



THE POLITICAL MARGINALIZATION OF PALESTINIAN WOMEN IN THE WEST BANK

By [Yara Hawari](#)

[Click here](#) to read online or [download](#) the full paper

Though Palestinian women have always played a fundamental role in the struggle for liberation from the Israeli settler colonial regime, they have faced consistent political marginalization. The overarching force suppressing Palestinian women's politicization has been and continues to be the Israeli regime, but it is also important to recognize the forces within the Palestinian and international communities that contribute to the weakened political role of Palestinian women.

Palestinian women's depoliticization has become more multifaceted and entrenched since the 1990s, when the Oslo Accords unleashed a myriad of changes in the structure of Palestinian society and governance. One of these changes was the professionalization and bureaucratization of civil society organizations, which created a distance between them and local grassroots communities. It also caused them to shift their focus to project deadlines, budgets, funding proposals, and annual reports, all of which were answerable to the international donor community.

The repercussions of this change are particularly noticeable in the post-Oslo lexicon of women's rights. Many terms or buzzwords used to obtain project funding have been defined by international organizations that place their own meanings and conditions upon them. For example, the term "empowerment" is limited to socioeconomic empowerment and participation in "decision-making," rather than empowering women to resist the occupation and build a vision for a postcolonial world. While this process of "NGO-ization" has demobilized many groups within Palestinian society, women remain disproportionately affected due to institutional tendencies to exclude women from the political sphere.

The current inclusion of women within institutional Palestinian politics remains very shallow. For instance, of the PLO Executive Council's 15 members, only one is female. Out of the 16 governorates in the West Bank and Gaza, only the governorate of Ramallah and El Bireh has a female governor. Similarly, the current government headed by Mohammad Shtayyeh has a mere three female cabinet ministers out of 22.

That Palestinian women are often lacking the most basic legal protections and political representation means that they are particularly vulnerable when it comes to the weaponization of their bodies. The threat of sexual violence and the use of sexual harassment are therefore particularly powerful weapons.

The Israeli regime's use of gendered tactics to oppress Palestinian women, including harassment, threats of sexual violence, and imprisonment, has contributed to the enforcement of gender stereotypes and patriarchal narratives, excluding women from the political sphere. The PA has adopted gendered mechanisms similar to those used by Israeli forces to deter female participation in political activities. Demonstrations and protests are often sites of gendered violence; in more severe cases physical sexual harassment occurs, with women grabbed and groped.

It is important to note that Palestinian women have not been passive in the face of gendered violence. They have, for instance, long confronted the weaponization of their bodies through such tactics as recognizing their right to remain silent during interrogations and remaining in groups or pairs at demonstrations.

Policy recommendations

- Palestinian women, collectives, groups, and organizations pursuing women's rights and gender equality need to be restructured and revitalized into an autonomous women's movement that struggles for women's liberation in all spheres.
- Women's groups and organizations must find a way to reconnect both with the grassroots and the liberation discourse.
- Groups and activists must engage with the political marginalization of women. In particular, men in these spaces need to be aware of the power dynamics that prevent women from participating and support women in fighting against them.
- Palestinian women should examine recent examples of other women in the region who have been part of processes of great political change.
- There is an urgent need to incorporate feminism into the Palestinian political project through the adoption of a new document of liberation, a document that would understand feminism not only as a theory but also as a practice and way of life that works toward the liberation of all people.