



**An-Najah National University  
Faculty of Graduate Studies**

**THE REPRESENTATION OF HOME, GENDER  
AND BORDERS IN CONTEMPORARY  
PALESTINIAN CINEMA**

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## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my father, and my son. You have been an inspiration throughout the way.

## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to everyone who has supported and guided me throughout the way. First and foremost, I extend my heartfelt thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Ahmad Qabaha, for his invaluable guidance, encouragement, and insightful feedbacks. Your expertise and patience were instrumental in shaping this research, and I am grateful for the time and effort you invested in mentoring me. I am also deeply thankful to the faculty and staff of the English Department for providing a stimulating academic environment and resources during my academic journey. Special thanks to Dr. Abdel Karim Daragmeh, Dr. Bilal Hamamra, Dr. Mohammad Hamdan for their support and for the knowledge they imparted during my Bachelor and Master studies.

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## Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that I submitted the thesis entitled:

# THE REPRESENTATION OF HOME, GENDER AND BORDERS IN CONTEMPORARY PALESTINIAN CINEMA

I declare that the work provided in this thesis, unless otherwise referenced, is the researcher's own work, and has not been submitted elsewhere for any other degree or qualification.

**Student's Name**

**Qamar Hussien Assad Assad**

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**25/01/2025**

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## Table of Contents

Dedication .....	iii
Acknowledgement.....	iv
Declaration .....	v
Table of Contents .....	vi
Abstract .....	viii
Chapter One: Introduction and Background .....	1
1.1 Background .....	1
1.2 Significance of the Study .....	6
1.3 Objectives of the Study .....	6
1.4 Questions of the Study .....	7
1.5 Methodologies of the Study .....	7
1.6 Limitations of the Study .....	9
1.7 Theoretical Framework .....	9
Chapter Two: Dual Colonization and Intersectionality: The Impact on Palestinian Women's Lives .....	13
2.1 Introduction .....	13
2.2 Interwoven Struggles: Patriarchy and Israeli Occupation in the Lives of Palestinian Women in Rana's Wedding .....	16
2.2.1 Coming of Age .....	17
2.2.2 Overcoming Adversity .....	20
2.3 Double Chains: The Dual Colonization of Patriarchy and Israeli Occupation over Palestinian Women in Naila and the Uprising .....	22
2.4 Conclusion.....	25
Chapter Three: Hybridity as Resistance: Palestinian Women under Israeli Occupation and Patriarchal Structures .....	27
3.1 Introduction .....	27
3.2 Hybridity in Action: The Mother Figure & Political Activism in Rana's Wedding.	29
3.3 Homi Bhabha's Idea of Hybridity Reflected in the Mother Role and Political Activism in Naila and the Uprising .....	35
3.4 Conclusion.....	38
Chapter Four: Palestinian Women Redefining Resistance: Precarity and Resistance as Male Act Practised by Palestinian Women .....	40
4.1 Introduction .....	40
4.2 Precarity and Erasing Palestinian Women's Presence and Resistance through Home Demolishing in Rana's Wedding .....	43

4.3 Precarity and the Politics of Vulnerability: The Deportation of Palestinian Men in Naila and the Uprising.....	46
4.4 Conclusion.....	49
References .....	51
الملخص .....	ب

# THE REPRESENTATION OF HOME, GENDER AND BORDERS IN CONTEMPORARY PALESTINIAN CINEMA

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the representation of home, gender, and borders in contemporary Palestinian cinema, providing a critical analysis of how these themes interrelate to reflect the complex social and political situation in Palestine, focusing on Palestinian women. The study examines how the concept of “home” is portrayed not just as a physical space but as a symbol of identity, belonging, and resistance in the face of the Israeli occupation. Drawing on Bhabha’s hybridity and Butler’s theories, the research explores how Palestinian film-makers depict the roles of Palestinian women within the home and the broader national struggle, highlighting their contributions to the preservation of cultural memory and their navigation of both traditional and modern roles. The study also delves into the representation of borders—both physical and symbolic—as they intersect with the notions of home and gender, emphasizing how these borders impose constraints on movement, identity, and autonomy. By analyzing Abu-Assad’s *Rana’s Wedding* and Bacha’s *Naila and the Uprising* (2017), this thesis uncovers the ways in which Palestinian cinema challenges and redefines conventional narratives of nationhood, gender, and belonging, capturing the stories of self-empowered Palestinian women. The study demonstrates the complexities of Palestinian women’s lives under Israeli occupation, and the resilience of the Palestinian identity of these Palestinian women. The study analyse two journeys of two Palestinian women, from individual memory, which in turn opens the doors to the memories of all the Palestinian women, to collective memory, and from there to the memory of a wounded homeland whose scars are still visible to this day. Finally, the study offers Palestinian women a higher position than the conventional Palestinian man in defending the Palestinian case, emphasizing over the importance of the Palestinian woman participation in politics as a mother nurturing the future generation and an active political activist.

**Keywords:** Gender; Borders; Palestinian Cinema.

# Chapter One

## Introduction and Background

### 1.1 Background

Palestinians' lives are shaped with different forms of both memory and identity repression, as well as their defiance against the Israeli occupation. The distinct experiences and struggles of Palestinians against the Israeli occupation highlight the need for capturing the suffering of the Palestinians in their daily lives through various artistic mediums, such as novels, short stories, history, poetry, and film. These art forms serve to portray the identity repression, restrictions on movement, and challenges faced by the indigenous Palestinians in their reality.

Thus, Palestinian cinema discusses the daily struggle of achieving the simplest things under the Israeli settler-colonialism. It is a weapon to change the Palestinian reality and defend the Palestinian case of “a country and its people disappeared from maps and dictionaries [...] ‘The Palestinian people does not exist’, said the new masters, and henceforth the Palestinians would be referred to by general, conveniently vague terms” (Sanbar, 2001, p. 87). The beginning of the Palestinian catastrophe was captured in documentaries and personal reminiscences so these had not been preserved. The beginning of the third period, marked between 1968 and 1982, had turned the focus from Palestinian-Palestinian relationship, as merely talking about Palestinians' history and culture, to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Gertz & Khleifi, 2008). Films of this period were released by the Palestinian institutions and not individuals. By the fourth period (1980s- present) film-makers started to, solely, produce films that discuss the disasters and tragedies of Palestinians, each employed his own creativity and freedom in representing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Gertz & Khleifi, 2008). Palestinian cinema in its essence describes the Palestinians' condition of dispersion. In other words, the catastrophe of 1948 until now is represented through art mediums from different places. The Palestinian case, portrayed through films, does not emerge only from the colonized country but also from different places, such as ‘Israel’, Europe, Gaza, the United States “to recollect and gather together what has been lost since 1948”, as Edward Said suggests (Dabashi, 2006, p. 3). The common purpose of the directors of Palestinian cinema is to “provide a visible incarnation of Palestinian existence in the year since 1948, the year of

the destruction of Palestine, and the dispersal and dispossession of the Palestinians; and a “way of resisting an imposed identity on Palestinians as terrorists, as violent people”, according to Edward Said (Dabashi, 2006, p. 3). In my thesis, I argue that the Palestinian cinema allows for a visual alternative that humanizes Palestinians, especially Palestinian women, and counters the imposed identity on Palestinians as terrorists, so they can reclaim their agency and shape their own collective narrative.

Many films were published to dehumanize and stereotype Palestinians, and many film adaptations shed light on the experiences and struggles of Palestinians to allow a critique of the narrative imposed on Palestinians. But this paper shows that the Palestinian cinema is a means of challenging the Israeli occupation through considering gender in the examination of the suffering of the Palestinian people since 1948, and exposing the Palestinian problem to the world. I argue that cinema has allowed its Palestinian actresses to feel free to express their feelings towards their nationalism and terrorized Palestine, as represented in Lina Soualem’s *Bye Bye Tiberias* (2023), and Abu-Assad’s *Rana’s Wedding* (2002), to construct a counter narrative of Palestinians’ self-determination and resistance by powerful Palestinian females. By way of example, in Abu-Assad’s *Rana’s Wedding* (2002) and *Bye Bye Tiberias* (2023), the Palestinian female actresses, as traditionally marginalized category that corresponds to the role in representing a marginalized nation, establish alternative narratives “to the intersecting power structures of colonial and patriarchal oppression” (Ball, 2012, p. 2). I discuss that amplifying the voices of Palestinian women challenges the dominance of colonial and patriarchal narratives. Palestinian actresses challenge and redefine the male-centric narratives of the Israeli colonizer that promote the patriarchal structures “of social sex and gender roles, combined with generally subordinate social and economic position of women, mean that women suffer in particular ways during and after conflict” (Hilary & Christine, 2000, p. 254). For instance, the body search at checkpoints and facilities promotes the Palestinian family’s overprotective views that restrict the Palestinian woman to participate fully in all aspects of society, but be a housewife. So, this paper addresses the challenges of the post-colonial reconstruction of leaving Palestinian women marginalized, and the aim of the Palestinian cinema to defend the Palestinian women as a marginalized category in a marginalized nation.

The emergence of the 'neoliberal feminine subject', that challenged the traditional concept of masculinity, has shifted Palestinian "women's priorities from protecting the traditional values to risking everything in order to loosen the grip of occupation" (Sabbagh, 1989, p. 62). This new movement of the neoliberal feminism has contributed to diversity, individuality and personal agency, in-dependency and self-reliance of the Palestinian woman. Radner & Stringer (2012) propose that highlighting gender in the Palestinian cinema contributes to "the undoing of masculinity in the face of evolving gender roles; the emergence of the neoliberal feminine subject; the vexed permutations of gender with regard to the post-colonial subject" (p. 4). In post-colonial context, Palestinian women are left marginalized, promoting the long-standing issue of the patriarchal structure. As Palestinian women experience leadership roles, this leads to re-imagining gender roles, empowering Palestinian women to transcend traditional binaries, and acknowledging the multifaceted nature of gender identities within diverse socio-political contexts. In their essay, Radner & Stringer (2012) refer to the sociologist Robert Merton's concept of "retreatism" that opposes the common term of consumerism that "emphasizes the privileged and legitimate form of self-fashioning available to Palestinian women- that again repositions them in terms of conventional femininity" (p. 6). The theory of Merton of "retreatism" emphasizes that departing from usual standards arises when being unable to achieve societal goals through legitimate means. The theory applies to the Palestinian woman who "has been discursively constructed (condemned) as inferior yet also threatening to man (to the Israeli occupation in the case of the research)" (King, 2004, p. 2). The Palestinian woman attaches to herself an unconventional description of being a serious threat to the male-centric narratives of the Israeli colonizer through her resistance.

Fanon's theory of 'violence and politics', which corresponds to the colonial world back to Fanon's time, justifies the aftermath of the Israeli occupation in the 1990s that is characterized by a "feminized Palestinian society [...] as initiating a process of liberation in a psychological sense" (Fanon, 1963, p. 62), as Sabbagh (1989) rereads Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. In his words, Sabbagh (1989) refers to Fanon's explanation of the intersection of the notions of politics, violence, and resistance, where "the act of violence directed at the source of oppression should be measured not by degree of damage inflicted

upon the oppressor but by the degree to which this act empowers the victim of oppression” (p. 62). Fanon proposes that the degree of Palestinian women’s empowerment depends on the amount of violence that surrounds them. Thus, he enables and proves their empowerment through a direct correlation to the scale of violence he describes in colonized Palestine:

The policeman and the military ensure the colonized are kept under close scrutiny, and contained by rifle butts and napalm. The agent does not alleviate oppression or mask domination. He displays and demonstrates them with clear conscience of the law enforcer, and brings violence into the homes and minds of the colonized subject (Fanon, 1963, p. 4).

The words napalm and rifle butts connote a time of intense violence, but, referring to Fanon’s theory, Palestinian women strive to consolidate their position as a leading role in determining their fate as Palestinians, reacting to this violence that “will be vindicated and appropriated when, taking history into their own hands, the colonized swarm into the forbidden cities” (Fanon, 1963, p. 6). Hansen (1974) expresses the power of the inferior category of Palestinian women to flourish without suppression or imposition, and “create the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth” through reacting to the Israeli occupation by revolutionary violence (p. 31). So, corresponding to Fanon’s theory, Hansen embraces equality of human existence, which the Israeli occupation, as a colonial power, fails to respect. She celebrates cultural and individual identities without erasure or domination.

Edward Said and Bhabha (1994) discuss the politics of binaries followed by the notion of hybridity that is regarded as “one of the main weapons against colonialism” (Andrade, 2014, p. 510). Chakrabarti (2012) discusses the common belief of both Said and Bhabha (1994) that,

The function of colonial discourse was to create a space for the colonized through the production of knowledge, a continuous mechanism of surveillance, and the creation of stereotypes. [...] helped the colonizer to locate the colonized as the ‘other’ so as to ratify cultural authority/superiority, on the other (p. 8)

As a result of this mechanism of surveillance of the Israeli military occupation, Palestinian women are characterized by their hybrid personalities that enable them to position themselves as a leading role in their Palestinian case; the role that is conventionally for Palestinian revolutionary men. Andrade (2014) defines hybridization as a “mode of knowledge and action associated with the hybrid. And this last idea denotes the interstices, the network of relationships that, while merging their essences and experiences, generate new productions and reproductions of themselves” (p. 510). Andrade (2014) proposes that hybrid personalities “often work in order to develop multivocalities of otherness” (p. 512). The leading role of the “conventional” Palestinian woman fosters her perspective and voice, and by developing “multivocalities of otherness,” this promotes the Palestinian women’s subjugated voices or perspectives that are outside of the mainstream and dominant discourse. This facilitates the Palestinian women’s integration, assimilation, inclusivity, and understanding of diverse experiences and viewpoints. Referring to Edward Said’s explanation of Orientalism, the thesis establishes a relationship between the Orient and Palestinian women in terms of Said’s (1978) description of the notion of Orientalism that says, “it is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (p. 3). Hartsock (2013) discusses that,

In the construction of these power relation, the Orient is often feminized; there is, however, the creation - out of this same process of the opposite of the colonized, the opposite of the Oriental, the opposite of women- of a being who sees himself as located at the center” (Hartsock, 2013, p. 161).

This paper adds to the movement restrictions on Palestinians long time ago now, a feminist perspective of the Palestinian case. In fact, Palestinian women as a “marginalized group is far less likely to mistake herself from the universal “man”. Palestinian women are well aware that they are not the universal man who can assume his experience of all, Palestinian women still need to name and describe their diverse experience” (Hartsock, 2013, p. 171). This shows the importance of Palestinian women’s perspectives and unique experiences in understanding the Palestinian struggle for maintaining their national identity. As a marginalized group, their voices are essential in constructing the Palestinian

society as inclusive and equitable, standing up to the patriarchal structure and the Israeli occupation.

## **1.2 Significance of the Study**

Palestinian women challenge intersecting forms of oppression that are represented in gender-based discrimination by the patriarchal society and the Israeli occupation. Addressing this type of ‘double colonization’ (Ahmed, 2019) upon Palestinian women promotes a construction of a counter narrative of Palestinians’ self-determination and resistance by powerful Palestinian females, and establishing a complementary relationship between gender, home, and borders that calls for gender equality and social justice to defend the Palestinian case by Palestinian women who are “deliberately victims in war, and in times of peace their own homes are turned into living hell” (Ennaji & Sadiqi, 2011, p. 22).

The study shows the intersection of the concepts of gender, home, and borders, and how they influence each other in political contexts, as they reveal power relations and the experiences of Palestinian women as a marginalized group through the eyes of the Israeli military soldier. The study challenges the common stereotypes of the superior man and the inferior woman, and contributes to broader discussions on identity, equality, and human rights, as this paper can serve as a reference to the Studies of Human Rights, Feminist Studies, the discussions of the Palestinian Issue, and Gender Violence that “takes interesting nuances and wears multiple faces in the Palestinian territories where tradition, social norm, religion, war, and politics intermingle in a powerful and tantalizing space-based patriarchy” (Ennaji & Sadiqi, 2011, p. 18).

## **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

This study shows Palestinian women’s contribution in constructing the Palestinian national story that defeats the lies of the Israeli occupation of owning the land. In fact, it shows the impact of the social norms and cultural constructs of Palestinian women, as inferior and weak, creating a reinforcing cycle of violence and repression by the patriarchal society towards Palestinian women, that leads to neglecting their vital role in the Palestinian case. Moreover, the study explores the reformation of the Palestinian woman’s identity against the conventional stereotypical identity that prevents her from

social and political integration. Additionally, the study establishes a complementary relationship between the Israeli military occupation that is metaphorically manifested within domestic spaces against Palestinian women.

#### **1.4 Questions of the Study**

This study answers these questions:

1. How do cultural norms and societal expectations about the conventional Palestinian women influence gender roles within the political context, regarding the Palestinian issue?
2. How is the oppression of the Israeli military occupation towards Palestinian women manifested within domestic spaces and influence the relationship between Palestinian people “as genders”?
3. How does the Palestinian woman’s body pose a threat to the Israeli settlement project over/beyond the Israeli military borders?
4. In what ways do the Israeli borders, both physical and metaphorical, affect the Palestinian women’s sense of identity and belonging?

#### **1.5 Methodologies of the Study**

The study depicts the Palestinian situation and Palestinian women’s agency, as opposed to the conventional views about women as powerless and dependent. The study employs the post-colonial theory that focuses on the concept of resistance for “the construction of the ‘new’ Palestinian woman” (Rajan, 1993). Riyal (2019) rephrases Fanon’s contribution to the topic of ‘women in colonialism’ in Fanon’s work “A Dying Colonialism”; he shows that “Fanon’s rhetoric consciously politicizes the veil of women, redefining colonialism as the project of ‘unveiling the nation’” (2019, p. 85). Relating to Fanon’s belief of a strong relationship between colonialism and women, besides the military domination, the Israeli occupation operates through cultural and gendered practices that aim at erasing the identity of the Palestinian people. Fanon (1965) proposes that “if we want to destroy the structure of a society, its capacity for resistance, we must, first of all, conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight” (p. 57-58). He discusses the focus of colonial

powers on controlling women as a means to loosen the social ties and undermine the resistance of a society. The Israeli occupation targets Palestinian women, who must be veiled, to undermine the familial and communal bonds that form the backbone of the notion of resistance. The Palestinian society faces pressure in an obscene manner on the Palestinian woman's dignity and honour that leads to more restrictions on women. Thus, the Israeli military agenda creates an unbalanced relationship between the Palestinian woman and her Palestinian men relatives. This facilitates the Israeli military operations against the non-cohesive Palestinian society.

To address these arguments, this study employs a contrapuntal approach, inspired by Edward Said's literary theory, to expose the suffering of the Palestinians since 1948, focusing on the repression against the Palestinian women by the Israeli colonial agenda that corresponds and promotes the conventional patriarchal structure in the Palestinian society. The contrapuntal approach allows for seeking both resemblances and variances between literary works that picture Palestinian women as independent and against the typical woman in the patriarchal society. Add to this, the study refers to the post-colonial theory that allows a deep examination of the colonial narrative regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the post-colonial reconstruction of leaving Palestinian women marginalized.

The thesis also conducts the analysis employing a post-colonial feminist perspective that creates an alternative narrative that better exposes the suffering of the Palestinian women as marginalized category, living in a marginalized nation, especially within the context of post-colonial discourse. So, the thesis challenges the male-centric narratives that are supported by the Israeli occupation through the restrictions imposed upon the Palestinians, especially the Palestinian women. Moreover, the study draws on queer theory and its connection to feminism in the political sphere, in particular. Marcus (2005) explores that the subversion of the traditional gender roles and norms that commonly "interpreted as lesbian style was in fact a new type of femininity that signified trendiness" (p. 210). Halberstam (1998), as a prominent queer theorist, warns against labelling a masculine-presenting woman as lesbian, but, "a modern tendency toward hedonism, secrecy, and excessive individuality, and the very pervasiveness of this tendency fosters a drive to contain her by imagining her to be the unique property of a few fringe group"

(Marcus, 2005, p. 212). This signifies a change in power relations and the loss of traditional distinctions for “the erosion of old differences that leads to the invention of new ones” (Marcus, 2005, p. 212). Thus, queer theory provides a powerful new category of independent females that allows Palestinian women to defend their case and maintain a sense of their Palestinian identity.

The data will be taken from Said’s work dedicated to the Palestinian issue after 1948, and other literary works and theoretical books that discuss Palestinian women’s leadership, corresponding to their suffering under the Israeli military occupation. Mainly, the study focuses on Palestinian cinema, such as Abu-Assad’s *Rana’s Wedding* (2002) and Bacha’s *Naila and the Uprising* (2017), which discuss the Palestinian case and Palestinian women’s participation in politics.

### **1.6 Limitations of the Study**

The study has potential limitations regarding the findings from other studies that may not be applicable to the situation of the Palestinian women in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; some laws are universally dedicated to women, but still may not be accepted in the Palestinian culture, reducing the amount of sources and information required for the study. The concept of gender in politics to achieve national sense of belonging has long been a subject of scholarly exploration, making it challenging to discuss and come up with new aspects of the topic of gender, home, and borders.

### **1.7 Theoretical Framework**

Palestinian women have played an essential role in resisting the Israeli military occupation and oppression. Their resilience and struggle for national self-determination, as an oppressed category, has a more effective impact on the Palestinian case, than the conventional political movements by Palestinian men, in highlighting the multifaceted nature of resistance among Palestinians. Palestinian women face unique challenges in their resistance efforts represented in patriarchal structures and societal expectations, along with the Israeli constraints on their movement in their daily lives. Since morale and emotions (psychology) are vital factors in conflicts, Palestinian women show the intention of the Israeli occupation to launch a psychological war against them, highlighting gender-based oppression within the political context.

Depending on the intersectional theory, the second chapter discusses the intersectionality between the Israeli occupation and patriarchy in understanding how the concept of gender intersects with the social and political contexts of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The chapter shows a dual colonization on Palestinian women as patriarchal structures influence power relations between Palestinian men and women, resulting in establishing a static political identity to the Palestinian women which in turn leads to their discrimination and oppression by the Israeli military soldiers, as “Palestinian women face multiple and interlocking systems of oppression that in some way serve to enhance the other” (Ernudd, 2007, p. 18). Heyman (2001) explains that borders serve as a means for enforcing unequal power relations, reinforcing hierarchies that marginalize vulnerable groups based on nationality and other factors. Thus, the relationship between patriarchy and the Israeli military occupation is based upon the military borders that perpetuate existing social inequalities of the patriarchal structures that present an existing metaphorical border, psychologically speaking, towards Palestinian women. The patriarchal norms shape the Palestinian women’s roles, especially in political spheres. The Israeli occupation exacerbates the obstacles on Palestinian women, imposing restrictions on movement and exposure to violence. Cortés Maisonave & Morales (2022) draw a simple conclusion about the Israeli occupation, enforcing borders that contribute to a static identity of the Palestinian woman that resembles her weak personality imposed by patriarchy: “the border can be understood as a bureaucratic, police, political and sociocultural system that simultaneously redefines the people divided and crossed by it” (p. 2).

Inspired by Bhabha’s theory of hybridity, the third chapter discusses the impact of gender hybridity in the Palestinian colonial context, by also employing a post-feminist analysis. In his essay, Mizutani (2009) refers to Bhabha’s (1994) definition of the concept of hybridity that is “characterised as challenging the 'temporal dimension' of colonial discourse: its logic of permanent presence, or of never-changing identity” (p. 9). The concept of hybridity challenges the static descriptions of the Israeli occupation of superiority and stereotypes of inferiority attached to Palestinian women. It undermines and exposes the fallacy of the Israeli colonial agendas that seek to impose a sense of permanence and superiority over the indigenous Palestinian women. In his study of

Home, Homo, Hybrid: Translating Gender, Patel (1997) examines Bhabha's idea of hybridity that challenges fixed notions of identity and stereotyping and suggests that it is not simply about being "other" but about continuously negotiating the self in the political context within conflicts. Mizutani (2009) defines Bhabha's theory of hybridity "as an analytic tool for a post-colonial resistance to it, as Bhabha locates the seeds of colonial violence in the very idea of reconstructing the past by historicist imagination" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 14). Through his theory, Bhabha supports a critical re-evaluation of history and societal norms, as well as power relations in order to recognize diversity of identities away from the stereotypical identities, thereby challenging the hegemonic structures of colonialism.

There is a complementary relationship between the concept of precarity and gender in underscoring the importance of a comprehensive approach that brings about change in politics. The concept of precarity allows for a feminist perspective that aims to ensure that resources of sustaining life should be to all individuals, regardless of gender or other axes of exclusion. This new perspective of precarity allows for advancing social and political alternatives that care for inclusivity and equality (Garrido, 2021). Butler's *Performativity, precarity, and sexual politics* explains how "gender is prompted by obligatory norms to be one gender or the other (usually within a strictly binary frame)", but it also proposes an unconventional meaning of precarity as a violent reaction to change that "the reproduction of gender is thus always a negotiation with power; and finally, there is no gender without this reproduction of norms that risks undoing or redoing the norm in unexpected ways, thus opening up the possibility of a remaking of gendered reality along new lines" (Butler, *Performativity, precarity and sexual politics*, 2009, p. 1). Judith Butler demonstrates the complexity of the concept of gender which is a combination of societal norms overlapping with the concept of power. Combining gender and power opens up the potential for new understandings of gender beyond traditional stereotypes and imposed static identities. Thus, this allows for reconstructing the static images of gender for both men and Palestinian women in unexpected ways and definitions. "The gendered effects of the occupation of Palestine and the ways that the Israeli state induces precarity through its administration of the West Bank", emphasizing on the common stereotypes about Palestinian women as dependent and weak, depriving

them of any opportunity to participate in political and social life (Griffiths & Joronen, 2019, p. 21). This is what Majewska (2020) expresses when referring to the Italian feminist scholar, Laura Fantone, who explains that "political activism around precarity tends to produce a normative and selective understanding of subjectivity" (p. 25), leading to judge Palestinian women's experiences based on certain norms and standards previously outlined by the patriarchal system, resulting in overlooking their rights in defending their case within the political context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

## Chapter Two

### Dual Colonization and Intersectionality: The Impact on Palestinian Women's Lives

#### 2.1 Introduction

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that recognizes that people's experiences and identities are shaped by multiple, overlapping social factors. These factors can include gender, class, sexual orientation, ability, and other dimensions of identity. It emphasizes that people can experience discrimination and privilege in various ways depending on the intersecting identities they hold (Crenshaw, 1997). According to Wyatt, Johnson, & Zaidi (2022),

Intersectionality theory examines how matrices of power and interlocking structures of oppression shape and influence people's multiple identities. It reminds us that people's lives cannot be explained by taking into account single categories, such as gender, race, sexuality, or socio-economic status. Rather, human lives are multi-dimensional and complex, and people's lived realities are shaped by different factors and social dynamics operating together (p. 863).

The theory provides a solid framework for understanding the complexity of social identities and oppression, as it emphasizes the need to recognize and address the unique challenges that arise from the intersections of multiple social categories (Crenshaw, 1997). Nazzal, Stringfellow, & Maclean (2024) argue that "Women have frequently been stymied by the nationalism vs feminism paradox, implying they must strive to convince a patriarchal, masculine society of the significance of their social rights and equalities, and their right to defend their country" (p. 268). Nationalism often involves a sense of tradition and may reinforce traditional gender roles, focusing on the conventional role of man as leader, but feminism seeks to challenge these roles, aiming for gender equality.

The matter of gender relations and the ways they affect and are affected by national projects, most of the conventional theorizing on human rights and nationalisms have disregarded gender relations as irrelevant. It is striking that a parallel theoretical approach with the use of men, or male, is rarely employed. This is so because male and maleness are assumed to be the norm from which

women and femaleness are to be differentiated. Women are thus, constructed as the other, the deviant from the norm (Ernudd, 2007, p. 8).

Despite this contradiction between nationalism and feminism, both movements seek empowerment and liberation from oppressive structures. In such context, feminist ideals can become part of the nationalist narrative, emphasizing Palestinian women's contributions to national identity and resistance, as "clear sexual division in war, however, usually disappears when there is no clear difference between battlefield and the home front..." (Yuval-Davis, 1995, p. 85). This allows Palestinian women's participation in the public sphere, defending their national identity.

Drawing on Smith's concept of "relations of ruling", that provides a framework for understanding how power operates within social structures, this chapter examines the context of patriarchy and Israeli occupation's impact on the female protagonists in *Rana's Wedding* (2002) and *Naila and the Uprising* (2017). Smith's framework elaborates how multiple layers of power intersect to shape Palestinian women's experiences and identities. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Israeli occupation functions as a dominant force that influences aspects of daily life. Under occupation, Palestinian women experience a complex web of power relations. Patriarchal structures within Palestinian society intersect with the Israeli occupation's control mechanisms, such as military checkpoints and discriminatory policies, to further marginalize and dis-empower Palestinian women. For instance, the Israeli occupation perpetuates a cycle of violence that affects Palestinian women who face heightened risks of gender-based violence, including harassment and assault, in the context of Israeli military incursions and settler violence. At the same time, patriarchal norms within Palestinian society intersect with the Israeli occupation to reinforce women's subordination. The Israeli military occupation exacerbates traditional gender roles, with Palestinian men perceived as protectors and women expected to prioritize care-giving roles, distracting Palestinian women from adopting a resolution about their case. Ernudd (2007) explains that "Home and community environments were daily sites of conflict" (p. 12). The term "home" is used to be associated with "woman" due to traditional gender roles and societal expectations, and cultural traditions imposed by the patriarchal society, "however strengthening women's rights and confronting gender discrimination within the family has not been a

priority” (Ernudd, 2007, p. 13). These norms can make it challenging to confront gender discrimination within political spheres in sites of conflict.

The Israeli military projects necessitate the utilization of discriminatory and racialized mechanisms to subjugate indigenous populations; it’s a systematic process rooted in the imposition of colonial power structures, often enforced through discriminatory means (Wolfe, 2006). However, “identity-based politics has been a source of strength, community, and intellectual development” (Crenshaw, 1997, p. 92). In other words, Palestinian women’s identity in relation to the political issue in Palestine has been a source of strength in terms of celebrating their cultural identities that remark them from other groups and give them a voice to express their concerns.

Mohanty (1991) highlights how colonization processes exploit and perpetuate existing social inequalities to achieve settler colonial state agendas. This chapter underscores the importance of examining how various forms of differentiation, such as those based on gender, intersect and are manipulated over time to serve the goals of colonization. Crenshaw (1997) elaborates that,

The embrace of identity politics, however, has been in tension with dominant conceptions of social justice. Race, gender, and other identity categories are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination - that is, as intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different (p. 92).

By understanding these intersections, it is obvious how colonial powers utilize strategies that exacerbate and reinforce existing gender inequalities. This includes the control of women by men, often justified through cultural and political frameworks. This emphasizes that colonial projects not only rely on the exploitation of land but also on the manipulation of social divisions and hierarchies, including those related to gender, to maintain and expand colonial control (Mohanty, 1991).

## **2.2 Interwoven Struggles: Patriarchy and Israeli Occupation in the Lives of Palestinian Women in *Rana's Wedding***

In one of his interviews at the Red Sea International Film Festival, Abu-Assad declares: “Some men feel threatened by the notion of empowering women, [...] But to empower women is to empower the occupied society as a whole”

*Rana's Wedding*, or “Jerusalem, Another Day”, released in 2002 by the Palestinian film director Abu-Assad (222), presents a Palestinian love story besieged by social and Israeli military barriers. As used to the life of Palestinians that is characterized by diaspora and subjugation under the Israeli occupation, *Rana's Wedding* is another surreal scene added to the black comedy list since the Nakba and the previous mandate. The title “*Rana's Wedding*” suggests that the story is centred on Rana's perspective which possibly contradicts the dominant patriarchal norms of man's authority. This focus implies a journey of personal growth and a search for autonomy. It reflects a Palestinian woman coming into her own and defining what her future marriage and life should look like under the Israeli occupation. Jalilova (2020) argues that “Scenarios where roles are enacted by males and females showcase men in traditional masculine stereotypes while women tend to be in purely decorative portrayals or in mother roles, which is the ultimate feminine achievement in Arab societies” (p. 80). However, Rana goes through a journey after “choice” from Jerusalem to Ramallah to find her lover, Khalil, and get married before “Tuesday at four” as her father requires, countering the separation borders of Israeli soldiers. Rana's father's insistence on her marriage is justified by Hammami's (2019) discussion in his article “Destabilizing Mastery and the Machine: Palestinian Agency and Gendered Embodiment at Israeli Military Checkpoints”: “Political violence increases the pressure on families which become vulnerable to various stress-related factors, and it changes the family unit as well as gender and age roles” (p. 3). Griffiths & Joronen (2019) further explain that “sirens and soldiers of the occupation are the main source of concern in Palestinian women early, pre-married, pre-motherhood life in the West Bank, but this changed on the birth of their children” (p. 10). This explains Rana's willingness to marry and have a family which in turn allows a shift in the traditional gender roles; she will transmit from an object, as patriarchy and Israeli occupation look at her, to a human who has agency on her own choice and children.

### 2.2.1 Coming of Age

Coming of age in Rana's Wedding appears as a result of the external challenges that force Rana to become another person; that is, "the transition from the innocence of childhood to the maturity of adulthood. [...] the specific time when coming of age occurs can vary from person to person, depending on the surroundings" (Oliveto, 2020, p. 4). Rana "struggles to find her authentic self, but the fact that external factors have constructed her identity adds to her confusion during this search" (Kirby & Gaither, 2005, p. 263). Rana feels a tension between the external challenges imposed by the patriarchal norms and the Israeli occupation, as well as her internal identity of her willingness to autonomy, contradicting the stereotypes attached to her as a "paralysed" female. Oliveto (2020) explains that,

Some people face unique experiences that force them to come of age earlier than most. For instance, a child might mature at an early age if they grow up in a war-zone or similar environment. Also, cultures and religions throughout the world often perform coming of age rituals at specific points in a child's life (para. 6).

The director Abu-Assad (2022) shows the huge impact of patriarchy and the Israeli occupation on Rana that leads her to become a new person who goes through new experiences by detaching herself from the conventional stereotypes. The family beliefs, societal norms, and cultural expectations that imprison Rana push her to insist on marrying Khalil who shares her interests and values, which in turn makes her feel at ease and supported. Rubenstein (2001) justifies the changes on Palestinian women surrounded by societal and political restrictions;

From the day a woman consents to growing old, her situation changes. Up to that time she was still a young woman, intent on struggling against a misfortune that was mysteriously disfiguring and deforming her; now she becomes a different being, unsexed but complete: an old woman. It may be considered that the crisis of her "dangerous age" has been passed. But it should not be supposed that henceforth her life will be an easy one. When she has given up the struggle against the fatality of time, another combat begins: she must maintain a place on earth (Rubenstein, 2001, p. 1).

This discussion shows a significant shift in Rana's life under Israeli occupation and patriarchal norms, indicating a turning point in her life as a Palestinian woman attached to dependency and domestic sphere. Rana refuses the conventional stereotypes as a mere body that force her to stay inside, moving beyond the societal expectations and into a new phase of life in Palestine, as a site of conflict.

In one of the scenarios, Rana's father complains about her lover:

- "He is the wrong man... Why didn't he study first"
- "He studied theatre" (Abu-Assad, 2002)(49:00).

The conversation shows two complex web of powers; the first appears in Rana's father rejection on her lover, instead he wants her to undergo his decision of an arranged marriage. The second is embedded in "he studies theatre"; this sentence shows divergent and rival forces represented in the word "theatre" that "has borrowed and adapted models, ideas, and methods from world drama, including Israeli theatre, in an ongoing process—in both postcolonial settings and under military occupation—of liberation and healing" against the Israeli military occupation (Nassar, 2006, pp. 16-17). In the Palestinian context, Rana faces political oppression which in turn makes her fall in love with Khalil who resonates Rana's suppressed voice, as theatre is a powerful form of resistance that creates a universal language heard by the world. Nassar (2006) argues that "Palestinian theatre, the group would strengthen the roots of theatre, attract audiences, and address the burdensome realities of occupation" (p. 18). Additionally, theatre is a tool that allows reclaiming identity; that is, Rana's attraction to Khalil, who studied theatre, is justified through reclaiming her identity, challenging the Israeli colonial agenda of objectifying and discriminating Palestinian women. But her father who represents patriarchy refuses the friction with the Israeli occupation to preserve her chastity as a female. Nassar (2006) discusses that "Under the military occupation, Palestinian theatre exemplifies postcolonial experiences precisely because of this struggle to (re)create a national identity" (p. 16). In fact, Rana's insistence on marrying Khalil, the actor, signifies her resistance, resilience, and her willingness to a cultural identity formation that help guard against stereotyping.

In another scene, Rana refers to her nameless father:

- “Why didn’t you marry earlier ... in the normal way?”
- “My father doesn’t want Khalil ... He wants me to choose from a list” (Abu-Assad, 2002)(45: 05).

This conversation invokes Levinas’ framework of “nameless singularity” that examines the nature of identity of the Other in different positions. Guenther (2009) explains that:

As long as Levinas maintains the impossibility of experiencing the Other’s face as a phenomenon, and as long as he forbids identifying the Other as such, he would seem to condemn the Other to “appear[ing] as ‘no person,’ as no individual, as no so-and-so” (Guenther, 2009, p. 167).

According to Levinas, in the cases where the Other cannot be encountered, there is a risk of turning the Other into a kind of abstraction, lacking in concrete individuality or personal characteristics. This signifies Rana’s attempt to de-construct her father’s dominant force in the patriarchal society, as well as, the colonial domination that corresponds to the patriarchal structures of suppressing Palestinian women and limiting authority to man.

Levinas’s ethics of responsibility, and especially his ethics of substitution, would seem to condemn the Other to an impersonal anonymity which is dangerously close to the impersonality of being that his philosophy explicitly seeks to overcome. Even worse perhaps, it would make use of the encounter with an Other in order to explain the individuality of the self, while leaving the face of the Other itself in nameless abstraction (p. 167-168).

Rana’s father is nameless and is a mere hidden object of complaining voice in which she attaches him to belonging to the realm of undefined existence. From a feminist perspective, Rana’s journey towards equality implies breaking free from prescribed roles and emphasizing over her identity and agency. In the context of this dissertation, the concept of Levinas’ indicates redefining identity and challenging patriarchal structures and reducing structures that maintain gender-based disparities.

### 2.2.2 Overcoming Adversity

The Europeans followed by the Zionists – the powerful and triumphant side in the national conflict over the Holy Land . . . generally ignored even the mere existence of the indigenous people of the land and their right over the country . The Palestinian women have been described as nomads, as peasants, or as miscellaneous groups and sections lacking any national consciousness (Manaa, 1999b, pp. 9-10).

This passage explains the Israeli military agenda of using stereotypes to occupy and undermine indigenous Palestinians', especially Palestinian women's, identities and rights. It focuses on Palestinian women's voices that are often suppressed. In her journey, Rana seeks to negate the dual colonization in which both Israeli occupation and Rana's father share the same attitude towards obliterating Rana's right in participating in the Palestinian historical and geopolitical narratives. Rana transcends the common stereotypes and shows her rejection for both patriarchal and Israeli domination:

- "What's up Rana? Don't you like this song?"
- "I don't like your voice" (Abu-Assad, 2002)(40:55).

I suggest that there is a complementary relationship between patriarchy and Israeli occupation. This statement proposes that patriarchal structures represented through Rana's father and the Israeli occupation share commonalities or even reinforce each other. In this context, the father represents a system of dominant power, leading to the marginalization or oppression of Rana. Similarly, the Israeli occupation can be seen as a system of power that marginalizes Palestinian women. Thus, voice, here, is a sign of Rana's authority and her negation of the domination of this dual colonization. The male voice represents control, dominance, or command. But Rana rejects this voice, potentially indicating resistance to male's authority, represented in patriarchal structures and Israeli occupation. From an inter-sectional perspective, gender-based and political oppression may intersect, supporting each other; which in turn shows Rana's resistance and defiance to assert autonomy and overcome adversity and common stereotypes asserted by patriarchal and political control. Hammami (2019) suggests that "It is these very instabilities of gender as a signifier that simultaneously can make it a resource for

Palestinian agency as well as a site of vulnerability for Israeli soldiers” (p. 89). In this context, the flexibility of gender offers Palestinian women a strategic advantage. This suggests a loss of gender-based traditional roles; “The homeland has been lost and with it so has masculinity” (Kanafani: 1963). I suggest that there is an integral relationship between women, men, and homeland, on any national issue, focusing on the Palestinian case. I propose that "Wo" in women is an abbreviation for "wife of" so /wo-man/ is “the wife of man” that means she is man's helpmate, other half and better half, seeking gender equality. Thus, by challenging or subverting traditional gender roles, Palestinian women use gender as a tool for political resistance and empowerment, as well as creating new narratives. Jalilova (2020) explains that “the male gaze has been dominant in art and subsequently film throughout its whole history, the situation has started changing in the last 30 years” (p. 82). This involves re-imagining gender roles to break free from oppressive structures and using gender relations to navigate the complexities of the Israeli occupation and patriarchal structures.

The Israeli military agenda is connected to sexual violence, capturing the Palestinian woman as a “foreign body”. For instance, the Israeli military soldiers “drastically reduce women’s freedom of movement and house demolitions” (Hammami, 2019, p. 11). The suggestion of a relationship between the Israeli military agenda, Palestinian women, and house demolitions shows another form of violence towards Palestinian women. The house demolition in scene (55:50) Rana comments that “The Israeli soldiers are demolishing a house on the day I want to build one” (56:38), but her friend says, “Don’t worry. We will rebuild it tomorrow” (56:44). This idea of destruction and rebuilding indicates conflict, hope and resilience. Gottlieb (2008) suggests that “the home is of essential meaning for the lives and identity of women. The state policy of house demolitions therefore inflicts terror and severe trauma on women” (p. 1). She continues, “If the Israeli military soldiers really wanted Palestinian women to move to another place, they would offer, but they want to destroy and destroy and destroy. To destroy women from the inside ... It’s a mechanism to destroy the actual person” (p. 5). Gottlieb's perspective highlights the impact of demolishing houses on the Palestinian woman, inflicting both psychological and emotional trauma. Home for Rana is identity, security and stability, de-constructing the Palestinian house means to undermine the Palestinian woman’s identity, reinforcing

the destruction of familial ties, as well as strengthening the common patriarchal structures of limiting the movement of the Palestinian women which in turn creates fear and uncertainty, and leading to a loss of a sense of belonging; hence, a decline in feelings of national duty.

Once the home is destroyed, women are left with the metaphoric and symbolic burdens—which are no less real than the material loss of a safe place to live—of not having a sense of safety and place of belonging.... The destruction of the home changes women’s previous gender roles sharply and requires them to face new challenges, carry the burden of rebuilding a new house/home and cope with all the inconveniences of moving, with the entire economic, social and psychological load it entails (Gottlieb, 2008, p. 6).

Rana says, “demolishing a house on the day I want to build one” (56:38); the demolition of the house is immediately followed by rebuilding a new house, causing changes in the traditional gender roles. The demolition of the Palestinian house is a reinforcement of the patriarchal structure as the house is the only place where Palestinian women should be. Thus, by de-constructing this house, the fear over the Palestinian woman is increased as a result of being exposed to the Other that the Palestinian society protects its women from, depending on patriarchal norms. On the other hand, the reconstruction of another house is a sign of hope and resilience by Rana, forming a new identity, neglecting common stereotypes.

### **2.3 Double Chains: The Dual Colonization of Patriarchy and Israeli Occupation over Palestinian Women in Naila and the Uprising**

Naila and the Uprising addresses the different forms of oppression towards Palestinian women. As opposed to Abu-Assad’s *Rana’s Wedding* (2022), Bacha’s *Naila and the Uprising* (2017) fully engages the Palestinian women in the political sphere against the Israeli military occupation. Naila describes the forms of oppression around her as a Palestinian and as a woman who is restricted by the patriarchal traditional structures and the Israeli military occupation:

- “My parents had one problem, he is like a jailbird” (8:40).
- “We want you to live a normal life”.

- “But I told them this was the main reason I wanted to marry him: to resist the occupation” (8:47).

This dialogue expresses Naila’s personal agency and will, on one hand, and her parents’ refusal of her political activism as a woman which goes against the conventional roles as a mere housewife. The parents reflect their desire for her to have a stable and “normal” life as asserted by the patriarchal structures that insert a normal life for women as housewives. The traditional Palestinian family expectations want her free from the turmoil and dangers associated with political activism and imprisonment that may affect their safety and dignity. But according to Naila, she highlights her support to collective struggle as well as collective resistance which requires her to be part in the political sphere which is an oppositional action against the imposed traditional roles. In Bacha’s documentary, Naila exposes the message of the Palestinian women’s organizations that “guarantees their right to hold public and senior management positions and be appointed to judicial bodies” (Vericat, 2017, p. 1). This statement underscores the importance of ensuring equal opportunities and representation for marginalized groups of Palestinian women in positions of power and decision-making within the Palestinian society. Naila’s husband confesses that “We needed a united message for this struggle” (20:19). In his words, Jamal Zakout describes the importance of diversity to the Palestinian movement and defiance against the Israeli occupation. While diversity is the remarkable term that bases and defines patriarchy that divides Palestinian people according to gender to men and women, diversity is also an essential part in the Palestinian movements that unites both genders against the Israeli occupation.

The film shows a difference between the control of patriarchy that imprisons Palestinian women whereas the scene (45:02) shows another harsh system that is superior to the long-lasting patriarchy that imprisons both genders under the Israeli occupation’s brutality. Thus, this is a call for the type of diversity that unifies the Palestinian people in the face of the Israeli occupiers not diversity that is taken against the interest of the Palestinian case, represented in patriarchy. Naila’s husband, Jamal Zakout, suggests the importance of both voices of Palestinian women and men, as well as both experiences to the contribution to the Palestinian case. Giacaman (1989) demonstrates the essential role of the Palestinian movements that emphasize over the huge abilities of Palestinian women,

as opposed to the conventional stereotypes, in constructing the economy of Palestine, hence the sovereignty of the country. He states, “The committees were crucial in developing the role of women outside the domestic sphere. Central to the more progressive of the women’s committees is the theme of how best to incorporate women into the economy” (p. 140). The centrality of gender equality and Palestinian women’s empowerment in socio-political processes also “stipulates the right of both men and women to contest the country’s presidency” (Vericat, 2017, p. 1). This underscores the fundamental notion that leadership opportunities should not be restricted by gender, thereby promoting a more inclusive and representative political landscape that helps in defending the Palestinian case. Zahira Kamal, one of the Palestinian women activists, compares between the period where patriarchal norms reigned, “In Palestinian society, authority lies in the hands of men and elders [...] because of the separation between genders” (30:00). But she shows the intention of increasing Palestinian women’s participation in politics; “Palestinian women were in the streets in large numbers, and the Israelis were not prepared for it” (32:25). The equal footing of both sexes in the Palestinian uprisings is a powerful testament to the potential for gender equality in societal movements. Women’s leadership and equal participation are not merely symbolic but practical and strategic, contributing significantly to the effectiveness and reach of these movements, as well as quitting the patriarchal structures. This participation of the Palestinian woman underscores the importance of including her voice and perspectives in all aspects of social and political life.

The absence of Naila’s husband and her obvious presence in the political sphere challenge the traditional notions of Palestinian women related to domestic spheres and men as leaders. This is highlighted through Naila’s son whose father is absent and Naila represents the center in his life. In one of her speeches, she says, “In my name and the name of my child Majd, who repeats the word “Dad” without knowing what it means” (50:48). This scene indicates “Ultimately, masculinity is a social rather than a biological notion” (Chesebro, 2000, p. 1). The statement emphasizes that masculinity is constructed and defined by social and political contexts and surroundings rather than inherent biological differences. Douglas Vavrus (2002) describes the situation as “Legitimizing domesticity for men and using stories about stay-at-home fathers as contexts for

consumerism enables these men to be imagined as purchasers and consumers of household and child-oriented products” (p. 355-356). This shift promotes gender equality and the end of the patriarchal structures, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for all Palestinian individuals, regardless of gender which in turn is required in the Israeli- Palestinian conflict. This change in Jamal’s situation of being departed and has nothing to do with the public sphere in Palestine, and Naila who is a political leader, strong and responsible, and has nothing to do with the domestic sphere, de-construct the stereotypes of Palestinian women, portraying them as active and capable in the political context in Palestine.

Political events and conflicts that result in social protest movements can redefine what is considered masculine. For instance, the Israeli occupation and the subsequent changes in Palestine have influenced the conventional gender roles and expectations of men and women, leading to more fluid and inclusive understandings of gender. Vericat (2017) suggests that “Because of the centrality of gender equality and women’s empowerment in these processes, female leaders and women’s associations, in cooperation with enlightened men, adopted the overarching notion of equal citizenship as their battle cry” (p. 2). This highlights the goal for a collective effort to challenge and transform the entrenched patriarchal norms and systemic inequalities that have historically marginalized Palestinian women. This is shown in the direct and wide participation of the Palestinian woman in the external meetings; “We were proud that our delegation included women, and this made us stand out” (1: 01: 50). The documentary highlights the importance of the recognition of Palestinian women within a delegation, reflecting diversity and negligence of patriarchal structures that deprived women from exercising their right to defend the Palestinian case. In fact, this is a progressive and inclusive step, emphasizing the value and impact of gender representation in leadership and decision-making roles in Palestinian post-colonial context.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

Both films show the restrictions of the patriarchal society under the constraints of the Israeli occupation. Although Rana is not fully considered an integral part of Palestinian society, her standing up to her father indicates her rejection of the strict patriarchal structure, and consummating her marriage in front of the Israeli checkpoint is an

indication of her determination to confront the restrictions of the Israeli occupation in achieving the simplest requirements of life, such as getting married. On the other hand, the documentary shows a complete integration of Palestinian women in 2017 into the Palestinian society, as their role exceeded that of men in confronting the Israeli occupation. Rana and Naila are exposed to their father's refusal to marry the person they want, but they stand up to them and get married, which is an opportunity for the Palestinian woman to end the structure of patriarchal society and impose her personality and voice within the Palestinian society. But the difference appears in Naila's appearance as a leader in demonstrations and meetings against the Israeli occupation, which led to her being imprisoned several times. This role belongs to the conventional Palestinian man, depending on the norms of patriarchal society, but in the film we see the opposite. Naila is at the front of the ranks and actively participates in confronting the Israeli occupation, while her husband, Jamal, who was deported outside the country, is photographed inside the house every time, forbidden from doing anything. This creates an equal relationship between Palestinian men and women, allowing the Palestinian woman to participate outside the borders of her home, which was forced on her.

## Chapter Three

### Hybridity as Resistance: Palestinian Women under Israeli Occupation and Patriarchal Structures

#### 3.1 Introduction

Being Palestinian may act like a burden at border crossings, as it does for some in everyday life, but it serves to remind a Palestinian that she or he can never take who they are for granted. Being Palestinian is a destiny within which one can negotiate a space of one's own but from which one cannot escape (Suleiman, 2016, p. 4).

Reflecting upon Suleiman's book, the chapter discusses the fact of the complex experience of maintaining the female Palestinian identity that involves a sense of belonging to the Palestinian culture and a set of challenges against the Israeli occupation and the patriarchal structures. But Suleiman's contribution to defining the Palestinian identity shows that being a Palestinian can also be a source of resilience and steadfastness besides the common belief of the long-lasting suppression attached to Palestinian women. This Palestinian identity connects its females to the Palestinian society that has been the best example of a resilient society that has withstood significant adversity. In other words, Palestinian identity is multifaceted; it can be a source of difficulty and discrimination under the Israeli occupation and patriarchal norms, but also a wellspring of strength and solidarity against these complexities.

The chapter offers an observation about the duality of Palestinian female identity as a mother and a weak human being in the eyes of patriarchal society as "motherhood is perceived in patriarchal terms" and Israeli occupation, and as a defender and political activist of the Palestinian case (Salimi, 2013, p. 47). This identity is a blend of essential and plural components, demonstrating the complexity and adaptability inherent in the Palestinian experience (Al-Dajani, 2013), demonstrates that,

It thus demonstrates that the Palestinian identity is one that is intrinsically dual, with both essential and plural identities that are constructed and negotiated within a social matrix, and that incorporate national ideologies, collective memories, and cultural identities in the creation of a Palestinian nationality (p. ii)

The essence of the Palestinian identity refers to the core aspects that define what it means to be Palestinian. These include Palestinian history, traditions, language, and religion. These elements often act as the foundational components of Palestinian national identity, providing a sense of unity and continuity. On the other hand, the Palestinian identity encompasses a huge variety of positions, depending on the diversity within the Palestinian individual experiences. It acknowledges that there is no single way to be Palestinian, and that identity can vary depending on female individual experiences and personal histories. This pluralistic aspect allows for flexibility and adaptability, enabling female Palestinians to navigate different political contexts and play an essential role in defending their nation.

Thus, these two definitions of the Palestinian identity reflect a broader understanding of how cultural identities contribute to the creation of the Palestinian nationality. This type of hybridity related to the Palestinian identity pays off in the construction of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the quest for recognition and self-determination. The multifaceted identity of the Palestinian female serves as a repository for shared experiences and stories that help maintain continuity across generations; it is a key to the resilience and adaptability of Palestinian nationality. This in turn allows for diversity and inclusivity, recognizing the unique experiences of Palestinians both men and women, quitting the common conventional stereotypes that prevent Palestinian women from participating in the nation's conflict.

The duality in Palestinian female identity underscores both the enduring connection to a shared heritage and a revolutionary wave of defiance against the Israeli occupation and patriarchal norms that destroy this Palestinian unified society. It is through this duality that Palestinian females continue to forge their own paths while maintaining a deep connection to their collective past. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha (1994) proposes that,

Hybridity ... is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the "pure" and original identity of authority), leading to a revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity and thereby constituting a disturbing questioning of the images and presences of authority (p. 112–113).

According to Bhabha (1994), the term of hybridity challenges the common beliefs of domination systems, such as patriarchal structures and occupation, of imposed notions of fixed identities and stereotypes. This allows the marginalized and suppressed voices to sustain their power. Unsettling established categories and hierarchies, the concept of hybridity exposes the tendency of colonial and systems of oppression towards constructing stereotypes of marginalized groups and calls for resistance through challenging and impeding these systems of oppression. Bauhn & Tepe (2016) suggest that,

Bhabha's idea is that colonial oppression presupposes a belief in distinct cultural identities, separating colonizer and colonized. Hence, to the extent that a colonized people can challenge this belief by asserting themselves as 'hybrids', having aspects of their identity in common with the colonizers, they can also liberate themselves from the identity-based hierarchy imposed on them by the colonizers (Bhabha, 1994, p. 350).

This statement shows the impact of the concept of hybridity on the formation of the post-colonial identity against the colonial narratives that impose fixed identities on oppressed groups, enabling colonized female Palestinians to reclaim agency and resist the imposition of stereotypical roles. In fact, hybridity is a means of liberation from dominant systems towards Palestinian women, offering them a way to celebrate their agency and reclaim autonomy over their identity and Palestinian narrative.

### **3.2 Hybridity in Action: The Mother Figure & Political Activism in Rana's Wedding**

Rana's Wedding centers its themes towards the female Rana who guides the conflict towards a solution that satisfies her, as opposed to the conventional subordination of women, forming a new model of the Palestinian woman advocating for her rights. In the 37th minute, a funeral gathers both Palestinian men and women and Rana is confused at the middle of this funeral, challenging the traditional role of woman as mere housewife, instead she acts as a political activist. Watkins (2020) discusses that "women's roles, particularly in regard to funerals, play an important role in building and strengthening connections in communities, whilst acknowledging changing social trends in their local regions" (p. iv). Watkins reveals an opposite side of women in the patriarchal society,

Rana along with other Palestinian women are part of the funeral, as opposed to the conventional belief of limiting their participation to houseworks, combining between their conventional duties and the new responsibility as a defender to form an integral whole image of the Palestinian woman who resist on every level to create a democratic and free society. The gathering of both Palestinian men and women in the film indicates and builds a strong bond between Palestinian men and women, causing a change in social power relations, which in turn unites this power against the Israeli occupation.

Rana's role in the funeral is deeply influential, contributing to the cohesion and resilience of the Palestinian community. By adapting to new power relations and cultural inclusivity, Palestinian women ensure that funerals remain a central, unifying event in their community life. Since "women are the key instigators of the funeral process", (Jalilova, 2020, p. 5) this fosters resilience and connection between Palestinians which in turn make them get stronger and reinforce their steadfastness in the face of the Israeli colonization. "It's clear that funeral homes can look forward to an influx of more female applicants in all areas of the business, from embalming room to management" (NFDA, 2021, para. 5). As death is inevitable to all human beings, males and females, it is a means of uniting power and quitting the conventional stereotypes of women that do not enable Palestinian women to take action according to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In addition to this, Palestinian women "are physical life-givers" (Vanacker, 2021). He continues,

The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. [...] The very name of the first woman meant (or sounded like) "life-giver". Every human being who has ever walked the earth has come from Eve, the very first life-giver on earth and the very first mom. The simple fact is that a mom is one who gives physical life to another (para. 5-6).

The statement indicates that the presence of Rana in the funeral connotes birth and life after death; thus, she is a woman in authority; she is a future mother of another generation of fighters. In fact, in the film, Hany Abu-Assad shows that,

This shift toward gender equity in death care isn't just about hiring, it's about upward mobility and leadership opportunities. Especially as millennials with progressive values become the funeral decision makers, your business needs to

reflect gender equity at all levels in order to appeal to and reflect the current social climate (NEDA, 2021, para. 10).

The statement discusses another explanation of the term death in relation to Palestinian women. It shows the importance of seeing Palestinians, especially Palestinian women, as full human beings with complex lives under the Israeli occupation rather than establishing a definition of the Palestinian experience and identity separate from the violent Israeli acts towards Palestinians. In other words, being subjected to a savage Israeli occupation leads Palestinian women to practice their political agency and step outside the box. In their study, Kotef & Amir (2007) discuss the misunderstanding of the connection between funerals, dead bodies, and Palestinians. They suggest that “As bodies that can explode at any moment and thereby terminate themselves as they terminate others, Palestinians embody death” (p. 979). According to the statement Palestinian women are symbolically associated with death due to the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the forms of “violent” resistance which in turn attach them to concepts of savagery and barbarity, leaving them behind as an inferior group. By framing Palestinian women primarily in terms of violence and savagery, this view dehumanizes them, stripping away their individual stories, struggles, and aspirations. It reduces them to instruments of death rather than recognizing them as people with diverse lives and experiences.

As a result of the harsh living conditions under the Israeli occupation, the scene (22:00) shows Rana’s resistance against the Israeli soldiers through stone-throwing, labelled as stone-thrower. Conventionally, stone-throwing has always been attached to Palestinian men, as Lombardo & Deaner (2018) suggest, “throwing is a male adaptation”(p. 91). Rana is masculine regarding her participation in resisting the Israeli occupation through throwing stones, which in turn allows her to break free from the conventional stereotypes that prevent her to participate in defending the Palestinian case.

Stone-throwing images dominated the intifada’s public presentation. Indeed it was a war of stones, but stones were more than weapons of defence: they were print weapons as well. With its preponderance of stones and stone walls, the landscape provided ready made, easily accessible weapons of communication, assault, and defense (Peteet, 1996, p. 139).

Stone-throwing is a dominant imagery during the Intifada, symbolizing the resistance of Palestinians against Israeli occupation. Such a primitive yet intelligent tool helped Palestinian people to obtain other nations' attention, in general, and destroy the stereotypes about Palestinian women as mere housewives, in particular. While stones were primarily used as weapons of defence and resistance by Palestinians, they also served as powerful symbols of defiance and the reconstruction of the Palestinian woman identity. In other words, stones are not only physical objects of conflict but also "print weapons". This term suggests that stones have a communicative power, conveying messages of Palestinian women's resistance, resilience, and protest, as well as the connection between stones and Palestinian history, emphasizing over Palestine as an independent nation. In other words, stones symbolize a connection to Palestine and an enduring struggle against the Israeli oppression. This dual role as weapons of defence and communication indicates a new phase in the lives of Palestinian women who have always been described as dependent, inferior, and weak, becoming independent and stone-throwers. Thus, stones are seen as tools for both physical battles for Palestinian women as political activists against the Israeli occupation and symbolic battles against restrictions and stereotypes of both patriarchy and Israeli occupation because Palestinian women are mothers of children-of-stones, the birth-givers of the generation of fighters. Lauria (2015) draws the attention to the relationship between stone-throwing and the physical and metaphorical restrictions imposed upon Palestinian women by the patriarchal norms in occupied Palestine. She discusses that Palestinian "girls and women took direct part in stone throwing alongside male youths, [...] the Intifada provided young women with opportunities for political engagement, both to challenge Israeli occupation and patriarchal social norms within Palestinian society" (p. 27). Holt (2003) shows the impact of intifada on changing the conventional gender roles;

The effects of the intifada on Palestinian women, in terms of victimisation and Agency [...] The intifada started as a display of spontaneous anger and a reassertion of national dignity, and has been described as an attempt by the 'young, armed only with stones and facing death and pain, ... to sweep away the older generation in terms of political relevance and actual leadership' (Holt, 2003, pp. 118-119).

Hany Abu-Assad (2022) shows the shift towards agency of suppressed Palestinian women as intifada was a period of empowerment for them. Palestinian women have always been surrounded by restrictions imposed by the patriarchal structures, but beside these norms there is the Israeli occupation who emphasized upon these constraints. This in turn opened up spaces for Palestinian women to emphasize upon their agency, leadership, and their contribution towards the Palestinian national case.

This reshaped gender roles within Palestinian society, highlighting the resilience and resourcefulness of Palestinian women in times of crisis.

Hany Abu-Assad (2022) demonstrates that Israeli military checkpoints play an essential role in controlling Palestinians' lives, especially women. In scene (52:10), Rana is exposed to body contact with the Israeli soldiers, adding pressure on Palestinian women in patriarchal societies. Griffiths & Repo (2021) explain that "Checkpoints have become sites of surveillance, arbitrary detention, ID card checks and confiscation and spaces of profound anxiety, threat and humiliation for Palestinians" (p. 250). Checkpoints disturb daily lives of Palestinian women; while the Palestinian society cares about the Palestinian woman's virtue, the physical searches at checkpoints intensify the amount of restrictions imposed on Palestinian women in patriarchal societies. Kotef & Amir (2007) bring together the suffering of Palestinian women at checkpoints where they discuss them as gendered spaces;

Despite the daily routine of injustice at the checkpoints, she (Palestinian woman) has become the symbol of all wrongs inflicted upon the innocent Palestinians. This iconization is both an outcome and a technique of the feminization of Palestinian suffering. It goes hand in hand with the mirrored masculinization of the Palestinian body that inflicts suffering (upon the Israelis), which produces the second type of body: the explosive body. The body that explodes in suicide attacks is always masculinized, even when the attack is performed by a woman (p. 978).

This discussion indicates an embodied experience of the Palestinian woman at checkpoints. The iconization of the Palestinian woman as a symbol of innocence and suffering, contrasted with the masculinization of the body that inflicts violence disagrees

with the conventional description of the woman. In other words, gender is formed and practised according to the surroundings. The interplay between gender, occupation, and resistance highlights that Palestinian women who face unique challenges at checkpoints and engage in violent resistance complicate traditional gender roles. Rana's insistence on crossing these military checkpoints connotes the construction of the mother figure, as she insists on marrying Khalil beyond these borders and starting a family, as well as being a political activist against the Israeli occupation. "There is some crucial work that draws attention to checkpoints as spaces where women experience gendered modes of discrimination and/or enact important forms of resistance", Holt (2003) describes the suffering and discrimination upon Palestinian women at checkpoints (p. 250). As a result, Palestinian woman has to resist, Holt continues,

Palestinian women confront the colonial subjugation of the checkpoint from the paradoxical position of being hailed as vessels of reproductive resistance to the occupation on the one hand while being subordinated to patriarchal formations on the other (Holt, 2003, p. 261).

Conventionally, Palestinian women are restricted by the traditional expectations imposed by the patriarchal system, but in the context of the Israeli occupation, these women are seen as symbols of defiance and resilience. The statement highlights that the Israeli military checkpoints represent sites of control and dehumanization. Checkpoints indicate the dual oppression under the Israeli occupation, as well as challenging the societal patriarchal norms that do not conform to the physical searches to the Palestinian woman. "The movement of Palestinian women through the checkpoint brings the politics of gender and occupation to the fore, and in particular the way that colonial security mechanisms situate women within colonial patriarchies" (Holt, 2003, p. 251). This duality captures the unique struggle of Palestinian women, who resist colonial oppression while simultaneously challenging and being constrained by patriarchal systems. The Israeli military checkpoints reveal how colonial power intersects with and reinforces patriarchal structures. Palestinian women are situated within a dual patriarchy represented in the colonial patriarchy of the occupiers and the traditional patriarchy within their own communities. Because of this intersectionality, Palestinian women need to address this

type of oppression and impose themselves when it comes to the Palestinian case and liberation.

### **3.3 Homi Bhabha's Idea of Hybridity Reflected in the Mother Role and Political Activism in Naila and the Uprising**

The concept of motherhood includes the notion that a mother can protect the whole nation by sacrificing herself (Salimi, 2013, p. 49).

This conversation describes the mother figure as a collector of a whole nation, extending beyond the immediate family to represent broader societal roles, portraying a mother as a protector of the entire nation through her capacity for self-sacrifice. Naila is a mother of emotional support, care and guidance; her selflessness and protective instincts are viewed as qualities that can safeguard and nurture the country. Hernández & Torres (2006) suggest that “the intersection of motherhood and political identity brings to the forefront the contradictions that women may be experiencing as a result of the effects of the current situation in Palestine” (p. 66). Motherhood and political identity are two different concepts with special qualities and features; thus, the intersection of these notions fashion into a radical change in the present Palestinian issue. Palestinian women face additional challenges and pressures, such as ensuring the safety and well-being of their children while also being politically active or affected by the political climate. But Naila's presence at the prison with her infant indicates her ability in combining between two distinctive aspects as a mother and protector of the Palestinian case, making her superior to the conventional Palestinian man who is, basically, attached to leadership. This gives Naila a higher position in defending the Palestinian case. In his study, Richter-Devroe (2012) discusses how female activists construct and navigate their identities within the context of civil resistance in Palestine. The two primary constructions of femininity are the mother figure and the female political figure. The mother figure is traditional and is a symbol of peace; thus, this construction emphasizes the role of Palestinian women as mothers and caregivers, often associated with nurturing, peace, and non-violence. In fact, the Palestinian mother figure often holds the need for safety and care for the community, particularly children, during times of conflict. On the other hand, the construction of the Palestinian female political activist highlights independence, directly involved in protest and resistance. For instance, Naila is visibly and vocally engaged in political activism,

often leading demonstrations, organizing movements, and challenging existing power structures. In this way, she emphasizes over Palestinian women's empowerment and their active role in shaping political discourse and actions. Merging these two identities within the Palestinian context enables Palestinian women to show their effectiveness in defending their case, and challenging the societal norms that prevent them from participating the political sphere, gaining broader support for their cause. This combination of these identities allows Palestinian female activists to adapt to different contexts, whether they need to appeal to traditional values or assert their modern political agency.

These constructions of the Palestinian mother figure and political activist help to appreciate the complexity of Palestinian female activism, illustrating how they balance traditional roles and modern political engagement to contribute to social and political changes. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Palestinian mother is given a central role. Richter-Devroe (2012) explains that "the mother figure is central to Palestinian political culture. Discourses of motherhood are politicised in nationalist steadfastness discourses which elevate mothers as social, cultural and biological reproducers of the nation" (p. 19). This highlights that mothers are not only seen as caregivers but also as key figures in maintaining and perpetuating national identity and resistance. They embody and transmit cultural values, traditions, and the collective memory of the Palestinian people. Through their roles in the family and community, mothers contribute significantly to the resilience and continuity of the national struggle. Conventionally, "motherhood is at the center of patriarchal analysis because this system of thought sees womanhood as an incomplete identity; it defines women only in relation to men, as wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters" (Salimi, 2013, p. 48). But, the Palestinian context portrays;

A new mother figure who reaches beyond her domestic role and becomes a nationally acclaimed heroine. She is a new mother who is the mother of all the children of Palestine, not just her own children. Therefore, she is ethically, instinctively, and rationally mandated to defend the nation's children even if it means abandoning her own biological offspring (Salimi, 2013, p. 56).

This statement emphasizes the profound sense of duty and sacrifice attributed to Palestinian mothers in the nationalist context. Their role extends beyond personal and familial boundaries to encompass a broader national responsibility. This portrayal of motherhood underscores the significant and often heroic contributions of women to the national cause, highlighting their integral role in the struggle for Palestinian identity and liberation. In fact, the presence of Naila and her son in the prison indicates the cultural representation of the Palestinian mother as a guardian of national identity and continuity, playing a greater role in maintaining the Palestinian presence. The scene (46:52) in the prison shows the idea of collective motherhood; Naila explains that, “My son was the only child in the prison” (45:34). She continues, “I saw so much pain in the eyes of the other female prisoners ... one would brush his hair, another would hold him ... compete to change his diaper, to play with him, to care for him” (46:14). The Palestinian female prisoners all imagined that Majd was their own child; they let him take their hair, stand him up and let him hold it until he learned to walk. They are depicted as guardians who nurture the next generation of Palestinians, instilling in them values of resistance and perseverance. The idea of collective motherhood extends beyond biological ties. This mother figure embodies the collective responsibility of all Palestinian women to protect and raise the nation’s Palestinian children, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose. In their study, Mignon & Ransford (2012) identify “challenges to the development and maintenance of contact between incarcerated mothers and their children” (p. 69), but the appearance of Naila with her son together in the prison indicates the strong contact of both that connotes social integration for both Palestinian children and mothers, increasing the willingness of the Palestinian mother to facilitate her national contact. As Mignon & Ransford (2012) continue, “when a mother is in prison, her difficulties can be exacerbated by the loss of influence in her children’s lives” (p. 70). They argue the consequences on the Palestinian children regarding their social and political integration because motherhood is the core aspect of their identity. In Majd’s situation, Naila is able to fulfil her role as a mother that emphasizes over her Palestinian identity and her son’s identity as a Palestinian activist who serves the cause in the future. Both the Palestinian mother and her children emphasize over their social and political experience in the prison, uniting their conventional social relationships and support each other in defending the Palestinian

case; as being in the prison together inspires solidarity and action of both genders. Shwaikh (2022) argues that,

They challenge this notion and re-imagine their roles in society not only as mothers but as resistance fighters and insurgents. More interestingly, this picture of fragile women bodies often raises questions about the abuse of the colonial state or patriarchal power, which allows campaigners and activists to shift the attention from the female body to that of the violating body (p. 8).

The statement discusses that Palestinian female mothers in prison see themselves not just as caregivers but as integral parts of the resistance against oppressive forces. This dual identity allows them to find strength and purpose in their circumstances, challenging the traditional, passive roles assigned to them by both colonial and patriarchal systems. The image of fragile Palestinian female bodies engaged in resistance often serves as a powerful symbol against oppression. It challenges the stereotypical notions of women as weak and passive, showcasing their resilience and strength. This inspires a redefinition of the conventional gender roles in the context of the Palestinian political struggle and conflict zones.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

The concept of hybridity in the Palestinian context offers the Palestinian women to construct two distinctive identities, the Palestinian mother figure and the female political activist. Combining both constructions together allows the Palestinian woman to position herself in a higher status than the conventional man who is believed to be attached to leadership. In *Rana's Wedding*, Rana shows her solidarity with the children of stone. In fact, Rana combines between being a future mother who protects the future children of stone and supports them, as well as being a political activist who defends the Palestinian case. The film introduces different cases where Rana constructs her two identities of a future Palestinian mother and a political activist. For instance, Rana's appearance in the midst of the funeral indicates her resilience and steadfastness against the Israeli occupation through neglecting the conventional stereotypes of women as homeworkers. At the same time, her appearance connotes giving new lives and generations after death. This in turn refers to a constant struggle against the Israeli occupation. In addition to this,

the Israeli military checkpoints appear to distinguish between Palestinian females and males, focusing on limiting the movement of Palestinian females because Rana crossing the Israeli borders to meet Khalil transcends her from a virgin to a new phase of maternity; a mother to the children-of-stones. On the other hand, the documentary employs a mother of real maternal love, Naila. The symbolism of Naila's presence in prison combines between two constructions of identities of the Palestinian female in the Palestinian context. It also changes the conventional stereotypes of the Palestinian women as housewives. Attaching such a political concept (to be in prison) to Naila indicates her superiority to the Palestinian political situation than Palestinian men.

## Chapter Four

### **Palestinian Women Redefining Resistance: Precarity and Resistance as Male Act Practised by Palestinian Women**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

They did it by asserting their own strength, in the form of stone throwing and verbal taunts, and by turning the beatings, torture, and imprisonment inflicted on them by the occupying Israeli authorities into something positive, ‘a critical rite of passage into adulthood’ (Holt, 2003, p. 119).

For Butler (2009), “Precarity, designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support more than others, and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death” (p. 2). Because of the Israeli understatement towards Palestinian women, and the restrictions on the borders and women’s right to defend their case, Holt’s statement highlights the Israeli-Palestinian case as a transformative experience for the Palestinian women, from their conventional personalities to reshaping new independent identities (Annamma, 2015), defines precarity as;

A life lived without predictability, and thus without security. While structural and political changes have encouraged increased agentic performativity among women in Palestine, a culture of condoned violence is nonetheless an ongoing and horrifying reality (p. 1739).

This passage signifies the paradoxical reality of the Palestinian woman who undergoes a patriarchal structure that constrains their movement and freedom of participating in the outside world, on one hand, and contradicting these patriarchal norms through insistence on their steadfastness in the face of the Israeli occupation attacks. In fact, this structural and political changes and conflicts indicate significant shifts aimed at empowering Palestinian women and enhancing their agency. Palestinian women are always after their rights and challenging the traditional norms that break the patriarchal chains which in turn facilitates their participation in the political sphere, asserting themselves as both Palestinians and women. But, this assertion occurs within a context where violence, both physical and psychological, is a threat because “precarity guides performativity, not only

because of social censure, but also because of the constant threat of violence” (Annamma, 2015, p. 1743). This encapsulates the intricate relationship between insecurity and violence by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and behaviour among Palestinian women. Precarity effectively promotes agency and empowerment; it has an effective impact on Palestinian women's lives. This involves not only structural reforms but also cultural shifts that challenge the norms of social censure “of those deemed by the powerful to not matter, whose lives are inherently precarious, [...] and viewed as lesser by the dominant social order” (Annamma, 2015, p. 1742), which in turn helps in mitigating the pervasive threat of the Israeli occupation violence towards Palestinian women.

The constant threat of violence practised by the Israeli military occupation against the Palestinian women through the brutal actions, checkpoints, or conflicts, creates a pervasive sense of mortality and precarity. Hakim et al. (2023) constructs “the situation of Palestine not as a battle between Israeli and Palestinian ethnonational groups, but rather as a context of precarity in which settler colonial displacement and dispossession deprives the indigenous population of the material basis for self-determination and coherence” (p. 23). This describes the unstable and unsafe life of the Palestinian women as a minority and suppressed group that undergoes both patriarchy and the Israeli occupation that promotes self-defence. Thus, this precarious life should be combated as;

Recognizing Palestinian precarity as a situation of settler colonialism entails a further recognition that the cure for this precarity is decolonization and liberation, rather than micro-political resolutions that either merely protect a Palestinian ethnic minority or establish a limited Palestinian sovereignty (Hakim, et al., 2023, p. 23).

Precarity under the Israeli settler colonialism should have a reaction, and this reaction is practised by the Palestinian women to face the Israeli challenges and constraints. In other words, Palestinian precarity argues for a radical approach to achieve liberation and justice, which involves an oppositional action to the traditional gender roles that impose definite weak descriptions to the Palestinian woman. This Palestinian precarity calls for a transformative shift in addressing the Palestinian case. In fact, the Israeli occupation “defines violence and precarity as natural by-products of this settler colonialism” (Hakim, et al., 2023, p. 32). This statement clarifies that Israeli settler colonialism is fundamentally

oppressive and cannot coexist with the well-being and security of the indigenous Palestinian people. Thus, only through decolonization and the dismantling of these colonial structures can genuine peace and stability be achieved for the colonized Palestinian population. Holt (2018) emphasizes over the importance of equality in gender roles at conflict zones that increases the possibilities of peace and decolonization:

The practice of ‘patriotic sacrifice’ and the protection of the nation or the community are usually constructed as male, in the Palestinian case women have at least partially transcended these gendered categories, thus challenging ‘the constricting hierarchies of peacetime existence’. Their actions have contributed to the creation of a new model of the female national subject” (Holt, 2018, p. 4).

This passage discusses the concept of (patriotic sacrifice), traditionally explained as a male domain. However, in the context of the Palestinian struggle, women have significantly participated in these activities, thereby challenging traditional gender roles and creating a new model of female national identity. Butler (2010) portrays ‘a new subject’ “emerging from the ravages of war, a subject who might be able to ‘traverse the splitting between public and private’ (p. 155). This involvement of Palestinian women in nationalistic and community protection efforts disrupts the conventional hierarchies that usually restrict their roles, especially during peacetime. In his study, Holt (2018) employs Edward Said’s concept of “a collectivity or community finding its way together” where he emphasizes that people “do not find the courage to fight continually against as powerful an army as Israel’s without some reservoir, some deeply and already present fund of bravery and revolutionary self-sacrifice” (p. 10). This shows the importance of a unified national identity and collective resilience in the face of external oppression. Edward Said highlights the necessity of an inherent and deeply rooted sense of bravery and revolutionary self-sacrifice within the occupied community.

The concept of precarity in relation to the Palestinian community is essential to understanding the resilience and resistance of Palestinian women in the face of conflict without any discrimination against women. Exploring these notions helps elucidate how Palestinians form a collective identity and sustain their struggle, quitting all the conventional stereotypes against Palestinian women. The concept of precarity as an ‘uncertain existence, lacking in predictability’ regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

“is necessary to explore further the notion of community and how it binds Palestinians together as a resisting entity” (Holt, 2018, p. 11). Thus, “it contributes to the construction of a ‘resilient self’, and under such circumstances ‘the modality of power through which individuals transform themselves into the willing subjects of a moral discourse is the subject’s agency’” (Bracke, 2016, pp. 62-63). The concepts of precarity, community, and the resilient self are intertwined in the Palestinian context. The Palestinian community provides a crucial framework for individual and collective resistance, enabling Palestinian women to navigate and resist the modalities of power that seek to undermine their agency and identity. By transforming themselves into willing subjects in political discourse centered on resistance and resilience, Palestinian women construct a resilient self that defies the precarity imposed upon them.

#### **4.2 Precarity and Erasing Palestinian Women’s Presence and Resistance through Home Demolishing in Rana’s Wedding**

She’s the mother of the martyr, sister of the martyr, daughter of the martyr – and now she is the martyr herself (Hasso, 2005, p. 34).

Martyrdom and home demolition are often interlinked in contexts of political conflict. This interplay indicates personal and familial experiences which are deeply intertwined with political and military strategies, where the home is not just a physical space that distinguishes between Palestinian male and female, regarding patriarchal structures, but a symbol of resistance and collective identity in the face of the Israeli occupation. Vasudevan and Ferreri (2019) suggest that “the building had become a symbol of long discredited ideologies and a widely stigmatised site of decay and criminality”(p. 1). They show that the building is likely more than just a physical structure; it symbolizes broader societal and political issues. For instance, in the Palestinian context, home represents an ideological, cultural, and political value. In other words, the destruction of a Palestinian building and martyrdom of family members creates a political indulgence of Palestinian women, the mother of Palestinian members, that will lead to new identities and shifting of the conventional patriarchal roles, then the reconstruction of the Palestinian home.

In the context of the Israeli military conflict, the deconstruction of homes is a powerful and traumatic experience. When the Palestinian home is occupied by Israeli military

forces, it ceases to be a safe and private space for Palestinian inhabitants, especially women. The Israeli occupation often leads to displacement, loss of property, and a profound sense of violation, as home, a symbol of personal and familial stability, is taken over by an external power. This form of occupation can also serve as a method of control, where occupying forces assert dominance over a population by taking control of their homes. The home, in this context, becomes a symbol of lost autonomy and the pervasive presence of conflict in everyday life. The home can also be a space of resistance against the Israeli occupation. In situations where Israeli forces attempt to take over or control a home, Palestinian women may use the space as a site of defiance. This can be seen in the form of maintaining familial practices as a form of resilience against the Israeli occupation and the “normalization” of precarious housing. Nowicki (2017) discusses that;

The normalisation of precarious housing through understanding how political rhetoric and policy in practice actively dismantle rights to home for those who are already some of the city’s most vulnerable and precariously housed citizens (Nowicki, 2017, p. 14).

The concept of the “normalization of precarious housing” refers to the process by which unstable and insecure living conditions become accepted as a standard or inevitable part of life, particularly for vulnerable Palestinian population. This normalization often occurs through political power and policies that subtly or overtly dismantle the rights of Palestinians to secure and stable housing, particularly for those who are already marginalized, specially Palestinian women. This intensive political power emphasizes individual responsibility over structural inequalities; that is, Palestinian female and males are equal in their rights to defend the Palestinian case and identity through protecting their homes and reconstructing new houses that creates new identities for the Palestinian female and de-constructs the patriarchal and political stereotypes about Palestinian women.

Palestine, as a conflict zone, makes this shared experience within the Palestinian home builds a strong solidarity between the Palestinian community as a whole regardless the conventional images that distinguish the Palestinian woman and man. Nowicki (2017) portrays home as a place that goes beyond being a personal dwelling to an entire nation:

Home, however, relates to a much more expansive, more emotive set of ideas. Home can vary drastically in scale, from dwelling, to nation, and beyond. It can refer to the material (e.g. dwelling), or a broader set of feelings, for example of security and familiarity. Although widely understood as an inherently positive space, the home can equally be imbued with precarity, violence, and loss (p. 15).

"Home" is a concept that expands to mean a neighborhood, a city, a country, or even a broader cultural or national identity. However, the understanding of "home" as both a place of security and a potential site of danger reflects the complexity of the Palestinian experience. It suggests that while home is often idealized as a safe haven, this is not the case for the Palestinian people who struggle under the Israeli occupation. Walters (2004) suggests the concept of "domopolitics" to explore the intricate relationship between the home, power authority, and the colonial governance practices. Walters (2004) suggests that the idea of "home" is not just a personal or domestic concept but is deeply embedded in political practices and governance. The term "domopolitics" emphasizes how the home is central to the way the colonizers exercise power and manage the indigenous Palestinian citizens. Walters (2004) argues that home, land and security are interconnected in Israeli colonizers' practices, where the protection of the "home" (whether a physical dwelling, a homeland, or national territory) becomes a central concern of Palestinian people. This leads to the discussion of another concept which is "domicide"; that is, the intentional destruction of home for political benefits of the colonial party (Porteous & Smith, 2001). Porteous & Smith (2001) discuss the term of domicile as "the deliberate destruction of home by human agency in the pursuit of specific goals, which causes suffering to the victims" (p. 12). For instance, the Israeli occupation demolish Palestinian homes for their political importance, to assert control, and prevent the growth of Palestinians, which in turn allows for reshaping the Palestinian region.

The demolition of one Palestinian house means the construction of other Palestinian houses and recreation of the Palestinian woman's new personality. Nowicki (2017) suggests that "Home is an integral site through which our personal and collective identities are constructed, a site of potential comfort, of alienation, of safety, of fear" (pp. 14-15). This quote highlights the multifaceted nature of "home" as a concept that plays a crucial role in shaping both personal and collective identities. It suggests that home is not

just a physical space but a complex environment where various emotions and experiences converge. Home is fundamental in the development of Palestinians' sense of self. It's where their values, memories, and experiences are formed and reinforced. But beyond the Palestinian individual identity, home also contributes to collective identities, such as familial, cultural, or community-based identities. The shared experiences within a home or a community can create a strong sense of belonging and solidarity among its members, especially Palestinian women.

#### **4.3 Precarity and the Politics of Vulnerability: The Deportation of Palestinian Men in Naila and the Uprising**

The demolition of my home, the loss of my belonging, of my ability to gather my family under one roof and feel safe. They looked at the building. I mean the physical building, as if it is about the walls, the windows and the doors. People maybe felt sorry when they heard the noise during the demolition, but do you think anybody is capable of hearing the demolition of our hearts? Of our dreams? Of our future plans? I guess such voices are never heard. Do you think they even noticed my fear, my agony, my horror? No way. They (fear, agony, and horror) have no voice, no noise, and military occupation has no eyes, no morality, no consciousness, no God (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2010, p. 2)

Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2010) uses Salwa's voice to "examine the loss of home, and housing demolitions from a feminist perspective" (p. 2). From a feminist perspective, Shalhoub-Kevorkian is particularly interested in how gender shapes the experience of home loss within the Palestinian context. For Palestinian women, the home is not just a physical space but also a significant part of their identity, daily life, and social relationships. The deportation of Palestinian men; thus, the destruction of the Palestinian home enables Palestinian women exercise their political agency and authority to reconstruct another Palestinian home that neglects the patriarchal norms, as caretakers and managers of the household, to stand against the Israeli occupation without distinguishing between Palestinian men and women. In the film, Naila expresses her father's sadness over the demolition of the house: "I remember how sad my father's eyes were [...] the experience planted in me a hostility towards the occupation" (5:30). This quote captures a powerful emotional moment and the lasting impact of that moment on

Naila's feelings towards the Israeli occupation. This personal memory is used to illustrate how the trauma of home loss and the visible suffering of the father, as an autonomous entity, shapes Naila's political consciousness and resistance. In other words, the statement demonstrates how individual experiences contribute to collective resistance. It shows that the Israeli occupation's impact is not just on a political or structural level but also on a deeply personal, emotional level that drives Palestinian women like Naila to resist. The destruction of Palestinian homes, both literal and figurative meanings (presented in man's deportation), is a deliberate Israeli military strategy that is meant to demolish the Palestinian social fabric. But, the Palestinian women against all odds reshape their agency and subjectivity in order to free themselves and the whole society from the brutality of the Israeli occupation. Feder-Bubis & Gottlieb (2014) explain that Palestinian "women's role as a mother and home-maker which, of all things, becomes a source for the transformation of trauma and despair into resilience and strength" (p. 150). This struggle needs to, firstly, be understood in terms of the role of the home in the lives of Palestinian women, challenging conventional feminist theories that often view the home as the first and only place for women. On the other hand, in the context of military violence, the Palestinian home also serves as a crucial space of resistance, affirmation, and humanity.

For Palestinian women living under occupation, the home becomes more than just a physical space. It represents a preservation of cultural identity, and exercise agency in the face of the occupation that seek to dehumanize them. This duality highlights the complexity of their experiences, where the private space of the home offers a form of resistance against both the political violence and the patriarchal structures that exist within the Palestinian community. In other words, the home becomes a site of personal and political resistance.

"Every time they invaded my home, I felt totally naked... as if they raped me...  
[T]hey actually raped my home" (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2006, p. 122).

This quotation emphasizes over a deep interconnection between the personal and political resistance in conflict zones. For many Palestinian women, the invasion of their home is not just a material disruption but an emotional and symbolic attack on their very being and must be resisted. Knapp, Muller, and Quiros (2009) describe the figurative meaning of the destruction of the Palestinian home:

“When one leaves their entire social network in their home community and begins a new life in a new place, social networks must be re-found and often rebuilt” (Knapp, Muller, & Quiros, 2009, p. 4).

Men are often the primary targets of deportation due to their higher visibility in public spaces. It is an Israeli military strategy that is meant to weaken the Palestinian women, relying on the stereotypical images of women as dependent objects. In other words, deportation often results in the separation of Palestinian men from their families, leading to emotional and psychological trauma for both the deported Palestinian men and their family members left behind, leading to destruct the whole Palestinian home. This separation can create a void in the household, affecting the roles and responsibilities traditionally held by both Palestinian men and women. In the film, Naila expresses her feelings after the deportation of Jamal: “Men deported from the West Bank, and Jamal’s name headed the list. This was like having something ripped from my body” (27:23). However, in the context of deportation, the agency of Palestinian women often becomes more pronounced as they navigate the challenges that arise from the absence of male family members. One of the Palestinian women activist in the first intifada demonstrates that “the arrest of a number of men opened the door for women to step into leadership positions” (33:22). With Palestinian men deported, women take on roles that were traditionally considered male responsibilities; this shift empowers Palestinian women, providing them with greater autonomy and a stronger voice in both family matters and the country’s matter.

Palestinian women bear the emotional burden of maintaining family unity and well-being in the face of deportation, emphasizing over their advocacy and resistance against the Israeli occupation. In fact, Naila’s son behind bars hurts her so much, leading to increase her agency which in turn leads to shifts in gender norms and expectations within the Palestinian community within context of conflict. As Palestinian women take on new responsibilities and assert their independence, traditional gender roles may be challenged, leading to broader social, cultural, and political changes. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) discusses how the deportation of the Palestinian men affects women’s roles, responsibilities, and decision-making power within families, as well as the public sphere. She examines how women take on new roles and responsibilities after their male partners

are deported. Her work shows how these shifts can empower women. This deportation opens the doors to new personalities and identities within the Palestinian family power relations and the roles Palestinian women play in maintaining, both family and Palestinian community unity and stability. In her study, Menjívar (2011) provides critical insights into how women usually navigate agency in contexts of instability and danger, which includes the deportation of male family members. In other words, women often develop strategies for survival and resistance against instabilities, forcing them to adapt and resist in various ways.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The precarious situation has always been Palestinians' unavoidable concomitant under the Israeli occupation. Particularly, this chapter focuses on Palestinian women struggling between the stereotypical definition as dependent and weak ; at the same time, they shift this conventional role to a new identity that enables them to participate in the public sphere, defending their personal identity, as well as the nation's culture and independency. Focusing on *Rana's Wedding* and *Naila and the Uprising*, the chapter employs different political actions, represented in the films, that reshape the Palestinian women's agency. For instance, home demolition and the deportation of Palestinian men reshape gender roles in contexts of conflicts and amplify Palestinian women's agency. While such military strategies impose significant challenges to Palestinian women, this also opens up new spaces for them to exercise agency, adapt to changing circumstances, and challenge traditional gender norms.

This thesis examines the status of Palestinian women under Israeli occupation, focusing on realistic topics that make the thesis significant and timeless. It compares two films: *Rana's Wedding* and *Naila and the Uprising*, where the protagonists of both films are Palestinian women striving for independence and asserting their strength amidst systems that attempt to erase their identity, both as Palestinians and as women.

The first part of the thesis pointed to two systems of power that govern Palestinian women, both of which associate women with weakness and dependence on men, denying them authority in external political participation, especially concerning their Palestinian cause. However, in both films, we see that Rana and Naila seek to dismantle one of these systems, namely patriarchy, and establish a new system of equality and shared power

between men and women, enabling them to face the brutal Israeli occupation together. In *Rana's Wedding*, the entire story is driven by Rana, who seeks to meet her lover and marry him despite her father's disapproval. The father never appears in the film, symbolizing the disregard for his presence and emphasizing Rana as the heroine, which contrasts with traditional customs that prioritize the man's presence. The film challenges norms where Palestinian women are expected to remain in the background, with men leading the way. Similarly, in *Naila and the Uprising*, Naila's father disapproves of her marriage to a politically active man. The patriarchal society expects Naila to remain confined to the home, but she defies her father and engages in political activism, often on the front lines, which goes against the traditional role where men are seen as the primary leaders.

In the second part, I employ Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, which suggests that one's environment shapes a different character. In the context of this thesis, the Palestinian woman emerges not only as a mother but also as a fighter resisting Israeli occupation. Rana's character reflects this duality when she throws stones, an act typically associated with Palestinian men. Her participation in throwing stones alongside the "children of the stones" merges the roles of a protective mother and a political activist. Similarly, Naila, as the mother of Majd, balances her care for her son in the absence of his father with her national duty, always standing at the forefront of the struggle against the occupation. These events illustrate how the circumstances around them shape Palestinian women to combine their maternal roles with active political participation.

Finally, the final chapter navigates precarity in a space historically dominated by men and is occupied by a powerful colonial agenda that discriminates against women. I discuss the concept of the precarity and instability that accompanies Palestinian women's lives, linking it to the ideas of performativity and resistance. This section highlights various events that push Palestinian women into resistance, including the destruction of homes and the deportation of Palestinian men. Metaphorically, the deportation of Palestinian men represents the destruction of the Palestinian home, placing the responsibility on women to take on men's roles and defend their homes, dignity, identity, and homeland. These films highlight how Palestinian women cope with a harsh reality filled with violence and oppression, as they redefine themselves and assert their strength in facing both the occupation and the patriarchal society.

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جامعة النّجاح الوطنيّة  
كلية الدراسات العليا

تمثيل الوطن والنوع الاجتماعي  
والحدود في السينما الفلسطينية المعاصرة

إعداد

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قدمت هذه الرسالة استكمالاً لمتطلبات الحصول على درجة الماجستير في الأدب المقارن بكلية الدراسات العليا في جامعة النجاح الوطنية في نابلس، فلسطين.

2025

## تمثيل الوطن والنوع الاجتماعي والحدود في السينما الفلسطينية المعاصرة

إعداد

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### الملخص

تبحث هذه الأطروحة في موضوع تمثيل الوطن والنوع الاجتماعي والحدود في السينما الفلسطينية المعاصرة، حيث تقدم تحليلاً نقدياً لكيفية ترابط هذه المصطلحات لتعكس الوضع الاجتماعي والسياسي المعقد في فلسطين بالتركيز على المرأة الفلسطينية. تناقش الرسالة كيفية تصوير مفهوم الوطن ليس فقط كحيز مادي، بل كرمز للهوية والانتماء والمقاومة في وجه الاحتلال الإسرائيلي. تبحث الرسالة أيضاً في أدوار المرأة الفلسطينية داخل المنزل والنضال الوطني، مع إبراز مساهماتهم في الحفاظ على الذاكرة الثقافية وتنقلهم بين الأدوار التقليدية، كونها أما، والحديثة من خلال مشاركتها بالوضع السياسي للدولة. تتعمق الرسالة في تمثيل الحدود بمعناها الحرفي والمجازي، وربطها مع مفهومي الوطن والنوع الاجتماعي مع التركيز على كيفية فرض هذه الحدود قيوداً على الحركة والهوية والاستقلالية. من خلال تحليل فيلم زفاف رنا لهاني أبو أسعد، ونائلة والانتفاضة لجوليا باشا، تكشف هذه الدراسة الطرق التي تتحدى بها السينما الفلسطينية وتعيد تعريف الروايات التقليدية عن الوطن والنوع الاجتماعي والانتماء والمرأة الفلسطينية على حد سواء، مع توضيح قصص النساء الفلسطينيات المتمكنات ذاتياً. تظهر الرسالة تعقيدات حياة المرأة الفلسطينية في ظل الاحتلال الإسرائيلي من خلال السينما الفلسطينية، ومرونة الهوية الفلسطينية لهؤلاء النساء الفلسطينيات. تحلل الرسالة رحلتين لامرأتين فلسطينيتين، من الذاكرة الفردية التي بدورها تفتح الأبواب أمام ذكريات كل النساء الفلسطينيات، إلى الذاكرة الجماعية، ومنها إلى ذاكرة وطن جريح لا زالت ندوبه ومعاناته ظاهرة حتى يومنا هذا.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** النوع الاجتماعي؛ الحدود، والسينما الفلسطينية