

Feminist Generations? The Long-Term Impact of Social Movement Involvement on Palestinian Women's Lives¹

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While there is an extensive literature addressing gender and women in social movements, there is very little addressing the impact of such participation on individual women in the aftermath of involvement. This article explores the individual impact of social movement participation using longitudinal qualitative research with working-class Palestinian women and argues that there exists among these former participants a "feminist generation" that is differentiated by a gender-egalitarian ideology and a high sense of self-efficacy. The article also argues that feminist subjectivities and possibilities will be circumscribed and difficult to maintain without the structural and cultural support provided by a stable, sovereign, and at least nominally democratic state and accountable feminist organizations that are responsive to diverse groups of women.

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is a rich and now extensive literature on women's social movement involvement (Basu 1995; Blee 1998; Jaquette 1994; West and Blumberg 1990; Badran 1995; Hart 1996; Ray 1999; Robnett 1997; Taylor 1996; Whittier 1995). This literature has focused on the various identities that

¹ An earlier formulation of the material in this article appeared in the author's dissertation (Hasso 1997). Talks based on previous versions of this article were presented at the University of Kentucky, Oberlin College, Antioch College, and the American Sociological Association meetings in 1999 and 2000. James House, Lynn Warner, Barbara Risman, and Jeffrey Dillman read earlier versions of this article and provided very helpful suggestions. Ellen Riggle, Tyrone Forman, and Suparna Bhaskaran contributed valuable additional methodological perspectives. I also appreciate the useful comments of the *AJS* reviewers. This article is dedicated to the Palestinian women interviewed, who graciously allowed me into their lives. I am also grateful to the PFWAC's generosity and openness to me during difficult times for the organization. Research for this article was funded by a 1995 dissertation grant from the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies, a 1996 Woodrow

mobilize women; gendered discourses and differences in movements; the effectiveness of movements in terms of macroinstitutional and ideological outcomes; the mobilizational narratives or “frames” of social movements; the persistence, albeit shifting nature of, feminist involvement over time; and identity formation among social movement participants. There is very little research, however, addressing the impact of such participation on individual women after involvement in a social movement ends.

In addition, most of the gender and social movement research, particularly in U.S. sociology, continues to empirically focus on women and gender in the United States and Western European countries (see Basu 1995; Moghadam 2000; Ray and Korteweg 1999). This is probably related to the genealogy of the discipline and the usually unaddressed geographic division of labor, at least in the United States, between sociology and anthropology. This division is more difficult to sustain in an era of interdisciplinary research and for sociologists whose backgrounds are non-Western or whose intellectual interests are broader. The most serious implications of the U.S. and Western European focus of sociological social movement theory, however, is related to the frequently universalistic theorizing that too often takes for granted the particularistic empirical bases (economic, political, and cultural) of this theorization.

This article explores the individual impact of social movement participation using longitudinal qualitative research with Palestinian women from the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I argue that there exists among these former participants a “feminist generation” that is differentiated by its egalitarian gender ideology and sense of self-efficacy. I avoid “the dilemma of particularism versus universalism” (Ray and Korteweg 1999, p. 48), whereby Third World women (and people outside the “West”) are seen as either intrinsically different from or fundamentally similar to non-Third World women. Also important is resisting the problematic dichotomy of Third World women as either victims (Mohanty 1991) or heroes (Carr 1994, p. 154). As Robert Carr and Leela Fernandes have noted, both sides of this dichotomy are dehistoricized, deterritorialized, and simplistic in their constructions of wholly agentic or overly passive subjects (Carr 1994, p. 155; Fernandes 1999, p. 148).

Karl Mannheim has argued that “similarly located contemporaries” who share an affinity in their collective response to the events of tumultuous historical moments constitute a “political generation” (Mannheim 1952,

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pp. 303–4). Generation as a temporal, biological, historical “location,” he argued, is transformed into generation as “actuality” when individuals “participate in the process of social transformation” during turbulent periods (pp. 303–4). The members of a political generation appear to be bound together and differentiated from the larger population in ways that are important and persistent even after the passage of turbulent historical periods (pp. 299–310). Most empirical studies addressing the long-term impact of social movement involvement on individual lives largely substantiate Mannheim’s argument (Fendrich and Tarleau 1973; Fendrich 1974; Fendrich and Krauss 1978; Jennings and Niemi 1981; Jennings 1987; McAdam 1989). The more intense the participation, the more significant and enduring is the impact on individual lives, particularly when there are social ties and structural supports to facilitate ideological maintenance (Jennings and Niemi 1981, pp. 364, 377; Abramowitz and Nassi 1981; Whalen and Flacks 1980, p. 231; Marwell, Aiken, and Demerath 1987; McAdam 1989; also see Newcomb 1943; Newcomb et al. 1967; Alwin, Cohen, and Newcomb 1991; Cohen and Alwin 1993).

This article is based on a two-wave panel study, the first conducted in 1989 and the second in 1995, with Palestinian women who in 1989 were employed in income-generating projects and preschools sponsored by the Palestinian Federation of Women’s Action Committees (PFWAC). The PFWAC was a nationalist-feminist organization created in the Occupied Palestinian Territories in 1978 by women who were also leaders of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), one of the four primary constituent parties of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). I argue that deep PFWAC involvement beyond employment helped to produce a feminist generation that persisted years after the end of the PFWAC.

The existing research on former social movement activists indicates that the impact of political participation is to some extent independent of the biographical criteria that lead some and not others to participate in such historical moments of opportunity in the first place. That is, self-selection appears to be important in explaining what categories of people are likely to participate in and be influenced by such political and intellectual currents (Jennings and Niemi 1981, pp. 339, 378–79) but does not fully explain the attitudinal and behavioral differences that occur after such participation. The PFWAC findings similarly demonstrate that while most of the women who compose this feminist generation were comparatively more independent-minded before their PFWAC involvement, they had not necessarily been feminist in their orientations. Deep political engagement, not surprisingly, pushed them in new ideological and personal directions.

Exploring whether and to what extent PFWAC involvement produced

a feminist generation would seem to require a definition of *feminism*, which, as many feminist scholars have noted, is contested and best defined plurally and in a contextualized, historicized manner.² In any given context, women will have multiple and imbricated locations and identities and various sources of support and subordination. Because not all sources of subordination are simply based on gender, and because women themselves are often different and unequal from each other along nongender axes, their feminist visions of the future can often differ fundamentally.³ The feminisms of Third World women (like those of poor women, U.S. women of color, or “minority” women in other countries) usually assume that “gender discrimination is neither the sole nor perhaps the primary locus of oppression” (Johnson-Odim 1991, p. 315).

Women’s responses to inequality or subordination are always structured by, and occur in negotiation with, past and present cultural, political, material, and discursive circumstances. Sometimes women will *accommodate* to the gender order, as did lower-middle-class women in Cairo, who Arlene Macleod argued were caught in crosscutting, overlapping subordinate interactions in which it was not clear which hierarchy—gender, class, or global inequities—was the most important source of their problems (1991, p. 145).

In contrast to either accommodating or taking dramatic resistant action that they are unlikely to win, several researchers have argued that subalterns are likely to engage in lower-scale, nonconfrontational responses to oppressive conditions (Scott 1986). These responses will usually draw on, and sometimes rearticulate, existing cultural and social repertoires. The Malaysian women electronic workers studied by Aihwa Ong (1987), for example, sometimes responded to their exploitation, loss of dignity and autonomy, and poor working conditions with “spiritual possessions” on the factory floor. Lila Abu-Lughod (1986, 1990) found a variety of expressive resistance strategies, most of them nonconfrontational but culturally important, among the Egyptian Bedouin women she studied (also see Reissman 2000). It is difficult to define such responses as *either* resistance or accommodation; they can be, and probably are, both.

Patricia Hill Collins has argued for the importance of seeing as feminist the everyday, individual acts whose focus is creating or maintaining dig-

² At its core, I would argue, a feminist consciousness requires a commitment to sexual egalitarianism (an idea with diverse implications and meanings in different historical and cultural contexts) and a recognition that subordination based on sex/gender is socially rather than “naturally” determined (for other definitions, see Evans [1979, pp. 219–20], Offen [1988] and Johnson-Odim [1991]).

³ And there is always the possibility of nonfeminist visions and feminist visions that resist addressing or reproduce racial, sexual, economic, international, or other inequalities.

nity, self-definition, self-reliance, and independence (1991). Sherna Berger Gluck demonstrated that for working-class women in particular, “changes in consciousness are not *necessarily* or *immediately* reflected in dramatic alterations in the public world” (1987, p. x). Many of the most important changes for white, Mexican-American, and black former “Rosie the Riveters” were private and individual (Gluck 1987, p. 269).

I also found former PFWAC employees’ feminism to exist at individual levels:⁴ relatively gender-egalitarian social and political attitudes and a high sense of self-efficacy influenced their decisions in a number of areas. The women often indicated that this sense of self-efficacy was at least partly the result of PFWAC experience and socialization.

While members of the PFWAC feminist generation (and even many of the women who were influenced less dramatically) sometimes challenged and changed the status quo in their social worlds in a range of ways, it is important to recognize that the nonexistence of local and national feminist institutional support and a stable, sovereign state with at least some accountability to women considerably limited the range of feminist possibilities for these women.

Some gender scholars, in contrast, have argued that the fluidity that occurs in periods of state crisis, instability, or regime transition sometimes provided *more* opportunities for women and women’s movements in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to gain significant political and economic influence. Moreover, MENA and other states often limit feminist possibilities through the control and co-optation that occurs with the establishment of state feminism (Brand 1998, pp. 8–12). While it is true that states are often relatively less accountable (and contradictory in terms of legislation and policy) to women, the poor, and “minority” constituents, they nevertheless have the potential to provide crucial safeguards for these groups if they are at least premised on ideals of democratic accountability. Clearly, however, the possibilities for realizing this state protection and accountability depend to some extent on the existence of strong advocacy movements, in this case feminist organizations, that are independent of the state and representative of a significant constituency.

PFWAC AND DFLP: FEMINISM, NATIONALISM, AND CRISIS

The PFWAC was committed to the mass mobilization of women in the Occupied Palestinian Territories for the dual purposes of gaining national liberation and improving women’s gender status—the organization had an explicitly nationalist-feminist agenda. This agenda placed significant

⁴ The equivalent Arabic term for “feminism” is *wa’i nisaai*, or “women’s awareness.”

importance on women's attainment of equal rights with men in "public sphere" matters—wages, job opportunities, education, and political participation. PFWAC leaders assumed that employment would give women the economic leverage to alter their home environments, and political activity would expose the contradictions of their own exploitation as women in their homes, leading them to take action that transformed their lives (Hasso 1998).

While the establishment of PFWAC preschools and income-generating projects was consistent with this ideological agenda, there were pragmatic political purposes as well. The preschools facilitated the mobilization of working-class women into the PFWAC and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) by providing needed day care to three categories of women: politically uninvolved "housewives" (*rabaat buyut*), employed married women with children, and politically active married women with children. PFWAC employment in the income-generating projects and preschools was also an avenue for mobilizing these women (and their family members) into the PFWAC because it provided needed money, it occurred in a unisex associational space that did not require supervision from male bosses (the situation that existed in most textile factories in the territories), and the work was with a politically and socially respected organization. This was important for the women employees themselves, their often socially conservative families, and the communities in which these projects existed.

Because the DFLP, like all PLO parties, was illegal in the territories under Israeli military law, its *formal* political, organizational, and financial bodies existed outside the territories (in Jordan, Syria, Tunisia, and Lebanon), where major party decisions were usually made and communicated to cadres inside. The possibility of eventual conflict between what Palestinians call "the inside" (*al-dakhil*) and "the outside" (*al-kharj*) was overdetermined by this geographic dispersal of the resistance movement and different regional-political conditions in the Arab world. The geographic dispersal did not become a serious issue of contention in the DFLP (ironically, these differences emerged among members of the Political Office *outside* the territories) until mid-1988, approximately seven months into the Palestinian uprising (*intifada*), when it appeared that a political resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict might be on the horizon. By September 1990, the DFLP and the PFWAC in the territories each had informally split into two organizations, ostensibly over the unequal distribution of "inside/outside" power and disagreement over the nature of a resolution with Israel (Hasso 1997, chap. 4). During and after the split, the DFLP, the PFWAC, and their offshoots lost most of the popular support built over many years in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

By splitting over the same issues that divided the party, as opposed to

differences over gender ideology or program, the PFWAC contradicted one of its foundational arguments: that gender and national liberation were equally important. On another level, however, the PFWAC split indicates the impossibility of excising “politics,” in this case nationalist politics, from feminist subjectivity. During this period, DFLP party women were systematically disenfranchised from extraordinary political power in the territories by party men in both DFLP factions. All of this, combined with a general demobilization of the population in the territories that came with the (unsuccessful) Madrid negotiations and Oslo Accords,⁵ ended the PFWAC as it had historically been constituted in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

METHOD, DEMOGRAPHICS, AND THE POLITICS OF RESEARCH

In 1989, when I was an unpaid PFWAC intern, I conducted semistructured interviews with 63 women who were employed by the PFWAC; these included all the nonmanagerial workers in the five major income-generating projects and 35 teachers in six selected PFWAC day care centers and nurseries throughout the territories.⁶ I reinterviewed 56 of these women in late 1995,⁷ approximately five years after the demise of the PFWAC.⁸ The findings discussed in this article are limited to the 56

⁵ On October 28, 1991, a Palestinian delegation from the territories met in Madrid with a delegation from the Israeli government for the first of 11 rounds of unsuccessful negotiations that continued through September 1993. Between January and September 1993, PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat and a team of Fateh officials secretly negotiated with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and a team of Israeli government officials under the sponsorship of the Norwegian government. These negotiations culminated in mutual recognition between the PLO and the Israeli government on September 9, 1993, followed by the signing of the Israeli-PLO “Declaration of Principles” (DOP), also known as the Oslo Accords, in Washington, D.C., on September 13, 1993.

⁶ The five income-generating projects were a dry baby food project, a ceramics and embroidery project, a sewing project, a biscuit project, and a dairy project.

⁷ Of the seven women not reinterviewed, one Ramallah-area woman (respondent 31), whom I was only able to reach by phone, refused with no explanation; one Gazan and one Jenin-area resident (respondents 57 and 59) had relocated to Gulf states with their husbands; I could not find a Ramallah-area woman (respondent 26) who had married; one woman, a Hebronite (respondent 64), was out of the country with her husband receiving medical treatment; and another two women (respondents 60 and 49), one from Bureij refugee camp (in Gaza) and another from a Jerusalem-area village, were not interviewed because they had moved and I was unable to locate them. All seven women not reinterviewed were married; four of these had married since 1989.

⁸ I conducted the first wave of this research during a 1989 six-month internship with the PFWAC Production Committee, while I was an M.A. student in Arab studies (with a concentration in economic development) at Georgetown University. I was kindly granted permission to do so by PFWAC leaders Zahira Kamal and Sama ‘Aweidah. I came to know most of the project employees through my occasional site visits and

women who were interviewed in both time periods. I conducted all of the interviews in Arabic. In 1989, security considerations did not allow for audio recording, so I relied on note taking (with immediate longhand translations into English); in 1995, I audiotaped and fully translated and transcribed all but two of the reinterviews.

The 1989 interviews, which took one to two hours each, focused on women's everyday lives: what they did the previous day from morning until evening, why they worked, how the money they earned was spent, their family relationships, gender relations in the household, political attitudes, and their views on gender relations, marriage, family planning, and child rearing. In 1995, I was similarly interested in women's gender ideologies and practices, in addition to their personal choices in the intervening six years, their attitudes toward the PFWAC, their assessment of their PFWAC experience, and their situations at home, especially given the dissolution of the PFWAC and the overall political demobilization that had occurred with the end of the intifada.⁹

The 56 women who were interviewed and reinterviewed six years later had been affiliated with the PFWAC for a mean of 2.26 years in 1989.¹⁰ The mean and median age of these women was 24 years. Of the 56, 50% were West Bankers, 27% were Gazans, and 23% were from East Jerusalem; 50% were villagers, 45% were town residents, and 5% lived in refugee camps.¹¹ In 1989, 80% were single. Of the 56 reinterviewed women, 18 had married between 1989 and 1995, 27 had remained single, and one woman was engaged to be married.

Based on the economic standards of the territories, in 1989, 20% of the women were very poor, 64% were average low income, and 16% were in

their attendance at periodic meetings in the PFWAC central office in Beit Hanina, Jerusalem, where I was based. Similarly, teachers came to the Beit Hanina offices for regular training sessions and were familiar with me on that basis. I was also known to the teachers at the largest PFWAC day care center, which was also in Beit Hanina, because for three months I lived in a small apartment attached to that center and a PFWAC-sponsored medical clinic. In 1995, I returned to Palestine as a University of Michigan sociology graduate student conducting dissertation research.

⁹ Members of my dissertation committee—Salim Tamari, James House, Janet Hart, and Sonya Rose—provided crucial advice on the construction of the 1995 interview protocol. Salim Tamari assisted with the 1989 protocol as well.

¹⁰ I do not address number of years affiliated or employed with the PFWAC in any of these analyses since I found that the nature and intensity of affiliation was far more important than length of affiliation or employment.

¹¹ In total, 60% of the population in the territories (80% of Gazans and 40% of West Bankers) live in urban areas. Urban areas include many refugee camps (Abu Libdeh, Ovansen, and Brunborg 1993, p. 41). Thus, the PFWAC women interviewed were more likely to be from villages in comparison to the larger population.

households that were, relatively speaking, comfortable economically.¹² Between 1989 and 1995, the economic position of seven of the 56 women had deteriorated from average low-income to very poor, four previously very poor women became either average low-income or comfortable, and 10 formerly average low-income women became relatively comfortable. Overall, the number of women in the relatively comfortable category almost doubled, to 30%, despite an overall deterioration in the economic situation for Palestinians in the territories. (The implications of this are discussed later.) The largest proportion of women, 53%, remained in the average low-income category.

It is important to attend to the political context in which the 1995 reinterviews occurred. Asking women about anything having to do with the PFWAC was a sensitive endeavor and was invariably colored by the events that culminated in the splits of both the DFLP and the PFWAC. The norm during the PFWAC division was personalized attacks, particularly through the spreading of rumors about collaboration with the Israeli military government, sexual promiscuity, and corruption, which had the almost immediate effect of alienating most women from the PFWAC and the DFLP.

The women interviewed had other reasons to be unhappy with the PFWAC and its former leadership. From 1990 through 1992—when it was unclear which faction would control the preschools and income generating projects, whether these projects would be terminated, or how they would be financed—most women continued to run the projects without pay, some for as long as a year.¹³ Bills for utilities, food (for preschool children), and other project expenses mounted during this period, and many women gave me tallies of money they were owed and asked me to appeal to the former PFWAC leaders to pay them. Others either harassed

¹² For very poor families, buying food was often a problem, they did not have telephones, almost two-thirds had no washing machine, and few had an automobile (most had access to a shared refrigerator). Average low-income families usually did not own a phone or a car, often owned the (very modest) roof over their heads, usually had a television set and a washing machine (that sometimes were not working properly), often supplemented their food stocks through small-scale cultivation, and usually avoided nonessential public transportation because it was expensive. Women who were *relatively* comfortable (possibly equivalent to the U.S. “lower-middle-class”) worried less about food, housing, and health care, although they usually contributed at least part of their pay to their households because men (brothers, fathers, or husbands) were often unemployed, intermittently employed, or underemployed. These women lived in households with refrigerators, televisions, and sometimes automobiles as well. (Only one or two women in the latter category had access to a car in 1989; in 1995, a number of women had attained licenses or had bought cars).

¹³ Some women continued working without pay until they realized that the PFWAC had indeed fallen apart or the new parties were closing most of the projects and demobilizing the rank and file.

former PFWAC leaders or found young men in the neighborhood to pressure the leaders to pay them.

Trying to assess which women had been very active in the PFWAC (or the DFLP) beyond their PFWAC employment, an issue that was too politically dangerous to raise in 1989, was complicated by this history. In 1995, five women denied being active with the PFWAC, although I had strong evidence indicating they had been somewhat or very active with the organization or the DFLP. For example, when I asked a 25-year-old Ramallah-area woman in 1989 how her family had reacted to her decision to work in the PFWAC project, she had replied, "My family was very difficult at first. I was the first girl to leave to work. [They believe] girls shouldn't go out and work. It took a long time, three months, to convince them to allow me to work [in the PFWAC preschool]. People from the *lijan* [PFWAC] came to convince my mother to let me work." When asked, "If it weren't economically necessary, would you still work outside the home?" she replied, "I would continue only if it was internal to the *lijan*. I've been a [PFWAC] member for *seven* years" (respondent 30, 1989; emphasis added).

In 1995, in contrast, when I asked her to evaluate the PFWAC, she responded, "I didn't work with the *lijan*." When I asked, "In general, how do you feel about your work with the [PFWAC] preschool? Do you feel it has had any significant effect on your life?" She responded, "No, it did not affect my life, my life was that I was only a worker there and then I would go home. I didn't use to get involved in their work; no, no, no" (respondent 30, 1995).¹⁴ Most women felt, as did a respondent from Hebron, that "in the end, the [PFWAC] political goals turned out to be more important than the social goals. That's my opinion" (respondent 63, 1995).

I usually had to overcome strong suspicions before I could reinterview women in 1995, whom I often had to reassure that I was not affiliated with the DFLP or the faction that separated from it, Fida. Most PFWAC women were bitter and felt betrayed by the PFWAC, the DFLP, and Fida. Others wondered whether I was attempting to gather information for the Palestinian National Authority, which they generally distrusted. Two women were nervous enough not to allow me to audiotape the reinterviews.

¹⁴ When I returned to the United States and first compared this Ramallah-area respondent's 1989 information with her very different 1995 responses, I thought I had reinterviewed the wrong person. A friend in Palestine, however, visited the woman interviewed in 1995, and the respondent confirmed that she was interviewed by me in 1989.

The sense of betrayal is captured in the words of one former activist from Gaza:

It is difficult for a person to bear the things that happened. . . . I quit, but I didn't want to quit. I feel like I'm like the other women [now], women who couldn't wait until they married and stayed at home. This is not a good thing—the amount of exhaustion that a female person [*al-wahda*] put in, the amount of struggle she gave, and in the end, it is over. No. I'm thinking, for example, even though I am home [right now], that I will sit for a specific period with the children at home, until they enter school. . . . I would organize myself and my situation and then I would start thinking about a project that would be for everybody or to enter an appropriate women's organization. (Respondent 10, 1995)

Gatekeepers, who were usually not an issue in 1989 because most interviews were conducted at a PFWAC workplace, were a major problem in 1995, when I usually arranged to meet with women in their homes. In some situations, these gatekeepers made it difficult for me to speak directly to the woman I was trying to locate. More often, interviews were interrupted by husbands, in-laws, mothers, or brothers who were either suspicious of my intentions or, after confirming my neutrality, assumed that I had the power to get them resources they really needed (e.g., U.S. citizenship, money, or a job). One mother, whose unmarried daughter's reputation was seriously hurt by false rumors spread during the PFWAC and DFLP splits, refused to leave the room during an interview (nudging her daughter's leg to censor her responses to certain questions). My repeated attempts in the following few weeks to speak to the daughter privately, especially after she slipped me a note giving me her phone number and asking me to contact her, failed because she was rarely allowed to leave her home, and I could never be sure whether her mother was listening to our phone conversations. The respondent eventually filled out a blank questionnaire that I delivered and picked up.

Rather than romanticizing their PFWAC past or providing what they may have believed were socially desirable answers about the impact of the PFWAC on their lives (given my 1989 volunteer affiliation with the organization), women veered in the opposite direction. Sometimes they denied and other times they understated their PFWAC involvement and its impact on their lives.

PFWAC AFFILIATES AND THE NATURE OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT

PFWAC women employees moved from their homes into a new socializing environment that expected them to engage with the national and gender issues of the day. However, not all the women made the move from

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employee to activist. I divided PFWAC affiliates into three categories of involvement. Of the 56 reinterviewed women, 16 (29%) were strictly employees, not participating in PFWAC activities beyond coming to work and establishing friendships there. Another 15 women (27%) were active in some limited PFWAC activities beyond employment. These women occasionally attended demonstrations, sit-ins, and political seminars, and often participated in educational seminars or courses. This second group rarely crossed over into DFLP activity, which was always composed of both men and women. Finally, 25 women (45%) had been *very* active in the PFWAC, and sometimes also the DFLP, in addition to employment in a PFWAC project. Very active women not only regularly attended events like educational and political seminars, demonstrations, funerals, and prison visits (particularly during the intifada), but they organized, coordinated, and mobilized for women's health seminars, literacy projects, demonstrations, and graffiti writing for the PFWAC or the DFLP.

I asked all the PFWAC women reinterviewed in 1995 to compare themselves retrospectively to their friends and relatives previous to their PFWAC affiliation: Were they more "timid," "the same," or "more independent minded" in comparison to other women? While recall bias is important, women's retrospective reports in 1995 were largely consistent with information in their 1989 interviews.¹⁵ Of the 56 women, 29% described themselves as previously "more timid," 41% described themselves as "the same" as other women, and 30% described themselves as relatively more "independent minded." In this respect, it appears that PFWAC *employment* attracted a broad range of women in terms of personal disposition.

Political activity beyond PFWAC employment, not surprisingly, was most attractive to the women who reported being more independent minded compared to their neighbors and relatives: 12 of these 17 women (71%) were in the most active category of PFWAC affiliates. The 16 women who reported pre-PFWAC timidity and the 23 who reported that they were the same as others did not differ in the level of their PFWAC involvement: they were about evenly distributed among the three levels of activity, indicating little relationship between self-reported predisposition and level of PFWAC involvement among these two groups of women.

¹⁵ I compared these 1995 self-reports with women's responses to 1989 questions about why they wanted to work with the PFWAC, how family members had responded to this desire, and strategies they used to counter family resistance. As I had not interviewed women prior to their PFWAC involvement, I had no other source of information regarding their pre-PFWAC subjectivities.

RESISTANCE AND ACCOMMODATION: THE IMPACT OF THE
PFWAC ON COMMUNITY, WORLDVIEWS, AND SELF-EFFICACY

In the remainder of the article, I use women's narratives to address the importance of the PFWAC's existence (and disappearance) as a nationalist-feminist institution in their communities. Second, I address the impact of PFWAC affiliation and socialization on their political and social attitudes and worldviews. Finally, I explore women's decisions in relation to employment, education, and marriage to argue that the women who were most deeply influenced by their PFWAC experience were the most likely to have a gender egalitarian sensibility and a high sense of self-efficacy that improved their individual situations.

Feminist Community Power

The generation of more empowering life options depends in part on an individual's ability to denaturalize her existing circumstances and imagine alternative possibilities. As indicated below, such imaginings are fostered, and turned into potentially transformative action(s), by an environment that provides discursive, social, and institutional support.

It's not right to say that things changed when I began working. It's more accurate to say that things changed when I joined the PFWAC. Now, if I want to leave, I don't give them [family] reports or have to tell them. They never allowed me to leave the house before. Now I can go on visits, trips, to the PFWAC offices, wherever I want to go. I used to expect that my parents would say "no" to anything. I recently asked my father if I could travel to Jordan and he just said "yes." (Respondent 47, 1989)

An important part of the PFWAC legacy was its institutional support for girls and women in the communities in which it had branches. Such support operated on a number of levels. On one level was the idiomatic or ideological importance of an organization run by women with a gender-egalitarian ideology. It is not surprising that in a gender-conservative environment legitimated by religious, nationalist, or other ideologies, alternative, more egalitarian idioms bolster girls and women who challenge or resist the status quo. On another level was the importance of the institutional support (composed of PFWAC cadres and leaders) that could be, and often was, mobilized to defend or "convince" family members to ease restrictions that limited a girl or woman's ability to work, travel, or become politically active. A girl or young woman arguing with a brother, father, uncle, mother, or husband about a gender-related restriction knew that a feminist-nationalist organization seen to be part of the community, but also larger than that community (with branches throughout the country), existed to intervene, if necessary, on her behalf. The importance of

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this community institutional support, and the implications of its collapse, came up regularly in the 1995 reinterviews with former PFWAC affiliates.

One 27-year-old Gazan, who had worked in the PFWAC biscuit project, had been very active and indicated that her life had been transformed by her involvement. She stated, “The period of the *lijan* [PFWAC] was a very, very good period for women. You know, in fact, you could not imagine the personal freedom. And the *lijan* opened many things for women, without the . . . women themselves knowing that these things were beneficial until she did not have them anymore” (respondent 9, 1995).

Many women, especially those who had few opportunities to leave their homes, missed the PFWAC days and the social space afforded by the organization in an almost physical way. These women were still devastated by what had happened, both to the PFWAC and to themselves since its demise, as indicated by a Jerusalem villager:

When I sit by myself and go back and think about what we used to do; we used to go to the Old City; we used to go to demonstrations; we would go to the hospital. Daily, daily, we had something to do. To get cut off all at once like this—they [the PFWAC and the DFLP] don’t even have a presence [anymore]. When people from Fateh [the largest political movement] ask, “Where did you all go? What are you all doing? Why are you sitting at home doing nothing?” Me, psychologically, when I hear this, I get exhausted. Even though I’ve left them for a while, . . . because of the level of my love for the *lijan* even until now I don’t hate them. (Respondent 2, 1995)

A Ramallah respondent who believed she was trapped in her village noted that nonconforming action was difficult for women to take without some cultural and institutional support. She said, “When [an unemployed girl] . . . every day or every other day goes out, the people start talking.” I asked, “How do you feel when people start talking?” She responded, “I begin to not want to do anything. People here are all like each other. But if there were people, for example, one or two people to help, one would begin to take risks. But I’m all by myself and I can’t, I can’t violate all the laws of this village; this is a small town” (respondent 38, 1995).

These narratives demonstrate the limits of individual challenges and the importance of local, institutional feminist support for women attempting to challenge the gender status quo. While there are many Palestinian feminist organizations in the post-intifada period, they are largely concentrated in urban areas and focus on organizing externally funded workshops, participating in international conferences, and extracting gender concessions from a Palestinian rentier parastate, whose powers are largely limited (by the Oslo Accords) to providing municipal services and policing the local population. While these feminist organizational foci are

important, they have little impact on most Palestinian women's lives. A more decentralized presence of Palestinian feminist organizations would likely bolster their agendas and help ensure that they are attuned and responsive to various women's needs.

Social and Political Worldviews: "The Daughters of the Committees"

For many women, engagement with the PFWAC dramatically reconstituted their gender ideologies, political worldviews, sense of the possible, and self-definitions. For these women, involvement also produced a strong sense of cohort or generational consciousness—a feeling that their individual potential was redefined as a result of their collective existence and power.

Socially and educationally, we advanced very, very much. When I was sitting at home, I was nothing—it was as if I didn't exist. After I left and joined the PFWAC—I give them a thousand thanks for this—first, it provided me the opportunity to become economically independent. Also, we didn't used to do courses and things like that. These courses increased our awareness and allowed us to increase other women's awareness. When any issue came up we used to meet about it. . . . The *lijan* . . . developed my own person and my personality. (Respondent 2, 1995)

This was a Jerusalem villager's response to the question of whether she was different from women who had not joined the PFWAC. When reinterviewed in 1995, she was pregnant, secretly smoked, and often argued with her husband, particularly about his expectation that her political opinions should parallel his ("like a parrot"). She was among the 18 women for whom PFWAC involvement appeared to be extremely important, probably the most important thing they had done in their lives at the time of involvement. These women reported or indicated that their lives and worldviews were transformed as a result of their involvement.¹⁶ They often referred to themselves as "the daughters of the [Palestinian Federation of Women's Action] committees" (*banaat al-lijan*) and believed that they were very different from other women who had not been active in the PFWAC. According to a Gazan who had said that joining the PFWAC was the most significant event in her life: "When I entered the federation, I felt that I became an active person who had entered another world. The woman who did not enter the federation and did not participate and did not make the effort, I feel that she does not know anything; I feel that she is in one world and I am in another" (respondent 10, 1995).

¹⁶ Of the 18 women who reported or indicated that their lives were transformed by their involvement, 15 had also been very active in the PFWAC.

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For an additional 31 of the women reinterviewed (these women were almost evenly split in terms of their level of PFWAC activity), PFWAC involvement had expanded their social world and their world-views—widening their social relations; increasing their self-confidence, especially outside the home; making them more aware of gender issues; and increasing their knowledge of and engagement with nationalist issues. As one Gazan put it, “Before the *lijan* [PFWAC], a person did not go out, did not mix with other people. When the PFWAC happened, one started to mix with people, to mix with other women, to mix with men. This changed one’s situation” (respondent 18, 1995).

The reports of seven women indicated that PFWAC involvement was insignificant or unimportant in their lives. Five of these women had limited their PFWAC affiliation to employment.

It appears that while most women were influenced by PFWAC affiliation, the previously independent minded were the most likely to be transformed by this involvement: 13 of the 18 transformed women reported being comparatively independent minded before PFWAC involvement. This is consistent with Mannheim’s argument that self-selection to some extent explains which members of a biological and geographic generation are likely to become members of a “political generation.”

In terms of religiosity,¹⁷ PFWAC women were almost twice as likely as Palestinian women in their age group to be nonreligious in 1995. Whereas a 1992 study indicates that about 32% of women 20–39 years old in the territories were not religiously observant (Heiberg 1993*b*, p. 262, fig. 9.9), 57% of PFWAC women were not observant. In terms of religious dress, PFWAC women were about as likely as other Palestinian women to wear the head scarf, but less likely to wear “strict Islamic dress” (both head scarf and robe) (Heiberg 1993*b*, p. 256, table 9.3).¹⁸

¹⁷ Women were coded as religious/not religious based on the presence/absence of statements in their interviews indicating that they prayed at least once a day, read religious literature, watched religious programming, wanted the man they married or their husband to pray or fast, or wanted an Islamic state. In 1989, I coded 46% of the women as religious and 54% as nonreligious. Religiosity largely remained constant between 1989 and 1995, with 75% of the women continuing to be religious or nonreligious, and the remainder about evenly split between those who became more religious and those who became less religious.

¹⁸ Although I use the term “Islamic dress” in this article to denote the wearing of a specific style of headscarf and robe, it is important to recognize that what that means and looks like (the sartorial practice and garments) varies in historical moment and location. Moreover, even with its dominant or hegemonic meaning in a given time and place, it has invariably been subject to either individual violations or systematic challenge by Muslim and secular feminists. As with other gender-related debates, Muslim feminists who have engaged in such contestation have largely done so by challenging the contemporary relevance of conservative gender discourses and interpretations of sacred legal texts.

Given the rapidly changing political situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and increased pressures on women to don Islamic dress during the intifada, at the end of each interview in 1989, I asked women to respond to the following question: "Let's say that five years from now there was a Palestinian state. What if the state legislated a law mandating Islamic dress [*al-libas al-shar'i*] for all women? What do you think about this?" About 75% of the women did not support the idea of such a dress code being imposed by the future Palestinian state, including 88% of nonreligious women and 59% of religious women. As these numbers indicate, while most women opposed such a law, religious women were much more likely to support it.

Many women were not supportive of such a law but could not see themselves publicly confronting or challenging it. A 23-year-old woman from the town of al-Bireh stressed the difficulty of acting alone in a cultural context that often collectively punishes individual deviation, and she made a distinction, as did many respondents, between personal religious conviction (*iqtinaa'*) and dictated norms: "I feel that if everyone dressed this way, I would have to, even if I weren't convinced, because I would feel ashamed" (respondent 28, 1989).

When reasked the question of whether they supported a Palestinian state that imposed such dress on women by law, women's 1995 responses remained relatively consistent, with 80% opposing the imposition of such dress, including two-thirds of religiously observant women.

While the 25 formerly very active and 15 intermediately active women were proportionally very similar in their opposition to the law (approximately 87%), the 16 women who limited their PFWAC affiliation to employment opposed the fictional mandatory dress law by only 63%.

Similarly, while the women who reported becoming more aware of women's issues or being transformed as a result of PFWAC involvement appeared similar to each other in their opposition to the law (83% and 89%, respectively), they were dramatically different from the women who reported being unaffected by PFWAC involvement. Only three (43%) of these seven women opposed the law. There is no national data that allows for comparison of PFWAC women's responses to women in the larger Palestinian population, although the within-group comparison indicates that PFWAC involvement beyond employment appears to have influenced women's ideas in these areas.

Self-Efficacy

The influence of PFWAC participation for many women went beyond the attitudinal and ideological. The self-efficacy that was fostered con-

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tributed to women making various individual decisions that increased their power and improved their lives despite the demise of the PFWAC.

I cannot say, one way or the another, that I haven't achieved anything from being with the *lijan* [PFWAC]. No, I learned a lot from being with the *lijan*. I learned how to be conscious, more conscious about my issues as a woman. I learned also how to be independent from them [the PFWAC]. I learned how to go places from them. I got more strong with them. I cannot say that I didn't achieve anything from being with them. And I guess also that being independent now, it's also part of having been with the *lijan*. (Respondent 58, 1995).

Ironically, women, such as this Gazan, who reported that the PFWAC had increased their gender awareness or transformed their lives were the most likely to use the self-confidence and critical skills they had learned to challenge the organization during the intifada. Such women left when they believed the PFWAC had breached its stated commitment to a combined national/feminist project, democratic process, and internal assessment. In the remainder of the article, I explore the ways in which PFWAC involvement influenced women's attitudes and decisions regarding employment, educational attainment, and marriage.

Consistent with PFWAC ideology, most of the women reinterviewed in 1995 viewed paid employment as a source of economic and social independence from family and an opening that allowed them to travel into town and be in public without commentary. This issue became particularly important with the contraction of the PFWAC and women's demobilization. Overall, in 1995 only 24 (43%) of the 56 women were employed.¹⁹ Among the women who had been inactive beyond PFWAC employment and intermediately active, 31% and 33%, respectively, were employed in 1995. Among the formerly very active, in contrast, 56% were employed. The differences are more dramatic among women who reported that PFWAC affiliation had transformed their lives, 11 of these 18 (61%) women were employed. In comparison, 13 of the 31 (42%) women reporting increased awareness of women's issues were employed, and none of the seven who reported being unaffected by PFWAC affiliation were employed.

PFWAC involvement also appears to have strongly influenced women's educational attainment between 1989 and 1995. The PFWAC program

¹⁹ Almost all the working women were in preschool and other teaching positions. Four taught in and ran their own preschools. The entrepreneurs were all single and West Bankers (three of four in villages). One of these women also ran a small store largely catering to village children. Of the 32 unemployed women, 20 were eager to work but either could not find socially appropriate employment or were not allowed to work by their families.

was particularly appealing to and often mobilized the most educated among working-class and village women—school teachers, high school graduates, and college students. The PFWAC focused on these women when first entering a new neighborhood because it (accurately) assumed that they would be more effective at mobilizing other women given the respect they usually commanded in their communities (Hasso 1998, p. 461n4). As evidence of this strategy, the 63 PFWAC women in the first wave of this study were better-educated in comparison to the general population in the territories, averaging 11.4 years of education in 1989, while other Palestinian women in their age group averaged about nine years of schooling (Heiberg 1993a, p. 136).²⁰

By the time women were reinterviewed in 1995, many had increased their educational attainment even more. One woman who in 1989 had not completed secondary school and three women who had only completed twelfth grade were in college. Two more women were preparing to enter or reenter university in the following academic year. Two women had completed B.A. degrees; one of these women had also received a law degree (apparently the only Palestinian woman attorney in Gaza at that time), and the other was preparing to enter graduate school abroad.

Having a less restrictive family was a necessary but not sufficient condition for educational attainment between 1989 and 1995 since there was no mobility among women in very restrictive families. The relationship between educational mobility and economic situation in 1995 was counterintuitive from a social reproduction (Bourdieu 1977, pp. 72–95) perspective: proportionally, most educational mobility occurred among women who had been “very poor” in 1989; those who had been “average low-income” or “relatively comfortable” were about even in their mobility.

With the exception of one not very active woman who had enrolled in an extra training course since 1989, there was *no* educational mobility among the women who were intermediately active in the PFWAC or inactive beyond employment. Almost all educational mobility between 1989 and 1995 occurred among women who had been very active in the PFWAC, indicating a high sense of self-efficacy that can at least partly be attributed to PFWAC socialization. Similarly, there was little educational attainment among women for whom PFWAC affiliation had been unimportant, but there was significant mobility among those who had become more aware of women’s issues and even more among those who reported that their lives had been transformed by their involvement.

Although it is difficult to disaggregate how much educational attainment would have occurred independently of PFWAC activity, the results

²⁰ Those with higher educational levels in 1989 were more likely to report that they were transformed by their PFWAC experience.

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indicate that deep engagement with the PFWAC influenced women's ideas about education and their educational attainment. The PFWAC strongly encouraged women's independence and "self-improvement," particularly through employment and education. Consistently, most of the former PFWAC women interviewed, including those who had not increased their educational attainment, saw education as a means by which they could "make" themselves by increasing their social and economic independence. The findings indicate, however, that it was the women who had been very active or reported that the PFWAC had increased their gender awareness or transformed them who were the most likely to act on these ideas despite economic and social constraints.

Marital attitudes and decisions also appear to have been influenced by PFWAC involvement, although this was one area where women often distinguished between their beliefs and desires and what they believed was possible, given cultural and economic constraints. Singlehood, which is stigmatized in most societies, is particularly so in Arab societies, which are highly kin oriented. With one exception, the 18 women who had married between 1989 and 1995 discussed the social coercion compelling marriage and the psychological and other costs of remaining unmarried. As a 29-year-old happily married Ramallah villager who had been very active in the PFWAC stated,

Marriage is the summit of life. . . . And in our society . . . people start asking, "Why is she unwilling to get married?" Not when she reaches 28 or 29, from when she hits 18 years, they say, "Why don't you want to get married? So-and-so got married, why not you?" Until a certain period, I kept saying, "I do not want to get married; right now I want to study; right now I want to work." Afterwards, it became an appropriate time for me. . . . The society constantly comments, even if a woman reaches death, they continue to comment [on her unwed state]. (Respondent 39, 1995)

Seven of the 18 recently married women had discussed and agreed to the terms of marriage with their future husbands before he or his family approached her family to formally request marriage. All seven had been very active in the PFWAC *and* reported that they had been transformed by their PFWAC involvement, indicating a relationship between the intensity and significance of PFWAC involvement, on the one hand, and willingness to violate cultural norms that are particularly salient among village and working-class women, on the other hand.

Women who had been very active or transformed by their PFWAC experience also had more egalitarian relationships with their spouses and in-laws and thus higher rates of marital satisfaction. This appeared to be related to their willingness to set ground rules safeguarding their freedoms both before they chose their spouses and after they married. One woman,

a Gazan who had been very active in the PFWAC and reported being transformed by this involvement, had it written in her Sunni Muslim marriage contract that her husband could not compel her to wear full Islamic dress after marriage (respondent 9, 1995).

Of the 56 women reinterviewed in 1995, 46 had been single in 1989. Given the strong cultural pressure on women to marry, a surprising proportion of them, 59%, not including one engaged woman, had remained single in 1995 (their mean age was 30.7 years). In comparison to data gathered in a 1992 survey of the territories, PFWAC women were almost three times more likely to be single than women of similar age in the larger population (see Hammami 1993, p. 291, table 10.4).

As would be expected, the women who had remained single stressed the psychological and social costs of remaining unmarried. With one exception, however, all had declined a number of opportunities to marry because the men were "inappropriate" for them (*mish munasib ili*). Moreover, 70% of the 27 single women were unwilling to marry unless they were sure it was "Mr. Right." When asked whether her life would improve, stay the same, or worsen if she married, a 34-year-old Jenin-area resident who ran her own preschool (she had been very involved beyond PFWAC employment and reported becoming more aware of gender issues) replied, "It depends on the conditions that I impose [laughs]!" When asked, "So what are the conditions you are going to lay down?" (both laughing), she replied, "I have to stay the way I am, having my freedom. If he agrees, he agrees. If he does not, no." When I said, "So your conditions are that you maintain your freedoms," she agreed, saying, "That I can go wherever I want, that I continue working" (respondent 56, 1995).

A Ramallah-area woman, also employed, said that she remained unmarried (and had recently declined an offer) because "he either has to be the appropriate person or forget it." She also suggested that she would leave a man she married if she was unhappy with him (respondent 37, 1995). She had been intermediately involved beyond PFWAC employment and had reported becoming more aware of gender issues as a result.

An additional two women had decided to forswear marriage. One of these, a Ramallah-area woman who had been intermediately involved in the PFWAC beyond employment and reported being transformed, had decided not to wed after watching her three sisters (one younger) suffer through unhappy marriages. She refused family and community pressure to marry and was the only daughter who completed high school and passed her high school matriculation exams. Like many of the women interviewed, she feared losing freedom and independence with marriage. "I like living freely; for no one to pressure me. I don't know what kind of man will come along. And of course, married life is not an experiment.

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So in order not to face these problems, I felt this way” (respondent 33, 1995).

My findings indicate that, more than anything else, some economic security facilitated women’s decisions to remain single. Indeed, 22 of the 27 single women were either in the average low-income or relatively comfortable economic categories. The relatively comfortable single women were those who had been intermediately or very active in the PFWAC and had dramatically advanced in terms of educational attainment in the previous six years, contrary to what their originating class backgrounds would lead one to expect. While self-selection in terms of personality, and, in some cases, other variables such as supportive families, cannot be ruled out as partial explanations for women’s feminist ideas or their ability to translate these into actions regarding marriage, their own reports and my extensive research on PFWAC history point to the importance of their PFWAC socialization and experiences.

CONCLUSION

Lila Abu-Lughod has argued for the importance of looking at resistance (and, I would argue, accommodation) as “diagnostic of power” (1990, p. 42). Rather than reading “all forms of resistance as signs of the ineffectiveness of systems of power and of the resilience and creativity of the human spirit” (p. 42), we should focus more deeply on what different types of resistance, and, again, accommodation, tell us about the genealogies, forms, and (institutional, individual, and cultural) sources of power in any given context. As the Palestinian women I reinterviewed often made clear, their choices in the intervening six years had occurred in negotiation with economic, political, and cultural constraints, including high unemployment rates, poverty, and economic instability; Israeli military occupation; statelessness; personal status laws that codified women’s second-class citizenship in certain areas; a weak public transportation system that limited particularly village women’s physical mobility; gendered norms that limited women’s options; and a cultural context where kinship, community bonds, and what Suad Joseph calls “connectivity” were robust and highly valued by all (Joseph 1993). For the women interviewed, the constraints also included the demise of the PFWAC itself, which had been a source of feminist institutional, ideological, and cultural support.

Because the state cannot be relied on to supersede family authority, most women’s options were ultimately dependent on their individual family situations and their willingness and ability to “bargain with patriarchy”

(Kandiyoti 1988) in their families and communities. This makes it particularly difficult to act radically in individual or collective contexts.

Although one could view the PFWAC as having “failed” in the feminist component of its agenda, the findings indicate that the organization had succeeded for many of its former participants and activists. The PFWAC experience produced a feminist generation that remained distinctive approximately five years after the demise of the organization. While acts that challenge gender norms at the individual level are necessary, however, they are not sufficient for systematically transforming the gender order, and they leave most women with little cultural or institutional support when they take such risks. Mass-based, accountable feminist movements that recognize the diverse needs of women and advocate on their behalf in a range of arenas continue to be particularly important for the well-being of many Palestinian women.

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