, you see that we were called the people of Israel, the sons of Israel. This was part of our identity for a long time before Zionism, and the fact that it's now triggering for Palestinians is obviously understandable.” (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 56)

Like Abdo and Yuval-Davis, Yael ties the ideology of Zionism to settler colonialism (Abdo/Yuval-Davis 1995: 291) and criticises that the association with statehood and nationalism as understood by Zionists would only lead to continued conflict. In her opinion "[Zionism] is handing down trauma instead of actually healing from it, that's all, that's everything that's wrong about it in that one sentence" (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 56). The problem of the Zionist and national project would be that the understanding of security is based on the need for this state to exist in order to be a safe haven for the Jewish population suffering from persecution and oppression. This would not address the intergenerational trauma that has been inflicted on both the Jewish population and the Palestinian population (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 50; 56). Many Israelis, according to her, would support the political system because of the intergenerational trauma that runs deep in their families, and she still feels the dehumanization of Germans on herself, knowing that its weaponized and instrumentalized by the Zionists (ibid., Pos. 38). Enass confirms this assessment and argues that due to trauma, to fear and the feeling of insecurity despite of the strength of the army, power would be enforced and accepted (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 73). While Zionist ideology instrumentalises the fear of insecurity to justify the harshness that comes with securing the state (Abdo/Yuval-Davis 1995: 295-298), the parties to the conflict would have to be humanised to break the vicious circle. The question of generation, of coming to terms with histories that shape identities and are passed on from one generation to the next, are thus central elements of the conflict as well as formative for activism if an attempt were to be made to address this.

However, it is not only the conflicting narratives of Zionism and the Nakba as the defining catastrophe that shape the activists, but also the history of women's movements and their example in the struggle for self-determination. Their struggle against oppression is integrated into the activists' family history. The link between the history of occupation and activism by Palestinian women, becomes evident by Lora stating that:

„So first of all, they were there in 1936 against the British mandatory, in Jerusalem and then they were in the Nakba, part of this whole catastrophe that was happening in the whole Palestine, in exile, going away with their children and living these hard times, many of them were pregnant, many of them were with children. Whatever, so this is like special talking about feminism. That was a great role for women moving from one place to another, walking on their feet while pregnant or with children is not easy. And then in '67 what I heard from women here in Palestine, especially in our city [Bethlehem], for example my grandmother, she would be in her house cooking for her family and once like the youth came to their house, they were followed by the soldiers, they would go to their house the women would help them change their cloth, feed them. [...] So, in the first intifada women had almost organized everything that happened inside the cities during the revolution that happened in Palestine that

day. My mom was part of that, my aunt, and my grandmother. They were activists.” (Lora 12.05.2022, Pos. 4)

As Molyneux et al. (2021) describe, Lora reflects on having been brought up with the knowledge and experience of women who were themselves activists. As already mentioned, activism thus becomes a part of her identity, something exemplified by her family. Although they might not have described themselves in the same way, it highlights that different circumstances and generational experiences have led to different forms of activism. As Molyneux et al. (2021) describe the world in which young feminists are now growing up is different from that of their mothers and grandmothers because many of them have fought a battle of self-determination themselves, influencing their daughters to become activists themselves and to continue the struggle that has endured throughout history, although it has changed (Molyneux et al. 2021: 13). The influence of the activism by their mother becomes also evident through the elaborations of Yael:

„So, I'll start by saying that my mother, she defined herself as a feminist from before I was born and she did all these like things that were very symbolic of, like, second wave feminism, but she always was a radical thinker and she would, for instance, she gave us [three girls] names that are relatively like considered more masculine. [...] And she was like fuck that gender roles and [...] she would encourage us to do things that were considered masculine because it was like, screw that like you can do whatever you want. She was very adamant about it and she would like also boycott certain products [...] and she was also the first, [...] [saying] something to me about the occupation during the second intifada when I was 12 years old and I had no way of understanding the situation [...] she puts like this sign on like her bike and I was like what is that? She's like, oh, that's me protesting about administrative detention of Palestinians. And I didn't understand what she was talking about, but I knew that there were people called Palestinians and they're Arab and the army is treating them badly, like the government is treating them bad. And it's not OK. And she thinks it's not OK. And she's gonna do something about it, even if it's really, really small. [...] Like from a very young age, I had the sense of like what feminism is [...]” (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 14)

The mother's imprint on the upbringing of the children, which can establish the foundation for patriarchal structures and ways of thinking, as Hooks (2021) writes, can thus also be broken through the mother's education. What is special about this generation is that their mothers were already able to be openly feminist and thereby set an example for their daughters, teaching them about feminist and decolonial ideas.

This chapter shows the relevance of the discussion about the connection between identity, personal and political history and ideology, and activism, which is a multiple intersection, shaping both the understanding of activism and experiences of oppression. It seems that for activists, coming to terms with their own identity and history is a central element of their activism. The question of self-description and the way of seeing oneself ground, shape and drive the activism of the dialogue partners. In order to address the question of the contribution

to Palestinian self-determination, answering the question of individual and historical identity seems to be a key pillar. Not only to define what it means for each person, but to recognise how identity and its instrumentalization affect the conflict and each individual, as it shapes everyday experiences of oppression and the ideas of fighting against it, as for example unlearning Zionism. However, unlearning a narrative that you grew up to believe in and which is used to ground your identity seems to require a constant process of engagement, but could contribute to mutual understanding. As Aharoni explains, the issue of identity does indeed play a major role within the conflict, but not only to find new justifications for the conflict (Aharoni 2016: 205-206), but also to understand that the conflict is not fenced in by state borders, but could go beyond them. Understanding how identity, nationalism and history are shaped by narratives that reflect a certain truth and reflecting on one's own identity as a way of questioning it is an important starting point for further analysis. As Aharoni has already written, it emerges from the conversations that the aspect of dealing with identity opens up the space for new feminist questions (Aharoni 2016: 206).

4.1.2 Systems of Oppression for Palestinian Feminist Activists

„The society and the religion and the generation ideas until now from ancient years give us this big idea that because of you being a woman you should be under the man's control and care and protection, and you are not a good one if you are refusing to be under a man's protection. And you will be like in some of wrong area and guilt area and you will be like going out of the line and that does not make sense for them because everyone believes in you should be under man's control like literally, and this is make us into another thing.” (Isabel in Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 54)

Through the conversations with the activists, it became clear, confirming Yuval-Davis statement, how the differential situatedness of different social agents influences their experiences of violence and the conflict. Different life situations resulted in a web of experiences of oppression that had a wide variety of influencing factors, most of them situated in the web of the power axes of gender-based violence due to patriarchal and settler colonial structure. As Yuval-Davis argues, and as the last chapter on identity highlighted, the feeling of being at home, of belonging to a particular place, is important, but being situated in that place is just as important for Palestinian feminist activists. Factors such as economic, political, religious and cultural influences are just as relevant as differences in everyday life experiences that are manifested through the geographical segregation by the occupation (Yuval-Davis 2011: 3-4). The different axes of power and their intersecting systems of oppression will be analysed in this chapter, to understand how feminist activism is shaped by them.

Systems of Oppression within Society, Law and Politics

Most of the authors mentioned in the literature review refer to an institutionalised patriarchal system which is manifested in the economic, political, religious and legal superiority of men, controlling women in Palestine in every part of society (Qazzaz 2021: 434-435; Nazzal et al. 2023: 13). Furthermore, Nazzal et al. (2023) findings suggest that patriarchy, social conservatism and cultural norms related to the family are important elements that lead to relatively stable structures linked to rules and resources that are used by actors, organisations and institutions to oppress women activists (ibid., Pos. 11). All these forms of oppression were addressed by the activists interviewed, differing in impact on their lives depending on the social situatedness of the women.

One of the biggest systems of oppression addressed by activists, especially those from conservative family backgrounds, are the patriarchal structures reflected in family norms and values as well in the institutions like school that influence their lives and activism. Gender stereotypes would be social norms, such as women staying at home and being primary caregivers, cooking and taking care of the household and men being breadwinners and taking care of public life, and are taught to children at an early age in school and in the family as well (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 32). Isabel understands the greatest influence in the mother's parenting, in upholding but also the possibility of changing the patriarchal system.

„And also, I think the hardest idea, or the hardest level of working about feminist is about the mothers' ideas, because the mothers' ideas it's about like from the moment she is given a birth and she have a girl she starts to think about how she has to protect her from herself, from her body, from the society, from a relative, from everything. Not about let her or teach her how to live her life. And also they start to imagine her a bride and they start to search for her for her husband from she's like in her first days and they keep thinking about you are not complete if you are not married in specific age, so they also they want, the woman, the mothers dealing or treat her daughter as you are now specially in age 16 and 17 you are preparing to be a bride.”(Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 32)

In the society in which Isabel lives, unmarried women are seen as incomplete and are externally controlled and constrained in their actions by their relatives and society. The constant family and social pressure would only be relieved when she was married, because then the husband would be the one making the decisions. If the husband allowed his wife to break certain social norms, such as smoking and dress codes, the family would also accept it (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 38). Haneen confirms this family pressure that would accompany girls in conservative Palestinian families from birth. She explains that marriage is a central element in a woman's coming of age, which must be achieved. She explains that „[m]arriage is a central issue also in my society. It's a law, you have to marry. [...] You know, you have to

be part of the marriage culture” (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 37). She explains that women who are alone because they are widowed or divorced or didn’t find a partner yet are considered a marginalised group, less respected and excluded. It is only slowly that this group, which has been marginalised by society for years, is being noticed (ibid.). Change would gradually occur as educated women would have the opportunity to work in jobs that would make them self-reliant and financially independent. They would therefore rise in the hierarchy within society and the idea that a woman needed a man to survive would slowly crumble. This financial independence means that young women no longer consider marriage a stopgap measure, but instead seek a partner who respects them. Similar to Isabel’s description, for educated women who have the freedom to choose, marriage would be an option, not just an obligation. Marriage is increasingly becoming a question of women’s socio-economic position (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 39). However, this does not mean that social change has already taken place, but that there are still big differences between the generations. Haneen explains that while many friends would ask her what to expect in a spouse and understand how difficult it is to find the right partner, this is far from being the case with the older generation (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 39). Isabel explains in detail the family interference in her daily life, ranging her appearance to her love life. For a long time, this was completely controlled and regulated by her family. She explains how her family would have chosen her future husband and arranged the wedding with his family, without her having any real decision-making power. The engagement was called off again, but since then she is struggling with a constant „question mark” (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 34) that would accompany her, since her community would expect from her to marry between the age of 18 to 21 and by calling off her wedding she damaged the family’s honour (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 34). She describes how she constantly feels the pressure from her family and society, which demands that she marries and fulfils her role. The patriarchal system has led to a stalemate for her, on the one hand she does not want to marry because it would show that she cannot withstand the external pressures of society, but at the same time marrying a young, more liberal man would be a way for her to break free from the rigid norms of her family that currently restrict her. In addition, according to her, this would not mean a real liberation, she would only hand herself over from one man’s control to another (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos.38). Enass describes the patriarchal system not as something pressuring her to fulfil her conservative gender role, but as a form of epistemic violence. She describes the social conservatism related to her family as a way of silencing her: „[...] my family was really conservative, so I didn't really have a voice, I wasn't

really allowed to have an opinion and to express myself” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 33). Haneen links the different intersecting experiences of oppression by stating:

„Here, because we are also conservative, and we have our own traditions. So, you have to stick to what is common. You're supposed to marry, to have children and to live in a certain way, not to talk about things, even to have an opinion about something.” (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 22)

It becomes clear that through the examination of feminisms, male dominance is reflected and placed in the patriarchal context. Because patriarchy, as described by Hooks, is a comprehensive concept based on male domination and power and all people, regardless of their gender, are incorporated into this system and learn these structures throughout their lives, through constant affirmation within the spheres in which patriarchy manifests itself (Hooks 2021: 1-2). Isabel explains that it would be wrong to assume that only women would suffer under this system. She believes that „[...] men, especially in the young age, they are victim of their family and society ideas because that's what they found themselves in it and that they have been told that's the right thing to do” (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 30). Therefore, according to her, in order to break the patriarchal system of oppression, feminist understanding would have to reach every person, especially young men, who would reflect on their actions and the structures they support through them. Many would not dare to do anything against the oppression of women because they would be oppressed by the power of society themselves, which is why the education must start at an early age (ibid.).

The feeling of not being given a voice, of women's opinions being suppressed by society and the resulting dependency on men and their subordination runs through women's experiences and is reflected, as literature describes and the data confirms, in all sub-sectors of the Palestinian society:

„We don't have as women independent choices or take choices, even if they are small [...] So, in law if I go for work and my husband is refusing this, I will lose in law my husband's money. Like food and cloth and place to live. And here it's like an issue or problem because we have a low salary. [...] nothing opposite my husband care like place to live and food and all of this stuff, so they will not endanger their relationship with her husband by taking work.” (Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 55)

This quote already refers to another issue, namely the manifestation of patriarchy in the economic and legal system, which reinforces the oppression of women and their dependence on men. As in many other countries, not only the division of labour within the family, but also the labour market is gendered. This means that professions are gendered and that there are corresponding inequalities in pay. Many care jobs are held by women, such as teaching, which is very poorly paid in Palestine. Haneen says that about 96% of teachers are women,

and women in general would be more restricted in going to strikes. But as a result of not demonstrating, the ministry would not increase the salary (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 20). The fact that women would earn less and that there are big gender differences in employment is seen as a big problem by many of the interviewees (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos.54, Iona 18.05.2022 (3), Pos.3), especially as low salary only being one issue of financial dependence and socio-economic inequality.

The inequality at the labour market is interlaced with discriminative laws, pressuring women into financial dependence. Bisan and Sheridan explained how the norms and values of society are manifested through law, with the example of inheritance:

„We have, like, laws in the government that discriminate female, it's not just like the community and the society and that no, there are government laws that actually prevent a woman from getting the same inheritance as her brother. Because the common mentality is like when I get married, I go to another family. So, I'm counted on the other family. I can't take my father's money or my mother's money and put it in another family into another family's money. So, they want to keep their money in the same family. This is why the boy gets the money because he has the last name of the family, not me. This is like small example of how the government system is absurd.” (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 58)

Moreover, labour law would be designed in such a way that the stereotypical image of men as breadwinners would be supported all the more. In conversation with the two lawyers, they explain that legally, provision and care for the family would also be anchored in labour law. On the one hand, this concerns benefits such as medical insurance, which a man in employment can provide for his family, but a woman cannot, and at the same time, if a man files for divorce, and in contemporary Palestine, only men are allowed to do so, the custody rights are affected as well. If a child actively decides to stay with the mother in the event of a divorce, no maintenance will have to be paid. And these legal impediment to women's self-determination go hand in hand with the social discrimination that divorce still means for a woman today. Her whole life, also as a mother, even if divorced, would be legally regulated by men. According to the lawyers, she is not allowed to transfer her children from one school to another, to apply for a passport for them and would additionally face social relegation, as marriage is a fundamental part of Palestinian society (Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 41; 43; 49). As Baldi (2018) writes, the legal system is a reinforcement of women's subordination, as they are simply denied the right to self-determination and rendered legally immature (Baldi 2018: 14).

This denying of self-determination, economically, socially and legally, would result an intersecting oppression, which restricts the daily life of the activists. Isabel explains that she can't apply for a passport, since her father wouldn't allow it, which means that every day she

would be reminded, that she isn't free to make her own choices (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 42). She describes in detail how this lack of control in her decision-making power and in her freedom of movement is imposed from the outside and manifests itself internally, because internally a feeling manifests itself of having to live up to this pressure:

„If you like stand up for yourself by saying stop controlling me to your dad or family or husband. In many ways the society will act with you like you are the guilty one, and you are the one who is making the problem. And you should be going to jail, and you should be killed, and nobody should deal with you because you are out of the line in a bad way. Just because you are standing for yourself. So, a lot of women even if she has this idea of, I want to stand up for myself but because she is afraid of all of this, she will not. And I know a lot of women, and she knows a lot of women they live like under violence of their husband, but they didn't do anything because out of this home they have no home to go.” (Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 58)

This confirms Hamamra's statement (2022) that the internalized and externalized norms of society restrict women and silence them, even if they are victims of violence. In the process, she explains the mutual influence of law and society and illustrates the intersectionality of discrimination. As mentioned in the literature review, the legal framework for gender-based violence does not meet the international standards, since policies like CEDAW are not implemented yet (ESCWA 2021: 3-4), which is still a huge issue for women in Palestine. This results in another discriminative law and socially accepted norm, addressed by Iona and Isabel concerning sexual violence, domestic violence and even incest. Sexual violence in the family would be a serious problem, because even in jurisdiction from the age of 15, the law would assume that the girl would consent to the sexual act, and it would have been in her hands to decide freely whether she wanted to carry out this sexual act. Thus, if young women have the courage to talk to the police about sexual abuse in the family, even the law would not support them at present. Many girls would therefore not report the sexual violence out of fear of being judged in court and being seen as guilty within society (Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 70; 72). They are thereby addressing the same problem as Hamamra (2022), Kawther (2009) and Mahamid et al. (2022). Men's violence is concealed through various silencing processes in order to maintain the family's honour, and for fear of social relegation and expulsion from society and the family, many women are reluctant to report GBV.

While the legal system in Palestine is dysfunctional and outdated, changes in the law depend on the willingness of society. As long as society remains anchored in patriarchal patterns of thought, laws will remain patriarchal and will continue to be written and enacted accordingly:

„Masculine society. This is like something we share from generation to the other because the society does agree about this. So, everyone is like - even women themselves - they have this idea and live with it. I am as a mother my own son could tell me don't wear this and don't go

there. And for sorry this has reflection to our laws, because the laws when they are written they look to society if it fits with them and because we have like a very extraordinary issues of government and our council and a lot of things like we didn't have the council, who writes the laws, so even if we want to edit something we cannot. And our laws are from 50s of the last centuries.” (Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 62)

As mentioned earlier, patriarchy is embedded in society and is reproduced and manifested by people, just as feminism is for everyone, patriarchal structures are something that is practiced by everyone. And even as Hawari would say: „While the patriarchy affects everyone, its violent manifestations disproportionately affect women” (Hawari 2018), it is difficult to change discriminative laws manifesting male dominance, if society still supports this idea.

Another manifestation of oppression in society would be related to religion according to the interviewees. A long discussion about the connection of patriarchy, religion and oppression occurred with Isabel. About how faith is instrumentalised to consolidate and legitimise patriarchal structures. As an unmarried woman, it would be forbidden to consider oneself a sexual being and to engage in sexual acts such as masturbation. However, if a woman were married, she would have to submit to her husband's sexuality:

„I really started to feel so angry to Islam because they treat you and sexual part like you're an animal and they put limits for you to not act what you want as you want [...] You can't touch yourself. [...] But also on the same time, if you are a wife and your husband just lay down next to you, no matter if you are tired or in bad mood, and there is some talk about Muhammad said, a prophet said it's about if your husband put his hand on you and you just move it, you are guilty to do this, and this is where the man have this power to ask sex from their wives without feeling guilty. [...] And they have this mad loud voice that it's my right because you are my wife whenever I want, I will ask and you have to respond to me.” (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 64)

Men would draw from Islam their justification to treat women submissively. However, not only would the actions resulting from this be patriarchal, but it is part of the interpretation of the Koran. Nowadays, the pronoun used to address Allah is considered a male pronoun, although in the ancient Arabic language the pronoun was gender neutral. The construction of religion as a patriarchal structuring element would lead to male dominance being explained in religious terms in order to legitimize the subordination of women (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 64).

Another mentioned manifestation of patriarchy is reflected in the political representation and participation. The power structures, which according to the literature review, can be interpreted as a result of the Oslo Accords (Kuttub 2009; Jad 2008, 2018; UN Women – Palestine Country Office 2018; Hawari 2019), show according to Lora an intersection between discrimination based on gender and religion:

„So, we can see after Oslo that all women that are let's say in good positions are from Fatah or from families that are very known in the government or the third option is that they are Christians because in the international community it is very good to have a women, good looking without hijab, a Christian, to say that we are giving minorities good positions in the government. So, you can see Christian women as a minister, as a part of leading parties or whatever.” (Lora 12.05.2022, Pos. 8)

This form of manipulation and discrimination is also reflected within the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. A similar challenge for political participation does exist for women living inside of the Israeli state, within the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. Haneen explains that „[...] the Israeli parliament, we don't have much Arab woman” (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos 71). The women in parliament would be appointed for representation, to achieve a good external image, not for their qualifications or knowledge (ibid.). This means that in addition to the already low participation of women in the political sphere reported by Jad and Hawari (Jad 2018; Hawari 2019), discrimination against certain women in the political sphere is happening at the same time. The isolated instances of women representing the Palestinian people, is always connected to the cause of stabilizing the power asymmetry, which is already inherent in Palestinian society. In addition, there is the problem that even the women who are active in politics are still not in positions to be decision-makers.

„Until now we like having a lot of successful movements or steps to develop political persons in Palestine. But the main problem is we are still in the second line. We are not in the first line in any space or in anything.” (Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 46)

Even if they would be in the position of making relevant political decisions, there is still the issue of being influenced by the political party and male relatives, enforcing their agenda on the woman. Isabel elaborates that:

„[...] it's also kind of the political representation problem that we don't have like a real represent even if there is a woman in a position to make decisions, because they are affecting her decisions. Like by her husband, her brother, her dad, even her minister or manager, because I don't know but they think there should be like a man idea in her work because she is a woman. But if she was a man, they would not do the same so yeah I feel like also a lot of women think like I am only in my position and want to stay so Ok I will do the work as they want to do the work.” (Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 47)

This represents a challenge, just because a woman is in a certain political position, it does not mean that the person represents feminist concerns, nor does it mean an improvement for equality. People are sometimes only in certain positions so that the representation is more diverse on the outside and not because they are qualified for the position. Haneen explains this with the example of an Arab woman in a Jewish party in the Knesset, who had caused some political scandals, but was the figurehead of the party „[...] to say that we have an Arab woman and look how good we are [...]” (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 71).

There is a clear, as Nazzal et al. (2023) would call it, “web of oppression” (ibid.: 1) based on an institutionalised power system of male dominance controlling, regulating and restricting women in all spaces of society, public and in the private sphere. This oppression leads to Palestinian women being denied their right to self-determination, as they are socially, economically and legally dependent on a male counterpart.

Experiences of Personal and Gender - Based Violence

As mentioned in the literature review, gender-based violence and the associated immunity from prosecution, are a huge issue in the context of intersecting systems of oppression for Palestinian women (Baldi 2018; Hamamra 2022). Some of the activists shared their personal experiences of violence that shed more light on the diverse everyday experiences of oppression.

The first experience that the interviewees describe is violence due to their political activism, but this is not separated from their identity and gender, and their role in society and therefore needs to be analysed within the context of gendered and racialised discrimination. Aya, one of the founders of many well-known new feminist movements and thus a person who has risen to prominence as a feminist and anti-colonial activist living in ‘48, says that she has been facing harassment for some time because of her activism. While this is one of the reasons why many women are afraid to become activists, it has become a part of everyday life for Aya. She describes that coming out in public and speaking openly about resistance groups, women's rights and the right to return as Palestinians has to be an active decision, as public appearances lead to harsh reactions. It would have started when she spoke publicly on a panel about the attack on Gaza in May 2021, and in the course of her social movement publicly addressed the experiences of prisoners from a women's perspective. This would have culminated in an article being published with her name, description of her activism and the accusation that she was trying to destroy society from within. According to Aya, the harassment she has received since then, especially from right-wing Israelis, is „[...] the price to be a feminist Palestinian national activist like me” (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 60). She feels the violence associated with the suppression of her knowledge and identity every day since she started to talk about the occupation openly and in front of Israelis being raised on the Zionist ideology, and wonders about how far they would go to silence her:

„At the first time that they get out the article against me. And also, a second one. I couldn't sleep. I was very, very afraid of what we will, what I will face and what will happen. Especially because I have girls and [...] they called me the whole things I said they called and they said she is teaching her girls [...] their right is to return to their village [...] and they

didn't have any borders for their, for their crimes. To write about my daughters, it's a crime for me. [...] I can't know what they can do. The second time they got my personal number and started to talk to me. And I was afraid that one day they can knock on my door. [...] Being an activist is that I know that I face the Zionist crimes and I not to be afraid from my society. Although, I'm very different. I'm talking about a woman rights. I talk about lesbian and gay rights. I don't feel afraid like the fear of what Israeli people can do (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 62)

Harassment, verbal attacks on their person, accusations and insults in real life as well as online, are experiences shared by most of the interviewees. Isabel and Iona describe how they would encounter anger on the streets from right – wing, conservative, religious men and women, even other lawyers criticizing and harassing them (Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 3; Pos. 73-78). They are called „a whore, you are not Muslim, you should be killed” (ibid., Pos. 77) and people would start campaigning against their activism (ibid.). Enass, living in Israel, explains that after sharing feminist or pro-Palestinian Facebook posts, she would get „[...] many hateful messages from people [she] went to school with” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 5), which is why she started to be afraid of being attacked every time bringing up these topics (ibid., Pos. 9).

In these accusations and narratives, a recurring image is drawn of a bad mother who raises her children wrong (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 60-62), that they want to destroy society by passing laws that would make all people gay, and that enforcing women rights would destroy families (Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 3; Pos. 75-77). The feeling these statements are intended to provoke is guilt that to be something different is endangering the established system. The accusations are stereotypical images of women as mothers, as wives, as subordinates and also protectors of the family and its norms. Clearly gendered views and accusations that the women have to face. They attack a system that perpetuates male dominance, enforces gender binaries and uses stereotypes to maintain current power structures, the same as Hawari wrote in “Patriarchy in Palestine” (Hawari 2018).

Another experience of violence reported by the interviewees is that of sexual violence and abuse. Yael, who is now a spokesperson for an organisation dealing with human trafficking and prostitution in Israel, says that through her intense involvement with the issue, she began to reflect on her personal experiences. When she took to the streets to demonstrate against a

famous rape case in Israel, she felt and understood the connection to her personal experiences²⁵ and 20 years later began to openly put these into words:

„Only after 20 years was I able to say it out loud for the first time. So, I went through a process of like going through, coming to terms with this talking about it with people that I know. Starting to go to therapy and handling this issue and also going to protest because I understood the connection between what I went through and what this woman is going through and why we all need to really fight this. And this was like a very strong struggle for me. So that's how I started going to the Slutwalks also.” (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 18)

The process of talking about these experiences took time for Yael and involved an intense process of reflection before she could open up and this process led her to join the ‘Slutwalks’. ‘Slutwalks’ are a protest started by young feminists that has developed into a transnational movement. It is directed against victim-blaming of sexual violence and „slut-shaming patriarchal cultures“ (Carr 2013: 24). Victim-blaming and shame are issues these feminist movements directly confront, but it remains an enduring problem in Palestine/Israel, as visualized in Enass’s story. Enass shares her experience of violence, which needs to be analysed in the context of a young Palestinian woman living in ‘48. It serves here as an example of Herzogs argument that “[...] these women’s experiences in racialised and gendered social sites, as well as within the class, religious, and ethnic contexts in the subordinated group and its relations with the dominant Jewish group” (Herzog 2006: 53) have to be analysed in an intersecting perspective. Enass describes an intersectional experience of violence and at the same time shows the complexity of multi-dimensional systems of oppression through her story:

„I actually was like literally abused when I was a child for 16 years. And when I was in high school, I went to the police, which is the Israeli police and reported my father. [...] as a woman, as a Palestinian that lives inside of Israel like you don't really have any option [...] you only have Israel to turn to. And in this case, it was really complicated to do the interrogations in Hebrew [...] but also like I think I had positive views about Israel because they were the ones who freed me from the oppression inside my family.” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 5)

While her community excluded her and stopped talking to her, her case was taken seriously by the police and she felt as though she had been saved and understood by her Israeli friends (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 5). The problem, she explains, is that a conflict arises precisely from this complex situation:

²⁵ Sexual abuse cannot be covered in this paper, but there are relevant studies on the topic. Studies on the impact, psychological processes and stigmatization in child and adolescent victims of sexual abuse, can be found for example by Kathleen Kendall-Tackett et al. (1993).

„[...] being a Palestinian women in Israel - like my community couldn't see the sexual abuse because my community don't want to accept that stuff like that happen in Muslim communities and like Israelis kind of accept the sexual abuse and they can embrace me and they can give me an amazing understanding, but they can't hear about the Palestinian story because it makes them like question who they are. [...] Because every time every word you are going to say will make people uncomfortable [...].” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 11)

And that would mean that every time she, as a Palestinian woman living in Israel, says or writes something about the oppression of Palestine, the reaction of those around her would be incomprehension and anger accompanied by the statement that she is lucky to live in Israel and not in other Arab countries where she would have had to continue to suffer the abuse of her father:

„[...] whenever I like I want to say something as a Palestinian who lives in Israel like they write or say but we are doing you a favour that we are here. Like imagine being a woman that went through sexual abuse in an Arab country, if Israel didn't really wasn't established like here it would be like Lebanon and Syria, like you would have suffered. [...] Like they use your gender against you to silence you.” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 33)

Although not discussing the experience with the police, Shalhoub-Kevorkian's (2007) culturalization of violence as an Arab cultural value can be seen in the context of her Israeli peers. This notion of the backwardness of the community and the portrayal of women in the Middle East who are imprisoned in comparison to liberated women from Israel echoes Khodary et al.'s (2020) critique that this portrayal of Middle Eastern women living under the oppression of a misogynistic religion and culture is used to legitimise control and exploitation of the Israeli occupation (ibid.: 206). Due to her experience of gender-based violence, and at the same time, her everyday experiences living under occupation, Enass needs to navigate and challenge dominant social definitions and stereotypes to negotiate her own identity in these gendered and racialised social sides, which generate co-operation and confrontation at the same time (Herzog 2006: 53; 77). It is an experience of intersectionality characterised by the fact that different systems of oppression intersect, which is why the personal experiences of the interviewees presented were very different, as the realities of their lives are very different.

Systems of Oppression Through the Occupation

This chapter deals with Palestinian women's experiences of violence in the context of settler-colonialism and gender-based violence. Palestinian women, already being suppressed by the patriarchal structures of society and its institutions, are additionally severely affected by the Israeli occupation, since its system of domination leads to further restrictions on women's self-determination like freedom of movement, of housing and physical and mental integrity.

First, for Sameeha, who lives in Massafer Yatta and knows the significance of the destruction of her home and its impact on the security of the local people, the active settlement policy and violence by settlers and occupation forces, are a part of her everyday life:

„Yeah, because this area declared as a firing zone area and settlement area. So, it's a C- area also under the Israeli occupation control totally. So, the Palestinian people who are living in small villages, living in caves and tents, are living this lifestyle because of the oppression of the Israeli occupation that does not allow them to have any life services, even the houses. [...] and it's expanding daily. So, they stole more and more from the Palestinian land and being more closer for the villages around. So, every day we're facing the settlers and the army in our field, in our house and our way to school in our, like, access to our lands and also the checkpoints [...]” (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 2)

She describes being part of a youth movement that has its meeting room and guest house in a community centre, which according to a demolition order is about to be torn down, and her concerns about where to accommodate guests coming to learn more about what is happening in Masafer Yatta. It is a fear surrounding the defending livelihoods, origins, but also the concern for family and community that weighs on her (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 6). The importance of the guest house is particularly significant as it is a form of awareness raising: „Because Masafer Yatta is unknown actually. No one knows about it, and no one is following what's happening here about the crimes that's happening for the Palestinian by the settlers and the army” (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 2). The arbitrary violence by settlers and the military in the firing zone leads to immense psychological pressure, and actual fear of harm, not only to property, but also for her life. She further elaborates her fear:

„Firing zone area means that the army and the settlers have the green line to shoot. They're allowed to shoot the people here. The law, the Israeli law will protect them if they shoot someone. And sometimes they used to shoot in around the villages just for the military training, because they use the firing zone as a military training to train that their army to use their guns [...]” (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 2)

This constant threat, the feeling of being exposed to this asymmetrical warfare is characterised, for example, by the feeling of being unsafe even at home:

„I'm living in my family house like my mom and dad, my brothers. That's our house! It's targeted by the settlers and the army. So, it's raided couples of times. During the night. We were just sleeping, and they wake up in the morning at 4 or at 5 in the morning, they wake us up. They just entering our house. You know, just destroying our property inside the house. [...] when they come to your house, they don't knock the door. Sometimes they just, you know, bombs the doors or, you know, block it, and enter. And you know, this is so scary even for us, not just for the kids in this house.” (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 20)

The undermining of the resident's physical security, lowering their standards of living by demolishing their houses, fields, and energy resources, increasing poverty and vulnerability, is something everyone would face in Massafer Yatta:

„[...] he was shot last year, he was shot in his neck from zero distance by a soldier because he was trying to protect his property. He was trying to protect his generator that he was using to have a light because I told you, here there is no water, there's no electricity, there's nothing to support the people to stay.” (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 18)

Her brother Sami, who was one of the leading activists demonstrating against this incident, was arrested during one of the midnight house raids and is still facing legal restrictions, such as a certain distance from checkpoints and settlements, arbitrary arrest and simultaneous violence by settlers (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 18). The restrictions on his daily life did not only affect him, but the whole family: „So very hard condition that charging of Sami, my older brother, that we also have this experience as a family” (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 18). For the family, this means that their already limited radius of movement, which is restricted by a multi-layered system of physical barriers, as well as administrative requirements such as permits to enter specific zones (ESCWA 2021: 22), has become even smaller. However, the restrictions of movement are particularly severe for women and children, as Sameeha underlines with a story that reflects the daily burden of the journey to school, both for the children and their families:

„For school, for example, we have just the main school in Masafer Yatta [...]. And all the villages around have to come to study in Tuwani, because they have no other choices, they have to walk in the settlements and in between the villages. [...] The children have to pass through settlements to come to the school and to go back to their homes, and this is one of the things that's happening daily here in Masafer Yatta. That is really speaking about what it does mean that there is no justice in this war and this life, because the children, the oldest one, is 13 years old, the youngest is 7 to 8 years old [...] [t]hey pass through the settlements where [...] a lot of children get injured and attacked by the settlers and hospitalized. [...] then a lot of childs stop to go to school because after they live this big level of fear against them. It's just a simple right that we have as a human being. It's the right of education and here it's very related in this way. [...] This is the injustice that I'm speaking about [...] mothers who sent their kids through the settlements, they know that maybe their kids will not come back [...]” (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 18)

Her life in Masafer Yatta is accompanied by constant worry about her loved ones, she would worry about her brother who has problems crossing checkpoints, her father who works in the fields that are close to the settlements and regularly vandalised by settlers (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 20). An additional psychological pressure would arise from the fact that while they worry about their family, due to patriarchal division of labour, women are the ones who are at home when the Israeli officers come with demolition orders or directly demolish their houses (ESCWA 2021: 22-24). Sameeha describes this very graphically:

„A lot of men use to go to work, who stay in the house is the woman and the children. And who is the most people who is facing this [violence] from the settlers is the woman and the kids because they are in the house 24 hours. So, the woman is always here in the first line because they are the farmers, they are the mother, the sister, the daughter [...] they are everything in Masafer Yatta. So, when the army is raiding, the woman is in the house. If they

want to come to the field, the woman is in the field. [...] So, they are facing everything with the children. For example, there's [...] this village [which] is in between two illegal outposts [...] and this village was attacked by settlers and the army from the two sides, [...] There was not a lot of men as much [as] children and the woman, and they start to attack their houses [...] When I arrive there and I see that they were shooting, they were throwing stones, they were following the kids with sticks. The army was throwing teargas and sound bombs to stop the people go out from their houses, and they were destroying the cars, the windows and then they attacked a child, who was five years old in his head, also with a big rock [...] and he was really lucky to survive after couple of weeks also in the hospital.“ (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 20).

Sameeha shares that she spoke to the boy's mother afterwards, who described her fear and inner conflict:

„And she told me: I have three kids [...] when they arrived in the village and start to beating everyone, I [had] two kids with me and the third one was [in] another room and the settlers were attacking him in the other room. I cannot leave these two and I cannot reach the third one. So, she said that in the end [...] [s]he left this two and she arrived from the other room while settlers were beating her with rocks. But she's the mother like she needs to bring her kids. [...] And she forgets that they're throwing rocks on her and have teargas. She just jumped to the other room to her son. When she arrived, she found that they were attacking him and another kids because they were in the same room. More than five kids and they were keep throwing rocks and she said [...]: ‘So I was hugging all these kids, while all the rocks hit on us, and I was seeing that this child was bleeding and [...] not awake anymore. [...] So, you can imagine with me that if you have more than one kid and at the same time you cannot protect either one of them. And then you cannot protect yourself and no one is around you to support you and help you and the kids just shouting and feeling scared.’” (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 20).

The psychological violence women face due to house demolitions, night raids and settler violence is, as Baldi (2018) explains and Sameeha confirms, accelerated due to the constant fear of losing loved ones and their livelihoods being destroyed. The constant threat, constant experience of violence and psychological stress also became apparent during our interview, when during the interview settlers attacked the village and Sameeha apologised for looking tired, drained and distracted because her brothers ran out of the house to see what was happening (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 59). The will not to interrupt the interview and the concern about the destruction of the guest house also illustrates that, as Brunner (2020) pleads, the concept of violence needs to be broadened and a greater understanding of the complexity of violence needs to emerge. For the fear that her knowledge of the oppression and experiences of Masafer Yatta will be destroyed along with the houses and that, as she says: „[...] no one know about Masafer Yatta. Even for the Palestinian side inside the West Bank, no one know where it is. No one know how the people live! No one!” (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 41). The fear of this becoming real, losing their home and their struggle to be forgotten, can be interpreted as a fear of epistemic violence in a settler colonial context. At the same time, the endeavour of the settlers, supported by a regime that offers them immunity, demonstrates settler colonialism by replacing the indigenous population with a settler society

with its own identity and sovereign claim. The tactic that many Palestinian women, including Sameeha, have found to deal with this kind of oppression, namely the adaptation of life under oppression, can be understood as a part of her feminist activism and her strategy to deal with everyday experiences of violence and oppression.

The experiences of, on the one hand, direct violence by settlers that affect women's everyday lives, but also their work, as well as experiencing the suppression in the process of raising awareness of the suppression of raising awareness about what is happening there by the occupying institutions, are also shared by other interlocutors. Iona, who works with women in workshops who are survivors of violence, cannot always reach them because settlers block the roads and throw stones or the military block the connecting roads due to political unrest in the country (Iona 18.05.2022 (3), Pos. 5). In addition, her work and her freedom of movement were increasingly restricted over time. While on the one hand it was made difficult for her to travel from Palestine to Jordan (Iona 18.05.2022 (3), Pos. 14), on her return trip, her bag was confiscated and the books she had in her bag were destroyed by Israeli soldiers. Iona explains this experience as follows: „I feel like they wish like that all Palestinians get no education or cultural knowledge [...] I don't know perhaps they don't want us to realize our rights are a way to telling the world our sacrificing and violence and attacks [...]” (Iona 18.05.2022 (3), Pos. 16-17). The experience of violence that all interviewees share in different ways and associate with the occupation is that of the unequal power relations. The feeling of being oppressed by an institutionalized system that is allowed to use violence and is not legally prosecuted for it, while they themselves feel they have no rights and have to expect heavy penalties even for minor offences (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 22; Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 21). As Michael Lynk on March 22, 2022 stated: „Apartheid is not, sadly, a phenomenon confined to the history books on southern Africa” (OHCHR 2022). Acts of violence occur in the context of an institutionalised regime that systematically oppresses one group and favours another, with the intention of keeping the regime in place (The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court 2013: Article 7, 2.(h)).

The violence described recalls Wolfe's phrase “Settler colonialism destroys to replace”(Wolfe 2006: 399), because the activists' description clearly shows that the aim of violence in this context is destruction. The destruction of houses, living space and even the destruction of life. It can be seen, as the concept explains, as a process that degenerates into a struggle for land, because spaces are taken by settlers to become homes and these are designed, in a sense, to make the space for indigenous people smaller, more separate and limited, and try to cut the

connection to the land itself. Tuck and Yang describe this as „[...] a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence. This violence is not temporally contained in the arrival of the settler but is reasserted each day of occupation” (Tuck/ Yang 2012: 5). The habitat, but also their knowledge, represented here by books and education, as well as the certainty that people will be persecuted in the event of legal violations, are taken from them, which shows that over time indigenous life and claims to land under the settler regime would be destroyed. The destruction of the guesthouse and the attempt to cover up what happened are at the same time clear forms of repression that shapes the activists not only in their everyday lives but also in their activism.

Epistemic Violence and Silencing Processes

Since the oppression of activists' voices plays a central role in the interviews, but also in this thesis, the topic of silencing processes and epistemic violence and their effects on Palestinian women and their activism will be briefly summarised here.

Aya founded an organisation that facilitates exchange and direct connection between women all over Palestine. She said the idea came about because first the British, then the Israeli occupation destroyed their archives, and she wants to write down and collect women's stories „[...] to establish feminist political national Palestinian archive. Yeah, that the women are in the front. In this, in the story of the Palestinian story” (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 33). She explains that even if women describe different realities of life and different experiences of violence, there is a unifying element that must be brought to the forefront of the storytelling, not their difference, but „[t]hat we are Palestinian women that live under the same occupation and living the same details, maybe in different areas or different issues in the daily life, but we are [...] the same, not people, nation! Living under the same occupation” (ibid.). That is why she collects all the stories, enables exchange between women and tries to bring what she had collected to the outside world to be heard.

However, as described in the last chapter, dominant institutionalised groups find ways to contain knowledge creation and knowledge sharing, either by destroying books as in Iona (Iona 18.05.2022 (3), Pos. 16) or the community centre in Masafer Yatta. To prevent experiences from being shared and attention from being created (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 10). Bisan and Sheridan explain that this institutionalised suppression of their knowledge limits their work. Bisan works for an NGO in Palestine that is monitored and criticised by an Israeli organisation, so she has to be careful about the language she uses in papers and when she writes about events, limiting her ability to express herself through writing (Bisan /

Sheridan 12.05.2022: Pos. 15), because „[t]hey [the government] don't give us a lot of space to express how we feel even if it's like against the Israeli government. They want us to keep silent” (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 22). When they write about injustices that happen to Palestinians, they have the feeling that they have to double-check everything so as not to intervene (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 112). Enass shares this feeling of double-checking to avoid being silenced or attacked. She explains that she experiences extreme headwinds and hatred when she writes about the conflict and feels she has to stand behind every word she writes:

„And I am doing a lot of reading and like double checking myself and like reading through narratives and I am really like obsessively truth. I am trying to read many archives and to ask many historians about stuff. So, I think that this is also like an obstacle that maybe it is because I am a woman, I'm really like double checking myself and I have to, like everything has to be right and perfect. But it is also because I am Palestinian.” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 15)

She integrates the intersectionality of oppression, not only that she feels oppressed as a Palestinian, but at the same time, as Spivak points out, that she is a woman who is silenced and afraid of being misinterpreted:

„There is a book it's called ‘Tainted Witness’²⁶ like it talks about why [we doubt] the witness of women and how we found it like hard [...] to believe women, it's hard to believe black people and Palestinians. So also like when you are the marginalized voice, you have to know what to say in a direct way and it has to be 100% right.” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 17)

By belonging to a marginalised group as a Palestinian living in Israel and living in a society that does not recognise cornerstones of her identity such as the Nakba and working and being friends with people who belong to the dominant group and voice, whilst at the same time coming from a very conservative patriarchal family, the feeling of being silenced is an everyday experience for her and feels like a double silencing:

„First, because like as I said before to be like a minority and to go to work with people that are the dominant voice and to have this feeling that your silenced daily is really hard. Also, I think that as a Palestinian woman, like my family was really conservative, so I didn't really have a voice, I wasn't really allowed to have an opinion and to express myself. So, it's like double silencing.” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 33)

The suppression of her voice and her Palestinian history would make her feel less human as she would not know who she is and her voice would neither be heard nor exist (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 90-93). The erasure of culture, language and identity, as experienced by

²⁶ She refers to: Leigh Gilmore (2017): *Tainted Witness: Why We Doubt What Women Say About Their Lives*. Columbia University Press.

people living in the '48, could be interpreted as an epistemicide, the „killing of knowledge systems” (Hall/Tandon 2017: 6) (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 26-28). The importance of knowledge and marginalised voices in scholarship becomes even more evident in Yael's reflective process, which was triggered by learning certain postcolonial and progressive concepts:

„[...] I remember that they taught us about Edward Said and about Orientalism. That was where I learned this term and they taught us about his theory about Orientalism, but they didn't mention that he's Palestinian. [...] I feel like this is an anecdote that's very symbolic of the journey that I've gone through with, like activism, feminism, knowledge, like learning history, unlearning Zionism. I feel like learning about Orientalism and using this term in, like implementing it in my discourse, but not knowing that he's Palestinian - Palestinian diaspora if I if I'm correct, if I'm not mistaken, this has a lot of meaning to the like fragmentation in Israeli society between being an activist, believing in human rights, being feminist, talking about solidarity, talking about equality, and then there's like this glass ceiling when it comes to Palestinian struggle.”(Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 2)

The notable aspect is that, despite the inclusion of Edward Said's concepts, a pioneer in postcolonial studies, in the curriculum of an Israeli university, the fact that the author is Palestinian remains untouched. At the same time, learning about asymmetrical power relations and integrating the concept of Orientalism into Yael's discourse led to a process of questioning her own knowledge and formative narrative, and shaping her activism. The institutionalisation of oppression, which finds expression in the combination of power/knowledge as described by Foucault (1980), begins, as Isabel argued, at an early age in school where patriarchal structures are learned and as Yael explained, the education system is designed in such a way that through indoctrination the Israeli dominant power structures cannot be questioned. Haneen, a Palestinian teacher in an Israeli school in '48, connects in her narrative the oppression of her Palestinian identity, the importance of power/knowledge in constituting truth and the importance of living and working in a gendered and racialised position. She describes her experiences at work in a Jewish school, as follows:

„[...] I told you I'm in the north now and they are so sensitive to hear the word Palestine or to be a Palestinian. They don't accept it, they will tell, if I say that in the school or in a class, she is a terrorist. Just because you define as one [Palestinian]. [...]. So, I'm like nothing, you know, for three years now, I don't say, who I am, I don't share, I don't talk about anything that is connected to politics. And above that I have to be part of their ceremonies, their Zionist ceremonies.” (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 12)

This means that she celebrates Independence Day at school as well as Remembrance Day for the fallen Israeli soldiers of 1948 and the victims of terrorist attacks. If she did not celebrate it equally, she would directly undermine the racist stigma and as a Palestinian “I am stamped as a terrorist. I am always stamped as one” (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 14). It is an accusation she is constantly confronted with, and she is used to being discriminated against because of her appearance and Palestinian origin (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 16). As a Palestinian woman, she

has to follow the institutionalised system of oppression and support it in constituting the truth, despite everyday experiences of violence.

All of these different everyday experiences of oppression shape the activists' understanding about themselves, about their identity, their environment and at the same time, their response which is restricted and formed by the system. However, in conclusion to this chapter, the intersectionality of all these described experiences should be foregrounded once again. There are certain relevant roads of oppression and recurring crossroads that can be recognised, to use Crenshaw's analogy. And yet the activists make a point of describing their personal experiences, the violence they experienced and the conclusions they drew from it were and remain their individual ones and should not be generalised.

Sameeha sums it up very aptly by making it clear that while she personally decided to become an activist due to her experiences, she is also aware that she can pay a high price for it and has decided for herself to ready herself and to fight her individual struggle:

„Look, because I have my own experience in total independence, I was just talking always about my experience and my area because otherwise because it's independence, when you speak about something independence you will pay this high price of what you are doing. For example, we are paying our freedom, we were arrested and attacked and shooting and raided. And because we choose to be an activist because we want to bring a change for this place and we are not under any, you know, [...] political umbrella or any support, we are just a group of young men and women, male and female who is just looking for justice and for defend their rights [...] I have [...] an independent experience with my own family and my own years and time [...] because I try to bring all this stuff for my place and my experience because it's happening on the ground. (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 45)

While Sameeha's experiences are largely shaped by living in Area C and under constant fear of settler violence, house raids and house demolitions, Haneen, Aya and Enass, who live in the '48, talk about the suppression of their Palestinian identity and voices in their environment. Iona and Isabel, who live in very conservative patriarchal societies in the West Bank, suffer from the patriarchal structures of society and its institutionalisation, while Lora, Bisan and Sheridan, who grew up in a more progressive society in the West Bank, feel the pressure of the Israeli and Western narrative in their work. This means, as Sameeha said, that the place the women grow up in has a great impact on their individual experiences of violence. But as Aya has already pointed out, they all share a common crossroads of oppression: „[...] we are Palestinian women that live under the same occupation and living the same details, maybe in different areas or different issues in the daily life, but we are in there. I mean we are the same, not people, nation!” (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 31).

This means that this multi-layered system of oppression has different intersections that have a higher discriminatory traffic volume and are very much characterised by gendered and racialised internalisation, that make people in their crossroads more vulnerable:

„[...] it's more dangerous for women who wear hijabs than us. [...] As soon as any Israeli soldier see you wearing a hijab, he thinks that you are a threat. So, this endangers your life and many of the women were killed just because they said, oh, she's carrying a knife beneath her [...] Jilbab. [...] So, they [...] just assume that they're going to commit a killing to some Israelis, so they killed them. [...] So many of the times when girls are going through a checkpoint, they are saying that because I'm wearing hijab, I'm 10% more scared than any other person because she's also a female” (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 70-72).

It thus becomes clear, as Yuval-Davis writes: „[...] how the differential situatedness of different social agents constructs the ways they affect and are affected by different social, economic and political projects” (Yuval-Davis 2011: 3).

This chapter, summarizing the intersecting systems of oppression, underscores in particular this significance of differential situatedness (Yuval-Davis 2011) in influencing the diverse experiences of activists. While all the experiences of the feminists are situated within the web of oppression woven from patriarchal and settler-colonial structures, they manifest differently depending on individual life situations and contexts. Patriarchal structures pervasive within Palestinian society create a system marked by the economic, political, and legal superiority of men, leading to the dependency of women. This power imbalance, the delegation of decision-making authority, and the silencing of their voices within families and society at large curtail their right to self-determination and restrict their agency in all aspects of life. Societal norms, both internalized and externalized, affect economics, politics, and law, perpetuating gender-based violence without proper accountability, hindering political representation, and sustaining stereotypical gender roles. Activists challenging these patriarchal structures and resisting the web of oppression face harassment, personal attacks, verbal abuse, both in-person and online. They are portrayed as threats to Palestinian society, seen as undermining its values and normative system. Simultaneously, these activists, whose self-determination is already compromised by various systems of oppression, face further constraints imposed by Israeli occupation forces and settler-colonial structures in which they reside. The system of Israeli settler-colonialism results in more profound limitations on their self-determination, particularly concerning their freedom of movement and mental and physical well-being. Both the socio-economic and geographical origins of the activists are pivotal in understanding the intersecting systems of oppression and everyday experiences they face. Activists from areas like the Firing Zone confront direct physical violence from settlers, house demolitions, night raids, and the constant psychological strain stemming from fear for loved ones and the

destruction of their livelihood. Meanwhile, activists from other regions in Palestine/Israel primarily endure restrictions on their freedom of movement and suppression of their knowledge, culture, and identity. Palestinian life and their claim to their land are gradually eroded by the settler regime, which not only deprives them of their living space but also denies their right to knowledge and a Palestinian identity. Concerning this matter, epistemic violence and various forms of silencing processes represent significant forms of oppression in this analysis, as they play an essential role, albeit to varying degrees, in all aspects of daily life for all feminist activists. The shared experience of having their voices suppressed, their stories unheard, and their right to self-determined lives denied is a unifying element among them. Whether marginalised as Palestinian women living in Israel, constantly subjected to a dominant narrative that fails to recognize their identity and accompanied by a feeling of being silenced and misunderstood even in their immediate surroundings or facing limitations on freedom of expression in the occupied territories, which influence their work and instil constant fear of losing their struggle for their habitat and identity.

On all these levels, the persistent feeling of not being heard, understood, or taken seriously prevails, emphasizing the feeling that the right to self-determination is denied, and the web of oppression strips them of the fundamental rights that constitute self-determined lives. To comprehend the diverse yet intersecting currents of feminist activism in contemporary Palestine, it is therefore imperative to examine the subject positions differentially situated in relation to multiple axes of power. These axes of power place constraints on the self-determination of young feminist activists, prompting an exploration of how these circumstances influence the emergence of various forms of activism and to delve deeper into the connections between situational factors and feminist understandings.

4.2 Feminist Activism and Transnational Feminist Solidarity

As presented in the literature review resistance is always connected to the oppression of a powerful dominant group and different form of oppression trigger a variety of forms of resistance (Khodary et al. 2020). Building on the intersectional systems of oppression, which influence the resources and possibilities of activism, this chapter will analyse the different forms of feminist intervention and understanding of feminism(s) of the young Palestinian activists. Building on the history of feminism and concepts of intersectional and transnational feminism, it will address the questions of whether there is a new wave of feminist activism and what possibilities and limitations there are for transnational solidarity for Palestinian feminists.

4.2.1 Forms of Activism and Feminist Resistance

„I think if there was no conflict here, I wouldn't be so attached to being Palestinian. And I think that if there was no patriarchy, I wouldn't be attached to call myself a woman. And I think also if you hear Palestinian men and women present themselves like men would say I'm a Palestinian and women would say I'm a Palestinian woman. And so, I think that for me like it's important to say that I'm a Palestinian because I have to have words for the problem that I'm having both as a feminist and a human being. And I think that having words is what helped to raise awareness, like you have to have words.“ (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 89)

Reasons for Activism

Some reasons for women's activism were mentioned more frequently than others. First, as already elaborated many describe their activism as part of their identity, as something that was already given to them by birth, and that they inherited by their parents and grandparents. The categories of identity and systems of oppression are closely intertwined with the category of activism and a variety of interactions can be derived.

Most of the activists seem to have grown up in a politicised environment and have thus already received political socialisation through their upbringing, as well as the history of their family, as the experiences of the Nakba, resistance against the occupation and left-leaning ideas, especially of the mothers. Thus, the findings confirm previous studies in movement research, that validate the argument that early socialisation influences perspectives and practices over a lifetime can be used to prove that family influence is significant for political socialisation or that a politicised household increases the likelihood that a person will become activist (Nazzal et al. 2023: 20).

Aya explains her motivation to be an activist by referring to her grandmother's experiences of the Nakba, and links her political struggle to the feminist one, by explaining that through her intense involvement in the national struggle based on the experience of her grandparents, she has been engaged in the struggle for justice and equality:

„[...] I really think that the feminist and the political issue are our national Palestinian struggle. It's the same struggle. I mean, woman, woman's right is in the whole package in the national Palestinian struggle. And so, I started to volunteer when I was 18. In several woman feminist Palestinian organizations, here in 48.“ (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 15)

Lora draws the connection between left-leaning parties and the integration of women in the political struggle for freedom, which would also run through her family and was characterised by the fact that women had an important and public political role, especially during the first intifada:

„My mom was part of that, my aunt, and my grandmother. They were activists. They were active in all the Palestinian parties at some point. Palestinian parties had very clearly,

especially the left-wing parties, had a special like let's say positions for women as revolutionists. At those times, in the first intifada I mean." (Lora 12.05.2022, Pos. 4)

Yael also starts with explaining her activism by referring to her mother being a feminist and being in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle. Her mother, as a second wave feminist, was against all gender-conforming roles, names and stereotypes and brought up her three daughters in this way. She was also the first person to talk to her about the occupation during the second intifada and to express her solidarity with the Palestinians, raising awareness for the struggle in public but also at home (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 14).

Sheridan joins this pattern of explanations, and draws attention to the meaning of being raised in a highly politicized family and environment:

„It is easier for us to like being raised as an activist because your families are all activists. My uncle is a martyr, so he died before I even know him. So, since the day I was born, people keep talking about him and I was furious with the Israeli government for killing my uncle and didn't even understand the Palestinian-Israeli war until like later on. So, I think, I think it's easier for us to be like activist and to choose to be activists, because all people around us are also that and being raised by families with people who have been activist for like 20,30, 50 years and we want to be like them. We want to make a difference and we want to actually change the things that our parents couldn't." (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 6)

While some activists describe their family as a sheltered space where they learned the meaning of activism, there are others who grew up under the patriarchal oppressive family relationships which this thesis previously described. They tell stories of being politicized by external influences, often when they were torn from their familiar environment and came into exchange with people from totally different backgrounds.

Haneen explains that she changed schools when she was 15 and because of her good grades, she had the opportunity to change from her village school and continue her education at a privileged school where she interacted with German exchange students and wealthy Israelis. Through interacting with these two groups, she began to reflect on who she is, what these external ascriptions like „48 Arabs“ (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 4) mean, and understood the meaning of the class differences between her and the privileged Israeli students. During her school and university years, she had the opportunity to live in different places in Palestine and to come into contact with people living in different life situations, which broadened her field of vision and made her an activist (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 4). Through her own reflective process and her privileged position due to her education, she had the opportunity to learn about concepts such as colonialism and feminism and by using these concepts she could empower herself and understand where the oppression comes from:

„So when [...] I look at my dad, at my old men in my family, they are struggling themselves, but [...] they're not aware why they are. 'Cause they don't [...] know how to define their problems. So I am, as a feminist who went to college and to other places, now I know how to name things. And so, I look on them, they are struggling, but we women struggle at double, like double times of them because of our gender and because we are, you know, weakest part in the whole struggle. You know, women everywhere are lower than men in the society. So, I believe because of politics firstly, and secondly because you know then who is oppressed will oppress you more, like our men” (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 81).

Isabel explains in detail how she tried to live the way her family expected her to live in the society she lives in, but at some point, she felt that she could no longer take the pressure and felt like she was losing herself. She felt like she was living half a life because she was trying to live by the definitions that were imposed on her from the outside and almost lost herself and her life in the process. For her, activism was the way to escape this pressure (Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 33; Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 54) and to understand it as self-empowering: „That part of me as a woman wanna fly by her wings even if she's in this society [...]. So, I believe that I could build my own wings, or even if I have it already, that make it stronger to make them, like, fly” (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 1-2).

The next reason given for activism were certain initial moments that represented a turning point for the individuals where it became clear to them that they wanted to become activists. These moments usually happened after some form of sensitisation to the issues and an intense engagement with certain concepts. This initial moment or turning point becomes particularly clear in the conversation with the activists who grew up in Israel and learned a certain hegemonic narrative and started to rethink it. Yael says that during her studies she was exposed to postcolonial and feminist theories, which started a process of questioning the narratives she had learned (Pos. 2; 18; 32). She describes that through her academic career, she was confronted for the first time with concepts and analyses of hegemonic power structures, subaltern feminisms and the oppression of identities that do not belong to this hegemon, and that academic education, as with Haneen, was necessary to name and understand these:

„I didn't have the tools to understand it until I was an academia because I come from very privileged background. And I think that if you don't experience these things yourself and you don't know what it's like to be outside of the hegemony, then I think it's very much harder to understand it just like naturally and you have to have someone explain it to you with these theories, which is what I had.” (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 32).

However, only direct exchange and contact with Palestinians gave her a deeper understanding of the conflict and the oppression of Palestinians, as their history continues to be largely disregarded at the university (ibid., Pos. 2):

„There was this friend that I was introduced to when I was like 27/8. She was like, very knowledgeable. She spoke Arabic and she grew up in New York and she came to do her masters in the university right next to where I was living [...] and we became really good friends. And she started interesting me, getting me more interested in Arabic and in understanding more like the narrative, the Palestinian narrative, and [...] she took me to Dubai for the first time before it was before the normalization agreements. [...] And I think that was a very strong turning point. Like, generally the friendship with her [...] but seeing, meeting Palestinians in the diaspora for the first time and seeing that they call themselves Palestinians. And that when I asked them where are you from? They gave me names of cities in the West Bank. Or in historical Palestine. And this was very new to me. As an Israeli, I had never met, I've never really seen them. [...] [I had] like almost no knowledge of what this whole refugee thing is about. [...] I think that once I realized, oh, this is like a thing, like this is something. This is a real issue [...], that I was totally blind to.” (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 18)

She therefore had the academic basis and knowledge to name and analyse oppression and could draw the parallel to the oppression of the Palestinians through direct personal exchange.

Enass describes a similar experience. A friend of hers had lost her brother in October 2000, who was murdered by policemen in front of her family, even though he had not harmed anyone. The respective persons were not prosecuted, and the family would have to live with the pain to this day that the murderers are walking around free. „[H]earing this from someone that went through this made me like understanding that not everything that I am reading in the news is true *laughing* and I need to keep digging into this” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 5). Activism is thus linked to a constant process of negotiation, with what one knows or thinks to know and new narratives that oppose these ‘truths’. In this process of confrontation, she would constantly gain more understanding and recognise connections that remained hidden from her before, which opened up her understanding for intersectional feminism as well:

„And also, like their [Tal3at] slogan that there is no free homeland without free women. I didn't understand it before but now like I think that I'm starting to understand that patriarchy and also oppression they could face by the police that someone is better than other, that someone should have more rights than others. [...] So, I think that we need to smash this way of thinking that someone is better than the other and it comes hand in hand like feminism and fight for ending occupation.” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 51)

These individual explanations for women's activism support arguments from movement research about motivators to participate in a social movement²⁷. Social movements emerge under certain historical, social and political circumstances. As McAdams et al. (1996) have shown, to trigger collective action, there needs to be a sense of unease about some aspect of

²⁷ There is a large field in sociology that deals with the emergence and meaning of social movements, namely social movement theory. These approaches are helpful to observe social movements on the basis of causal relations with their environment, such as social change or the availability of resource mobilising organisations. See McAdam 1999: 51; Opp 2009: 328. In this thesis, however, the contextualization of feminist movements and its impact on the young generation of feminists is significant, which is why classic elements of social movement theory will be not further elaborated.

the agent's life and optimism about collectively fixing the problem. According to McAdam et al., people are very unlikely to be mobilized if either one of these perceptions is missing. These perceptions are conditioned by social psychological dynamics, such as collective attribution and/or social construction, and are referred to as framing processes²⁸ (McAdam 1999: 5). This is illustrated by the statement of Sameeha who, due to the constant oppression and fear of settler violence and house demolitions, has joined a youth movement to collectively put a stop to it:

„This is what does it mean to be an activist or to follow an idea that you want to protect the, you know, your house or your people, or you want to do and defend your rights, the same rights that we should enjoy. It's our home, you know, you have to feel safe at least at your home, but in Masafer Yatta you have no home to live to feel peace or to live in a quiet. Because the people are living in caves and tents, you can imagine with me that we are in 2022 [...]” (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 18)

All activists describe a sense of injustice in their environment that they feel they can address through activist action and believe strongly that it can change. The focus of this analysis is on the individual consciousness of the women, whereby the motivations and cognitions of the individuals are relevant for explanation, such as the experience of relative deprivation. The subjective experience of disadvantage, as well as the understanding that certain groups of people are unjustifiably disadvantaged compared to comparable other groups of people, plays a significant role in the activists' explanatory patterns. Repeatedly, the feeling of injustice is described whether in the category of women or Palestinians, or in an intersectional perspective, as Haneen says, the meaning of self-attribution and external attribution as a Palestinian woman. The activists thus confirm Opp's argument that many individual processes, reflection on privilege, academic education or family history, precede participation in social movement and is an aggregation of many independently taken decisions (Opp 2009: 330). However, as a frequent reproach to the relative deprivation approach, feminist activism in Palestine, with its different currents and different agents, will not be considered as a mere aggregation of independent individuals (Oberschall 1978: 301), but this chapter aims to foreground the individual motivators in context of feminists being part of a new generation of activists in contemporary Palestine.

²⁸ Entman (1993) defines framing as follows: „To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.” Entman 1993: 53.

The findings confirm the argument of generational studies that each generation shares certain historical and cultural experiences that are the foundation of their specific identity. For most activists, the second Intifada was a powerful historical experience that inspired them to become activists. When the second Intifada broke out in 2000 and lasted for five years, it became increasingly clear that the original aspirations of the Oslo Accords would not be honoured (Todorova 2020: 322-324), the activists were already at a childhood age (approx. 3-12 years) in which they had already experienced the consequences of the violent escalation between Palestinians and Israelis and carried them with them as an incisive childhood memory. As a result, not only Haneen (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 97) and Yael (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 14) mention the second intifada in their statement, but also Bisan:

„I don't know how to answer this like how since when I've been an activist, but I think from 2000, I think I was a kid back then, [...] around the 2000 there was a second uprising, the second intifada and then my parents, they had a business and [...] because of the war and everything, they lost it and all that. I think it led me to become like an activist and [...] led me to politics and activism [...] I was just 3 years old or 4, but [...] basically we spent like our whole childhood to get back what we had. So that's when we used to like, listen to a lot of stories and [...] all the [...] [things] that Israel does and that's how I became an activist.” (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 2)

As explained above, all activists have their own histories, identities and forms of self-expression, but they share common values, which are reflected in these statements. The unifying element according to generational studies is the sharing of specific historical moments and cultural experiences that shape these values and have an influence on the movement.

As elaborated in the subchapter *Women in Conflict – Representation and Resistance* this thesis follows the approach of focusing on the exclusion of women in public life and their activism as an expression of political participation, while bringing the voices of Palestinian women activists to the fore. Through this approach, different forms of individual and collective motivators for activism and resistance have been identified that address different forms of oppression and inequality. The various individual but also connecting events and stories that ultimately led to the decision to become activists were of importance within this subchapter. Now, it is crucial to delve further into which forms of activism have emerged from these motivators and, above all, how they are shaped by the discussed forms of oppression.

Professional Feminist NGOs and Policy and Advocacy-oriented Approaches

As described by Kuttab (2009) and Jad (2018), NGO-ization of women's movements in Palestine took place and an increasing number of specialised and professional feminist NGOs began to intervene in the national and international policy process, trying to influence new national policies through more policy and advocacy-oriented actions (Kuttab 2009: 110-113; Jad 2018: 161-162). Many of the activists work for NGOs and are affected by international policy processes, prompting them to reflect on their experiences within a complex interplay of oppression and empowerment.

An important example of international interference is CEDAW as mentioned before, until now it is not implemented in everyday politics and incorporated into policymaking (Hawari 2019b; Abdo/Yuval-Davis 1995; Jad 2018). Iona and Isabel are both part of the Women's Coalition for Justice and Equality (Erada)²⁹ that continues to put pressure to publish the CEDAW Agreement in the Palestinian Official Gazette, to implement it and adapt the national legislation and various administrative structures in accordance with its provisions (Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 3; 11; 19; 71; 79). Erada is trying to change society towards more justice and women's rights by trying to influence the law, especially in the area of family law. While successes have already been achieved through the movement, such as the approval to raise the age of marriage from 14 to 18 years, they continue to struggle to change gender-based discrimination in legislation, such as the right to open a bank account or to request a passport for herself and her children (Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 11; 12-14; 19; Iona 18.05.2022 (2), Pos. 26). Through advocacy campaigns, collecting signatures and dialogue with political decision-makers, legislative changes are intended (Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 17). At the same time, it is important for them to raise awareness, support and change attitudes through a range of educational measures, which is why they work together with various actors, especially focussing on decision-makers in Palestine to work together in workshop to develop the amendment of laws (Iona 18.05.2022 (2), Pos. 26). At the same time, according to her, it is important to start with society itself in order to break down patriarchal structures, therefore working with regular women and men in workshops is equally important:

„Now I'm working with the roots, this is an organization working about or with the woman which suffering from violence and survived. [...] This service we offer them is, we present the

²⁹ Translation by the activists: „in English we call it the willing movement” (Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 11)

legal advice and a workshop to them, and we work also, not only with the women, but also with the men. [...] And we work about the thoughts, mindsets and knowledge and all that. And we represent them in court [...]"(Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 25)

Yael works in a similar field in Israel, also with the intention of putting pressure on the government to stop gender-based discrimination and human rights violations:

„I'm the spokesperson for the task force on human trafficking and prostitution. This is an NGO. It's nongovernmental, we're funded by private donors purposely because we don't want to be confined by the government. We want to work to put pressure on the government here in Israel, it is an Israeli organization, but it's very much oriented to human rights." (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 2)

She reflects on the NGOs' focus on human rights, but not, as Jad (2018) has criticised, that the shifted focus on universal human rights has led to a demobilisation and weakening of the women's movements (ibid.: 163; 168), but instead as an Israeli in relation to what human rights focus often means in Israel. She explains that her organization is different from others, which are connecting human rights with citizenship, showing that Freire's argument is right that the oppressor understands humanity as its exclusive right (Freire 2014 [1968]: 58-59), but her NGO would be "[...] directed towards the discourse of real, like human rights like regardless of if they're Jewish, regardless of if they're citizens [...]" (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 2). Yael summarises her activism, which, like most of the other interviewees, takes place both professionally and in her free time, as follows: „So yeah, I do paid activism and non-paid activism" (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 48). Whereby her efforts always focus on both struggles, the Palestinian struggle and the feminist struggle (ibid.). In what she would call non-paid activism, she uses creative and social channels, such as Sameeha, to generate attention and a shift in thinking:

„I think that a lot of it is like regarding like changing consciousness and doing things that are connected to public discourse [...] My tool is writing, is talking about like how people think, like the podcast is very much about that. About, just like giving a different perspective and like, breaking these barriers of like these black and white like perceptions of how what's going on here and like seeing that like there's other ways to approach it. So yeah, and I do go to demonstrations of all different organizations like against occupation, and it could be different things regarding Palestinian struggle, can be feminist demonstrations." (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 46)

Bisan and Sheridan, agree that „NGOs are doing a fine job" (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 31) when it comes to raising awareness and conducting workshops to address a broader social mass in the field of feminism and to give new perspectives (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 33). But as mentioned before the institutionalised control of NGOs means that their language and narratives are regulated and free expression is limited (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 15). Since Bisan works for an NGO that is regulated by an Israeli organisation, she feels silenced in her work and Israeli regulations are described as „[...] what

keeps us behind from going further with our feminism“ (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 72). This means that even if they succeed in generating attention, what is said is first sent through the filter of the hegemon, so that their self-determination is limited even in their work.

Homegrown Palestinian Forms of Feminist Resistance: Halaqat Istiqbal and Sumud

Kuttab (2009) and Jad (2018) argue that the international influence and NGO-ization of women's movements has destroyed traditional Palestinian forms of activism. According to Jad, the shift of focus was so disconnected from its local context that it weakened the homegrown feminism and demobilized women groups by ignoring the local context (Jad 2018: 163, 168). However, in the interviews with the activists, a clear shift towards historical forms of feminist activism grown in Palestine can be analysed.

Aya is part of a project called *Halaqat Istiqbal*³⁰, which is about reviving an old tradition of Palestinian women who used to gather weekly or monthly to share their experiences and stories. Before the Nakba, she explains, it would have been common for women „[...] to be together to sit together to talk about political issues, social issues and to read the articles to, to talk about it, to play music“ (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 15). She had learned about this through a course run by another organisation, where Palestinian researchers spoke about women's history in Palestine, and decided to re-establish this form of feminist resistance (ibid.). The project started in March 2017 in Lod, when she developed the idea „to organize political, feminist tours“ (ibid.) through cities and villages all over historic Palestine to document Palestinian women's narratives. The initiative directly addresses the oppression of Palestinian women through epistemic violence by giving silenced and misinterpreted voices (Spivak 2009) the opportunity to be heard while facilitating dialogue among Palestinian women. Aya explains the importance for her:

“[...] being in the different villages and towns - you are part of the space. And you walk in the town or in the village, and you meet other women from there, and they talk to you and speak about their story. And you write it [down], and you understand, you get to understand some ideas from the struggle. Only when you hear the woman and when you meet the woman with other women that are not activist woman or something. They are very far from my space or my activism, but Halaqat Istiqbal succeeded to bring these women to be part of political movement without to be in demonstration or without to be facing soldiers or facing police or facing the occupation in a right fight. So Halaqat Istiqbal creates other kind of activism or political national activism. Palestinian activism, that is feminist with a review it's feminists

³⁰ Aya translates this term into „reception circles“ (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 37)

talking about woman rights. All the time. [...] And also, the woman's right to be part of struggling this occupation.” (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 27-29)

Haneen is also part of this initiative and had joined other women circles before during her studies in Jerusalem. She explains that they always chose a specific topic to talk about, such as health, sports, society, which were always highlighted in the context of and for women in (East) Jerusalem and linked to activities. At the same time, an elementary part of the women's circles was to talk about feminisms (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 12). These women's circles were likely the starting point for her as a Palestinian feminist activist and while it was difficult to find a foothold in women's rights organisations afterwards, the opportunity to revive a Palestinian tradition with Halaqat Istiqbal and to connect with Palestinian women in different places in Palestine is something she is excited about (ibid., Pos. 18; 55; 63).

Sameeha is part of a youth movement called *Youth of Sumud*, in which young men and women defend their human rights in the area of the South Hebron hills trying to bring attention to the area and their daily life struggles for the international and Palestinian community (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 2). The movement started in 2017 and the number of members rose from 6-8 persons to around 35 today (ibid., Pos. 51). While Youth of Sumud is a youth movement, it also has older supporters like her 90 years old grandmother, who has been committed to her land for a long time and accompanies them in their activities, believing in them to bring change to the place (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 49).

Sumud³¹ is another example of a traditional non-violent form of resistance:

„Sumud is a tactic of resistance to the Israeli occupation that relies upon adaptation to the difficulties of life under occupation, staying in the territories despite hardship, and asserting Palestinian culture and identity in response to Zionist claims which posit Israelis as the sole legitimate inhabitants of the land. Sumud represents a „resilient resistance”— a tactic of resistance that relies on qualities of resilience such as getting by and adapting to shock.” (Ryan 2015: 299)

Palestinian women would „[...] engage in unconventional unarmed or peaceful resistance through Sumud [...]” (Khodary et al. 2020: 205), which represents a source of power and defiance by Palestinian women’s insistence not to abandon their right to land by protecting their homes and resisting to leave despite the occupation (ibid.: 215). Palestinian women understand Sumud as something uniquely Palestinian, which allows them to retain dignity. It represents a resilient resistance because despite all the daily experiences of oppression, they

³¹ „Sumud translates from Arabic as ‘steadfastness’ or ‘resilience’ - yet it encompasses a broad range of tactics and actions directed at maintaining a Palestinian presence on the land of historic Palestine, including what is now known as the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem, as well as practices aimed at coping with daily life under occupation” Ryan 2015: 300.

choose to remain on the land (Ryan 2015: 300). The focus is on actively remaining, daily resisting in the cultivation of their own home and the culture and identity that women teach their children, who inherit the struggle. Because of the patriarchal structure of the gender division of labour, Palestinian women are the ones who pass it on to the next generations (Khodary et al. 2020: 215). It is about Palestinian life, about normalizing this life to make it liveable and preserving community life and family. They organize weddings and family celebrations, arrange trips to relatives and friends in other parts of the West Bank, or meet through largely informal networks to go on outings together. All of these would be everyday parts of a normal life, but through the Israeli-imposed restrictions of mobility they become acts of everyday resistance (Johansson/Vinthagen 2015: 110-111). The cultivation and transmission of culture also creates cultural resistance. By retaining and performing practices such as sewing traditional clothing, visual and literary arts, opportunities arise to define the narrative and break the Israeli-dominated discourse of Palestinians as either victims or terrorists. By representing their own reality through art and storytelling, „Palestinian women [can] present an alternative local/indigenous discourse about ‘Palestine’ and the ‘Palestinians’” (Khodary et al. 2020: 216).

Sameeha confirms these findings of Khodary et al. (2020) and Johansson/Vinthagen (2015) by explaining that their activities are divided into awareness raising for what is happening on the ground and enabling everyday life on the ground for themselves and the people who live there as well (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 6). First, this means that they use their social media to raise awareness about the evictions and house demolitions as well as inviting people to visit the place and exert pressure through their channels.

„What we are doing is organizing a tour for like diplomatic people, international people who can come and reach the place to come and see by their own eyes and support the people and really make a pressure through their social media, through their [...] embassy, through anything they can do to stop this order. We bring as much as we can people here for the area to come and see and meet the families. You can have the experience of the people about the abolition of the of the human rights that's happening [...]” (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 6)

At the same time, they are following daily activities, like accompanying shepherds that get attacked on their land by settlers, night and day raids, and document these to publish videos and posts on their social media channels to raise awareness (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 6). She explains that this is not only to gain attention, but also to motivate other young people to become part of the movement and support the fight against the occupation (ibid.). For her, it is relevant to expose the situation and to make a statement by staying. This refusal to leave, the resistance to give up the land and to fight for their right to the land is, as Khodary et al. (2020) have already explained, is an essential form of peaceful resistance for Palestinian

women (Khodary et al 2020: 205; 215). Sameeha describes this connection with the land as follows:

„A lot of times they told me go and live in the city. But no, we don't have any place in the city to go to live in. Where is the city that we should go for? So, this is our land! Why you're kicking us out of it? You're just bringing settlers from abroad from all over the world and you give them all the services. Then you come to kill our parents and destroy our shelter.” (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 20)

Leaving and abandoning her land, her family, her community, and her home is not an option for her. She actively decides to stay and resist, even if that means just giving other local people a chance to stay and not become a refugee in their own country. Therefore, people whose houses were destroyed receive shelter in their family houses or in the community centre or the group stays with them until another shelter could be built (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 22). In addition to these activities, their presence alone can be understood as a form of resistance, but the spaces for everyday life would consistently become smaller and more limited, placing a particular burden on women who would not leave this conflict-ridden place as they care for children, home and land. Therefore, one form of her resistance would have been to create a space for women, called *Mothers of Sumud Garden*, where they can sit and relax (ibid., Pos. 22), but this space is also taken away from them:

„[...] this part of land was in front of the settlements, and it was targeted to be confiscated and used for the settlements. And so, the idea was first of all, to protect this land. Second is to make it a place for the woman where they can spend their own time and bring some games, and you know, chairs and umbrellas where they can feel that there's kind of park in the area where they cannot be so far from their kids. [...] but it was attacked couples of times from the settlers, and they destroyed the plants, the different kind of trees and they cut it all. We plant more than 80 trees just to make a life in this place and they destroyed all. And then I was bringing some games for the children and all that and they came and destroyed it [...]” (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 28)

Supporting other women is particularly close to her heart in her activism, so in addition to creating spaces, she has asked a doctor to provide psychosocial support to women and children whose homes have been destroyed or who have experienced settler violence, and to talk to people in the villages and offer workshops to help them cope. Since then, every week this doctor offers sessions for women to talk about their experiences of violence (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 20; 33). In addition, she uses a creative form of activism to enable psychosocial support and the sharing of experiences as Palestinian women in an oppressed

space. The project is called *Photovoice*³² and aims to give women the space to talk about their experiences and share them with each other:

„They're feeling shy and not ready to stand and speak their stories and what's happening with them. Like when the army raids their houses, they're not ready to talk, they feel shy and not ready I noticed. So, I was helping them through ‘Photovoice’ to speak their stories, but through a photo that they took by themselves. So, I also had that kind of show for their photos in Bethlehem and invited a lot of people and kind of support them to speak with some, because it's so important for you to do.” (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 22)

She garnered attention from all over the world through a large exhibition in Bethlehem, where she shared the photos and the women's stories with the public. At the same time, it was a way to take the women away from Masafer Yatta and give them the space to have fun and be together in a place that is not characterised by constant violence (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 22). It empowered women by teaching them how to take photographs, to tell their own stories from their photographed perspective. The obstacle of talking about their experiences of violence on their own would have been overwhelming, but the protection of the camera and the photographing of the place would have opened them up. Sameeha describes it as an indirect form of communication with their stories being told through the pictures rather than the women having to tell their stories directly. „So yeah, this is the idea from ‘Photovoice’. ‘Photovoice’ means the voice of the photo, it means the story of the photo“ (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 33). As Wang and Burris (1997) note, it is a way of producing knowledge and opening up critical dialogue on important issues. While, as Sameeha describes, it serves to provide psychosocial support to women, it is also a way of resisting the epistemic violence that Palestinian women face, especially in Masafer Yatta. As Trottier et al. (2020) explain, the repressed voice is not even heard or listened to when it speaks, but the possibility of speaking through an image is a way of visualising the narrative. Moreover, it can also be understood as a form of Sumud, because, as Khodary et al. theorise, by representing their own reality through creative forms of expression and storytelling, Palestinian women can open up an alternative discourse about Palestine and Palestinians, thereby breaking the Israeli-dominated discourse of Palestinians as either victims or terrorists (ibid.: 216).

³² „Photovoice is a process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique. As a practice based in the production of knowledge, photovoice has three main goals: (1) to enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns, (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussion of photographs, and (3) to reach policymakers.“ Wang/Burris 1997: 369.

BDS – Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions

In addition to the local Palestinian forms of resistance, there are movements in Palestine that are inspired by other activists all over the world. The movement BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) is aiming to put pressure on Israel internationally to comply with international law and stop human rights violations against the Palestinian people. It is considered to be a promising sign of solidarity and a major expression of resistance coming out of Palestine in recent years. Officially issued in July 2005 by over 175 Palestinian civil society organizations, including many women's groups, it has become a global movement that is steadily growing incorporating many different actors and is receiving increasing support from an international audience, and international feminist circles (Welchman et al. 2021: 358; Sharoni et al. 2015: 655; Elia 2017: 45-46). Inspired by the South African anti-apartheid movement in the 1980s, it calls for non-violent pressure on Israel by boycotting Israeli sporting, cultural and academic institutions, and companies involved in Palestinian human rights violations, to withdraw investment from the State Israel and companies that support its apartheid, and sanction government's involvement with Israel in international forums and by making business through international trade agreements (BDS Movement 2016). Several of the interviewees refer to BDS and are either part of the movement or show solidarity with it (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 58; Iona 18.05.2022 (3), Pos. 11; 14; Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 65). Sheridan is part of BDS both professionally and in her spare time and describes the movement as her central form of activism:

„I work in an NGO as a product officer. The projects are mainly to help artisans in Palestine to have a sustainable income and have a decent living by producing Palestinian products that are related to our heritage. And we promote these products outside of Palestine. So, this is like the approach that I like. Promotion outside Palestine, through Palestinian products and sports festivals, boycotting Israeli products.” (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 16)

As she herself is a national footballer in the field of international sports competitions, she considers the BDS approach a possibility to draw attention to the issue in an international context (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 6). According to her, BDS takes a longer period of time and needs patience before seeing any results. She describes it as an attention-grabbing process that could have a “a long-term impact for the Palestinian cause” (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 18). As an example, Sheridan refers to famous musicians who face headwinds for hosting a concert in Tel Aviv and who cancel their concerts because of the criticism. In her opinion, people need to understand that they are coming to an occupied place where people have been displaced and human rights are being violated. For her, this would make it possible for Israelis who are affected to start questioning:

„[...] Israelis who live in Tel Aviv will ask ‘Why did he do that? What did I do wrong with being here? I’m just living my life. [...]’ but they need to understand that they’re coming to an occupied place. [...] So, when singers, or football players maybe, or influencers or famous persons or famous brands boycott Israel, this is when Israelis start to think. ‘What did I do wrong?’ And they maybe start to search a little bit for the Palestinian war. [...] So, this is what the BDS does [...] [it] just opens the minds of people to let them understand that you can’t support Israelis products or the government [...].” (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 20)

According to the literature just mentioned (Welchman et al. 2021; Sharoni et al. 2015; Elia 2017), BDS is a promising sign of an emerging transnational feminist solidarity and an important expression of resistance in the last years. The activists’ statements confirm the increasing importance of the BDS for Palestinian feminists, as Aya explains that especially since a rising number of Palestinian women are part of BDS, it would be a possibility to think of the struggles in solidarity and uniting: „It makes all the struggles in one struggle “(Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 58). Enass considers the BDS approach to be the most meaningful and non-violent way to resolve the conflict. For her, as a writer, it’s another way to shape the public opinion (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 65). Furthermore, according to Enass, it could be a crucial tool for resolving the conflict through transnational movements like BDS:

„ [...] I believe in BDS as a very important tool, and I think it can also come from the international feminist movements. Like if they also start [...] supporting Palestine and supporting the right to live in a free land and not under occupation. It can really change like everyone’s reality. [...] I believe that having solidarity and supporting BDS is the only thing that will save more lives. In the future.” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 63)

The support of activists for transnational feminist movements appears to be significant primarily because they believe that such movements have the potential to shape the international perception of Palestine and the occupation. This influence could, in turn, impact the future of Palestinian women and the ongoing conflict.

As the opening quote by Enass clearly demonstrates, within this chapter, it has been emphasized how crucial it is to have words that describe the problem. For her, the statement of being a Palestinian woman signifies not only identity but also simultaneously expresses her activism as a feminist in Palestine. This self-description as a Palestinian woman is a vital element that needs to be considered for both analysing the reasons and forms of activism as a way out of this feeling of not being human and out of their invisibility. Within the chapter, it became evident that the motivators for becoming activists are diverse, yet the significance of one’s background, family history, and stories heard from an early age strongly shapes their identity and activism. Upbringing, particularly by mothers and grandmothers who have been or are activists themselves, appears to have been influential for some feminists. For others facing patriarchal family structures, activism became a way to escape family pressure and

pursue self-determination through activism. However, familial influence alone does not seem to be the sole reason for activism. Most of the interviewees speak of initial moments or turning points that made them realise the oppressive system while also instilling optimism that collective action could address the identified problem. This chapter has underscored that it does not depict a homogeneous group of feminists but, as repeatedly emphasised, a highly diverse group with various living situations, intersecting systems of oppression, different forms of activism, and diverse understandings of feminism within this heterogeneous collective. The important issue is that they all share the sense that they are addressing the oppressive system through activist behaviour, and the stories that shape them and the narratives they use to explain it exhibit strong parallels. These parallels illustrate the unifying element that connects these individuals as a generation, binding them through certain historical and cultural experiences. The stories passed down, such as those related to the Nakba and the First Intifada, unite them as much as their earliest active memories as children during the historically significant violent conflicts between Israel and Palestine during the Second Intifada.

It is essential to recognize that both the motivating factors for activism and the evolution of feminist activism in Palestine have been influenced by narratives and historical events over time. The transformations and adjustments made by the younger generation of feminists to the circumstances are particularly interesting, as they continue to be affected by international policy processes. However, the described NGO-ization process, which led to the depoliticization and professionalisation of grassroots feminist struggles, is being balanced by the younger generation. Until today, efforts are underway to implement CEDAW, combat elitist structures that impede the authentic political participation of Palestinian women, and grapple with the substantial interference imposed by the Israeli government on the orientation and information dissemination of NGOs. However, as Yael (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 48) succinctly summarises, the path of activists is to connect paid activism and non-paid activism. This means that those working for international and national NGOs also participate in activist groups that fight for the feminist and national goals of Palestinian women as grassroots movements on both national and international levels. In the realm of grassroots feminist struggles, two critical elements play a significant role in addressing the depoliticization and marginalisation of homegrown feminism that followed the Oslo Accords. Firstly, there is a return to and revival of forms of homegrown feminist resistance, such as Halaqat Istiqbal or Youth Sumud, which now employ resistance methods used by Palestinian women before 1948 and utilise modern technologies like online meeting forums and social media to connect

with each other across the barriers that have separated them since that time. Additionally, some activists are part of or supporters of the BDS, a transnational movement considered to be a promising sign of solidarity and a significant expression of resistance emerging from Palestine in recent years. The younger generation appears to have learned valuable lessons from the past and undergone a transformation in their feminist approach. They seem to have harnessed precisely this combination of transnational solidarity and the fortification of homegrown feminism through feminist grassroots movements, that Jad has already written in her letter to Mohanty, moving away from NGO-ization and embracing a synthesis of nationalism and feminist liberation struggle (Mohanty 2013: 984-985). This evolution underscores the enduring impact of the older generation's experiences, highlighting how the feminist movement continues to evolve based on lessons learned from both historical and political events and the insights of those who came before. This phenomenon can be observed not only in the form of activism but also in the respective understanding of feminisms itself. Moreover, it's essential to note that the effects of the Oslo Accords continue to play a significant role for these feminists, influencing their activism to this day. While they have learned from the lessons of the previous generation, they still grapple with the marginalization of grassroots feminism, a topic that will be further explored in the following chapter on the understandings of feminisms.

4.2.2 Feminism(s) in Palestine

„And some of us are working about our rights in our society. And others their struggle is only against the occupation and me and other women are working in the both of them as one struggle. [...] It's the same struggle as I said before the national Palestinian political struggle to get the rights from the occupation to liberate Palestine and to liberate the woman in Palestine as well, and at the same time. I don't want to liberate Palestine from the occupation and then to start to work about women rights. No, [...] I think that when we will get woman right in Palestine, we will be more stronger to get our liberation from the Israeli occupation.”
(Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 21)

Palestinian Feminist History

Palestinian feminist history plays a pivotal role in understanding feminist movements and their developments, as well as the connection to the national struggle, in contemporary Palestine. The importance of history becomes even more visible in the narratives of the interviewees, since their understanding of feminism is often based on the historical importance of women in Palestine.

Lora, who is currently writing her PhD about feminism in Palestine elaborates on the essential parts women played throughout history. Similar to Jad (2018) and Kuttab (2009) she emphasizes the transformation that women's movements have experienced throughout

Palestinian political history, as well as the different struggles they had to fight due to the changing political circumstances:

„Women through the history of Palestine had a great role through the revolution, starting from the 1936 revolution. Then the Nakba and then in the war of 1967. Well, the thing is that feminism in Palestine always had ups and downs, throughout their work, because we live in the Middle East, we have a [...] patriarchy [...] but the thing is that always women were there.” (Lora 12.05.2022, Pos. 4)

Even if women were not always immediately considered to be at the core of changing political circumstances, they were the ones who fled with their children during the Nakba, the ones who would have helped fighters with food and clothes during the Six Day War, and the ones who organised life in the cities during the first intifada (Lora 12.05.2022, Pos. 4). Because of this adaptability and the experiences, the women had to go through, they could be the key for change according to Lora:

„So, lesson-learned for me since ever in this history is that women should always be in the revolution, in the streets, taking the like a great position, politically and socially, so that they, because they can change, they do play a great role in the revolution and the Palestinian history.” (Lora 12.05.2022, Pos. 4)

However, according to literature, the revolutionary role of women was taken away by the changes brought about by the Oslo Accords (Kuttab 2009; Jad 2008, 2018). Those women who were allowed to continue to hold certain offices were either women with social power, by which she means women from powerful families who were already part of the leading party or otherwise of value to the government, or, as mentioned before, used to create appearance of offering minorities good positions in the government (Lora 12.05.2022, Pos. 8; 4). The disempowerment of women since Oslo would continue to this day (ibid., Pos. 10) and led to the gradual disappearance of „real feminist movements“ (Lora 12.05.2022, Pos. 28) year after year, because the women who used to have leading roles as revolutionaries now either work in NGOs influenced by the international discourse about Palestinian women or local organisations, which are, however, sponsored by the PA. In these positions they do not have „the freedom of expression to put all their opinion into the cause “ (ibid.). They could not work freely because of the requirements of the sponsors (ibid.). Lora's research is consistent with the theory used here that after the Oslo Accords, a dependency on international donors and the PA would have emerged that would prevent a real struggle against the existing system (Hawari 2019b). While the previous chapter briefly touched upon how activists have found ways to address the issue of real feminist movements losing power and cohesion, particularly in light of the growing influence of international NGOs (Kuttab 2009: 110-113; Jad 2018: 161-162), it's important to highlight that today's activists continue

to build upon these lessons from their predecessors. They are striving to revive a feminism that recalls the pre-Nakba and pre-NGO-ization era, drawing inspiration from the strategies that worked before. This resurgence is apparent through statements such as Aya's, who describes the return to the tradition of women's circles as a continuation of women's activism before '48 (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 19-21; 31-33). At the same time, Enass explains that she feels that before '48 there would have been a country for her to be a feminist in and when she thinks about the future now, she reflects on how these women and their activism have changed due to political circumstances and what that means for her own future as an activist (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 45; 63). The return to the women's movement of the past therefore appears to be a defining element of feminists of today. At the same time, according to Iona, there is a return to the meaning of feminism as such. While women used to focus on politics and are still led by it today, the number of independent movements whose focus is on the feminist struggle would increase, such as Erada or Tal3at. Even if only small goals could be achieved, there would have been a change in the social society. Women would have changed over the years and would claim their right to ask for what they want and raise their voices, even in politics (Iona 18.05.2022 (3), Pos. 49). They would be confronted with difficulties, since the PA would put obstacles in the way of these independent movements, and at the same time would not allow women who are in the leading parties to leave or oppose the party lines. However, in the in the last 10 years this strict line has weakened even with Fatah, so that they can operate increasingly independent (Iona 18.05.2022 (3), Pos. 49). It seems, as Jad wrote to Mohanty, that Palestinian women gained back their energy for reclaiming their own feminism, detached from the influence of the Oslo actors and their donors. What feminism means to the young activists now, if they represent a new wave of feminism and whether Jad's statement can be confirmed that Mohanty's concept of transnational feminist solidarity has brought back the spirit of resistance will be analysed below.

Understanding of Feminism

There is no such thing as one feminism, instead, as elaborated in the subchapter *Waves and Generations of Feminist Activism*, there are various interpretations of feminism(s). From the activists' statements, it becomes clear that the meaning is different for each person, or at least has different emphases, Sheridan explains:

„It's like peace. It has different, yeah, different meanings. For me, being a feminist is just that for me to be able to do and apply my potential. Like regardless of my gender and all these things. So, I think being a feminist is just like you can do [...] whatever you want, whatever you can because woman, they do have potential. And you need to give them the space to fulfil this potential.” (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 35)

For Bisan and Sheridan, the focus is on realising potential, and equal opportunities are in the foreground of their understanding of feminism:

„[...] I don't want to be equal to men because I can be better than them. What feminism is for me is being able to reach my potential without restrictions. This is like the most powerful way to talk about feminism that I can be whatever I want to be, whatever I can be, and if I don't want to be that it's my choice. Not because someone restricted me.” (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 37)

This equality of opportunity and the freedom of choice, without any restrictions is something that is reflected in other conversations as well. For Isabel, feminism means liberation for her and others who are confined by the narrow patriarchal thought structures. She understands the fight against sexism and against patriarchy as an investment, as she believes that independent women who believe in justice and freedom fight for the liberation of others: „When we are free, maybe we could make other people free too” (Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 33). Her focus is on achieving liberation from patriarchal structures that oppress her through society and family structures and her aim is to live life according to what she wants and not due to the definition of society (Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 33). Her definition of feminism is self-determination and freedom, she understands women's rights as human rights, because without self-determined decisions „[...] we are not a complete human being we need like always agreement from dad or biggest brother or even the husband [...]” (Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 56). To end patriarchy, according to Hooks, everyone's mindset needs to be changed (Hooks 2000: viii-ix), this question of upbringing in patriarchal structures is reflected by Isabel when asking what feminism means to her: „I think the main idea is about equality. It's about why we should live with feeling that the men are better than us. And why should men be raised on this idea?” (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 30).

The idea of being a role model seems to be an important motive. The opportunity as a woman to stand up for her own rights, and be self-determined in her choice, thereby setting an example for the younger generation is something that concerns the young activists. Sheridan feels this power through sports, and as she works in a male-dominated sport, it is even more important to show young women that they can empower themselves through sport (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 25): „So, this is why I'm going to approach sports where I can promote the Palestinian women through football and that we have the right to play, not even just football, but any sports and I can liberate from that” (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 22). The struggle for women's rights and the goal that „I want to live the life which I believe in and take my right and all the women rights” (Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 35), also drives Iona in her work. She also sees herself as a pioneer for the next generation, as she

shares the opinion that social change is necessary to break down patriarchal structures. Although this change in thinking would take place very slowly, which is why she believes that it will take the next generation to achieve this change. While small successes can be recorded, the big break would only happen when they succeed in paving the way for the next generation (Iona 18.05.2022 (3), Pos. 28). The importance of women pioneers is particularly evident in the fact that well-known Palestinian feminists are described by the activists as having shaped their own lives. The suffering and oppression, as well as the strength of women such as Khalid al Jarrah, who spent many years in prison because of her activism, or the suppression of the voice of Nawal al Sa'adawi, who was asked by Betty Friedan not to speak about occupation at the UN women's conference, are thus described as iconic women (Iona 18.05.2022 (3), Pos. 19; Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 41-45). In addition, the activists describe the murder of Shireen Abu Akleh, who was murdered while carrying out an Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) raid on Jenin Refugee Camp on 11 May 2022, as a profound experience because for many young women she had an advocacy role that they respected (Iona 18.05.2022 (2), Pos. 11-12): „[...] for us she's a role model as a people, she was our voice in the TV, in the media. But when she was killed, she also was our voice because they killed our voice [...] it was like we all got shot” (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 97).

However, social movements emerge under certain historical, social and political circumstances, which means that the feminism in Palestine is deeply marked by the special circumstances of living under patriarchy and occupation at the same time. The importance of these two axes of oppression is evident in feminism's understanding with other interlocutors who believe that the struggle against patriarchy in Palestine is not enough to liberate Palestinian women and bring the decolonial perspective into the discourse.

„I think you can't talk about equality between boys and girls in school when both of them don't go to school because of another war that is happening. You can't talk about like the western feminism which is like equality when you don't have basic needs met.” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 48)

In line with Angela Davis' perspective, that in feminism instead of thinking things separate, Enass follows an intersectional approach. She explains that in Palestine/Israel, the problem is not only that men have more rights and opportunities than women, but that Israelis and settlers have different rights than the Palestinian population. Instead of focusing on the gender perspective, the system of dominance needs to be overcome, which means that according to her „[...] it comes hand in hand like feminism and fight for ending occupation“ (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 51).

Aya agrees with Enass and regards the feminist struggle in Palestine as one against an intersecting oppression system. As the opening statement of the chapter already states, the point is that “[i]t is the same struggle, as I said before, the Palestinian national political struggle to get the rights from the occupation, to liberate Palestine and also to liberate the woman in Palestine as well, and at the same time” (Aya 28.06.2022, pos. 21), whereby women's self-determination would be a way to strengthen the struggle for Palestinian self-determination (ibid.). In this context, the struggle against patriarchy is not opposed to the national struggle, but rather the liberation from these oppressive patriarchal structures as an enrichment for the liberation struggle in general. Women's freedom should not be neglected when it comes to the liberation of the Palestinians. The same is true for Lora, who criticises that if the struggle is against patriarchy and the concept of freedom is limited to gender, no real freedom can be achieved if Palestinian women continue to live under occupation (Lora 12.05.2022, Pos. 18). The limited concept of freedom shaped by international society and NGOs would lead to stereotyping that would deprive them of the space for real liberation (Lora 12.05.2022, Pos. 12), because „Palestinian women are powerful, they are strong. These women are losing children, [...] they have their sons in prisons and exile. They are suffering a lot, but they are still strong, and they are still fighting for the freedom of their children or fighting for the liberty in this revolution” (Lora 12.05.2022, Pos. 14) and this potential should be fully exhausted. Within this discourse on freedom, women's rights, and the struggle against different systems of oppression, the critique of the representation of Palestinian women becomes even more clear. They criticise the portrayal of women in the Middle East as oppressed victims without agency who need to be helped by the superior global North (Khodary et al. 2020: 206). In contrast, they join the critique of texts by postcolonial feminist writers who are increasingly challenging this narrative and the complex relationship that develops between oppression and conflict on the one hand and women's agency, activism, and resistance on the other (ibid.) and highlight the strength with which Palestinian women approach the struggle. This critique is echoed by Yael, who is aware of, and reflects on her privileged position as an Ashkenazi Israeli and the position of power she finds herself in (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 42). This realisation of the position of power within feminist discourse would have led her to understand that other women have to fight a battle on several fronts, which she wants to support (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 18). At the same time, the positioning, due to her identity and environment, means that she must strive for a constant process of reflection in order to avoid becoming an ally of the system of oppression. For her as an Israeli, this also means a clear distancing from the Israeli oppressive regime, such as the Israeli military: „Like

if you're gonna be a feminist then you can't take pride in something that's oppressing Palestinian women, or any women for that matter” (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 2).

The elaboration of the interconnected multidimensional systems of oppression that must be resisted shows an intersectional understanding of feminism. It shows a clear resistance to the replication and reinforcement of the subordination of people, as described by Crenshaw, and a struggle for equality waged on different levels, within different dimensions, or as Audre Lorde would describe it, the Palestinian feminist struggle here understands itself as a non „single-issue struggle” (Audre Lorde). The feminism that the activists represent is as demanded by intersectional feminism, directly attacking the systems that have perpetuated structures of inequality for years, and thus signifying self-determination, rather than focusing on gender equality as a buzzword.

Nationalism vs. Feminism – Priorities of the New Generation of Palestinian Feminists

According to Fidaa al Zaanin, there is a new generation of young feminists who understand the oppression of women in the context of intersectionality and are pursuing new forms of feminist activism (Al Zaanin 2021a: 4). In her research, al Zaanin refers to the Tal3at movement as one of the movements that revitalised the discourse of feminism, gaining local and international attention with the slogan ‘No Free Homeland Without Free Women’.

Aya was the one who invented the slogan for Tal3at (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 42-47) to express this idea that the feminist and the political struggle are both part of the national Palestinian struggle (ibid., Pos. 15) and for her both struggles have to be fought together (ibid., Pos. 21). In order to understand the needs of Palestinian women, women must also be part of the political life and national struggle. Since political life is dominated by men, more women need to be politically engaged in order to bring the feminist perspective into the political struggle for freedom, which is why an improvement of women's rights is indispensable. It is still difficult to anchor this idea in the national liberation struggle that women are fighting against multiple oppression in the struggle for self-determination (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 41).

„But the more challenging thing is that [...] you talk about your feminist rights and [...] that I can be different from you and think in another way like as a woman and as a Palestinian that lives under the occupation, you have to respect the difference between us. And respect that [...] I will guide with you this struggle and it's not easy. [...] We will never give up until we it will be the regular view in Palestine.” (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 41)

A similar approach is taken by Erada, who support Tal3at and plans to work together on activities. According to Iona, is important not to prioritise one struggle over the other, because if women do not succeed in fighting for their own self-determination and self-determination

in the national struggle, the liberation of Palestine as a free country with a free Palestinian population will not succeed (Iona 18.05.2022 (3), Pos. 41).

„We have only our struggle to get freedom from the occupation and we bring it all the time that no, it's the same struggle and we have to respect other people and when you are struggling against something it's very regular to support other people in your society. [...] I'm working on it to be aware and to respect other struggles, and that we are in the same society, and we struggle together.” (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 63)

This respect for leading the struggle with an intersectional approach is something they have to fight for not only against men, but from the interviews it can be concluded that there is a certain consensus on the attitude that one goal stands above the other and that the united struggle remains difficult.

„I think it is that people don't consider feminism is the real issue in Palestine. So, if I want to do like an activity for feminism inside Palestine, people will be like we are in the middle of an occupation, this is a war happening in Gaza and you are trying to get the same pay as your cousin [it] is not the time for that. This is one of the restrictions we have in Palestine, because our main problem, main issues like, I mean we are just focused on the occupation.[...] we want to think about the freedom of Palestine, then maybe we can start talking about the other stuff that matters most as a feminist, because the big problem is not now, from feminism, it's actually occupation.” (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 40-42)

Moreover, this prioritisation imposed on them as activists is partly reflected in their own mindset, for example, Lora and Sheridan agree that it is more important to end the occupation at the moment and argue that Palestinian women could wait a few more years for their rights (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 45).

„Sorry but I think for me the political situation is a bit like more important because it's to fix a whole country. The Palestinian women are strong and as I tell you we can tolerate another 5 maybe 10 years of being unequal.” (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 47)

Lora explains this attitude by clarifying that occupation has a higher weight as it affects different discrimination systems that would lead to more extremism towards women. Lora also criticises Tal3at for being an initiative without vision: „They were like in the streets trying to call for some freedom, but the freedom that is limited by sex, cloth, you can go out with shorts or whatever. But they were not fighting for real freedom that we need as Palestinian women under occupation first and then under patriarchy” (Lora 12.05.2022, Pos. 18). The congruence of the agenda of national and feminist freedom struggle therefore seems to be further challenged, since a prioritisation remains, but nevertheless it shows a rethinking of the meaning of Palestinian self-determination and the way to achieve it. This rethinking and unification of the two struggles could have far-reaching consequences in that, according

to Jad's research, „[t]he greatest successes have been achieved at moments when the feminist and nationalist agendas were maximally synergistic” (Jad 2018: 165).

According to al Zaanin, the activism of the young feminists would make space for diversity in the experiences of Palestinian women marked by origin, identity, and forms of oppression, and thus their differing needs (Al Zaanin 2021a: 4). This confirms the data of Halaqat Istiqbal, Tal3at and Erada. In all three cases, the difference between the women, different ages, experiences and knowledge is one of the fundamental pillars of the initiatives. Isabel says that what is special about Erada is that the initiative „[...] contain[s] the woman from a lot of association, from a lot of jobs, from a lot of places like there is a government women worker and not government women worker. And there is some kind of NGOs women association or another or independent work and we are just in Erada [...]” (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 6). They are women with different life experiences and different stories and when they exchange ideas and discuss their next action, they have the feeling that together they can really change something (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 14). The differences between them, different families, jobs, environment, would not distance them from each other, but rather would clarify that they are all fighting the same battle and turn them into a small society of their own since they understand each other (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 16). In Tal3at, Aya explains, it was particularly important to show that oppression is something that affects women all over Palestine, not just in certain areas, which is why the establishment of the connection should take place across the forced borders:

„So then in the first meeting I remember I told my other colleagues, feminist activists, that if you will come out with something new, we have to get in all Palestine [...] because we are one nation living under one occupation and we want our struggle for our rights to be in all Palestine[...] this was the new thing Tal3at get in that we get out in a demonstration in Haifa, in the West Bank, in Lebanon, refugee camps, yani, in the whole historic Palestine. And in the whole Palestinian society. Yes. And this was the strongest thing Tal3at came to talk about.” (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 49)

Hearing the stories of women on Halaqat Istiqbal's tours would reinforce this sense of community. This makes it all the more important to bring women who have experienced violence into contact with each other, to understand that the struggle they are fighting and the pain they are feeling is the same:

„[...] we met the mother of Aseel Asleh who was killed and murdered by the Israeli soldiers and police. And then she talked [...] with us about her life, about her son, about her struggle. And then we go with her to a mother that her daughter was killed from her husband or ex-husband. And then we said that we are facing the same struggle all the time [...] to work together or to talk together all the time together and to be in one movement that talking about the same or the two struggles, the two stories, but in the same movement, in the same struggle.” (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 21)

For her, this dialogue could be a chance for more people to understand that it is one and the same struggle and a way of pursuing homegrown Palestinian feminism. Qazzaz (2021) question if there is a new wave of feminism arising through younger feminists below 35 years, who identify with the fourth wave using cyber space as a main field of activism, seems to be confirmed with the data presented. The activists use modern ways of mobilisation like social media to generate more attention and to connect with each other, as will be analysed in more detail in the next chapter, and consider their activism as a continuation of the struggle of their ancestors. Highlighting that these are not new challenges they are tackling, but the context of intersectional oppression results in a persistence of gender inequality in all aspects of life (Qazzaz 2021: 434-435), which shows Sameeha's statement clearly:

„So, we feel as young people that it's our responsibility to do our best through our activism, with different activity that we're following up here to bring all these attention from this place to be known at least [...]” (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 2)

The connection across borders and the possibility to express themselves seem to be an important part of young feminists. At the same time, they identify themselves as the new generation and a new wave of feminists in their self-description. They confirm that there is a new wave of feminism in Palestine (Lora 12.05.2022, Pos. 5-6) and see themselves as a part of it (Iona 18.05.2022 (3), Pos. 44-49). They are the young people who carry on the struggle for the women fighters before them, whom they respect and see as role models (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 97), and who support them in their fight for liberation:

„You know my grandma, she's 80 years old, 90 years old sorry, and she's part of the group. Like yes, she's the main supporter of our group and she used to sleep with us in the cave, she used to cook for us, she used to sleep with us. [...] and she was always saying to us: Kids I believe in you, I know that you are the one that will help and that you are the one that support. So yalla! Go on!” (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 49)

Transnational Feminist Solidarity

Jad argues that Mohanty's approach of transnational solidarity would have been the way to reverse the international influence and to find their way back to the “spirit of resistance as the basis for solidarity” (Mohanty 2013: 985). During the interviews, the issue of transnational feminist solidarity was raised repeatedly and appears to be a significant part of contemporary feminist activism in Palestine. However, it is important to emphasise that the activists have very different and sometimes contrasting views on this. In order to answer the question of what possibilities and constraints for transnational solidarity arise for feminists in contemporary Palestine, it is therefore necessary to first clarify the meaning and the conditions that need to be met for this solidarity to be recognised.

And this is the crucial point which becomes especially clear in the question of whether Israeli feminists can be in solidarity with Palestinian feminists. Yael therefore asks the relevant question herself, namely what it means to be in solidarity with Palestinian women in their struggle as an Israeli feminist:

„Look, I know that it's a very complicated question because it depends on what you regard as support and what you regard as solidarity, because a lot of people will say like, yeah, we're in support of Palestinian women as well. But like, what does this really mean? Are you going to support them when they have the struggle against husbands killing their wives? Or are you going to support them in their struggle for liberation as Palestinians as well, regardless of the gender-based violence that they have to suffer from the men in their lives?“ (Yael 16.05.2022)

Aya states that she does not want to be associated with Israeli feminists in her struggle, nor be a partner as long as they do not recognise the occupation and what it means for Palestinian women (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 49). According to Yael, this remains a major problem with Israeli feminist organisations, which launch valuable and successful feminist campaigns, such as against rape culture and victim blaming, but often hurt the Mizrahim community through false framing (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 2) or ignore their needs and everyday struggle. This would manifest itself in large feminist movements in Israel falling into patterns of white feminism³³ (ibid.), thus prioritising the existence of certain forms of oppression that primarily affect white middle class women. This exclusionary feminist approach, which is harshly criticised by intersectional feminists, ignores how misogyny intersects with other forms of oppression like racism, classism and Islamophobia, by just assuming that all women experience misogyny in the same way (Ezaydi 2023). In the case of the relationship between Israeli and Palestinian feminists, the ignorance of the occupation and its importance for Palestinian women can be recognised, for example, by sharing posts celebrating the first female commander of a combat unit in the Israeli army (Yael 16. 05.2022, Pos. 2), or that Yael Sherer, a Jewish activist against violence against women, lit a torch on Independence Day, which for Palestinians is a commemoration of the Nakba (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 4). This form of „IDF glorification“ (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 2), is what Yael calls a „textbook hypocrisy [...] and it's textbook white feminism“ (ibid.), which is why she has written to Israeli feminist organisations to draw their attention to it (ibid.). Because that is what it would mean to be an Israeli feminist in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle (ibid., Pos. 4).

„You can't do that and then not talk about the Palestinian struggle as a whole, because that's also a struggle of Palestinian women. All you have to do is you have to hear what the

³³ For more information read: Beck, Koa (2021): *White Feminism: From the Suffragettes to Influencers and Who They Leave Behind*. India: Atria Books.

Palestinian women like Samah Salaimah say. And then you know where your solidarity has to stand. But the things that she says: A: Don't get that much of a platform in the Israeli Hebrew discourse and B: [...] up until recently, for Palestinian citizens of Israel, it's very, very dangerous and scary to actually talk about the Palestinian struggle and to affiliate with it publicly because they pay a very heavy price [...] for actually being outspoken about their Palestinian identity.” (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 8)

Many Palestinian women in Israel would not be willing to pay this price and would fear ruining their alliance, so they often stay quiet and cooperate on what they have already found common ground on, as they have low expectations of Zionist feminists (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 8). But this is precisely the crux of the matter, because one would have to unlearn Zionism in order to be in real solidarity with the Palestinian feminist struggle for freedom:

„Like if you're a Zionist then it's very hard to let that go and support the Palestinian struggle. It doesn't go together. So, you have to choose. You have to choose sides like it sounds bad, but it's what it is. You're either in solidarity or you're not. I understand this, but I think a lot of Israeli feminists don't understand this concept. They see themselves as allies and as in solidarity with Palestinian feminists, regardless of if Palestinian feminists accept that alliance or not. Yeah, there's a lot of blindness.” (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 8)

She agrees with the slogan of Tal3at, saying ‘No Free homeland, Without Free Women’, understanding the concept of the two struggles that must be fought together. At the same time, Mohanty's claim to solidarity is recognised, as Yael reflects on her own position as oppressor, respects the role of women in this struggle, and says that she sees it as a common interest to free Palestinian women from what is currently oppressing them, whether by society or by the apartheid regime (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 50). This shows as Mohanty defines solidarity her understanding of accountability and the recognition of the common interest, and of ending the Israeli occupation (Mohanty 2003: 7). Furthermore, Yael reflects on her position and in every step of her activism chooses to fight together with Palestinian women for self-determination. However, the idea that solidarity is possible, and both wanted and recognised remains difficult because trust in each other is lacking and many are unwilling to talk to their oppressors. Bisan and Sheridan explain that on the one hand there would be mutual distrust and fear of each other, and they would only be willing to talk when the occupation was over (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 123-128). Even if Israeli and Palestinian feminists „sharing the same thoughts about feminism, sharing the same passion about changing the life of feminists“ (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 124) they would fall short on the matter of knowing the real meaning of the liberation of Palestinian women and a free Palestine. Therefore, they are of the opinion that there is no solidarity between Israelis and Palestinians, not during the time of occupation:

„I can't have solidarity because I can't betray the people who were killed and the people who lost their loved ones because I want to have a feminism approach. This would be not loyal for the Palestinian cause. To be selfish.” (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 130)

At the same time, the question of solidarity in an international context arises. Here, too, the critique of liberal and white feminism becomes loud and a certain anger and mistrust towards feminists from the global North is evident. As Elia (2015) and Naber (2016) have illustrated, expressions of solidarity are by no means self-evident for Palestinian feminists. Aya makes it clear that the support she perceives as patronising is neither wanted nor needed, because Palestinian women themselves know best how to fight their battle, and through the interwoven web of oppression, they have developed a strength that people who do not suffer from it would not understand:

„We do it very well and we know how to do it very well and how we should do it without external ideology like Israeli or, American or British or whatever, only Palestinian people who know how to guide their struggle and only the feminist woman will know how to do it as well. [...] I mean freedom is one of my personality characteristics. So, I don't need people to tell me how I will get my freedom [...] Especially as a Palestinian woman living under the Israeli occupation, [...] I'm more strong to talk about this issues and more brave to talk with Israeli and tell them you are not going to teach me or to learn me how to get out my struggle. I know very well, and I don't need you. And this is my personal message. This is the Tal3at message. So, this is the Halaqat Istiqbal message.” (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 57)

Betty Friedan's statement to Nawal el Saadawi, at the UN International Conference on Women, in 1985, still concerns young feminists today. Enass refers to el Sadawi's answer when stating that the struggle of Palestinian women must include talking about the occupation (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 45). Aya further elaborates that this is one of the main statements of the young feminists, which should be understood as a strength. While in other countries, people fight among themselves over different ideas of queer and women's rights, Palestinians could unite a large mass under the umbrella of the freedom struggle against occupation. She therefore believes that: „the Palestinians struggle, and the feminist struggle is so strong and so brave, because I don't have the privilege that others have, and [...] they fight about it against each other “(Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 64). Not only that she therefore does not need support from the global North, but in her opinion, it would not even be possible:

„[...] I think that yani white struggle can't be a partner with me. Because yes, I am working against colonialism and I want to talk about it and what I want the most, one thing that I want from other activists from the whole of the world, especially woman to talk about the right of Palestinian people to get their freedom. I really don't need them in the feminist struggle or queer struggle unless you are not talking about the occupation and the colonialism [...]. Struggle alone do whatever you want, but don't destroy my struggle and don't try to get it from me and to teach me how to do it well, because I know it very well and now, I'm telling you, if you want to be with me work against the occupation and the colonialism.” (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 66)

In addition, the disappointment towards international solidarity efforts in the past becomes clear, as international laws and restrictions are not really enforced and the Israeli government is allowed to manipulate the truth whilst international laws do not appear to apply for them. „[...] I think the international voice for Palestine is doing a neutral job“ (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 115) says Sheridan, because there are more and more international expressions of solidarity, but actions are still mostly missing (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 114-115). For them, like for Aya, the most important and most resourceful people are those who live in historical Palestine and know the struggle because they live and see it every day. People who would live outside these realities would need time to really understand it and although all the international support would help their cause, people on the ground would be the most important, because compared to international solidarity movements: „The people here are the most influential because you don't really have to move them. They just move by themselves“ (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 120).

However, even among the critical voices towards transnational solidarity, the focus on possible solidarity can be seen as long as the national and intersectional oppression faced by Palestinian women is acknowledged. Aya, too, says that if one wants to cooperate with her, one must lead the common struggle against occupation and colonialism (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 66). The activists' attitudes confirm Welchman et al's (2021) research that young feminists attempt „[...] building and sustaining the 'intersectionality of movements' (Davis, 2016, p. 27) in the struggle against the colonial and imperial 'matrix of domination' (Hill Collins, 2000)“ (ibid.: 350). Welchman et al. write that through the common struggle against colonial power structures and intersectional experiences of oppression allows forming alliances with other social movements around the world that are engaged in an anti-colonial struggle (ibid.: 355). Isabel believes that sharing one goal would make it easier to form alliances with movements that are in similar situations and sees feminism as a link, as a common basic idea to bring all these people together (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 12). For her, other feminist groups around the world are a source of inspiration and motivation, because even while other struggles have to be fought and different intersectional forms of oppression are expressed on women's bodies, actions of resistance would motivate her to try similar forms. „It's not about specific behaviour but just about the courage and idea and believing in ourselves“ (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 20), which already inspires her. For Isabel, there is a transnational solidarity between feminists that can would offer strength for each other:

„[...] I think that's really exist because we believe in the same idea but from different places and different minds and different thoughts, but we are believing in the same thing [...] each

one of us in different places have different life, have different challenges. But we are believing in same things. So, I think we could because when we have our struggling and share it and other people see it. They may continue their struggling also, [...] I feel like we will feel like there's a hope in the end of the world because we are sharing our experience in struggling [...] and it might make us not giving up, you know? Yeah. Each one in their society.” (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 24)

She senses a new wave of feminism, in which women all over the world would start to move and stand up for their rights, on the one hand each for themselves at the same time as a global momentum, as each individual movement would influence the others, because „[...] I feel like we are connected to each other“ (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 64).

Lora has already had the opportunity to feel the connection among feminists and to continue the Palestinian feminist struggle in Spain and even sees the movements outside Palestine/Israel as an opportunity to increase influence.

„What is good is that the international community, when we are talking about the people themselves, the movements that we see in each country, we see that there is some movements and they do, I mean they can, affect at some point. So, we always had these coalitions with other feminist movements from america latina, from Europe, from indigenous people, like we were always together. And they also were there in our concentrations and everywhere. So, they know about Palestine. I don't know I think there is a movement outside the country, more than inside. Because there are less rules oppressing women, Palestinian women in specific.” (Lora 12.05.2022, Pos. 30)

She differentiates in that she believes that certain movements are in solidarity with the Palestinian feminist movement and others can be understood as a part of it. It would not be a mere solidarity, but they are a part of the movement by fighting together from all over the world and not only standing aside but also considering themselves as a part of the Palestinian feminist struggle. If movements understand themselves as a part of each other, solidarity starts to matter, since it transforms mere talking into action (Lora 12.05.2022, Pos. 32; 33; 37). Lora confirms Mohanty's argument that feminism can succeed without silences and exclusions and through the recognition of different conflicts and intersections of discriminations to strive together for social justice across these boundaries of everyday life (Mohanty 2003: 2). It would offer strength to continue to fight and the attention that is garnered through alliances towards a transnational feminist movement is especially important for people living under daily oppression, as they need to generate momentum to seize the moment:

„So, look, if you're right, it just can be in the one moment in this area. So, we need this you know solidarity, you know, from all this sides and that what we are doing right now, and we hope that we will reach this point that we will collect this attention that we need to stop all these kinds of happening here.” (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 41)

It seems that nowadays, slowly the trust and faith in solidarity is returning and more attention is being paid to the real Palestinian feminist struggle, so that the connection to a transnational solidarity movement that understands solidarity „in terms of mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests“ (Mohanty 2003: 7) and recognises the central point of interest of the struggle against occupation, thus leading to a decolonial struggle through the practice of solidarity, that „Feminism without Borders“ (ibid.) is possible and enriching for the young feminists in Palestine. Current feminism in Palestine has thus grown out of, and with history and has been energised by intersectional feminist concepts. On the one hand, the young feminists are reflecting on their own homegrown feminism, which is realised in a modern way using cyber space as a main field of activism by utilizing modern technologies and social media to stay connected and to reach and to garner more attention for the issue by sharing their message with people worldwide through the use of social media. While they acknowledge transnational feminist solidarity, but also people in solidarity with them, as long as they understand the intersectional struggle against patriarchy and occupation as a common simultaneous struggle, they turn away from oppressive feminisms and international donor-funded ideas of feminism in Palestine. The thesis thus supports Jad's argument that Mohanty's concept of transnational solidarity can be understood as a critical intervention against hegemonic feminist formations and a new discursive space for decolonising feminist hegemonies (Mohanty 2013: 985) has been created by giving epistemic privileges to those who best understand and know how to wage the struggle.

First and foremost, this chapter underscores the significant role played by the history of the women's movement in Palestine and the lessons learned from the experiences of Palestinian feminists who came before the younger generation. They draw upon the forms of feminism practiced by their predecessors while bridging the gap between homegrown feminism and transnational connectivity through the use of new technologies. However, they do not merely see themselves as continuing the work of those who preceded them; they aim to embrace this feminist legacy and serve as role models for the next generation. Their sense of responsibility towards the next generation is evident, as they aspire to set a positive example while paving the way for the generation to come, hoping for a breakthrough in the rights of Palestinian women's self-determination. Despite the various orientations within feminist activism and the resulting diverse understandings, an intersectional and decolonial approach serves as a unifying element. The oppressive system stemming from patriarchal and settler-colonial structures must be collectively challenged, as Enass suggests, “hand in hand” (Enass, 11.05.2022, Pos. 51). Through this understanding of Palestinian feminist struggle for self-

determination, the gap between national liberation and the fight for women's rights is intended to be bridged, viewed as a united and common struggle for liberation. Instead of prioritizing Palestinian national liberation, the emphasis lies in recognizing that Palestine cannot be liberated without the self-determination of Palestinian women, who, through their multifaceted struggles, have learned to unite despite vastly different experiences of violence and life circumstances, creatively employing non-violent forms of resistance against these intersecting systems of oppression. Once again, this understanding of a pioneering role becomes evident, which is also reflected in the discourse on solidarity, focusing on giving voice and space to those who best understand the struggle. Cross-border connections are a vital element for the younger generation, encompassing not only the mobilization of Palestinian women from the West Bank, Israel, Gaza, and the diaspora but also people who, according to the Palestinian feminists' understanding, express solidarity. Thus, recognizing them as leaders in the struggle and, following Mohanty's definition, standing in solidarity with them in their united fight against occupation and patriarchy as one. The alignment of these struggles at both national and international levels strengthens their efforts towards achieving real Palestinian self-determination.

4.3 Palestinian Self-Determination for Feminist Activists

The issue of Palestinian self-determination is widely discussed with the question of its link to statehood, nationalism and the traditional peace negotiations process increasingly being questioned. The decolonisation and overcoming of forced segregation and the recollection of unity of the whole Palestinian people is therefore proposed as an approach. The increasing focus on women as actors and the incorporation of new discourses as transnational feminist solidarity could present new opportunities for dealing with the ongoing conflict (BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights 2021; Mohanty 2013; Todorova 2020). But in order to consider whether feminists can play a central role in the Palestinian struggle for self-determination, it is first necessary to clarify what self-determination means for young Palestinian feminists and what approaches they take to achieve it. As described in the previous section, two elements are central for the new generation of feminists: generating attention and spreading their narrative through social media and overcoming borders through exchange and reviving the recollection of unity of the whole Palestinian people. These two aspects and their meaning for self-determination and the associated vision for the future will now be analysed in more detail.

4.3.1 Dialogue, Social Media and Unity

„Because this is our life now. The social media, all the world is supporting or living the movements and struggles by the media, and I think Sheikh Jarrah, Muna Al-Kurd, yani, success to do what they did is due to social media because they were all the time on the media. This is our world now.” (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 76-77)

The ability to reach people and spread one's narrative through social media is a significant form of awareness raising and has been studied extensively in relation to Palestine in recent years. The #SaveSheikhJarrah went viral in April/May 2021 when social media was used to raise awareness that Israeli forces evicted Palestinian families from their households in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood Sheikh Jarrah. While Abbas et al. (2022) focus on the media provider TikTok and the importance of knowledge dissemination by young people, who thereby live out political participation, there are other authors who understand social media as a whole as a significant activist tool for Palestinians, as it has led to a shift in the struggle from geographically limited physical spaces to distributable and editable digital spaces (Li/Prasad 2018). At the same time, as Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2011) points out, it is a double-edged sword, because on the one hand, advances in Information Computer Technologies (ICT) lead to emancipatory possibilities for the narrative of Palestinian women by creating spaces of resistance and contestation, whilst on the other hand, it increases their vulnerability and victimization in the context of insecurity and surveillance (ibid.). The importance of the rise of digital mobilisation in the twenty-first century and the related evolution of transnational social movements cannot be ignored in the analysis of contemporary feminist activism in Palestine. At the same time, non-digital forms of exchange are examined, which are used by the activists in several forms, leading to a better understanding and possible solidarity among Palestinians with each other, but also Israelis.

Raising Awareness and Social Media as an Instrument

According to Li and Prasad, the ability to write to spread one's narrative is particularly important for people suffering from epistemic violence:

„Writing is a potent instrument in the hands of the disenfranchised (Haraway, 1997). Writing allows for subjects rendered invisible—or relegated to the social periphery— in the crystallization of inequality, to reclaim and to give voice to their own narratives while, at the same time, offering powerful political statements seeking redress.” (Li/Prasad 2018: 494)

The written word, but also other forms of sharing content such as photos and films, is used by the activists to generate attention. Aya says that one of Tal3at's mobilisation strategies was to show a „scenario from a daily life of women “(Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 53) in Palestine and describes it as „the strongest thing that we did in Tal3at “(Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 53). Sameeha

also describes that she was concerned with portraying everyday life, prevailing oppression and everyday resistance. She explains that:

„[t]he main things we do is documenting the violation that's happening daily here [...] Where we are the only thing we can do is document and publish in our social media, Youth of Sumud page in Facebook and Instagram to, you know, really bring awareness for this place on what's going on here.” (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 6)

In her opinion, on the one hand, this would be the best way to gain international attention and „to show it for the world“ (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 18) and she understands it as her mission as an activist to show exactly these forms of everyday occupation and resistance for people to understand (ibid.). On the other hand, it would be an opportunity to connect with other youth movements in the West Bank and share experiences, understand their life situation and convince more young Palestinians to become part of their activism and not to stay quiet in the face of occupation (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 6). However, digital activism on social media is not an uncontested area and comes with certain opportunities and challenges, such as increasing inequality in access to visibility, and a danger, for example due to lack of protection from hate speech on the platform (Castillo-Esparcia et al. 2023). One of the barriers to international attention addressed is that of the language barrier, or the importance of English in international discourse³⁴. Sameeha explains that most posts on social media are written in English because of the international followers and then translated into Arabic (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 63). The importance of international attention, but also of eloquence and proficiency in English, is evident in the example of Sheikh Jarrah. The importance of the social activism promoted by Muna el-Kurd and her brother Mohammad is particularly evident in this example, as almost all activists referred to it when discussing the importance of social media (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 29; Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 78).

„ Mohammad El Kurd and Muna El Kurd they have a lot of followers, they started taking part in global interviews. Before that the Palestinian voice wasn't heard. Like it was, it wasn't like our narrative, it wasn't out there, and it wasn't in English also. Like Mohammed El Kurd says in his interviews that he is a better writer in Arabic, but he writes in English because he wants to change the narrative. I think that mainly this is the part that people started sharing live videos of like how a girl was shot in her like home as she did nothing and Bella Hadid shares that and there are like 3 million likes. It's really like you can't really stay indifferent to it. Like it reaches people from the entire world.” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 27)

Consequently, it would be a way out of invisibility, a sign against the epistemic violence that would be inflicted on them and a possibility, as Li and Prasad (2018) describe, to make one's

³⁴ The dominance on English being the international language of scientific communication and its effects of this dominance is a well-studied field, for more information read Ferguson (2007): The global spread of English, scientific communication and ESP: questions of equity, access and domain loss.

own voice heard and to spread one's own narrative (ibid.: 494). Having Palestinian women who can gain international attention could be a great advantage and these personalities might be even more influential if they can speak English:

„Having like strong people like Muna and Mohammad that can actually fluently speak English and deliver the right story. Mohammad gave an interview with CNN [...]. He's like speaking to the United Nations³⁵. He has, like, so sophisticated words. He delivers the story exactly as it is. So having people like Muna and Mohammad is a huge advantage for [the] Palestinian cause, actually. And other people like Bella like many celebrities who support.” (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 103)

It would be necessary for both attention and understanding to emerge in international society and not to speak about Palestine, but for Palestinians to tell their own story and then spread it through social media through people like Muna, who can reach millions through a post on Instagram³⁶ (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 96-99; Pos. 103). Influencers would thus be a significant element of contemporary activism in Palestine.

„I think it's really important! Like it gives you strength, it makes you feel like you have a voice. Makes you feel like there is someone that hears you and it's really like empowering to know that. And I think that many Palestinians who were afraid to share their political abuse on social media now that many people and many important people are sharing those posts [...] that they now are sharing stuff. So, I think that when someone like gives you space and like gives you the permission sometimes it is really important. Like when Emma Watson shared that post like 'Solidarity is a verb' with a picture about 'Free Palestine' like I had tears [...] I really appreciate her as a feminist and as a woman and as a human being. And to know that she sees like what's going on here, like just the validation makes you feel like you are not crazy.” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 61)

The validation from the international public, the feeling of being seen and heard, is also an essential part of the social media activism, as it would spread a feeling of solidarity that „[...] there is someone that sees the abuse that we are experiencing and it's like encouraging me to have a stronger voice” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 61). At the same time, the impact of influencers would not only be significant for the feeling of being seen, but could also, as BDS calls for, exert international pressure on Israel, meaning that famous people could contribute to a rethink and a change in the narrative through this kind of expression of solidarity, such as cancelling a concert (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 20).

Understanding the connections between different struggles and drawing attention to it, would help the Palestinian cause. Sheridan says Mourinho, the football coach of AS Roma, has done so by comparing the Ukrainian and Palestinian struggles for freedom. When asked to

³⁵ Speech by Mohammed Al-Kurd before the UN General Assembly see: <https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Speech-of-Mohammed-Al-Kurd-before-the-General-Assembly-cad.pdf>.

³⁶ According to Instagram 1,5 Mio. Followers (10.06.2023).

comment on the conflict in Ukraine, he used the interview to draw attention to Palestine through the importance of the struggle against oppression:

„And he was like, I have no right to express my feelings. You have to ask the people who are really involved in stuff. And I hope war ends whether it's in Ukraine and Syria or in Palestine or in Gaza. So, I'm not allowed to say any words. I just feel sorry for all of them. So not many people like Mourinho actually connect the wars with the war in Palestine. Is like there are two different wars. [...] So having people bring the similarities between the two wars together actually is a good thing for the Palestinian cause to say that the Palestinian war and the Syrian war and the Iraq war and Afghanistan war are just the same as the Ukrainian war. Why do you apply double standards? So, I think that's a good thing for social media, bringing people who have like a good influence on so many others that they can speak the truth about the Palestinian cause.“ (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 103)

For Bisan and Sheridan, it is precisely the influence on social media through influencers and celebrities that would have the greatest impact on the Palestinian cause, because it could reach more people and their opinions could influence even people who have not otherwise dealt with the issue or who are even opposed to it. „So, I think for now, the best and the fastest way to have real influence and real effect is by having more people with power to talk about the Palestinian cause“ (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 119).

These attitudes reflect research on the new generation of feminists according to Molyneux et al. (2021), who explain that the young generation of feminists use social media postings to generate attention and are not afraid to speak freely through this medium. The worldwide spread of the internet has made new forms of activism possible and has given a voice to new actors. The young generation, who have grown up with the medium of the internet, are familiar with this form of communication and use a variety of social media channels to spread their message and connect globally. At the same time, it is through social media that grass-roots engagement can be secured and a larger mass of people can be mobilised than through old channels of communication. According to Molyneux et al. this digitalisation would have led to a democratisation of information so that previously silenced voices can be heard. However, the opponents of feminists can also use these media for their own purposes, in some cases with completely different resources (ibid.: 1; 14). The activists report on this ambiguous issue. On the one hand, through social media they are able to tell their story and counterbalance the dominant narrative of the Israelis; on the other hand, they are confronted with hate speech and the intervention of the PA-Israeli control apparatus.

Sameeha states, that social media is controlled so that freedom of expression on matters of public interest is restricted, thus their posts are also deleted from Instagram and Facebook, and the Youth of Sumud channel faced blockages (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 18). Despite the suppression of activists' information channels, it is important to try to report as much as

possible about what is happening, as the Israeli media tries very hard to influence the narrative by controlling the media³⁷, as the example of the murder of Shireen Abu Akleh demonstrates. Bisan and Sheridan explain that it is necessary: „[...] to compete. Yeah, really, we need to compete. Israeli media, it's fast and intelligent. They can change the whole narrative [...]“ (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 77). They explain that the problem is that the dominant narrative is so powerful that it shapes the image of the conflict, and that Israel uses this power to influence people:

„So, the second Shireen was killed, was shot. They started to think like OK what are we gonna do? [...] So, we're gonna blame the Palestinians that they were randomly shooting and then they shot her by accident. And some people believe that. [...] It's easy to believe that the people that they call terrorists shot someone by accident.“ (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 85-87)

Social media would enable them to challenge this dominant narrative, due to its ease of use and distribution (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 104). As described in the chapter *Israeli Occupation and Settler-Colonial Structures* on epistemic violence and silencing processes, one of the biggest challenges of feminists in Palestine is that they are insulted and attacked both in the streets and on social media. It is particularly difficult for Palestinians living in Israel who have grown up in an environment of the dominant narrative, with Enass saying that „[...] it's really hard for me to even share a Facebook post without getting many hateful messages from people I went to school with“ (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 5). This would lead them to constantly feel that they have to double check all the facts before posting anything publicly (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 15; 17). But at the same time, social media allows people to easily get the information they want to share out to the public and this would take away some of the insecurity:

„But most of the times I'm so sure, because there is stuff happening to us and we're not just talking about history. And we are talking about no I saw Palestinian press getting killed. I saw that. People say that so when I tell you about the Israeli killing people and the Israeli injustice, I think I'm just telling the truth. I don't have to double check about it. They have to double check when they want to argue with me, not me. I think that's it.“ (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 112)

However, social media are an additional risk, as Enass explains, because the algorithms are tuned to interests, with the result that „there is also a lot of polarisation due to social media.

³⁷ According to reporter without borders, since the May 2021 clashes in which several journalists were injured by Israeli security forces, the Palestinian territories are now ranked 170 out of 180 countries in terms of freedom of the press. Israel is ranked 86th. e.V. Reporter ohne Grenzen 2023.

Like you see what you want to see” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 84) and the battle over information and knowledge is only shifted:

„But even if it’s the case I think that still like I see some Israeli posts and I’m sure Israelis see Palestinian posts even if it’s not the main. So, I think that yes, but I think that I am not sure that it’s helping because it’s so hard. Like many Israelis just say it’s lies, it’s lies, it’s lies. They don’t really believe it, like even the journalist that was killed today, I shared on Instagram and two Israelis send me but why would a soldier kill her, like we know that you are a good person why would you be spreading hate? And they mean it! So, they really believe that! So, I’m not sure that it like social media is going to help.” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos 86)

At the same time, they all seem to agree that this type of exchange of information makes it easier to get in touch, to be connected and to hear each other, which is something that has changed in their generation. Enass explains:

„And like our generation now. Something is changing. There is a new awareness that is emerging, and I think this is also because I believe that is also because of social media. [...] I think that in order to cultivate your narratives it’s hard to do it by yourself and we have to have a medium in what you can do it. Like Palestinians inside of Israel don’t really have a medium that isn’t censored. So, like with the emergence of social media we managed to connect one with the other and to have our stories without them choosing the words to have.” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 23)

These observations and statements confirm the findings of Cortés-Ramos et al. (2021) on „Activism and Social Media: Youth Participation and Communication“ that in an interconnected world, the participation of the young generation in social movements is becoming increasingly important, as there is enormous potential to use social networks and virtual platforms as a form of informal communication that could be an effective vehicle for social transformation. Social Media can therefore be understood as a self-determined way of Palestinian feminists to decide on their narrative and to be empowered to spread the word against the strong hegemonic narrative.

Forced Segregation and the Recollection of Unity of the Whole Palestinian People

However, networks and connections among each other are not only relevant digitally, but the personal exchange among each other and the possibility to get to know each other in conversation is just as important. There are different boundaries that the young feminists want to overcome and different struggles that they try to connect. The example of Halaqat Istiqbal, as described above, tries to break the physical forced segregation whilst trying to unite the struggle for freedom nationally as well as towards the patriarchy. The feminism that Aya represents makes space for diversity in the experiences of Palestinian women and challenges imperialism and the systems perpetuating the structures of inequality (Al Zaanin 2021a) by bringing together Palestinian women and hearing their stories to understand their daily life

struggle (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 21; 27). As Gloria Steinem supposedly once said: „You can't empower women without listening to their stories” (Blackwell et al. 2017) seems to be implemented here as well as being understood not only as empowerment, but also as a feminist act through their contribution to others hearing their stories (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 27). To set an example, these meetings are a way to foster dialogue, understand and resist the (de)colonial forced separation that has destroyed their archives and made women's stories unheard (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 31-33). Hanneen, who takes part in these tours, explains the special nature of the feeling of sisterhood with people of all ages and backgrounds. Within these conversations, the differences between them, such as religion, age and background, are unimportant; the focus is on the shared experiences. Through each woman's story, the connection would become clearer and if someone had the space to share the experiences with the other women, what separates them would be insignificant, only the connection and appreciation would count (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 67). Yael describes this feeling of connection as „female kinship “(Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 16) and explains that she herself has experienced the strength of the power of friendships and deep understanding between women (ibid.). Therefore, according to Aya, the next objective is for the women who have guided them through their cities and told their stories to form a women's circle to share their experiences with each other and „[...] to start to connect and do a network between the Palestinian woman from all Palestine “(Aya 28. 06.2022, Pos. 39).

By systematically separating Palestinian women over the years, through wars, persecution and restriction of movements, a sign of connection had to be made, according to Aya:

„So, I talked with the women in Gaza to do a demonstration. I talked with women from Lod to do a demonstration. Who did it, did it in Jaffa. I talked with the women [...] in Lebanon and the others talked about [it] with other women. But this is what was our idea. At the same time, in the same day Palestinian women from different areas will get out with this slogan and talk about violence against women [...]” (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 53)

And just as Halaqat Istiqbal's idea is „[to] support, [...] to connect, to meet and listen, and to learn and teach. Teach each side of us “, the logical and essential step in the next few years is to expand: „And I'm trying to establish a feminist network in the whole Arab world, like the Palestinians did there in the 1970s [...] A Feminist Arab Union of Palestine, Tunis and Egypt, Lebanon. I think that is the next thing I would love to do [...] “(Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 72). Aya tries to create connections that once were, by creating the unity of Palestinian people at least already in the mind and in common protests, because the women understand that they are all part of the Palestinian women living under occupation. The differences, different living conditions and physical borders are to be overcome through this idea of unity. Isabel shares

Ayas idea that the main task of feminist movements in contemporary Palestine is to „[...] reconnect connection between all of these types of people. It's about making a connection and links between the situation or even every group [...]“ (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 12). She shares Aya's idea that it is essential to create a possibility that „[...] we should like all as a woman who have the same vision connect with each other and try to do something like in the same time in every place“ (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 12).

As Sa'di and Abu-Lughod (2007) point out, the Nakba, which led to a disintegrated, segregated community (ibid.: 2-3) is still an issue for activists today, and their activism seems to be a way to return to communal life as they knew it before. This mobilisation across borders can thus be understood, as Munayyer (2021) describes, as a sign of continued perseverance and unity of the Palestinian population against the ongoing occupation (ibid.: 96-97). However, physical segregation is a strategy that is entrenched in people's minds, as well as through physical walls. For many, unification is therefore the strength of the movement. Youth of Sumud thus seeks first and foremost to create unity among Palestinians and to fight against the system that divides them. Sameeha explains that it is a strategy that there are different sectors like Gaza, West Bank and Palestine/Israel and the dominant system tries to keep them busy with their problems in the respective sectors so that „[...] as Palestinians we will be really more weak because there is no support from the others“ (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 41). No one knows what exactly is going on in the other sectors, which makes the exchange all the more important (ibid.).

The different living conditions under occupation, where „[t]he situation is controlled and divided by the Israeli government and accepted by our government“ (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 146), is particularly evident in the division of those who did not leave their homes in 1948 and still live there today. The constant confrontation with the Israeli narrative and Israelis surrounding them cannot be compared to the situation when one is only in exchange with Israeli soldiers at checkpoints (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 142 -147). But for Bisan and Sheridan, unity is still in the centre of attention, because „, I mean it divides us like the reality and all this, yeah. But not the heart“ (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 149). These statements are evidence of Angela Davis's intersectional claim that it is a feminist methodology to find connections that are not immediately apparent and that carry contradictions that can be embraced. Freely applying her phrase to Palestine shows how feminist methodology can create unity because: „Feminism insists on methods of thought and action that urge us to think things together that appear to be separate, and to de-segregate things that appear to naturally belong together“ (Angela Davis at The Chicago Center for

Contemporary Theory 2013). The strength of Palestinian feminism could lie precisely in this understanding of unity, to see the separated as united again. But in order to achieve this unity, education would have to be provided and an exchange with each other would have to be made possible.

One of the groups that advocate and need this contact and exchange, according to Haneen, are people who grow up in Israel and, as already analysed, have a constant struggle with their own identity. She describes the dialogue with people from other countries and other regions of Palestine as „eye opening “(Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 4), which first triggered reflection and inquiry about historical and current politics and an engagement with Palestinian identity (ibid.). However, the feeling of being different from each other, despite the sense of connection, remains because there are so many differences that lead to a different privileging in society:

„[...] we have also this kind of separations between us. You are Muslims, you are Christian, you are secular, you are a believer. You know we have a lot of divisions between us. And sure, you are a girl, you are woman [...]. You take all of these stigmas everywhere.” (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 8)

How people are read and constructed in other social divisions like social class, gender, nationality, and geography determines the different intersecting systems of oppression. And as Haneen describes, a person is classified and categorised differently according to these social divisions and depending on where they are in Palestine/Israel.

„[...] I have to talk much about my Palestinian origin, that I am not an Israeli Arab. I am a Palestinian Arab who holds an Israeli ID. [...] I think in Jerusalem, they can see you as a Palestinian. But in the north, they don't accept it at all. There are also differences. In Jerusalem, you know, they say, these Palestinians like you [...] if you say 48 Arab, you know, they don't [...] care for your division, but in the north [...] they want to call us like you are the good Arabs, they are the Palestinians. You don't relate to them.” (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 12)

She noticed the difference in herself when she returned to the North after being in Jerusalem, a place she describes as „kind of a washing machine and everything is popping up the whole time “(Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 43). The opportunity to talk about feminism with other Palestinian women through the women's circles had changed her, made her reflect on her identity and she would since then continue the dialogue of what it means to be a Palestinian woman with her young colleagues (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 20; 22; 35).

However, unity and understanding for intersecting systems of oppression needs to reach everyone. In order to create a social transformation, the activists are concerned to talk and work with men. Like Hooks (2000), they understand feminism as something for everyone who lives and perpetuates these structures. Haneen therefore criticises the fact that so far only

women have been part of the tours at Halaqat Istiqbal, as she believes that it would be very important for men to also hear the women's stories and meet the people so that a change of mindset can be initiated (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 69). Isabel and Iona are already working in workshops with men to educate them about women's rights and to change their mindsets by increasing their knowledge (Iona / Isabel 18.05.2022 (1), Pos. 25-26). For Isabel, however, this is not enough, as she believes that education must be the starting point for transformation. Isabel therefore wants to give workshops on women's rights and socially accepted role models at an early age, where children and young people, regardless of gender, learn about them at school and then at university. According to her, it is important to explain from the beginning that patriarchal structures affect the whole society and that attributed definitions of action have to be reconsidered (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 8; 12):

„[...] because when you talk with a man who is 40 years old, it's so different as when you will talk to the young man, when he's like 16 years old. And it's about [...] [to] make it clear that we are as a woman and man we are not fighting each other for no reason it's just about society give me a definition and give him a definition. But we want to free ourselves from this definition [...]. ” (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 12)

In order to achieve real liberation for Palestinian people and generate a shift in thinking that affects their struggle for self-determination on several levels at the same time, the change of mindset in society is of the highest priority:

„I think the most influential people would be people living here because people outside they don't see it, they [...] don't know what's happening and people here they can tell like the right narrative or like the real narrative. And yeah, I think everyone is needed. Definitely. People living outside, international communities and everyone. Like they all put together, it only strengthens us. I think what matters the most are people who are living here.” (Bisan / Sheridan 12.05.2022, Pos. 118)

They strive for a social change that enables understanding and solidarity not only between women but also for men, by focusing on the common struggle against daily oppression and creating a unifying element that makes them united as whole Palestinian people again.

Dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians: Getting to Know Each Other and Changing Narratives

In order to change attitudes and understand people with contrary views, it is important to create awareness of each other's needs. What proved to be very relevant during the interviews were the attitudes towards Israeli feminists and their attitudes towards the young Palestinian feminists who demand self-determination not only in relation to patriarchy but also in relation to occupation. The activists agree that education and the narrative about ‘the others’ are essential for relations with each other. In order to change these relationships, it would be

necessary to start again with education from an early age, to enable exchange and thus deconstruct the image of ‘the others’.

For Yael herself, it has been a long process of questioning the narrative she grew up with and, through this process of reflection, breaking through the worldview she was taught. Through education at university, learning decolonial concepts, exchanges with other feminists and Palestinians abroad, she became an activist (Yael 16.06.2022, Pos. 2; 18; 20). This process, which she describes as „learning history, unlearning Zionism “(Yael 16.06.2022, Pos. 2), was a long one, as the two conflicting narratives simply cannot be explained in a short conversation; breaking through the indoctrination would be a long journey and a process of negotiation with oneself and other people:

„[...] for an Israeli Jew, if you're not gonna put yourself in the position of being committed to learning the real history that was denied from your learning as part of the indoctrination, the Zionist indoctrination and if you're not gonna like, put the time into unlearning Zionism, then you're not gonna really be able to understand what those Palestinian feminists are even talking about.” (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 8)

Naber et al. (2016) explain that Zionism is understood by Palestinian feminists as a racist ideology that justifies an apartheid state that oppresses the indigenous population through settler-colonial strategies (ibid.: 99). This ideology is equally linked to narratives of national security (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2007: 180) and the associated pride that the state of Israel could only be created a decade after the horrific persecution of the genocide under the Nazis (Sa'di /Abu-Lughod 2007: 4). The system is characterised by a strict separation, which prevents exchange between the conflict parties and constructs an image of the enemy through mutually contradictory narratives and leads to dehumanisation through generalisation (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 10), which prevents understanding for each other. Yael says that she felt that „[...] all this information was concealed from men “(Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 20), so that only through intensive research and direct contact with Palestinians from the West Bank and the opportunity to visit Area A in the West Bank, she understood that she had been brought up as a Zionist and this realisation was the turning point for her (ibid.). The issue is that contact with Palestinians is non-existent, or rather the system is designed to segregate them in order to stabilise its own power, and opportunities to get to know each other are suppressed. Many Israelis therefore know nothing about the situation in the West Bank or Gaza or what it means to be a Palestinian refugee (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 34). The system would be built on instrumentalising this ignorance and sealing people off from each other, which is why opportunities for dialogue would have to be actively created:

„It's pretty much impossible to do without some kind of mediation because of the separation because of the segregation because we're living in an apartheid regime and an apartheid

regime means that I can live my life from being born to dying without actually having to confront Palestinians. As an Israeli. This is a fact. I have friends that live like this. If someone lives in a segregated society, the default is gonna be the dehumanization and disconnection and the opposite of familiarity like being estranged from a whole community of people. Part of what I learned is not only history and unlearning Zionism and empathy, but that is also learning about the Palestinian culture that obviously means also learning Arabic, a lot of things that were erased. Because of segregation.” (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 38)

This attitude seems to be shared by some of the other activists. Isabel explains that through her contact with Israelis she realised that they are also „victims of their thoughts“ (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 54). She compares it to the patriarchal thought structures that are learned and solidified, meaning that mutual mistrust and fear are trained through the construction of an image of the enemy:

„They are raised up on the idea that Palestinian wanna kill you, the Palestinian wanna take this from you, the Palestinian kill your father and your grandpa and all of this stuff. So, they are scared of dealing with us and we are scared to deal with them too.” (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 54)

Trust in each other would have to be built, but for this it would be necessary to break down prejudices and to question one's own narrative. Enass, who is constantly confronted the Zionist myth of 'land without people for a people without land', is critical towards this establishing of trust:

„I heard many Jews who were saying stuff like when we came here there were no people it was like an empty land. A land without people, so people without a land and everything. [...] They don't really think that there is occupation. They think that it's lies. They believe in the army and in the police [...] like blindly.” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 5).

She explains that the people saying this just don't know any better because no one is telling them how people live in the West Bank and „[...] they're trained to believe in the system so blindly that like just questioning it it's like really shattering their world “(Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 5). In order to change mindsets and narratives and to enable mutual understanding between the conflict parties, some organisations offer programmes that are intended to lead to conflict transformation and peacebuilding through dialogue. Dialogue remains one of the most widely used methods in peacebuilding and can be adapted according to the context. „The basic assumption underpinning dialogue is that under appropriate conditions, *interpersonal contact* is one of the most effective ways to improve communication, understanding and interaction between opposing groups“ (forumZDF 2023). There are different levels of dialogue, such as diplomacy and formal mediation, which are used as tools by governments to deal with conflict, but the focus here is on dialogue between citizens of communities, which brings the humanitarian dimension into focus in order to change the relationship between them (Saunders (1999): xxii-xxiii). Enass and Yael, who have both participated in different programmes, see potential in such initiatives, but at the same time

there would be certain pitfalls. Enass participated in a project called *Tech2Peace*³⁸ (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 71) and describes that through the exchange, especially the Israelis would have gone through a transformation as they learned about the situation of the Palestinians:

„[...] they couldn't understand how like they can't leave the West Bank without a special permission from the army and they didn't know that they can't travel and they didn't know that there are checkpoints. And like I saw their transformation until this day many of them like used to blindly support the army and now they understand, they took like a step back.” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 73)

A humanisation process occurred in which the Israelis understood that the Palestinians were also only human beings who wanted to live their lives (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 73). According to Enass, this is precisely one of the greatest challenges, „[b]ecause I feel like there is so much pain that we can't see each other as humans anymore“ (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 73). The pain and anger would also be multiplied by the disinformation of history, because according to Enass, the ignorance of the Nakba and the consequences it had for the Palestinian population would lead to a lack of understanding of today's violence:

„[...] it's like there was a war, they won and there is no other side. And this is how many people are taught from a very young age. And then they come to the world, and they are like oh terrorist attack and then they start asking like why do they hate us so much? What have we done to them? And they mean it when they say that which is driving me crazy but they are so unaware of what their government is doing. Like for them it's like the army is another phase of life before going to the like big hiking trip.” (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 77)

According to Freire (2014 [1968]), the oppressors' consciousness desires to “transform everything surrounding it into an object of its domination” (ibid.: 58), including the idea of humanity is an object that only the oppressor can possess. If we look at what Enass describes from a decolonial and feminist perspective, it seems like understanding between the groups can emerge from the reservoir of power and resistance within the feminists. Decolonisation, loosely interpreted according to Fanon (2002 [1961]), can only be explained to the extent that we can recognise the movements that give it historical form and content, and signifies a complete change in the world order. A dialogue based on establishing a knowledge of history, narratives and their implications could lead to a humanisation of the parties to the conflict and a greater understanding of each other.

Yael also explains that the exchange and experiences with Palestinians helped her to understand the conflict, but in her opinion, this comes at a high price.

„So, on the one hand this is a very very effective way to get Israelis to be more prone to be in solidarity with Palestinians. On the other hand, first of all there are Israelis that go through

³⁸ For further information follow: <https://www.tech2peace.com/>

these programs and still don't understand what solidarity really means still don't understand the Palestinian struggle. [...] There's a price that the Palestinians are paying for normalizing relations and acting like it's normal to interact with their oppressors, just so that their oppressors can understand their pain and that's really screwed up. [...] Oppressed people shouldn't have to interact with their oppressors in these ways. To be able to be liberated like this is wrong and especially not during, while the oppression is happening simultaneously in such a grotesque, like ironic way [...]" (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 38)

The problem, in her opinion, is that many of the initiatives target children and young people who, after going through these initiatives, may form friendships „[...] but then they finish high school and they go to the army, and they might be standing in a checkpoint and oppressing their fellow Palestinians from these programmes a few years later [...]“ (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 38). She understands that it would make sense to establish this exchange as a reconciliation programme, but reconciliation while the apartheid regime and conflict continues would be pointless in her opinion, as people continue to live in and support this system (ibid.). There are organisations that are aware of this irony, such as Combatants for Peace³⁹, and include power asymmetries, occupation and the apartheid regime in their discourse in order to stop the discourse of normalisation. This could be a „loophole“ (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 40). Mediated dialogue must be designed in such a way that there are no power asymmetries and no discourse of normalisation, but rather „[...] to experience what I just described like to actually meet humans on the human level on the eye-to-eye level and see them for what they are because like there's a lot of dehumanisation on both sides [...]“ (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 38).

Yael confirms the findings of Jonathan Kuttab (1988) on the weaknesses of dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis. Kuttab also identifies the biggest and most serious pitfall of these dialogues as the assumption of a symmetry between oppressor and oppressed. Palestinian and Israelis have different possibilities of freedom of expression, immunity from retaliation, but above all, other options than dialogue for achieving their goals, as well as other resources and interest in being able to continue the dialogue at all (Kuttab/Kaufman 1988: 85). This power asymmetry is the most significant pitfall, as it is reflected in the other weaknesses of this kind of dialogue, such as the normalisation of dialogue as a substitute for real action against the injustice of the oppressed, or the ignoring of basic conflict issues, such as land and national rights, for fear that dialogue will break down (ibid.: 85-88). But Kuttab is also an advocate for dialogue, as long as it is truthful, however painful, without manipulation of the dialogue partners and with the goal to act (ibid.: 89-91). Kuttab concludes with the statement that

³⁹ For more information : <https://cfpeace.org/about-en/>

“[g]roundwork can thus be laid for true coexistence. This can be done as they move from a dialogue of empty words to the dialogues of hands and feet working together for justice and peace. This is the proper path“(Kuttab/Kaufman 1988: 91).

That the trust in a non-asymmetrical dialogue and an exchange on an eye-to-eye level still needs to be established is made clear by Isabel's statement that she would be willing to talk to Israelis, but only if she could be sure that it would be a safe space where she would not have to fear that what was said could be instrumentalised to harm Palestinians (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 60). Sameeha decided for herself and together with her movement that Masafer Yatta needs all the support and attention it can get, which is why they invite people from all over the world to come and see for themselves what it means to live in a firing zone. For them, it is about human rights, so it doesn't matter what countries the visitors come from or what religion they are, as long as they understand that occupation and oppression is happening there, which also includes Jewish activists like „the Jewish against the occupation and violence“ (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 43), who regularly visit the place. For them, the focus is on the importance of solidarity, which could lead to the necessary attention:

„So, we need this you know solidarity, you know, from all this sides and [...] that we will reach this point that we will collect this attention that we need to stop all these kinds of happening here.“ (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 41)

A humanisation process that breaks down traditional conflictive narratives and allows dialogue without power asymmetries could therefore be a way to establish mutual understanding. Sameeha tries to establish exactly this “dialogues of hands and feet working together for justice and peace” (Kuttab/ Kaufman 1988: 91) by showing what is happening on the ground with their tours in Massaffer Yatta. However, as other activists have correctly criticised, there are many physical and mental barriers to exchange, but the example of Yael and Haneen clearly show the importance for feminist activism in Palestine when it succeeds.

This chapter therefore highlights the pivotal role of dialogue, both at the national and international levels, as well as between Israelis and Palestinians, in challenging epistemic violence. By actively engaging in dialogue, they are reclaiming their voices and challenging the hegemonic narrative that has suppressed their experiences. It serves as a means to establish understanding, generate attention, remember Palestinian unity and rebuild it across borders. Moreover, it facilitates the dissemination of their own history and narrative, allowing their voices to be heard.

The young generation of feminists' places great importance on the use of new technologies and social media in achieving these goals. Interviews confirm the increasing significance of

social media as a tool for activism. This transition from geographically confined physical spaces to distributable digital spaces has been pivotal. Digital activism allows for the rapid depiction of the local reality and the sharing of their message with a global audience, thereby garnering international attention and exerting international pressure on Israel. The epistemic significance of social media cannot be overstated. Palestinian women, often silenced on multiple fronts and their struggles being invisible, find a platform to amplify their voices and raise awareness about their lives and struggles. International attention and mobilization foster greater understanding and solidarity, as influencers and activists worldwide draw attention to the feminist struggle, thus amplifying their impact. Nonetheless, digital activism comes with its own set of challenges, including issues of invisibility, with the English language being a key medium of communication. Many remain unheard due to language barriers. However, articulate Palestinian women, like Muna Al-Kurd, have the potential to attract international attention and reshape the image of Palestinian women. Furthermore, social media platforms pose risks, including content censorship, account suspension, and online verbal attacks, perpetuating the dominant Israeli narrative. Despite these challenges, activists concur that social media is an indispensable tool for the self-determination of Palestinian feminists, enabling them to control their narrative and challenge the hegemonic discourse.

Beyond the role of social media, overcoming forced segregation, both online and offline, is crucial for the activists. Overcoming the barriers that segregate them—whether physical, social, or political—is central to the feminist struggle for self-determination. By uniting their voices, these women aim to dismantle oppressive systems and assert their right to self-determination. Facilitating exchanges and conversations, getting to know one another, and breaking down barriers imposed by physical border, different rights and opportunities in segregated areas are central ways to achieve this. It is about transcending divisions to emphasize Palestinian women's unity and their collective fight against oppression. It becomes a means of reclaiming agency, viewing their aim of unity as a way to counteract the effects of settler-colonialism that have deliberately divided the Palestinian community. They see unity as a sign of perseverance and solidarity in the face of ongoing occupation. This understanding has the potential to unite Palestinians beyond what separates them and acknowledge what unites them. This unity can be instrumental in challenging oppressive systems of power and by learning from each other, feminists can strengthen their collective struggle against intersecting systems of oppression in Palestine. However, this perspective must extend beyond feminists and reach the wider Palestinian society to truly address the issues of disintegration and isolation.

The interviews highlight the need to address not only intra-Palestinian understanding but also the barriers, fears, and prejudices between Palestinians and Israelis. Mutual understanding, achieved through sharing narratives, listening to stories, and challenging preconceived notions, is vital for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. This involves humanising each other and questioning the portrayal of the ‘other’ and one’s own narrative as the ultimate truth. The path toward reconciliation will require unlearning elements of Zionism and engaging in a dialogue that invites open conversation, creating an environment for non-asymmetrical dialogue, where power imbalances are minimized or eliminated, allowing for genuine exchange and understanding. This is a contentious demand, as the power asymmetry between Israelis and Palestinians persists. Trust remains a significant issue for Palestinian feminists, as the dialogue involves oppressors and the oppressed living within and stabilising this unequal system. As outlined in theoretical frameworks (Kuttab/Kaufman 1988), a truthful and action-oriented dialogue, free from manipulation, could pave the way for genuine coexistence. Several Israeli and Palestinian organizations are attempting to establish such dialogues, and some activists are actively involved. However, it remains a topic of debate, as explored in the analysis.

In summary, this chapter emphasises the transformative role of dialogue and social media in promoting unity and amplifying Palestinian feminist voices. Dialogue, both with the international community and among Palestinians themselves, emerges as one of the key strategies for achieving Palestinian self-determination. It goes beyond just speaking out; it involves the active process of mutual understanding and learning from one another. This commitment to dialogue demonstrates the young generation’s determination to challenge epistemic violence and pave the way for Palestinian self-determination. It addresses the challenges faced in this digital era and underscores the importance of overcoming divisions, both among Palestinians and between Israelis and Palestinians.

4.3.2 Self-Determination of Palestinian Women From the River to the Sea

„To live from the sea to the river in freedom and liberation, whole the Palestinian society, the whole groups and movements and kind of Palestinian people. That we all will get our rights to be whatever we want to be.” (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 70)

Asking about their future and the envisaged future for Palestine/Israel has shown that although there are different conceptions, the question always relates to the meaning of self-determination at different levels. „From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be Free” is a famous slogan for the Palestinian freedom struggle alluded to by Aya (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 70), and is often criticised as meaning that the entire region, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, should be free of the Jewish population and is therefore anti-Semitic.

However, Munayyer (2021) explains that this criticism is not justified, but Palestinians who use this slogan demand: „[...] a state in which Palestinians can live in their homeland as free and equal citizens, neither dominated by others nor dominating them. When we call for a free Palestine from the river to the sea, it is precisely the existing system of domination that we seek to end“ (Munayyer 2021). Both Aya (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 70) and Lora (Lora 12.05.2022, Pos. 55) want to express, using this slogan in their interviews, their desire for a future without occupation, a free Palestine, with a free society, living in freedom in one state (ibid.). The demand focuses on freedom and equality for all people living in the state. However, most activists seem to doubt whether this dream will ever come true, which is why a multi-stage project is envisaged that will ultimately lead to a state with equal rights for everyone living there. The steps to be taken, according to most, are the right of return of Palestinian refugees, at least the end of the occupation of the ‘67 lands⁴⁰, release of prisoners, equal rights (Lora 12.05.2022, Pos. 52; Enass 11. 05.2022, Pos. 67; Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 56; Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 56) and, as a stopgap, a two-state solution, which they currently see as the most likely solution (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 67; Lora 12.05.2022, Pos. 57-62). The issue, according to Haneen, is that borders have already become so blurred over the years that a true two-state solution cannot be sustainable in the long term. Palestinian self-determination, in her opinion, would be to open all the borders and no longer allow any subdivisions between them (Haneen 15.06.2022, Pos. 85). The problem of borders is equally addressed by Yael, who considers the construct of borders and the concept of the nation state to be a remnant of colonialism (Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 50) and therefore believes „[...] that nation states as a whole is a concept that it's rooted in colonialism. If I really want to break down barriers and if I really want to think in a radical way, then nation states are not really the solution and they're not really what's gonna liberate us“ (ibid.). For her, the nation state and symbols of the nation state, such as national flags, are just another form of oppression, not a sign of liberation, but a constant reminder of control and oppression that needs to be abolished (ibid.).

Understanding feminism as Angela Davis does, that „[i]t has to involve a consciousness of capitalism, and racism, and colonialism, and postcolonialities“ (Angela Davis at The Chicago Center for Contemporary Theory 2013), self-determination should no longer be thought in terms of the rigid boundaries of the nation-state, but instead as Yael states: „[...] I think self-

⁴⁰ The term '67 lands used by the interviewees refers to the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), which I defined at the beginning as those territories that Israel conquered in the 1967 war and from which the state was required to withdraw by the UN Resolution 242, which includes the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.

determination is much deeper and much stronger has more to do with identity and more to do with being free and feeling safe to be who you are as a group and having rights as to be, to celebrate who you are as a group“ (Yael 16. 05.2022, Pos. 54). Similar to Enass, Yael sees a danger in repeating history, as the two agree that through the myth of the Jewish state, which is a misinterpretation of Jewish self-determination and the associated „very dangerous supremacist ideology “(Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 54) of Zionism, laid the foundation of the ongoing conflict. Misinterpreting self-determination in the context of hierarchy and domination would not be a solution, rather their hope is to find a peaceful solution without violence, but through conversations and the realisation that as Munayyer (2021) says, the existing system of domination needs to end and will not be repeated (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 73; Yael 16.05.2022, Pos. 54; 56). In these honest, non-asymmetrical conversations, Isabel sees the key to what she calls peace, namely a coexistence in which it is possible to share the land peacefully with each other on the basis of equality (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 56). In order to achieve this, it would be necessary to overcome the pain and the history and to focus on the future (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 58):

„ But I think because we have the land and they also have the same land we should give more value to our lives and to our time, and it's a specific actually, we will not live forever. The land will stay forever. So, let's just try to have a talk from generation to another generation and try to have something that will make us live together.” (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 58)

For her, the key actors involved in this dialogue are the young generation, who look to the future to find a common solution (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 58). The project of self-determination for the young feminists is a project of liberation of the whole Palestinian society and the slogan ‘From the river to the sea’ calls for the same (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 70). Munayyer (2021) describes the slogan as a “rejoinder to the fragmentation of Palestinian land and people by Israeli occupation and discrimination [...] All of them suffer from [...] a system that can only be challenged by their unified opposition. All of them have a right to live freely in the land from the river to the sea” (Munayyer 2021). While Munayyer refers here mostly to the unification of the Palestinian people beyond forged segregation, the young feminists go one step further and understand in the demand for unification and the common struggle for freedom, their self-determination as Palestinian women as a core requirement and pathfinder.

The overcoming of forced fragmentation and the demand of a united struggle also means for them, and at the same time, the demand of equality for all those living in the society. Similar to the matter of national liberation, the activists know that the demand for women’s self-determination will be a long and ongoing process and struggle (Iona 18.05.2022 (3), Pos. 28),

which means that for them personally there are different ideas for their own future. For Iona, her personal aim is to achieve a certain level of democracy, which is reflected in the law having equal rights for men and women and prioritise feminist issues in government, so that the conditions are created for women to live independently, which means both physical and economic security, and to realise their potential freely (Iona 18.05.2022 (3), Pos. 58). But for others, the hope of change in the long run is not enough. Isabel knows that in order to live a self-determined life, she needs to escape the patriarchal structures in her family. Isabel explains that „I don't wanna live in Palestine, because I really wanna do everything [...] like without feeling guilty, without feeling I am hurting my family, or I am something so bad in the society. I wanna feel normal [...] if I wanted to go out from my home wearing a short or shorter dress or having like a wild night in some club or something“ (Isabel 19.05.2022, Pos. 40). For her, the corset that society ties is too tight and she feels „like I can't breathe in this society“ (ibid.). The individual struggle that each activist faces is hard, but Aya finds comfort in the idea that she is connected to other women fighting the same struggle as her. Feminist activism across the Arab world is a source of inspiration for her and although they are separated by borders, she wishes to overcome fragmentation standing side by side with women from Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Jordan and fight as partners for a free Arab world (Aya 28.06.2022, Pos. 70). Enass' belief in transnational solidarity movements as a possibility for a peaceful solution is also unbroken, as she believes that having solidarity could save more lives in the future (Enass 11.05.2022, Pos. 63). This solidarity is exactly what Sameeha demands and hopes for, so that the struggle does not go unheard:

„I hope that I will never see the people are just taking their stuff and being kicked out from this land. I hope that one day we can see that the settlements are just as a field in between our villages [...] I hope Masafer Yatta will be as the people hope to be, because they are suffering since more than eighty years until this moment, to have at least normal houses and they don't manage to do that. I hope that the history that the past and the old people who were dying in fighting in this place, will not just be dying for nothing, and then in the end they take this land. I hope it will be protected. I hope another youth people will be more activist and help us and give one hand to bring all this attention that we can bring. And you know it not to be disappeared.“ (Sameeha 15.06.2022, Pos. 47)

To Palestinian feminists, self-determination signifies the determination not to fade into obscurity, to remain in memory, and to ensure their voices to be heard, thereby preventing their struggle from becoming futile. Their fight embodies the belief that a liberated homeland, accompanied by liberated women, is possible.

In the context of understanding the self-determination of feminist activists, this chapter underscores the multi-faceted nature of their struggle. As previously discussed, it is not solely a fight for Palestinian self-determination but also a struggle to lead self-determined lives as

Palestinian women. The interviews consistently emphasize this duality of objectives, coupled with the leadership role these young feminist activists aspire to assume in their struggle. Even if they view themselves as the generation paving the way, they seek recognition so that the next generation can build upon their efforts and lessons learned.

Furthermore, it becomes evident that the struggle for self-determination is not centred around the establishment of a nation-state. Instead, it reflects a decolonial understanding that calls for a land where all people in their homeland can live as free and equal citizens. This region, often referred to as “From the River to the Sea” encompasses the area from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, as indicated by the slogan. Crucially, their vision entails equal rights for all, with no domination or subjugation. They advocate for the realisation of this Palestine/Israel through measures such as the right of return for Palestinian refugees, the end of the occupation of at least the OPT, and, as an interim solution, a two-state solution, ultimately aiming to become one country with equal rights for all. This vision is critically examined, and the nation-state itself is identified as an oppressor, highlighting the feminist aspiration to think beyond rigid power structures and to conceive self-determination as a far-reaching much deeper concept. It is understood as a part of one’s identity, offering the possibility to move freely and securely as individuals and as a group, with equal rights. Instead of perpetuating a system of dominance through the establishment of a nation-state, a peaceful solution is called for, achieved through non-asymmetrical conversations, enabling coexistence in a land with equal rights.

The demand for a unified Palestine is a central component of their activism, with their self-determination as Palestinian women serving as a core requirement and pathfinder toward this goal. Being united in this struggle as Palestinians, as well as in transnational solidarity with those fighting alongside them for self-determination, provides the young activists with courage and reinforces their determination to persist, even in the face of setbacks and everyday experiences of oppression.

5. Conclusion

Looking at the Palestinian struggle for self-determination from a feminist perspective has shown that Palestinian women are not only the ones who suffer most from the intersecting system of oppression, but are also the ones who, through their struggle against different everyday experiences of oppression, carry a strength, a wealth of knowledge and an energy for resistance that is significant and central to a struggle for self-determination. The aim of the work was to show that it is important for marginalised and oppressed voices to be heard, as they are shaped by daily resistance and know what it means to live a self-determined life.

The young generation of feminists - and I deliberately do not use the word 'wave', which is once again marked by the oppression of white liberal feminists (Stephan 2014: 1) - has learned to overcome borders and differences by understanding the intersecting systems of oppression and an intersectional and transnational solidarity feminist struggle against it and aim to fight for the self-determination of the whole Palestinian people through their initiatives nationally and internationally. They manage to connect both the grassroots and the liberation discourse and distance themselves from the elitist NGO structures, as Hawari suggests (Hawari 2019).

Their narratives and identities have been shaped by history, through which at the same time their systems of oppression have emerged, still affecting their daily lives. Recognising that these structures that determine women's lives are learned and manifested within society, their activism is directed towards unlearning the structures of oppression. On the one hand, this means educating people about patriarchal structures and their manifestations in institutions, law and politics and replacing them with feminist thought and action. On the other hand, it means actively resisting against epistemic violence and silencing processes and making their cause heard nationally and internationally. For this, the young generation of feminists uses social media to increase their influence through their own channels, as well as through celebrities spreading the word. At the same time, they support connection with other intersectional feminists who are in solidarity with them, in that they understand the feminist struggle in Palestine as a simultaneous struggle against occupation and its systems of oppression. In order to establish a common intersectional feminist understanding, dialogue and exchange are at the forefront of their actions, they create space for diversity in the experiences of Palestinian women marked by origin, identity, and forms of oppression, and thus their differing needs, and bring these women together to be a part of a political movement by sharing their stories and contributing to the establishment of a feminist archive in Palestine or joining protests as one Palestinian people separated by history but not by heart.

A sense for community is created that enables a recollection of unity of the whole Palestinian people across forced segregation through a revival of the old homegrown feminism in modern interpretations.

The unity of Palestinian women and the whole Palestinian people is at the forefront of their quest for self-determination, but transnational feminist solidarity and international support to generate attention and increase pressure on the Israeli state, through collective protests, posts or BDS, is supported as long as the feminist struggle in Palestine is understood as a simultaneous struggle against oppression and solidarity is understood in terms of mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests, and not as a patronisation of what it means to be a feminist.

History has shown that the interference of the international feminist discourse and their orientalist and oppressive ideas about Palestinian women and their feminism led to the further marginalisation of women's voices in the project of Palestinian self-determination through professionalisation and NGO-ization of women's movements. Their idea that feminism per se could perform miracles turned out to be misguided and only led to further oppression of feminists in Palestine (Kuttab 2009: 110-113; Jad 2018: 161-162). It was decolonial, intersectional and critical feminism that brought concepts such as transnational feminist solidarity, which made it possible to simultaneously focus on one's own homegrown feminism while building non-colonising feminist solidarity across borders.

Their struggle for self-determination is reflected in all spheres of the web of oppression, it is about self-determination in everyday life situations like being independent financially, legally, and politically, in their freedom of movement, being free of fear from settler violence and arbitrariness of occupation forces and being free from people oppressing their narratives, identity and knowledge. The struggle for Palestinian self-determination is not a single-issue struggle for the feminists I interviewed but is fought on several fronts simultaneously. The narrow definition of self-determination with statehood cannot do justice to this endeavour, but the understanding of self-determination is much broader - it includes the breaking of domination, a homeland in which all Palestinians can live as free and equal citizens, neither dominated by others nor dominating them. And that successively also means 'No Free Homeland Without Free Women' who can live there. At the same time, the slogan can also be interpreted to mean that a free homeland can only be achieved through the freedom of women who have learnt to fight against an intersecting system of oppression in a variety of ways and whose experience and knowledge in this struggle could pave the way for the struggle for

Palestinian self-determination and the unity of the whole Palestinian people. While there is an impediment of any diplomatic breakthrough in managing the conflict through the Palestinian division (Brown 2010: 35-36), the Palestinian feminists try to reunite the whole Palestinian people to speak with one voice. History has shown that “[t]he greatest successes have been achieved at moments when the feminist and nationalist agendas were maximally synergistic” (Jad 2018: 165), the future will show the impact of the young feminists uniting these struggles on the path of Palestinian self-determination.

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Appendix

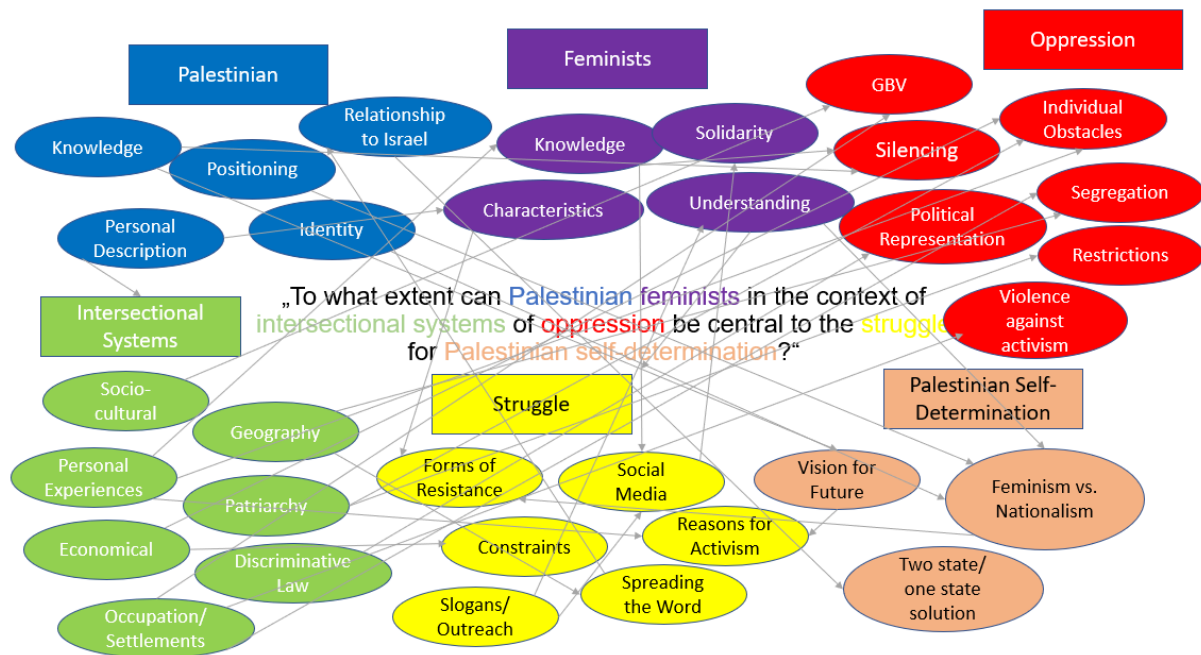


Figure 1: Codes and problem structures after open and axial coding

Coding Families/ Category	Codes
Exchange	• Social Media • Raising Awareness • Relationship between Israelis and Palestinians • Changing Narratives • Connecting with other Women • Getting to know each other • Forced Segregation • Changing Mindsets
Systems of Oppression	• Internal Struggle in Palestine/Israel • Intersectional Oppression • Gender Based Violence • Individual Struggle • Patriarchy • Personal Experience of Violence • Economic Issues • Socio-Cultural Issues

	• Political Representation • Settler Violence • Occupation • Discriminative Law • Epistemic Violence
Question of Solidarity	• Feminist Solidarity • Struggle between Feminists • De-colonial Solidarity
Narratives	• Conflicting Narratives • Israeli Narrative • Palestinian Narrative
Vision for Future	• Pan-Arabism in Feminism • Right of Return • Freedom and Liberation • Two-State Solution • One State Equal Rights • Life Abroad • Gender Equality • Meaning of Peace • Hope for Change • Palestinian Self-Determination
Feminism in Palestine	• Feminist vs. national issues • Famous Female Activists • Feminist Struggles • New Generation • Palestinian Feminist History • Understanding of Feminism • Feminist movements
Identity	• Religion • Personal Description
Activism and Feminist Resistance	• New Wave of Activism • Constrains for Activism

	• Oppression of Activists • Feminist Resistance • Reasons for Activism • Form of Activism • Reason for Questioning the System
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Table 1: Coding families/ Categories with associated codes after selective coding