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Citizenship in the absence of a state and Republican motherhood in the absence of a Republic



Artist: Sliman Mansour, "The Village Awakens," 1988. From:  
<http://www.art.net/~samia/page/pagetwo/fatenpicts.html>

This paper is a small part of my dissertation project. The dissertation will examine what I call 'stateless citizenship' and aims to address two main questions: How do Palestinian women perform citizenship under conditions of statelessness? Here, I hope to examine how Palestinian women claim their own political space and voice under conditions of sexism, militarism, occupation and statelessness and how their marginal status in society might have produced a unique expression of citizenship. The second question asks, "What discourses present in Palestinian society describe the ideal female citizen". In this paper I will begin to explore the latter question. I begin by pointing out that citizenship is performative and that citizenship can be performed in the absence of a state. I discuss how citizenship is gendered. I then delve into one discourse prevalent in Palestinian society today, namely that a woman's political role is to raise sons dedicated to their country and willing to die for it. I examine this discourse and compare it to the concept of Republican motherhood.

In 2010, nearly 600 Israeli's signed up for a campaign of civil disobedience that defied Israeli law to smuggle Palestinian women and children from the occupied West Bank into Israel.<sup>1</sup> This campaign was inspired by the Israeli writer, Ilana Hammerman, who smuggled three Palestinian teenagers into Israel for a day out. Hammerman informed the public of her illegal action by publishing an article in Haaretz in which she admitted breaking the law. Her action inspired other Israeli women to join her in organizing several trips to Israel. Over 100 Palestinian women have been smuggled into Israel to spend a day along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The main purpose of this act of civil disobedience was not merely to give Palestinian women a fun day out or a taste of life outside the occupied West Bank, but more importantly, it was to spark debate about Israel's system of segregation that denies Palestinians access to historic Palestine. The group placed an advertisement in Haaretz titled "we refuse to obey." The ad said, "We crossed the checkpoint with them [the Palestinian women] and knowingly violated the Entry into Israel Act. We are hereby declaring this fact publicly... we do not recognize the legitimacy of the Entry Into Israel Act, which permits every Israeli and every Jew to move freely throughout most of the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River and denies that right to the Palestinian, whose land this is, as well."<sup>2</sup> Hanna Rubinstein, one of the Israeli women who took part in smuggling Palestinian women, acknowledged, "What we are doing here will not change the situation. But it is one more activity to oppose the occupation. One day in the future, people will ask, like they did of the Germans: 'Did you know?' And I will be able to say, 'I knew. And I acted.'" <sup>3</sup> Hammerman affirmed, "None of us are anarchists, yet we broke the law. That

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<sup>1</sup> Global Research: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/israelis-risk-jail-to-smuggle-palestinians/20750>

<sup>2</sup> Promised land: News and Opinions from Israel. "This absurd act of rebellion: why did we publicly violate the law (interview with Klil Zisapel)" <http://www.promisedlandblog.com/?tag=how-far-is-it-from-tel-aviv-to-palestine>

<sup>3</sup> The New York Times July 26, 2011. "Where Politics Are Complex, Simple Joys at the Beach." [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/27/world/middleeast/27swim.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/27/world/middleeast/27swim.html?_r=0)

is a symbolic act.”<sup>4</sup>

On 15 November 2011, six Palestinian activists called themselves ‘freedom riders’ (inspired by the Freedom Riders of the American civil rights movement who challenged segregation on interstate buses). They boarded a segregated Israeli bus that links Jewish settlements in the West bank to occupied East Jerusalem. The Palestinian activists were wearing Kuffiyehs (Palestinian scarves) and t-shirts reading ‘justice’, ‘Freedom’ and ‘we shall overcome’. This daring action was taken in order to demand the right to travel freely to Jerusalem. Hurriyah Ziada, a spokeswoman for the activists said “As part of our struggle for freedom, justice and dignity, we demand the ability to be able to travel freely on our roads, on our own land, including the right to travel to Jerusalem.”<sup>5</sup> Howeida Arraf one of the freedom riders and a co-founder of the International Solidarity Movement, said that one of their aims is to expose the international companies, Egged and Veolia that operate these segregated bus lines and profit from the occupation. Another freedom rider, Fadi Quran said before boarding the bus, “We are using civil disobedience to disrupt the status quo.”<sup>6</sup>

Unequivocally, the purpose of these two acts is to disrupt the status quo, dismantle established laws and create new possibilities. The actors in both incidents break the law and call it into question. They disrupt the binary constellation of powerful versus powerless. The Palestinian freedom riders claim the right to have rights and the Israeli smugglers endeavor to transform their society, which has been torn apart by the conflict with the Palestinians. If we use Hannah Arendt’s work on action, politics and participation as our guide to analyze these actions, we realize that the actors are engaging in authentic politics and therefore are performing citizenship. For Arendt, to be a citizen is not merely to cast a ballot and pay taxes but rather to engage in eruptive politics, a politics of beginning that intends to start something new and unexpected. According to Arendt, citizenship is enacted by appearing in public through words and deeds, “where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities.”<sup>7</sup> Citizenship in this sense is not merely a status assigned by the state but rather a political action, enacted and performed. This dissertation deals with citizenship in action. More specifically, it approaches citizenship as performative. Drawing on Judith Butler’s work on gender performativity, I argue that like gender, citizenship is “a phenomenon that is being produced and reproduced all the time.”<sup>8</sup> It is culturally formed and it entails instances of performativity. By doing gender one becomes a woman or a man, and by appearing in public through words and deeds one

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<sup>4</sup> Haaretz. Sept. 21, 2010. “Author questioned for allegedly smuggling Palestinians into Israel for day of fun.” <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/author-questioned-for-allegedly-smuggling-palestinians-into-israel-for-day-of-fun-1.315032>

<sup>5</sup> The Washington Post. Nov. 15, 2011. “Palestinian ‘Freedom Riders’ arrested on bus to Jerusalem.” [http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-11-15/world/35283321\\_1\\_jewish-settlements-west-bank-bus-protest](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-11-15/world/35283321_1_jewish-settlements-west-bank-bus-protest)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> d’Entrèves, Maurizio. *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*. Routledge. 1993

<sup>8</sup> Butler, Judith. Your behavior creates your gender. Feb. 19, 2011. <http://bigthink.com/ideas/30766>

becomes a citizen. In other words, the political act produces the citizen and not the other way around.

Scholarship on citizenship has focused its attention intensively on how citizenship rights are distributed in the state. It has approached citizenship mainly as legal membership within the state. By reducing citizenship to a legal status and binding it to nation-states we limit ourselves to a binary concept of citizenship. However, by shifting our focus to the performance of citizenship that is independent of the status of the subject, we enable ourselves to think of citizenship as a spectrum. We widen the field further to include subjects that have been excluded from the field of citizenship, namely, non-citizens, illegal aliens and immigrants. We include them not as others but as subjects who are engaging in politics and performing citizenship. This approach to citizenship will allow us to uncover and examine many different types of citizenship, including what I call 'stateless citizenship.'

### **Why Palestine?**

My reasons behind choosing Palestine, as my case study are partly personal but mostly because it is a good example of stateless citizenship. Legally, the people of Gaza and the West Bank are stateless. The Palestinians are the largest stateless population in the world. Since 1948, the lives of the Palestinians have been shaped by statelessness. As noted by Hannah Arendt stateless people are "nothing but human beings" and this is very dangerous since "passports or birth certificates, and sometimes even income receipts are no longer formal papers but matters of social distinction."<sup>9</sup> Stateless people are vulnerable to "state people." When the Iraqi regime occupied Kuwait in 1990 they transferred thousands of Palestinians to Iraq. With the liberation of Kuwait, Palestinians remaining in Kuwait were accused of collaborating with the Iraqi regime and expelled by the Kuwaiti government. Similarly in Libya, when Ghadhafi disapproved of the Oslo process he expelled thousands of Palestinians to Lebanon. The Lebanese government immediately clamped down on travel regulations governing Palestinians to prevent their influx into Lebanon. To be stateless is similar to being in Hobbes's state of nature. The Palestinians who live in neighboring Arab countries are denied many rights including the right to education, medical care, work, property ownership, inheritance, travel, and state protection. To use Hannah Arendt's term, they are denied the 'right to have rights.' They are denied the right to fully participate in a world that is made up of nation-states.

The Palestinians, who live in Gaza and the West Bank, however are under different conditions. Although, they are stateless like the rest of the Palestinians in the diaspora and are deprived of many rights including the right to self-determination, they live in and belong to a polity. The experience of living together over time and being subjected to the same restrictions and rules has produced a community of people that is capable- although not with complete freedom- to facilitate the identification of shared values. Their shared experience of resisting Israeli occupation has induced them to constitute themselves as political actors, i.e. citizens. Undoubtedly, the first Intifada was instrumental in establishing democratic institutions. It has led to the establishment of

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<sup>9</sup> Bernstein, Richard. 1996. *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*. MIT Press Edition. P:77

many grassroots organizations, trade unions, professional associations as well as women's and youth movements. Many Palestinians became active participants of these grass root organizations and NGO's, which promoted bottom-up state building. Their political activism was a method to resist occupation. During the Intifada, many Palestinians used to say that the "Realization of statehood is within a stone's throw." However, a Palestinian state was never actualized and the Palestinians, who performed citizenship, became citizens of non-state territories. They are citizens of what I call an 'imagined state'. Actually, after the Oslo Accord, the Palestinian Authority was pushed to look and act like a state in spite of the limitations imposed on them. They were compelled to take care of their "citizens" in order to relieve Israel of its responsibilities towards the occupied people. In other words, the Oslo Accord gave the PA the responsibilities of a state without the rights of a state. Consequently, the people in Gaza and the West Bank have been administered and managed by an idea of a nation-state rather than its actuality. They have been citizens of an imagined political community. The Palestinian territories are an example of a stateless people inhabiting a single polity where citizenship is performed.

It is important to note here that the aim of this project is not to undermine the importance of nation-states and formal citizenship. In fact, I acknowledge that the hardship of the Palestinians emanates from not belonging to a nation-state and not having a legal status. This project, however, suggests that there might be different modalities of citizenship that diverge from the nation-state and that non-citizens can and are performing citizenship. As a matter of fact some countries allow non-citizens to vote and stand for office in local elections.

### **Gendered Citizenship in Palestine**

Since the 1980's, feminist scholars have focused on the interplay between citizenship and gender.<sup>10</sup> They launched a critical examination of the historical tradition of citizenship in its theoretical and practical aspects across the globe. They concluded that citizenship is a deeply gendered concept. Some argued that the notion of citizenship is originally predicated on the very exclusion of women.<sup>11</sup> Pateman, Okin and Elshtain among other scholars assert that the notion of citizenship was and continues to be linked to qualities, characteristics and activities that embody male values and experiences.

Gender inequality persists in theories and practices of citizenship all over the world and specifically in Palestinian society, which is shaped by traditional patriarchal roles and relations. Patriarchy is potent in Palestine because it is sustained by age-based kinship values, familial relationships as well as religion. Patriarchy infiltrates the different sectors of society. It is reflected and reinforced in every institution of the Palestinian society, such as education, economy and politics. Thus, women are positioned within a patriarchal structure, which tends to reduce them to mothers, wives or siblings.

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<sup>10</sup> The question of women's citizenship was first raised by Carole Pateman. (1985) See *Women and Democratic Citizenship*.

<sup>11</sup> See Pateman. 1992. "Equality Difference and Subordination: The Politics of Motherhood and Women's Citizenship."

Their relationship to the political community is interceded through family ties and their worth is often depicted in terms of their familial roles, particularly as mothers. While the role of the Palestinian man is to risk his life in defending the country, the essential role of the Palestinian women is to “produce, support and nourish men.”<sup>12</sup> As noted by Karma, a politically active Palestinian woman from the West Bank,

*“Some Women actively participated in the struggle through politics but all participated just being here, by remaining on the land. Because the life for men is so difficult, the most important way women participate is by supporting them. Women really aren’t expected to be politically active. Many women participated in demonstrations to show support for the men. A few women were organized-actually from the early 1980’s- in women’s committees and women’s unions, but they too really worked in support of the male factions with which they were affiliated.”<sup>13</sup>*

This quote addresses the political role of women in Palestinian society. Their role is generally limited to being strong wives and mothers, who are capable of supporting their men in their political actions. Even when women act politically by participating in demonstrations and joining women’s unions, their actions are subordinate to and supportive of men’s political activity. It shows how most women including those who are politically active have internalized the prevalent gendered notions of politics. Staying put in the land and maintaining the family in the face of occupation is regarded, as women’s activism and a form of participation in the political struggle. The Palestinian society has succeeded in reinterpreting domesticity. They have “invested reproduction and domesticity with political meaning and given a domestic content to activism.”<sup>14</sup>

Women and men came to be positioned differently with respect to political rights and obligations. Men’s political obligations require actions that create glory, respect and dignity, whereas women’s political obligation requires motherhood. Women’s political participation in Palestine is grounded in their reproductive role and nurturing capabilities. Like the Spartan mother, the Palestinian mother is expected to cope with sons and husbands dying for the sake of their country. Moreover, she is expected, as a loyal member of the political community, to reproduce a societal value system that promotes men’s allegiance and passion for the country. She is supposed to raise her sons to be politically active and not shy away from their responsibilities towards their country. These are the main tenets of republican motherhood. In what follows I will introduce the concept of Republican motherhood a term coined by Linda Kerber and compare it to the prevalent discourse of the ideal female citizen in Palestine.

## **Republican Motherhood**

In her article, “The Republican Mother” (1976), Linda Kerber contrived the

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<sup>12</sup> Rubenberg, Cheryl A. 2001. *Palestinian Women: Patriarchy and Resistance in the West Bank*. Lynne Rienner Publishers. P:220

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Peteet, Julie. 1991. *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement*. Colombia University Press. P:183

phrase in order to delineate the new roles of American women in the early Republic. Kerber explained that the republican mother that we observe in the early years of the republic resembles the Spartan mother, whose civic duty was to raise sons “prepared to sacrifice themselves to the good of the polis”.<sup>15</sup> It was reported by Plutarch that a Spartan mother killed her son for he was a coward and not worthy of her and Sparta. The mother said, “He was not my offspring...for I did not bear one unworthy of Sparta.”<sup>16</sup> Spartan mothers were the only ones who were famous in antiquity qua mothers. They were exalted for their ability to raise Spartan citizens. Like the Spartan mother, the American mother in the early republic and specifically after the revolution, was encouraged to raise her sons to value patriotism and be willing to sacrifice their own needs for the greater good of the country. Thus, their reproductive roles and what they do in the household became charged with political significance.

Women participated in various ways in the American Revolution. After the revolution, it became difficult to deny that women were capable of making, moral, rational and political choices. They proved their patriotism as well as their ability to maintain political identity. The founding fathers were faced with the question of the role of women in the republic. However they were not ready to grant women full citizenship rights. Their solution was in politicizing motherhood such that a mother’s political role in the republic became to raise patriotic republican children. The Republican Mother was to encourage her son's civic interest and participation (Kerber 1980, 283). Kerber claims that, “The Republican mother was a device which attempted to integrate domesticity and politics.”<sup>17</sup>

The founding fathers feared that the influence of women in politics would subvert republican order. Criticizing French women’s interference in government, Jefferson writes: “The tender breasts of ladies were not formed for political convulsions and the French ladies miscalculate much their own happiness when they wander the true field of their influence into that of politics.”<sup>18</sup> In her book *No constitutional Right to be Ladies*, Kerber argues that the founding fathers did not envision women as part of the social compact they established. Similarly, Mark Kann contends that the founding fathers have created a “Republic of men.” Kann adds, “The founders sought liberty, equality and citizenship for American males.”<sup>19</sup> The gendered language they adopted right from the beginning- “all men were created equal”- demonstrates that women were excluded from the republic. Even though, republican values are at odds with absolutism, the founding fathers failed to apply these values to domestic patriarchy. They erased the culture of kingship in politics but were uncritical of the king in the family. Despite the egalitarian ethic of republicanism, they managed to preserve males’ dominance over women by keeping patriarchal laws, such as the law of coverture.

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<sup>15</sup> Kerber, Linda. 1976. “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment-An American Perspective.” *American Quarterly* 28, no. 2: 187-205. P:188

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>17</sup> ibid. 203

<sup>18</sup> Cote, Richard. 2005. *Strength And Honor: The Life Of Dolley Madison*. Corinthian

<sup>19</sup> Kann, Mark. 1998. *A Republic of Men: The American Founders, Gendered Language, and Patriarchal Politics*. New York University Press. P:1

The founders conceived citizenship as a male enterprise. Many years after the revolution, citizenship was still defined in opposition to female qualities. While manhood was portrayed as a virtue desired by every citizen, effeminacy was a vice abhorred by every patriotic American citizen. A republican citizen was characterized by possessing manly virtues such as, independence, courage, commitment, confidence as well as self-control and little emotion. A Republican citizen was also a family man; a husband and a father. Marriage was perceived to be an important institution that disciplines males' desires. It develops their sense of commitment and compels them to be responsible, trustworthy and stable. A married man was assumed to be more suited to citizenship by virtue of governing his family dependents and ensuring good order in the home. The founders' rhetoric of citizenship and politics demanded male governance over women. Benjamin Franklin, proclaimed, "Any man that is really a man is master of his own family."<sup>20</sup> The husband was supposed to exert his authority over his family without becoming a tyrant. Thus, from the beginning of the republic, the founders conjoined citizenship to manhood and marriage. In the 1760s New York artisans proposed that "every man who honestly supports a family by useful employment should have the right to vote and hold office."<sup>21</sup>

But, if marriage tends to ameliorate the character of male citizens, then the character of women should also be of political significance. Young men were advised to choose virtuous, modest and pious women. A republican citizen was told to be worthy of a republican woman who inspires him to be honorable and righteous. The founders assigned women civic responsibility through their family life, "the founders thickened both men's and women's marital responsibilities by adding a layer of civic duty. Husbands were to defend their rights, families, and country while wives were to serve as republican mothers who educated sons to become 'virtuous citizens of the republic.'"<sup>22</sup> Female civic duty was to be displayed at home, in the woman's domain. Despite the fact, that during the revolution women assumed political roles outside their traditional domain, after the revolution women were urged to take the role of the republican mother, which was portrayed as essential to the new republic.

Republican mothers were taught to sacrifice their subjectivity for the good of their families and nation. In their campaign for virtue, the founders promoted selflessness and sacrifice as essential female virtues and important components of republican motherhood. The manners of women became of political significance to the republic. As noted by John Adams, "The manners of women, are the surest criterion by which to determine whether a Republican government is practicable in a nation or not. The Jews, the Greeks, the Romans, the Swiss, the Dutch, all lost their public spirit, their Republican principles and habits, and their Republican forms of governments, when they lost the modesty and domestic virtues of their women."<sup>23</sup> Republican success relied on women's morality and on republican mothers capable of monitoring their husband's goodness and transmitting

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 81

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 7

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 176

<sup>23</sup> Cott, Nancy. 2000. *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. P:20



republican values to future generations of citizens. In this sense, the ideology of Republican motherhood became an indirect way in which women could influence politics and the public realm. In her book, *Women of the Republic*, Kerber reported of a letter written in 1790 by a Marylander who signed his name “Philanthropos”, arguing that “as long as virtuous women had private opportunity to influence men and to ‘mold our minds,’ they ought not regret ‘their exclusion from the perplexity and tumult of a political life.’”<sup>24</sup> The founders and the supporters of republican motherhood presume to have assigned women a new role in politics, but in fact women’s roles did not change. Women used to and continued after the revolution to support their husbands and teach their sons. Women’s role continued to be confined to that of wives and mothers. However, republican motherhood gave women’s domestic role a political significance based on republican principles and mores. It “redefin[ed] female political behavior as valuable rather than abnormal, as a source of strength to the Republic rather than an embarrassment.”<sup>25</sup> Without making women full citizens, the ideology of republican motherhood gave women a civic responsibility.

Historians tend to disagree on the implications of the ideology of republican motherhood on women’s lives after the American Revolution. Some historians, such as Kerber argue that republican motherhood did not raise women’s status but was used to “mask women’s true place in the polis: they were still on its edges.”<sup>26</sup> Kerber asserts that republican motherhood was a conservative ideology, attempting to preserve the sexual division within the family and politics. However, like most historians, Kerber recognizes that republican motherhood provided justification for women’s education. Since women became the source of civic virtue, education was the next logical demand. As historian Joan Gunderson wrote, “mothers could not instruct their sons in morals, liberty, and republicanism without appropriate tools.”<sup>27</sup> Carol Berkin, considered republican motherhood to be an oppressive ideology. In her book *Revolutionary Mothers*, Berkin argues that republican motherhood gave women greater domestic duties and limited their political involvement.<sup>28</sup> She contends that republican motherhood allowed men to hide behind the ideology to argue that women already have a role in politics. On the other hand, other scholars such as Mary Beth Norton, interpreted Republican motherhood as a symbol of women’s progress. In her book, *Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women*, Norton contends that as a result of the ideal of republican motherhood, women’s work was valued and respected and thus women became proud of their sex.<sup>29</sup> Some historians believe that the rise of the ideals of republican motherhood did not necessarily advance or suspend women’s progression towards equality. However, they perceive republican motherhood as part of women’s

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<sup>24</sup> Kerber, Linda 1980. *Women of The Republic: Intellect and Ideology In Revolutionary America*. University of Carolina Press. P:281

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 284

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 12

<sup>27</sup> Gunderson, Joan. 2006. *To Be Useful to the World: Women in Revolutionary America 1740-1790*. The University of North Carolina Press. P: 174

<sup>28</sup> See Berkin, Carol. 2006. *Revolutionary Mother: Women in the Struggle for America’s Independence*. Vintage.

<sup>29</sup> Norton, Marry Beth. 1996 *Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women*. Cornell University press.

experience in the early republic, which is characterized by a series of “trade-offs” as Gunderson noted.<sup>30</sup> The ideology of republican motherhood might have domesticated women further by idealizing the role of motherhood, but it also contributed to expanding women’s opportunities for education. As noted by Gerda Lerner, “Status loss in one area- social production- may be offset by status gain in another- access to education.”<sup>31</sup>

### **Republican Motherhood without a Republic**

Palestinian women in Gaza and the West Bank played vital roles in the first Intifada. Like the women of the American Revolution, Palestinian women in the occupied territories participated and performed citizenship in every way possible. They joined demonstrations, boycotted Israeli products, organized marches, threw stones, burned tires, transported and prepared stones, assisted the injured, raised Palestinian flags and confronted Israeli soldiers to prevent them from arresting people. The Intifada empowered Palestinian women to challenge patriarchal forces and defy major social taboos, such as women’s honor. It gave Palestinian women the opportunity to be heroines and to participate in the creation of the “state.” During the intifada, Palestinian women gained freedoms and were able to challenge the prevalent notions of femininity, masculinity and gender relations. They challenged societal norms of proper female behavior. Modes of behavior that were deemed to be unacceptable for women before the intifada became commonplace. A Palestinian activist reported that, “Before the intifada, no girl was allowed to walk in the streets alone. She had to be either with her father, either with her brother...Now I come back to home maybe after 10 P.M.”<sup>32</sup> However, these challenges failed to yield real transformations in either gender relations or division of labor.

By the end of the Intifada, Women’s role in the public sphere became generally unappreciated, while their role in the domestic sphere became highly exalted. Palestinian nationalist leaders started to talk about the importance of women’s domestic role as guardians of cultural values. They expressed their support for women’s contribution to the creation of the state but without upsetting gender structures and relations. The Palestinian declaration of Independence issued on November 15, 1988, included a “special tribute to the brave Palestinian woman, guardian of sustenance and life, keeper of our people’s perennial flame.”<sup>33</sup> This tribute was a feeble recognition of women’s active role in the first Intifada while circumscribing her role to that of the republican mother. Like the founding fathers during the revolution, the patriarchal leaders in Palestine gladly accepted the participatory citizenship of women during the intifada but failed to broaden their political role after the intifada beyond the realm of the domestic.

Palestinian leaders paid lip service to feminist liberation by claiming

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<sup>30</sup> Gunderson, Joan. 2006. *To Be Useful to the World: Women in Revolutionary America 1740-1790*. The University of North Carolina Press. P: xii

<sup>31</sup> Lerner, Gerda. 1975. “Placing women in History: Definitions and challenges” *Feminist studies* 3 no. ½ P:11

<sup>32</sup> West, Lois (ed.) *Feminist and Nationalism*, 1997. New York: Routledge, P:111

<sup>33</sup> Sharoni, Simona. 1995. *Gender and the Israeli Palestinian conflict*. Syracuse University Press. P:48

commitment to the “woman question.” Fateh, the dominant political group in the PLO duplicated the patriarchal family structure with Arafat as the father of the movement and nation. Other dominant groups within the PLO namely the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, despite being Marxist organizations and claiming to support equality for women, were as traditional and patriarchal as Fateh, each with its own patriarch as head of the organization. Neither group worked to advance the political roles of women despite paying lip service to the advancement of feminist issues. Even though the intifada created a space for women to participate in the political arena, the entrenched political groups quickly closed this space after the intifada.

The image of the activist Palestinian woman began to fade away by the beginning of 1990’s. The new image became that of a mother as a giver and sustainer of life whose political contribution was directly linked to the number of sons she bore. As biological reproducers of the nation, women’s reproductive role gained national importance and their decision to have children or not became a matter of national security. In their political rhetoric, political leaders encouraged women to have children and sanctified those who had more. Yasser Arafat once said, “The Palestinian woman who bears yet another Palestinian every ten months...is a biological time bomb threatening to blow up Israel from within.”<sup>34</sup> The private act of reproduction became politicized. This is evident from the stature given to martyrs’ mothers. Mothers of martyrs acquire access to political leaders. They are invited to attend political celebrations with the leadership. Some of them used this “power” to help members of their local community. As mothers, Palestinian women came to experience power within their community. Thus, like the American woman of the early republic, the Palestinian woman’s political rights emanate from her sexual relationship.

In addition to being the biological reproducers of the nation, Palestinian women were also constructed as the guardians of Palestinian identity, traditions and values. The continuance of the nation is very much dependent on transmitting specific cultural codes, values, and modes of behavior. Although, culture is not fixed or stagnant, cultural myths and symbols can be enduring and can be reproduced from generation to generation. Unlike American women, Palestinian women are not required to transmit republican values to the next generation. Rather, they are expected to transmit allegiance to the nation, identity including religious beliefs and patriarchal norms. As reported by Elise Young, “The woman’s place is in the home of the fighter and in the fighting family. Her important role is taking care of the home, raising the children, educating them in the values of Islam and in the fulfillment of its commandments, in anticipation of their role in the coming *jihad*.”<sup>35</sup> Palestinian mothers were praised for sacrificing their sons, “Praise to the suffering wives and to the sisters who took leave of their loved ones heroically and steadfastly, and who uphold the pledge to raise a generation imbued with faith and with

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<sup>34</sup> Yuval-Davis, Nira. 1997. *Gender and Nation*, London: Sage Publications.

P:36

<sup>35</sup> Young, Elise. 1992. *Keepers of the History: Women and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. New York: Teachers College Press. P: 50

the spirit of *jihad*, in order to continue the mission.”<sup>36</sup> It is instructive to note that this discourse that helped define the Palestinian woman as the bearer of the traditions, values and the future generations of fighters, was not only promoted by the leaders but also by the family and religious leaders. As noted by Suad Joseph, in the Middle East, family and religion are crucial in defining female citizenship and maintaining patriarchy. In Palestine women’s rights, gender relations, as well as family structure are all defined and regulated according to the Shari’a law.

## Conclusion

As I demonstrated in this paper, the discourse of republican motherhood is an old Western discourse, yet it has been utilized in non-western cultures. As noted by Tea Skokic, “throughout history the image of a mother as the most desirable role for a woman in society has been adapted to the social and political moment, but it has remained linked to the role of bearer of the nation, mother of the future soldiers and keeper of traditional values and the home.”<sup>37</sup> The ideal of republican mother has been used in the United States and Palestine in order to deny women political rights. By giving women’s traditional roles a political look, they have disguised women’s status in the polis. Through the ‘device’ of republican motherhood, they have managed to sanctify women’s role in the polis, yet denying her entrance into the political arena. By imposing motherhood and caring on women as a way to prove their patriotism and love for the nation, the discourse prevented women from constructing their own political practices. Thus, those who do not adhere to the republican mother model have undermined their civic role. In Palestine, political leaders have utilized the ideology of republican motherhood in order to mobilize women in their national projects and at the same time maintain traditional gender roles. The ideals of republican motherhood in Palestine seem to have succeeded in institutionalizing women’s association with the domestic sphere by inculcating it with national and patriotic meanings. Palestinian women seem to be caught between the discourse of ‘republican motherhood’ and the struggle for national liberation. The discourse of republican Motherhood by limiting women’s political role to reproduction of children and reproduction of societal norms, further limits the scope for Palestinian women to perform citizenship.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Ivekovic, Rada and Mostov, Julie (ed.) 2002. *From Gender to Nation*. University of Bologna. P:202