Clan and Patriarchy in Palestinian Politics

Introduction

Constantine Zurayik, in The Meaning of Disaster on the Palestine refugee crisis in 1948, defined ideas that were to have a tremendous impact on the Arab and Palestinian political thought. Zurayik identified social, political and cultural backwardness found in dogmatic religious traditionalism, and tribal socio-political organization. A progressive, radical, industrial program was needed where all parochial identities were transcended. The founders of the Palestinian national movement adopted Zurayik’s ideas. Palestine was to be liberated by a progressive, pan-national Arab movement, while socio-political organization founded on patriarchal, kinship based honour groups were actively challenged.¹

Within one month in the summer of 1948, Gaza’s population had tripled, from 70,000 to 210,000. Gaza became divided between the refugees and the indigenous population whose inwardness and particularism was strengthened as Gaza became the refugee state. Out of the ashes in the camps of Gaza, where most refugees lived, came the fedayi, the Palestinian freedom fighter. There was no other meaning of life in the camps of Gaza than to be a fedayi.²

Inside the borders of Israel after the 1948 war only 10% of the original Palestinian population remained. Israel, regarding the so-called Israeli Arabs as a fifth column, imposed military emergency rule over their villages, where no one could leave the village to another village without a prearranged permit from the military governor. The fear of the Palestinians inside was to become the victims of a new expulsion. They found refuge in exactly what Zurayk had criticized; their hamulas, the tribal organized clans.

This is how two completely different kinds of political culture evolved inside Israel and among the refugee community in Gaza. Inside, clannism, a kinship based patriarchy, was reinforced. In Gaza, a secular, anti-particularistic, anti-patriarchal radical national movement evolved.

Palestinian resistance groups still controls Gaza. And hamula politics still dominates local politics inside the Arab sector in Israel. But the roles have changed. Zurayik’s dichotomy of the progressive national movement as the alternative to reactionary kinship based socio-political organization is no longer applicable. This is, I will argue, the result of exposure to regular democratic elections among Palestinians in Israel, and the absence of such regular elections in the occupied territories. As a result the hamulas have democratized while their patriarchal features have weakened. Conversely,
the resistance movements have become de-democratized and, at least for the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), more patriarchalized.

**Clan, Patriarchy and Patrimonialism**

East

The definition of the *hamula* has not been challenged much since Cohen defined it as “patronymic association”. The Israeli-Palestinian anthropologist Majid Al-Haj 30 years later defines it as:

> [...] a patrilineal descent group composed of all the members related biologically to the common great-grand-father, or of members who have related themselves socially to certain *hamulas* by fictive relatedness in order to obtain the advantage of *hamula* protection and rights along with *hamula* responsibility and commitments.

The members of a *hamula* share surname and are related to each other through patrilineal descent, without necessarily knowing how they are related. The term has often been translated as “clan”.

**Patriarchy**, as originally outlined by Max Weber, referred to male power through being heads of (extended) households. This implied a dual form of dominance: male dominance over woman but also the patriarch’s power over the children. Thus patriarchy refers to male dominance within two hierarchal structures: age hierarchy and gender hierarchy.

Building on Weber, Hisham Sharabi labelled the characteristic way authoritarianism in the Middle East was sustained as *neopatriarchy*, referring to how rulers built their power on vertical chains of kinship ties under patriarchal dominance. Everybody who is involved in the patronage system gains from it, Sharabi maintains. Fear from being excluded, which the most marginalized will experience because they lack *wasta* (contacts), is a basic factor in the reproduction of the system.

Weber himself labeled patriarchal structures integrated into larger political systems as *patrimonialism*. Originally the concept referred to hereditary passage of power and resources within family units. Increasingly the concept was appropriated on client-patron relationships where clients, individuals or kinship groups, submit themselves to a higher authority.

In modern contexts *neopatrimonialism*, building on Weber, refers to a form of rule marked by rivalry between clients competing for resources and the “ear” of the patron, whose rule is thus contingent on this rivalry. According to Brynen neopatrimonialism distinguished the form of rule of the Palestinian Authority after its establishment in 1994. As we shall see below, the destructive role of clans in politics in Gaza peaked during PA’s realm in Gaza, eventually leading to its downfall.

**Part I: A Marriage in Gaza**

Why is Hamas’ control over Gaza so strong? Why has, since 2007, an international boycott, an Egyptian and Israeli blockade, three wars with massive destruction, not weakened Hamas rule in Gaza while the massive international supported rule of Fatah and the Palestinian Authority only became weaker and weaker, virtually collapsing in 2005-6?
A decisive factor in this, it will be argued below, is how the two liberation movements anchored their power in Gaza. Fatah/PA anchored their authority with the non-refugee community of Gaza, Hamas theirs in the refugee camps, the centre of gravity in the politics of Gaza. Neo-patrimonial rule, anchoring power with the clans of Gaza the way the returning Fatah/PLO leadership did when establishing the Palestinian Authority in 1994, proved to be building a house of cards; the foundation being utterly unreliable.

The massive influx of refugees in 1948 led to an increased introspectiveness among the indigenous clans in Gaza, protecting their privileges. One expression of this was that no Gaza clan would give away a daughter to a refugee family. 92 % of refugees in Gaza married other Palestinian refugees, and the rest married foreigners rather than Gazan non-refugees. Therefore it was quite an event in 1994 when the son of Umm Jihad married from the local Abu Middin clan. The marriage was a sensation in Gaza, because no-one had ever heard of a girl from one of the powerful Gaza-clans marrying outside a powerful Gaza clan. The Abu Middin clan owned most of the land along the coast of Gaza. Marrying a daughter outside the clan symbolized that a new alliance was forged. The mother of the bridegroom, Umm Jihad, was the widow of the legendary PLO leader Abu Jihad, who had been killed in Tunis by Israel in 1988. Umm Jihad was a powerful returnee and Social Affairs minister in the PA from 1995 to 2005. Gaza had since 1948 been a divided society, between the original inhabitants and the refugees. The marriage expressed an alliance of elites: the indigenous population of Gaza and the returning elite of the PLO/Fatah.

The social structure of Gaza today is the following: 25 % of the population are from indigenous, non-refugee families, referred to as “muwatinin”, citizens, in local terminology. The muwatinin are of three categories: the ayan, the urban notable extended families of the towns, known as the “money class” whom often historically acted as patrons of poor rural people. The second category is the large clans (hamulas), which are conglomerates of extended families (or patrilineal decent groups) each claiming descent from a common ancestor. Clan members tend to live in the same neighbourhoods but rarely exclusively control areas. Members of hamulas in Gaza and Palestine are considered of peasant origin and are therefore different from those belonging to the third category: those of desert origin, Bedouins, having once migrated from the Arab peninsula. All Bedouins in Gaza belong to one of six tribal confederations. The two largest confederations are the Hanajreh and the Tabarin. While two tribes; Abu Hajaj and Abu Daher, lost their land to Israel in 1948, the three tribes located in central and southern Gaza; Abu Middain, Nuseirat and Sumeira, retained their land. The largest tribes and clans, like the Masris, have as many as 12 000 members.
Muwatin, “citizen,” the original inhabitants, is one of the two social identities that divide the Palestinian population in Gaza. The other is refugee. 75% of Gaza’s population are of refugee origin. More than half of these still live in refugee camps. The refugees have, as the result of being scattered around in 1948, small families. Thus, the Bureij camp of Gaza is composed of 4,627 different households from as many as 718 different non-genealogically related patrilineages. One third of the households are, as shown below, households not related by kinship to any other households in the camp. Isa, the largest patrilineage in Bureij is composed of 107 households (see figure).

Because the refugee families are small, they do not have any benefits from organizing collectively based on kinship, different from the muwatinin, whose clans might be composed of more than 10,000 members.

The Palestinian Authority and the Gaza Clans

The first intifada, from 1988 to 1994, had had elements of a social revolution. The initifada leaders had wanted to ‘do away with anything traditional.' 16 Mukhtars, leaders of strong Gazan non-refugee families, had been accused of collaboration with Israel and were killed by the initifada activists. 17 When the Palestinian Authority (PA) was established by returning Fatah and PLO cadres in 1994 they feared the political competition of the young intifada-leaders. Consequently, the PA disbanded all intifada committees without much further ado. Meanwhile, kinship based institutions, despised by the initifada-generation, were restored. In October 1995 the ‘Office for Tribal Affairs’ was established as part of the patrimony of the Palestinian President. It was made mandatory for every person in Gaza to have a mukhtar (a family headman) as a representative. This meant that the small families had to align themselves with larger ones, who had a mukhtar approved by the authorities. Basic civil services, like having an identity card, people would apply for through their mukhtar.
Within the judiciary, informal, tribal law, urf, was promoted at the expense of the formal institutions of rule of law. It meant to have sulha, agreements between clans and families, and diyye, blood money, rather than crime, trial and punishment. This conflict resolution system favoured the large clans, who could then get away with crimes, even murders. It also favoured the PA through their role as jaha, mediators. PA would even pay diyye themselves, when faults were found within their ranks.20

Furthermore, the election system designed for the national elections in 1996 was a system of multiple member majority voting, implying a majority system in multiple member constituencies. People did not vote for parties, but marked the number of persons they wanted to have elected from their constituency. This favoured groupings with strong internal solidarity, and so large families managed to elect their candidates, either as independents or as Fatah-members. The first elected Palestinian legislative council in 1996 reflected this: 55 of the elected members were from Fatah, while 33 were independents, mostly from large non-refugee families who had voted in tandem. When PA officials were chosen, they were so, said Marwan Barghuti who came to symbolise the internal opposition in Fatah, “based on the desire to co-opt families and extended clans and strengthen their roles.”

Most ominously was the security apparatus, where whole clans were recruited under their clan leader. Thus, in 1998 the security sector had six main branches, each with several sub-branches. Each branch had considerable autonomy, and the only authority they de facto were submitted to was the president of the Palestinian Authority. The clan militia of the Masris from Beit Hanoun was recruited as the soldiers of the commander of the General Intelligence, General Mohammed Masri. Clan members of Hillis were recruited by the general of the National Security Forces, General Suleiman Hillis. His cousin, Brigade General Adel Hillis, operated the Criminal Investigation Department, also being manned by the Hillis clan. Others, like the Kafarna and Abu Hasanain clans held prominent intelligence posts, as did the Samhadana clan in southern Gaza. The benefit of manning the branches from the leaders’ clans was that each leader then had the unambiguous loyalty of all his men rather than split loyalties within. There was also a deterrence factor as potential attackers would risk to be dragged into the violent circles of clan vendettas. The downside was that loyalties were not to the security apparatus as such. It was a classic system of neo-patrimonialism as described by Brynen, with rivalry between autonomous groups under the patron. The patron was Yassir Arafat, the leader of PA, PLO and Fatah. When he died in November 2004 the glue that kept the groups together evaporated. Furthermore, when Israel decided to withdraw from Gaza the following year, underlying particularist loyalties came to the surface. “Fawda al-silah”, the chaos of the weapons, people in Gaza called the situation while commentators outside Gaza wrote on the “somalization” of Gaza, and referred to the chaos as the product of clan violence. This was a simplification. The chaos was the logical outcome of a political process: The PA’s cultivation of militias resulting from the neo-patrimonial politics where whole clan segments had been integrated into PA’s security apparatus, as described above. The PA had armed the clans, even asking personnel to bring home weapons and store them in their homes as Israel destroyed police stations and weapons stores during the second intifada. Security personnel
recruited on a clan basis who were more loyal to their clans than the security apparatus handed the weapons to their fellow clan members. The Palestinian Authority literally handed away the monopoly over the means of force.

Exacerbating this spiralling violence was, to be elaborated upon below, weakened intra-clan patriarchal authority structures and consequent age bonding among younger clan members. For neo-patrimonialism to work the client groups must have internal cohesion. When not so, the house of cards falls.

The Rise of Youth Clan Militias

During the chaos of the weapons “defence committees” were organized inside clans by youngsters who had developed a culture where gun possession and gun control formed the badge of honour. The defence committees were professionalized with regular training sessions organized, and with systems to organize defence lines in their neighbourhoods. This increased the level of violent conflicts. Traditionally settling disputes with paying of blood money, diyya, had mostly ended in respectful ways; with payments being returned after the monetary compensation as a mark of respect. By 2006-7 diyya became a business, strong clans speculating to get into conflicts with weaker groups to get a diyya. One clan, Abu Hassanan, allegedly brought a lion they had stolen from the Gazan zoo into diyya negotiations. What had been a conflict deterrent had become a business. The main reason was that parents were no longer in control over their sons. Mukhtars no longer took the decisions of the clans. Where the elders had settled disputes over a cup of coffee the young clan members did it with rocket propelled grenades. Some clan based militia networks started to operate as mercenaries for shifting political interests. In 2006 the Fatah leader Mahmoud Dahlan reportedly recruited hundreds of gunmen from clan militias, allegedly to take on Hamas armed wing.

One of the most notorious cases of a clan militia in Gaza was the Dughmush clan, originating from Anatolia where its ancestors migrated from during the Ottoman empire (1516-1918). One member of the Dughmush clan, Mumtaz Dughmush, had been a Fatah member, employed by the PAs security forces. During the second intifada he left the PA and organized his own clan militia. In 2006 his group first joined Fatah against Hamas. Subsequently, falling out with Fatah intelligence officers, he shifted allegiance to Hamas only to by the end of the year to return to Fatah. Meanwhile, Mumtaz formed a jihadist group, Army of Islam, that took the BBC reporter Adam Johnston hostage in March 2007. Thus, while ideological belonging fluctuated, the clan base remained. When clan elders appealed to release Johnson and respect kinship codes of hospitality and respect, Mumtaz’s group refrained. Patriarchal authority within the clans had vanished.

The End of Neo-Patrimonial Rule in Gaza

Neo-patrimonial rule in Gaza came to an end with the forced military takeover of power in Gaza by the Islamist resistance movement Hamas in 2007. The success Hamas had in curbing the violence of the clans is evidence that the internecine violence during the rule of their predecessors can largely be seen as the result of a failure of governance. Hamas represented a total break with PA’s form of
rule. Immediately upon seizing power, Hamas cracked down on the clans, arrested wanted persons and collected arms that clans had received from the PA. Those who refused were met with well-planned, targeted military operations, starting with the surrounding of the clan area, cutting off infrastructural access including power lines, and eventually physical entering the areas to finish the job. The Dughmush clan was the second last clan to surrender and hand in the guns received from the PA. Hamas laid siege on their quarter, interdicted weapons and supplies and arrested Dughmush kinsmen. The Dughmush capitulated without a fight, releasing the BBC-journalist Alan Johnston. The last clan to surrender was the “pure” Fatah clan, Hillis. The head of Fatah in Gaza as well as the head of the National Security Forces (NSF) in PA at the time were both from Hillis. 12 Hillis members and 2 fighters from Hamas military wing were killed in the crackdown in August 2007. Previously, during clashes of clans with authorities, the clans had been joined by other clans in the fighting. But nobody came to aid the last standing Fatah-clan of Gaza. “No family can defeat this government”, a man from Dughmush said. Hillis were overrun, and their leaders fled into Israel and the West Bank.27

Opposition to the Hamas rule in Gaza was crushed. The time when people could take the law into their own hands was over. Hamas re-established the judiciary system, and media broadcast messages that revenge was haram. Clansmen using guns were arrested, and overnight families reverted to feuding with sticks, knives and swords. By the end of 2007 even the lioness the Abu Hassanain clan had stolen was returned to the Gaza zoo.28

Hamas with Refugees, Fatah with the Indigenous Families

The Democracy is threatening for members of clientelist systems. Elections in Gaza threatened privileged clans and warlords and benefitted marginalized refugees as the refugees constituted a dominant proportion of the population in Gaza. The voting pattern among refugees demonstrated how the political culture of refugees differed from that of the clans as clan members as a rule operate uniformly, including in their voting pattern. In 2005 local elections were held in Gaza. In the Bureij camp there were 31 polling stations. Nowhere did the winning candidate gain more than 61 % of the votes, and nowhere less than 43 %. The least popular candidate nowhere gained more than 1 % of the votes. All the candidates except one ran as representatives of factions. The independent candidate only gained 10 % maximum, and minimum 0 % in the polling stations of the camp. If clan/family had been a factor, the results would have varied more from polling station to polling station as internal coherent clans are congregated in the same neighbourhoods through principles of endogamy (marrying inside the kinship group) and patrilocality (residing in the area of the father’s descent line). There were no hamula/extended family candidates, extended families did not vote uniformly, and family did not have an impact on the results of the elections in the camp, not in the local elections in 2005 and not in the elections for the PA in 2006.
The political culture in camps is based on ideological politics, not primordialism. This resonates with Hamas as their political ethos is incompatible with clannism. For Hamas loyalty to the movement and to Islam has priority over any other allegiance, including blood. Sayyid Qutb, one of the most influential ideologists for the Muslim Brotherhood, the organization Hamas had evolved from, strictly warned against tribalism. Particularism- clannism or tribalism- belonged to the age of *jahiliyya*, ignorance, Qutb wrote. Where the segmentation of power was ingrained in the whole idea of Fatah, merging very different groups under no common ideology, Hamas ideologically, as well as organizationally, accepted no parallel authority, no rivals. Hamas-commanders explicitly warned their soldiers against the evils of *asabiyya* - tribal solidarity - as the movement cleansed the security sector of clan influence. Hamas’ political ethos thus resonated better with the camp refugees than the clientelism of PA.

Hamas therefor defeated Fatah in the elections in Bureij and in other refugee camps in Gaza. During the local elections in Bureij in 2005, Fatah members actually went on strike. They had not accepted the candidate list that Fatah had sent from their headquarters. Thus a version of the refugee – muwatinin division that underlay the Hamas-Fatah division in Gaza is also found within Fatah. On one side was the Fatah of the *muwatinin* that the PLO-returnees had allied with. The clans in Gaza had tellingly flagged Fatah’s yellow flags when Hamas seized power in 2007. On the other side was the Fatah of the intifadas and the camps, loyal to their former leader in Gaza, the now deposed Mahmod Dahlan, in exile in the United Arab Emirates. As late as in 2015 the two groups violently fought each other in Gaza, leading to numerous injuries. When co-opting Gaza’s *muwatinin* Fatah’s central leadership simultaneously lost the legitimacy of their owns in the camps.

Hamas’ first Prime Minister, Ismail Hanieyh, retained his residence inside the Shati refugee camp after becoming prime minister in 2006. So did the leaders of Hamas’ armed wing. Marwan Isa who in 2014 became the new leader of Hamas armed wing were from Bureij. Equally Yahia Sinwar, regarded as the strong man of Hamas armed branches, resides in the middle of the Khan Younis
refugee camp, where according to one newsreport he is “seen as the champion of the oppressed, suffering alongside them.”

The clannism that peaked in Gaza around 2005-6 was nurtured by the neo-patrimonial form of rule of the PA in Gaza. But the ties between the muwatin clans and PA alienated the refugee community. Hamas radically broke with clannism and neo-patrimonialism while re-establishing the refugee community as the social basis for power in Gaza.

**Part II: The Israeli Palestinians: “the Tails of the Government”**

The Israeli Palestinians are those Arab speaking people who did not become refugees in 1948 but remained in Israel, being Israeli citizens, today numbering 1.5 million people. From 1948 until 1966 their ethnic homogenous villages and towns were under military government. The restrictions on free movement in and out of the villages contributed to an introvert political orientation in the villages. *Hamulas* that had been weakened during the British mandate from 1922 to 1948 during this period made a comeback as the most important local solidarity groups. Palestinian nationalists, including Israeli Palestinians, despised the role of the clans. “The tails of the government” they called clan leaders who were largely co-opted by the Israeli government. In one notorious incident in 1963 the government lacked one single vote to extend the military rule over the Arab sector. The prime minister’s office then appealed to one of the Arab representatives, from a co-opted *hamula*, to vote in favour of the extension—which the old *hamula* leader did, although it meant continuous lack of freedom of movement and assembly for his own local constituency.

In 1966 the military rule was finally abolished. Elected local councils were from then on established in the Arab sector. This led to great political transformations. One was increased political autonomy with the end of the patrimonial form of governance and the development of democratic governance. A second transformation was that non-Zionist parties transcended local particularistic ties and articulated national collective concerns of the whole Israeli Palestinian nation. Finally, also the clans were transformed. They gradually adopted modern forms of political procedures. Some clans have, as we shall see, institutionalised more democratic internal procedures than the parties. Politically, the clans are no longer “tails of the government.” They are interest groups of their members, reflecting their political sentiments.

**The Local and the National**

From 1951 to 1969 more than 50% of the Palestinians in Israel voted for one of the Zionist parties, mainly the Labor party, in national elections for the Israeli parliament. This changed after the occupation in 1967. In the 1970s and 80s, left oriented, non-Zionist Arab parties captured the votes of the Arab electorate. Even the PLO urged them to vote for parties that served Palestinian national interests. The national Arab parties also defeated clan-lists in local elections, dominating both the national and local vote of Palestinians in Israel. However, in the early 1990s, this trend was reversed. In 1993 72% and in 1998 82% voted for clan lists – and only 20% and 13% for non-Zionist political party lists in local elections. At the same time the support for non-Zionist parties in national elections went up, capturing 2/3 of the Arab votes in 1996 and 1999. The tendency has
later only been strengthened. In the Israeli national elections in March 2015, the Joint list of the Arab parties received 82% of the votes of the Israeli Palestinians. At the local level, though, parties have simply stopped to take part in elections due to the costs associated with campaigns when the outcome is that non-clan candidates fail to be elected.\(^{37}\)

An important factor behind the resurgence of clan-based lists in local politics has been a revolution in youth participation. The *ikhtiarat*, councils of elders of the clans are all gone. Young, educated men with ambitions have replaced them.

**The Youth Revolution**

Back in 1996 the Israeli advisor to the prime minister on “Arab affairs” inside Israel, Ori Stendel, noted that while the influence of the *hamula* remained strong the role of the elders had “reached its end” as a “youth revolution” was observed\(^{38}\). This trend has later continued. Accompanying the increased power of the *hamula* has been a growing number of young, educated men replacing the older *hamula* leadership.\(^{39}\) Young, aspiring university-educated men (so far, few women as will be commented upon below), who want to pursue political careers, start in local politics – representing clan lists, not the parties that are widely perceived as dominated by patriarchal structures. As part of a clan one could start a list and have the support of sub-clan members and ideological peers alike. The new generation remains loyal to their kinship group, while political processes inside the *hamulas* have been modernized and democratized. First and foremost, the nomination process has been professionalized. Internal primaries within the *hamulas* have become an institutionalized practice, with various degrees of formality; some having formal election committees to oversee that the primaries are conducted properly.\(^{40}\)

In 2013 elections were held in Deir al Asad, in northern Israel, a Muslim town of some 13,000 inhabitants. A clan candidate, Ahmed Dhabbah, defeated the candidate of the strongest party in the village, the communist party, Jabbah (the Front), in the election for mayor. Typical for local elections in the Arab sector was a youth candidate from a clan list, challenging both. The candidate, Bilal Sanallah Asadi, was a second nephew of the candidate for the communist party, and himself a former youth leader of Jabbah. He challenged his party as well as his clan, trying to get votes from both segments. “There is no internal democracy in the party”, he said in an interview.\(^{41}\) “It is not for younger people like me. Take Deir Hanna, the same guy, Raja Khatib, has been the candidate of Jabbah since 1976!” Bilal did not create a revolution in the village, getting merely 242 votes (4%) in the election, mostly from the polling station of his own neighbourhood. “It was big”, Bilal said, realizing that he had lacked the money and personnel to do a comprehensive campaign.

After the elections the mayor from the clan (Ahmed Dhabbah) asked the leader of the communist party to be his deputy mayor. Thus the political elites in the village, former foes, were united. Moreover, they asked Bilal to be the lawyer of the council, which he accepted. No one thought he had acted disrespectfully by challenging his family and party. Rather, perhaps a token of the new political culture of the Palestinians within, he was rewarded for his political guts.
The Absence of Female Participation in Local Politics

While patriarchal structures have been shaken within the Israeli Palestinian community in terms of age hierarchy, great inequalities in terms of female participation in politics remain.

From 1948 until 2013, only three Arab women served in local councils. In the 2013 elections 13 were elected. All in all only 16 women have been elected in Arab local councils during the last 60 years. As for membership in the Knesset no woman were elected until 1999. Since then four Arab women have served, one of them being Aida Toma Suleiman, from the Joint List.

Suleiman is a long time feminist activist who has campaigned to increase female participation in politics. While increased female participation in the labour force contributes to lower the barrier between the private and public sector, it is important to understand that formal wage labour also represents an increased workload on women, Suleiman said in an interview. Women continue to play the role as mothers, wives and housekeepers in addition to the work. Moreover, local council meetings usually happen in the evenings, sometimes very late, “not a very good time for our women to be out.” Nevertheless, things are apparently changing:

I am optimistic, I can see now that more professional people are elected, more educated people are elected. That gives the women the possibility of participating and being part of the social discourse. Even the most patriarchal understand that if they want to attract the young people they have to have a woman on their list.

In Deir al-Asad, some female candidates had agreed to run in the 2013 elections, both on the communist party list and some clan lists, but later pulled out. One of these was Haifa Asadi. She said that the problem for her had been that if she had been elected to the council, she could not work there at the same time which she did now, and she clearly prioritized her job in the local municipality. Next time, female candidates would run in the local election in the village, though, she assured.

Conclusion: The Importance of Democratic Practice

“We look to the Palestinians inside for inspiration” said Ahmed Azam, a professor of political science at the Bir Zeit University in the West Bank after the Israeli parliamentary elections in 2015 where the Joint List became the third largest party in Israel. Where the Palestinians in the occupied territories were divided, the Israeli Palestinians were united. Where the national Palestinian movement was patriarchal, the Israeli Palestinians witnessed a youth revolution in political participation. The clans, so subversive in Gaza, in the Israeli context were startlingly more democratic than the Palestinian national movements, be it Fatah and PA ruling the West Bank or Hamas in Gaza. How can the clans in one context be post-patriarchal and democratic, in the other violent and subversive?

The answer is democratic context and practice. The differences are not about political content or ideological differences. Palestinians inside Israel, in the West Bank and Gaza basically share the same Palestinian national consciousness. The differences therefor do not have to do with hamulaism or clannism inside Israel versus nationalist politics and ideology, secularism and political
Islamism, in the occupied territories. They have to do with practice – internalization of democratic values through democratic practice.

In terms of political institution building the main difference between politics organized inside and outside the 48 borders is that inside, since 1948, and locally, since the 1960s, there have been regular democratic elections. A Palestinian born and raised in 1948 in Israel, would normally, from 1966 until today, have participated in local and national election 26 times. He or she would experience an election every second year. In Gaza, or the West Bank, one would have experienced elections 3 times. Every twentieth year, there would be an election.

While the clans have primaries, Fatah and the PLO lack internal democracy. The National Congress of Fatah is its supreme political authority. During the last 26 years it has had only one session. The PLO, international recognized as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, has never had an election. The Fatah and PLO’s leader, Mahmod Abbas, is 81 years old. The leader of PLOs parliament, the Palestinian National Council, Salim Zanoun, also from Fatah, is 82 years old. The leader of the Israeli Palestinians in the Knesset was under 40 when elected.

An election is a part of a political education. To return to the local elections in Gaza, in the Bureij camp: When Fatah members went on strike, they actually succeeded. Fatah could not run the campaign without any locals running it, so they were forced to give in. They eventually lost, but the political contest forced them to renew themselves. Democratic political competition thus improves political organization. Where you have regular elections, nomination processes, campaigns, change of positions, every second year, you have a political system continuously revitalized, and you internalize democratic values and a democratic political culture. Where you have elections every 20th year, you don’t. That is the problem of the Palestinian national movement.

They have never institutionalized democratic practices. The result is that while the clan oriented Palestinians inside are united and non-patriarchal, in the occupied territories the Palestinians are internally divided with a boiling, lost generation doomed to find outlet for political frustrations outside the formal political system.
According to Aida Toma Suleiman, Knesset member for the Joint List, personal communication (Tel Aviv, November 2015).
Interview with author, Tel Aviv, October 2015.
Interview with author, Deir al Asad, November 2015.
Interview with author, Ramallah, March 2015.